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Bible Study # 58
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—Background on the Apostle Paul

We're going to get into something a little different in Bible study. Last time we completed our survey of the Major Prophets. I've given some consideration as to what would be a good place to go. At this point, we're going to take up a new series of Bible study, one entitled "The Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul." **We are going to focus in on both the life of the Apostle Paul as well as going through the letters that he wrote.**

I will comment a little later on the way in which we will proceed through Paul's letters or his Epistles. "Epistles" is just simply an older word that means "letters." You won't have to be like the lady in the joke I heard one time: the lady thought the epistles were the wives of the apostles. I won't belabor you with the entire joke, but that basically was the punch line of it.

This evening, to kind of set the stage, **we are going to focus in on introductory material. We will focus on the background of the life of the Apostle Paul and the letters he wrote.** It is important to understand the background of the Apostle Paul and these letters in order to understand the message that's contained in each of them. We are going to proceed through these letters in the order in which Paul wrote them. We will go through them in the context of the book of Acts in order to try to get them in their proper perspective and their relationship with one another.

Before we get into the letters Paul wrote, let's talk a little bit about the Apostle Paul. In order to understand and appreciate what he wrote, we have to understand some things about him. There are many things that we're told. Primarily, our biographical information on the Apostle Paul comes from the book of Acts, as well as certain information that he mentioned in some of his Epistles. Particularly in the book of Galatians, he mentioned a little bit about his background.

One of the things Paul mentions is that he came from Tarsus. Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. If you have maps in your Bible, you might notice that this is in the area of what is modern-day Turkey. It is what was anciently called the Asia Minor peninsula. It has as its southern coast, the Mediterranean Sea and its northern coast, the Black Sea. Cilicia was

a province that was in the southeastern section of modern-day Turkey or ancient Asia Minor.

The city of Tarsus was the capital of this province. It was a thriving and prosperous city. It was a commercial center. It was, virtually, at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Asia and Europe. They all converged there in that Middle Eastern area. That's one of the reasons the Middle East has always played such an important role. Civilization—whether it was African civilization centered in Egypt to the south, Greece to the west or the area of Mesopotamia to the east—converged there in the Middle East. Egypt was the gateway to Africa, just as the area of Mesopotamia was the gateway to Asia, and Greece served as the gateway to Europe. They all converged there in the Middle East.

You had a convergence of civilizations, commercial trade and travel. There were all sorts of things going on. There were great caravan and sea routes that came through—caravan routes to the East and sea routes coming up from Egypt. There was commerce that traveled up the Nile coming from the Port of Alexandria there in Egypt and commercial travel across the Black Sea. A lot of things converged in this area. It was a commercial area.

Tarsus was located, as far as agriculture is concerned, in a fertile plain. It had a dense population and was very wealthy. It was also the focal point of Greek culture and one of the greatest centers of education in the ancient world. The university in Tarsus ranked third in the ancient world, right after the universities of Athens and Alexandria. Those were the most noted centers of learning in the ancient world—let's say, of the first century, anyway.

The Apostle Paul grew up in a thriving, teeming, commercial, metropolitan area. It was an area noted for Greek culture. There were many Greeks in the area; Greek was the predominant population. The Greek language was very common. It was the language of commerce all through that area. It was an area where a wide variety of people from further east in Asia, Africa and Europe would converge in the great market squares where the various things were being sold and traded.

As Paul grew up as a young boy, this was the background that he had. In fact, he was very much involved in that because we learned that his father was a prosperous tentmaker. As a prosperous tentmaker, one of the main sources of his trade would be dealing with many of these caravans and traders, providing them with

tents. We learned he was a tentmaker; we know he was prosperous. I will show you a couple things later that will show how we know he was prosperous.

The family was Jewish. They were not the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora. "Diaspora" is the term that is used to refer to the Jews who were dispersed away from the land of Judea. Those who were dispersed throughout the rest of the world tended to center in certain areas. Many of the Jews, in what was called the "Diaspora," tended to absorb a lot of Greek culture and Greek ideas. They were not that different from many of the Jews in modern-day America and Europe in that they tended to absorb the culture and the attitudes of the people around them and only cling in a very superficial way to Jewish religion.

The Apostle Paul's family was not that way. His father was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect of the Jews. Even though he lived in the Diaspora and had commercial dealings with the Gentile populace and the people who came and went, yet he was a very strict practicing Jew. As a tentmaker, the Gentile populace would have been his clientele. The main ones he would have sold his wares to would have been the caravans that traveled through, the traders.

Paul grew up in this environment. He grew up as a young boy being there around his father's shop, learning his father's craft. He grew up meeting and seeing these people of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds come in there and haggle over the price of tents and put in orders for things that they wanted to buy.

There was a big university there in Tarsus. The teacher of the Roman Emperor Augustus, the great stoic philosopher Athenodoras, was a native of Tarsus.

Tarsus had the status of a Roman free city. Many of its citizens possessed Roman citizenship. There was a sizable Jewish community there. Paul's father was a Pharisee and he was also a Roman citizen. We find that Paul inherited his Roman citizenship. Remember, in one encounter in the book of Acts, Paul brought up that he was a Roman citizen.

Acts 22:28, one of the Roman officers there was impressed and said, "... 'With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.' And Paul said, 'But I was born a citizen.'"

The only way you were born a Roman citizen was if your father was one. We take citizenship for granted. If you are born in the United States, you are an American citizen. You can also acquire citizenship. Anciently, Roman

citizenship was confined to natives of Rome. That's why it is called Roman.

The little city-state of Rome gradually conquered some of the other communities in the central Italian peninsula, gradually subdued the whole of the Italian peninsula and eventually they extended out. At first, they didn't allow any of these people to be Roman citizens. The only ones who possessed the rights and prerogatives of Roman citizens were people whose ancestry was in itself Roman. Gradually, they extended that out and Roman citizenship included everyone in the Italian peninsula. As the Roman Empire spread, they limited Roman citizenship to people whose origin was in the Italian peninsula (those who were born there) and to those who would go out to administer the empire in various areas.

A Roman citizen had a lot of protection. He had rights as a Roman citizen. He had the protection of Roman law. Much of our concept in terms of our American concept of Republican government and the written constitution go back to concepts of Roman law. Roman citizens had many rights.

As an area was conquered, not everybody became a Roman citizen. They were subject people of the Roman Empire, but they were not citizens. However, from time to time, individuals because of certain particular things on their part would be granted the status of Roman citizenship. When somebody was granted that status, then it was hereditary in their family from then on. They could pass it down.

Being a Roman citizen was a very coveted possession. It was not something that everyone could obtain. Generally, you had to do something of great merit for the Roman Empire. You had to help out in some way. You had to do something that they felt like they rewarded you. As time went on, it got to where (as a lot of things) it could be purchased with a price. If you were willing to pay enough or pay off the right officials, they would manage to find some way that you could be given citizenship. We find that human nature hasn't changed a whole lot and politicians haven't changed a whole lot. Some of these things went on then and have continued down.

Paul's father was a Roman citizen. How he became one, we are not told, but Paul was born as a Roman citizen. His father was prosperous. We can tell that by the fact that he was a Roman citizen. Being a Roman citizen was not common among the Jews. The other factor is that when Paul was a young man (a teenager), he was sent to Jerusalem to study at the school of Gamaliel.

Gamaliel was the foremost Jewish Rabbi of the day. In the Jewish community, to be able to be sent to study at the school of Gamaliel was the equivalent of going to Oxford and becoming a Rhodes scholar. It was like getting a law degree from Harvard University in the United States. To study at Jerusalem, the center of Jewish learning, and to study at the school of a great and famous rabbi, Gamaliel, the most renowned rabbi of his period, was a very, very prestigious thing in the Jewish community. This attests to the fact that Paul's father was a wealthy and influential man who was able to get his son into a school such as that.

What we find is that the Apostle Paul (or as he was at that time, the Jewish lad, Saul of Tarsus) grew up in a prosperous Jewish family that was very orthodox and strict in their practice of the Jewish religion. His father was engaged as a tent manufacturer. He grew up having commercial and business dealings with a variety of Gentile people from many nationalities that would converge in the crossroads there at Tarsus. This meant that he had a far broader outlook and knowledge of people than did most of the Jews who grew up in Judea who never had dealings with anyone other than other Jews and the occupying Roman troops. He grew up in a city that was dominated by Greek culture and education. He was very educated in Greek culture. We find him quoting Greek poets in Acts 17:28; on Mars Hill he was able to quote the Greek poets of the day. He was learned in the culture and in the philosophy of his day.

I might just point out something. Sometimes in school or college, our young people are exposed to the ideas, literature and philosophies of some of the so-called great philosophers, writers and thinkers of our age—some of whose stuff is nothing but a bunch of garbage. Many times the thought is: What is the value of knowing any of this? The Apostle Paul was exposed to many of the things of his day (much of which was a lot of garbage), but it enabled him to understand the thinking of the people with whom he dealt.

We live in a world that is dominated by people who think a certain way, who have a certain philosophical mind-set, a certain way of thinking and set of values. Paul understood where they were coming from. But he also understood where they were in error. He was conversant with the literature of the Greek and Roman world. He was able to quote from it when he needed.

He was also very well educated and well grounded in the Bible. The Epistles of Paul are absolutely loaded down with biblical quotations

from the Old Testament. We will see that as we go through it. He was very much acquainted with the education and philosophy of his day. God had him prepared. God had a job in mind for him a long time before. He grew up in an environment that, unknown to him, prepared him. He had a business background. He learned principles of how to administer and how to handle many things. He was trained at business.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong, in his autobiography, makes comment on the way that he feels that God prepared him for his job, in terms of the advertising profession and business. These are the things that prepared him in many ways.

God prepared the Apostle Paul for many of these things in a variety of ways. He had a much broader background than did most of the other apostles who were natives of Judea and simply had a much more limited background.

To set the stage, we might notice briefly in the book of Acts that Saul of Tarsus was a very zealous individual. He was a man of strong convictions. What he believed, he believed with his whole heart. He was not a "wishy-washy" sort of person. He was not the kind of person who had a kind of "ho-hum," lackadaisical approach. You would never refer to Paul as a "Laodicean" sort of person—there was nothing lukewarm about him. He was hot or cold. He was on fire; even when he was wrong, he was wrong in a grand way. We pick up the story.

Acts 9:1-2, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

He was stirred up. He viewed Christianity as a heresy that was a threat to the religion of God. He was determined to do whatever it took to wipe it out and he was prepared to do it. He was a "gung-ho" sort of fellow. He was not one who was simply content to sit back and say, 'I sure think they are wrong.' If Paul thought something, he thought it very, very strongly.

God had plans for him.

Verse 3, on his way to Damascus, he was struck down. We have the story of his dramatic encounter. There was this blinding light and this roll of thunder; he heard a voice, but everybody else heard the sound. Paul understood the words, but none of the others did. What Paul saw and encountered when he was blinded by this blast of light was Jesus Christ in vision.

Verse 4-5, "Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"

Verses 6-8, he was told to go on into Damascus.

Verse 9, "And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."

Verses 10-12, Ananias, a disciple there, was instructed of God to go to Saul.

Verses 13-19, he went and talked with him, laid hands on him and Paul was healed. He was then baptized and received God's Holy Spirit. We find Saul's conversion.

One thing I would like to point out. God works through human instruments and God works in an organized, orderly way. Saul did not appoint himself to his job. God worked through the authority that He had set in His Church. When He struck Saul blind, He sent a man who served there in some capacity as an elder to come and anoint and lay hands on him, and he was healed. He sent the elder to counsel with him and then take him out and baptize him. God could have done all these things without the use of human intermediary, but He wanted it made evident that He was working through the constituted authority of His Church.

If you want a chronology of Paul's life, we would date his birth at approximately 1 A.D. This is a general date. It places him just slightly younger than Jesus Christ and a few of the other apostles. Stephen's stoning was in 33 A.D. (Acts 7). This is two years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected and the miracle of Pentecost. In the aftermath of Stephen's stoning in 33 A.D., the disciples began to spread out from Jerusalem.

We're first introduced to Paul at Stephen's stoning. He was holding the coats for some of the men who were throwing the stones. Two years later, in 35 A.D., is when we pick up the story of the Apostle Paul in Acts 9. This is the time of his conversion. In the aftermath of this, he then spent three years in Arabia. He was being taught directly by Jesus Christ in visions and revelations. He spent a time of preparation and then returned to Jerusalem in 38 A.D. He spent two weeks with James and Peter; then he left and went back to his hometown of Tarsus in 38 A.D. where he remained until 42 A.D.

Acts 9:17-18, we find that Paul was healed.

Acts 9:19-23, "And when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the

synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him."

Verses 25-27, "Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

Verse 30 describes that when the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

We actually are skimming over several years here. You wouldn't realize that from Acts 9, but there are about three years that transpired in this account. To get the chronology of it, let's go to Galatians 1. We have to put the Bible together to get the whole story.

Galatians 1:11, "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." He said, 'It's not some human invention. It's not something I got from what other people told me.'

Verses 12-24, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me."

Galatians 2:1, "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me."

We have here the basis of establishing the chronology of Paul's life. The event that he makes reference to in Galatians 2:1 is the ministerial conference that is recorded in Acts 15. We date that as 49 A.D.; Paul refers to going up to Jerusalem in 49 A.D. He was going up there for the conference 14 years after his conversion. That would place his conversion in 35 A.D.

In Galatians 1:16-17, we are told that when he was converted, he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood or go up to Jerusalem. Rather, he went up to Arabia and then returned to Damascus.

Verses 18-19, after his return to Damascus, he went to Jerusalem three years after he was converted. He was there two weeks, and the only apostles he talked to were Peter and James. He was instructed by them to go on back home.

Verse 21, he went back to Cilicia; Tarsus, his hometown, is the capital of Cilicia.

What we find when you put that account together with Acts 9 is that he was in Damascus and preached for a short time. He was there and had access to the synagogues. He was given letters of recommendation. He was a highly educated Jew, and there is some indication that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The indication of that is a reference to his consenting to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Why did he have a voice in the matter? Because this was normally something that was decided in an official capacity by the Sanhedrin, it's very possible that he was even a member of the Sanhedrin. He certainly was connected with it in some capacity. He was an individual of note and highly educated; his credentials were recognized throughout the world by the Jewish community.

Acts 9:3, when he was going to Damascus, He was converted before he ever got there.

Verses 8-9, he was sitting in Damascus, blind, fasting and praying.

Verses 17-19, an elder came in, counseled with him, anointed him and laid hands on him. His sight was restored. Then he was taken out and baptized.

Verse 20, immediately, he was so excited that he did what most of us do when we start coming into the Church—we start trying to convert everybody. He stirred up a real "hullabaloo." People said, 'This is the guy who had the letters to put all these people in jail' (Acts 9:1-2). 'What in the world has happened to him?'

He didn't stay there very long. He left immediately from Damascus.

Acts 9:23, "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him." The "many days" is the equivalent of the three years he was in Arabia.

1 Kings 2:38-39, "...So Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. Now it happened at the end of three years," The expressions "three years" and "many days" are used interchangeably. "Many days" can certainly refer to a period of three years.

In fact, it refers to exactly that in 1 Kings 2. It makes a reference to a period of "many days" in Acts 9:23, but when you put it together with Galatians 1, we find that Paul, within a matter of a few days after his conversion and baptism, left and went to Arabia.

Galatians 1:17-18, he was there three years and then he returned to Damascus.

Acts 9:23, when he returned to Damascus is what it talks about, "many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him." He disappeared and was gone from the scene; nobody heard of him for three years. Suddenly, when he came back, he appeared on the scene and began once again to speak in the synagogues. This time the attitude toward Christians had hardened to the point that he barely got out of there with his life.

Verse 26, he then went to Jerusalem.

Galatians 1:18, the first time he went to Jerusalem was three years after his conversion. He went up to Jerusalem and talked with Peter and James.

In Acts 9:26, after Paul got away from Damascus, he came to Jerusalem. He wanted to come there and be a part of the group, but everyone was a little bit skeptical. They wondered what he was up to. He had simply dropped out of circulation. The last they had known, he had left Jerusalem going down there to arrest Christians. They had, undoubtedly, gotten the story of his baptism and the fact that he disappeared and was gone for three years. Nobody heard of him or knew what happened to him. The next thing they know, he pops up in Jerusalem as though he is a part of the Church. They are not sure how to receive him.

How did Paul react? Did he suddenly get offended and say, 'If you people can't be more

“Christian” than that, I’m going to leave.’ No, he didn’t say that. Maybe they didn’t receive him as well as they could have, but they were suspicious. They didn’t know and understand what he was up to. There was something kind of odd about this whole thing. They were nervous and acted funny around him. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with him.

Verse 27, Barnabas kind of took him under his wing, talked to him and brought him to Peter.

Galatians 1:18-19 and Acts 9:28, he spent two weeks with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus—the two leading apostles. James presided over the Church in Jerusalem and Peter was the chief of the 12 apostles. He was talking and fellowshiping with them. Undoubtedly, there were a lot of deep conversations about the things that he had experienced. At the end of this time, they came to the conclusion that it was not yet time for whatever God had in mind for him. They told him that instead of his remaining in Jerusalem as a part of the ministry, what he needed to do was go back to his hometown. In effect, “don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

Have you ever volunteered for something and felt like you kind of got the “brush-off”? It’s important to understand that he did not simply appoint himself. We’re going to read a little later in the book of Acts of his ordination as an apostle. Previously, he had been ordained as an elder.

God works in an organized way. A period of time went by. We can skim over it in a few pages and not realize years went by. He went back to Tarsus. He was respectful and responsive to the government in God’s Church. At this point, they didn’t have a need for him. They didn’t see a place for him right there in Jerusalem as a part of the ministry at that time. He was in his hometown for four years, from 38 A.D. to 42 A.D. He lived a Christian life, was engaged in his own business and did the things that he was to do.

In the meantime, we have the story in Acts 10. Just a short time after Paul left God opened the door for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. Remember the vision that Peter had of the sheet coming down from heaven? God opened the door for a work to be done among the Gentile nations through Peter. Previous to this time, there was no grasp of organized preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. In fact, the concept was that unless they became circumcised and converted to Judaism first, they could not be baptized as a part of the Church.

Peter’s vision in Acts 10 is the story of Cornelius and his household. The revelation that uncircumcised Gentiles could be converted was a major revelation.

Acts 11 continues with the story of the Gentiles accepted into fellowship.

Verse 19, we find the scattering abroad that took place after the stoning of Stephen and that the word was preached.

Verses 20-21, word came back that there was a group of disciples in Antioch.

Acts 11:22, “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.”

Verse 24, “...And a great many people were added to the Lord.”

Verses 25-26, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.” This is 42 A.D. Paul had disappeared from the scene; he had gone back to Tarsus.

Things had gone along. A lot of the Jews had been converted there in Jerusalem. There were a lot of Jews coming to Jerusalem for the festivals. Jews from all over the Roman world came to Jerusalem for the festivals. The word spread and several of them were baptized. They went back to their own home areas; certain areas were major commercial centers that people moved to.

Just as today, some of you are not from this area. You are here because of job circumstances. People sometimes relocate. They go to certain major urban areas because of jobs that are available there. This is what happened in ancient times as well.

In Antioch, there were several Jews who were converted. They were excited about it and this set the synagogues “abuzz.”

Verse 22, word got back to Jerusalem and they decided they had better send a minister down there.

Again, we see organization and leadership. We see the headquarters Church taking a leading role and making a decision. We see that the group in Antioch did not organize themselves into a Church and decide whom they would call to be their minister. For some of you who come out of a Baptist background as I did, that comes as a little bit of a revelation. They didn’t send out and listen to various ones preach and then elect who they wanted to hire to be their preacher. The Church in Jerusalem heard that there were some down there and said, ‘We better send somebody down there.’ They sent Barnabas who was

probably at the time holding the rank of evangelist. He went down there and preached.

He saw what the situation was and within a fairly short time, verse 25, he left and went on up to Tarsus where Paul was. He had, perhaps, kept in some sort of contact with Paul.

In Acts 9:27, we find that he had befriended Paul several years earlier when Paul had come to Jerusalem. By this time—four years later—Paul had proved himself and Barnabas offered Paul the opportunity of coming full time into the ministry (Acts 11:25-26). At this point, Paul was brought down to Antioch. He came to Antioch as an elder and entered full time in the ministry working with Barnabas in Antioch.

Acts 11:27, “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.” They were dispatched by the apostles.

Acts 12 is somewhat of an inset. It is an account of Herod seeking to stir up certain trouble.

Verses 1-2, he killed James, the brother of John. James was one of the 12 apostles; this was not James, the brother of Jesus.

Acts 12:3, “And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.”

Verse 7, but God delivered Peter from jail.

In the meantime, Saul and Barnabas had taken some foodstuffs up to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).

Then in Acts 12:25, they came back.

Acts 13:1, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger [Niger was the term used at that time to refer to Blacks from the area of West Africa; the word “Niger” is the Greek word for Black. The term “Ethiopia” was the term used to refer to Blacks from East Africa. The Niger River in West Africa, the nation of Niger, as well as the nation of Nigeria, all derived their name from this.], Lucius of Cyrene [Cyrene is a city of North Africa up in the modern-day nation of Lybia.], Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch [Manaen could have either been considered one of the prophets but more likely was one of the elders], and Saul.” Barnabas is mentioned first because he was the pastor of the Antioch Church.

We see that Simeon and Lucius, at least, were prophets because it mentions prophets were sent down from Jerusalem on a mission there. We read the details of that in Acts 11:27-30.

Acts 13:2-3, God revealed to the prophets (to Simeon and Lucius) that Barnabas and Saul were

to be set apart (separated, ordained) for the job He had. When they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Simeon and Lucius fasted and prayed, which is customary prior to an ordination. They laid hands on them (set them apart) and sent them away. This is the ordination of Saul and Barnabas as apostles.

Verse 4, “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” They departed.

We find here the story of Paul’s first evangelistic journey. This would bring us to 45 A.D. Paul, if we’re following through, was converted in 35 A.D. He was in Arabia until 38 A.D. and then came back to Damascus very briefly. He had to flee for his life to Jerusalem. He spent a couple of weeks there with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. They sent him back to Tarsus in 38 A.D. He remained in Tarsus in business from 38 A.D. to 42 A.D. Then in 42 A.D., the Jerusalem Church dispatched Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch to assist him and to serve in the ministry full time. Paul remained in the local ministry there in Antioch from 42 A.D. to 45 A.D. In 45 A.D., he was ordained as an apostle and began his first evangelistic journey. Interestingly enough, this is 12 years after the stoning of Stephen and ten years after his own conversion.

We see that even when God has a special mission for someone, He still works through the constituted authority that already is present in His Church. He does it in an organized, orderly way. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God does not have all kinds of conflicting groups working against one another. There is order.

We see in Acts 13:4 **Paul’s first evangelistic journey** which began in 45 A.D. The journey took a period of about three years. It was completed in 48 A.D. with Paul’s return to Antioch.

He first sailed from Antioch down to the island of Cyprus. If you look on a map, you can see that Cyprus is in the Mediterranean Sea west of Antioch.

Verse 5, Paul began his teaching there.

Verse 13, he sailed from Cyprus up to Asia Minor (Galatia). He went through some of the cities of Galatia, which is in Central Turkey or Central Asia Minor. He went through there from city to city then retraced his steps back.

Acts 14:26, then instead of coming back to Cyprus, he sailed directly back to Antioch. We find the story of his first journey in Acts 13 and

14. He came to Cyprus in Acts 13:4; he preached the word. It goes through the details of what he did, and they came from Cyprus to Asia Minor.

Verses 13-14, they went to Pamphylia and to Antioch in Pisidia. This is not the Antioch of Syria that Paul had as his headquarters but an area in central Turkey or Asia Minor.

Verses 14-41 give the account of his sermon in the synagogue. You find the extent to which Paul was very, very conversant with the Old Testament by the amount of quotations that he gave.

A couple of things we might note.

Verse 14, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. When he was given an opportunity to speak, he did. Some would say the only reason he went in on the Sabbath was because he was preaching to the Jews and not because he viewed the Sabbath as a day of worship.

Acts 13:42, “And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” Why didn’t Paul tell them, ‘You don’t need to wait until next Sabbath? The Sabbath is done away. We are going to have church for you Gentiles ten o’clock tomorrow morning.’ That is what any self-respecting Protestant or Catholic would have done.

Verse 44, “And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” It wasn’t just Jews. These were Gentiles.

Verse 45, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” They were mad about it and a lot of trouble stirred up. Paul traveled through this area.

Acts 14 lists Iconium (v. 1), Lystra and Derbe (v. 6); these are areas of Galatia. He preached in many of these areas and then he retraced his steps.

Acts 14:21-26, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch,”

Antioch is the area that served as Paul’s headquarters for the Gentile work.

Acts 13 and 14 tell of Paul’s first evangelistic journey in the area through Cyprus and the area of Galatia. A period of three years transpired as he traveled through that area and spent time place by place. Then on the way back, he fully organized them into Churches and ordained elders. By that time, it was apparent who God was choosing to be used in those capacities. Things were organized; then he and Barnabas left and returned to Antioch.

After they returned to Antioch, Acts 15:1, individuals from Judea came and stirred up quite a bit of controversy by claiming that it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be converted and be a part of the Church.

Acts 15:2, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” After the matter had been discussed and Paul and Barnabas had sought to explain the situation and settle the controversy, it became apparent that this was stirred up to the point that it was necessary to go to Jerusalem and receive an official clarification about this question.

Verse 5, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.’” There came up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who had come into the Church from this background; they were very adamant of the necessity of circumcising the Gentiles and instructing them in the ritual laws.

Verses 6-7, “So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute [a lot of discussion], Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’”

Verses 7-12, Peter set and expounded the matter. He explained how God made it plain, to begin with, that circumcision was not necessary for conversion and gave the story.

James, as the pastor of the Jerusalem Church, was the presiding apostle over the conference.

Verses 13-18, he went through and reiterated what Peter had said. Then he stated the judgment of the Church.

Verse 19, “Therefore I judge [“krino,” a legal technical term which means “my decision; the binding decision of the Church”] that we should

not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God...” His judgment was, ‘We are not going to insist that the Gentiles be circumcised.’ God had already revealed by a direct miracle that this was not necessary.

However, verse 20, they were to be instructed in terms of other questions that had been raised involving idolatry, fornication, things strangled and from blood. They were to abstain from these things. These were not ceremonial laws and should not be regarded as such.

The issue came up as to what was ceremonial. Once you make the statement that circumcision is not necessary, then the question arises—what is? If rituals are not necessary, what is a ritual? There were questions they raised concerning meat offered to idols, meat improperly slaughtered and immorality (fornication). There are some who sometimes have misunderstood some comments Paul made in 1 Corinthians and think that Paul just arbitrarily took it upon himself to change the statement of the Jerusalem Church in regard to meat offered to idols. If you read carefully what Paul says in Romans and 1 Corinthians, it is very plain that Paul reiterates the decision of the Jerusalem Church (Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-13; 10:7-8, 16-33).

The Jews misunderstood. The point that he makes is that meat offered to idols did not physically taint the meat. The only reason to avoid meat offered to idols was to avoid the appearance of being involved in idolatrous worship. The meat itself had not been hurt. If you ate meat that had been offered to an idol, this was not the issue. If you didn’t know that it had been offered to idols, and somebody made comment about it having been, the meat hadn’t been hurt and that was not the issue.

It was stressed that the Gentiles coming into the Church were to culturally withdraw from the society and culture of which they had been a part. The Greek and Roman culture around them took immorality very lightly. They were very casual in their approach to morality as well as the issue of idolatry.

Notice why the apostles didn’t feel it necessary to go into greater detail.

Verse 21, “‘For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’” ‘Everything else you will hear being read in the synagogues on the Sabbath.’

Verse 22, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul

and Barnabas,” They sent a deputation back from Jerusalem.

Verse 23, “They wrote this letter by them:”

Verses 23-29 was the official decision.

The account of Acts 15 is the ministerial conference of 49 A.D.

There was the decision in Acts 15 (latter part) for **Paul’s second evangelistic journey**.

Verse 40, Paul this time took Silas and departed.

Verse 39, Barnabas took a different route. He took Mark and they went in a different way.

Verse 41, “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Paul is going back to the area of Galatia, but this time, instead of sailing to Cyprus and going up by water, he travels overland. This would be in the spring of 50 A.D.

Acts 16:1, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra.”

This is the area of Galatia where he had established Churches several years earlier. He now travels overland up from Antioch and through the eastern part of the Turkish peninsula.

Verses 1-3, Timothy, whom he had known earlier as a younger teenager, is now up in age (perhaps 18-19 by this time) and Paul takes him with him. He did go ahead and circumcise Timothy because Timothy’s mother was Jewish and he knew this would be a matter of controversy. Timothy was at least part Jewish; he was Jewish on his mother’s side and Greek on his father’s side. Paul knew the fact that Timothy was uncircumcised would be a matter that the Jews would really take exception to. At this account, Paul and Silas have traveled on across the Turkish peninsula or Asia Minor peninsula.

Verse 9, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” Paul has a vision; he sees a man of Macedonia, which is across into northern Greece and southern Yugoslavia, the modern area of Macedonia. Paul crossed into Europe.

Verse 13, “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”

We can show this to be the day of Pentecost of 50 A.D. The gospel was first preached in Europe exactly 19 years after the gospel was first preached on Pentecost in 31 A.D. The word “Sabbath” in verse 13 is a different form. It is literally “Sabbaths.” “And on the day of Sabbaths” would be a more literal rendering. It is a term that the Jews used to refer to Pentecost. We find here the preaching in Macedonia. This is

his second evangelistic journey. He comes down further into Greece proper.

Acts 17:1, "...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews."

Verses 2-4, he preaches in Thessalonica.

Verse 10, he then went to Berea.

Verse 15, he went into Athens.

Verses 22-31, we have his sermon on Mars Hill.

Acts 18:1, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth." This is the fall of 50 A.D.

Verse 11, he stays there for about 18 months. It is during that period of time, while Paul is in Corinth from the fall of 50 A.D. to the spring of 52 A.D., that Paul wrote the first letter (actually the first two letters) that we have preserved for us in the New Testament. During that 18-month period that he was in Corinth, he wrote the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Now we come to a period, 15 to 17 years after his conversion, five to seven years after his ordination as an apostle and in the midst of his second evangelistic journey, that we have the first of the letters that Paul wrote that makes up such a crucial part of our New Testament. We will go into those letters next time.

I want to give you a little background leading up to the beginning of Paul's letters. I'd like to review a couple of things. What we are going to do in this series is study the life and the writings of Paul with emphasis on doctrine and Christian living. We want to get the overview of Paul's background and the background of each book. We want to understand the message of the book in the light of its historical setting.

Paul's letters are very important. First, they are essential for understanding the historical development of the New Testament Church. They provide the record of the development of the New Testament Church over a 15- to 17-year period. That was the period during which Paul wrote. We learn a lot about how the New Testament Church developed.

Second, we can learn much from the examples of the early Church. We learn about Church authority and organization. We see mistakes that were made that we can avoid. We have examples of the early Church pointed out. There are things we should copy and things we should avoid. That's why God has examples recorded. Every generation doesn't have to "reinvent the wheel." We can learn from what has gone before.

Third, Paul's letters are very important because they are the chief repositories of what might be termed "the systematic theology of the New Testament." It is the clearest and chief place

where we have a detailed exposition of what the Church believed and taught.

Paul wrote 14 letters that are preserved as a part of the New Testament canon. There are nine letters that were written to seven specific Churches. The Churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossi and Thessalonica represent seven Churches. There are nine letters written to those seven Churches because two of the letters were written to the Church at Corinth and two to the Church at Thessalonica. Paul wrote one General Epistle, the book of Hebrews. He wrote four Pastoral Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. He wrote two letters to Timothy, making four. We have 14 letters altogether.

It's very interesting the way in which the letters of Paul are arranged. One of the things we will notice as we go through is that Paul's letters are not arranged in the order in which he wrote them. He wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians first. Why don't we have them in the order in which he wrote them? We are going to go through and study them, in this series, in the order in which Paul wrote them because we're going to study it going through the book of Acts and from the Life and Letters of Paul.

When you go through and read it in the New Testament, the order that they were preserved in is important. There are some important concepts there. In fact, we could divide Paul's 14 letters and there is a specific order. You might be aware that the order of the Greek Bibles (the Byzantine text of the Bible that has been preserved by the Greek Church) is different than the Latin order that has been preserved in the western world. They're the same books but a different order.

The Greek order is sometimes referred to as the inspired order because it was the order that was preserved by the Greeks who preserved the New Testament. The order in which they preserved the New Testament books was, first, the four Gospels and Acts, just as we have them. The next section that they preserved was the General Epistles: James, Peter, John and Jude and then the Epistles of Paul. They preserved the Epistles of Paul as we have them, with one change. They preserved Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then in the Greek order came the book of Hebrews, followed by 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, then the book of Revelation.

This makes four sections of the Greek New Testament that the Greeks preserved: (1) the Gospels and Acts, (2) the General Epistles, (3)

the Epistles of Paul and (4) the book of Revelation. You take those four sections and combine them with the three that the Jews recognized of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Altogether, you have seven divisions or sections of Scripture that constitute the Bible and shows a stamp of completion. There's no room for an Apocrypha. There's no room for some of the extra books that have gotten in. They don't fit with either the Old or the New Testament.

Why are Paul's Epistles arranged in the order in which they are? The interesting thing is that if you look at the first ten of Paul's Epistles (Romans through Hebrews), you find that these books basically follow the order of the Holy Days and the message that they expound. Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians are books that deal with the subject matter of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

We have scriptures in the book of Romans that clearly deals with these subjects.

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

Romans 5:8-10, "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Romans 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."

Verse 16, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?"

What we find here is the message of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The emphasis is on the message of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the matter of Christ's atonement, the necessity of putting sin out of our lives, of being justified by Christ's sacrifice.

1 Corinthians focuses in on much of the message. 1 Corinthians 5 is the famous chapter that we read nearly every year prior to Passover and Unleavened Bread.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8, "...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and

wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

1 Corinthians 11 gives instructions about observing the Passover service.

2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This certainly deals with the matter of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The subject matter of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians is the subject matter of Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—the emphasis on the Savior and the necessity of our coming out of sin and putting away sin.

The next four Epistles—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians—would tie in and parallel the message of Pentecost. They consist of deeper spiritual things. They talk about the covenants and about the fruits of the Spirit. We find much of these things in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. The day of Pentecost focuses in on the Old and the New Covenant, on the giving of God's Holy Spirit, the fruits of God's Spirit—many, many things that could come out.

1 and 2 Thessalonians tie in with the message of the Feast of Trumpets. There are many places we could look at.

1 Thessalonians 4:16, "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."

1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." It goes into details.

2 Thessalonians continues and talks further about some of those same things. Clearly, there is an emphasis on the subject matter of the Feast of Trumpets, the return of Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews deals with the subject matter that relates to the Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day.

We have Hebrews 9 and 10 that deal with the subject matter of the Day of Atonement. It explains and goes through the symbolism in great detail of the high priest entering into the Holy Place. It goes through and explains the symbolism of the Day of Atonement.

We have in Hebrews 3 and 4 the information about entering into God's rest, the parallel that ties in with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Hebrews 11 also has a lot concerning the fulfillment of that.

There's insight into the Last Great Day, the time of judgment. I will summarize on some of that. We went through it at a much earlier Bible study

when we went through the canonization of Scripture. If you want more details, you can go back and review those Bible studies.

Basically, the Pastoral Epistles were in the order of the rank of the individual to whom he wrote. Timothy was an evangelist, Titus was a pastor, and Philemon was a local elder in Colossi.

We find that there is a systematic arrangement in his letters, in terms of subject matter. I think from this we can get a little bit of insight. Paul's letters come in an appropriate place.

The Gospels, the personal teachings of Jesus Christ, form the basis. That is logically where you start. The book of Acts picks up the story and goes on through and shows the continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The first five books of the New Testament correspond to the first five books of the Old Testament. They correspond to the Law, to the books of Moses.

These are the books of the second Moses, of Jesus Christ who was prophesied in Deuteronomy 18.

Deuteronomy 18:15, ““The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, ...””

Hebrews 9:15, “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant,”

We have the direct teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and Acts continues the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The General Epistles are the teachings of the senior apostles, the ones who were with Jesus, either in the case of James and Jude (two of his physical brothers) or in the case of Peter and John, two of the original twelve. They pick up the story and they deal with very basic fundamental issues.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter even tells us that Paul wrote some things hard to be understood. When you have that background, then you get into Paul's writings. Paul's writings are arranged in an order that follows a subject flow that really, in terms of emphasis, follows the basic outline and plan of God, concluding with letters of pastoral instruction.

Then the New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation. Revelation is the logical place to end. It is the counterpoint to the book of Genesis.

In our survey of Paul's life and letters, we are going to follow them through in the order that he wrote them. We are going to get their message in the context of the background provided by the book of Acts. Hopefully, this different approach will give us a little more of a fresh insight into these letters and into the message that they

contain. They contain a timeless message. It is a message for us today. It is a message that is just as important for us today as it was for those to whom it was originally addressed.

This will be our last Bible study prior to the Feast of Tabernacles, which is an incredible thing. Our next scheduled Bible study would have been the evening that begins the Feast of Trumpets. Two weeks from tonight, we will be observing the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets and two weeks from then, we will be observing the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles.

On the evening that we are gathered around the world observing the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles—the evening of Wednesday, October 3—there will be something else of note that will take place at the same time we are meeting. Documents will be signed in Berlin on the evening of Wednesday, October 3, that will officially reunite Germany as one nation. One year ago at the Feast you saw the Berlin Wall begin tumbling down. An awful lot has happened in the last year. Can you imagine where we will be if the world changes as much in the next year as it has changed in the last year?

Bible Study # 59
November 13, 1990
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—1 and 2
Thessalonians

We have started into our series of the Life and Letters of Paul. We went into basic background of Paul's life. We have noted in the book of Acts the story of Paul being struck down on the road to Damascus and his conversion.

I would like to give you a little insight into why we are going through the Epistles of Paul in the order that we are. Basically, we **are going through them in the order that he wrote them.** How do we know in which order he wrote them? How do we know when he wrote each book? I'd like to share a little of that with you here in the beginning.

We went through a lot of these things last time. I am just going to briefly refer to his conversion in Acts 9.

In Acts 10, Peter has a vision and the gospel goes out to the Gentiles for the first time.

Acts 11 is the story of the Gentiles being accepted into fellowship; Peter explains his vision to others there in Jerusalem, and the headquarters Church sends Barnabas to Antioch to raise up a Church.

Acts 11:25, "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul." This is several years after Paul's conversion. He had been dispatched back to Tarsus, his hometown. In effect, he had been told, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

You have to understand the situation. Paul was the leading persecutor of the Church prior to his conversion.

Acts 9:3-8, he was struck down on the road to Damascus in a very dramatic way.

Verses 9-22, he was blinded, subsequently anointed and healed of his blindness and then baptized. He went into the synagogue. They were expecting him to speak and he started teaching that Jesus was the Messiah. People couldn't believe it. It's kind of like Billy Graham getting up and preaching a sermon on the importance of keeping the Sabbath. It created quite a stir. It stirred up a hornet's nest. Within a matter of a very few weeks he left Damascus.

Acts 9:23, "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him."

When you put the "many days" with Galatians 1:17-18, we find that Paul left and went to Arabia.

Verses 11-16, he was directly taught and worked with by Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:17-18, "...but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days." After three years (the "many days" in Acts 9:23) he came back to Damascus. It talks about when he returned to Damascus.

Acts 9:23-25, the situation had hardened. When he showed up, within a week or two he had to flee for his life. They actually let him down the city wall at night in a basket so he could escape. Some of the Jews were literally ready to kill him. They felt he had betrayed them and that this was too much.

Verse 26, therefore, he went to Jerusalem. Nobody in Jerusalem wanted to deal with him very much.

Verse 27, Barnabas finally took him and introduced him to Peter and James. He spent a couple weeks with them, and at the end of that two weeks or 15 days, as he mentions in Galatians 1:18, they simply told him, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

Galatians 1:21, he went back to Tarsus and stayed there for about four or five years. He went back to his business and remained there. It is important to realize that God does work through the government in His Church. Paul had to prove himself. He was called and converted. God had called him for a specific job. God had revealed that to him, but he had to wait. It wasn't enough that he knew it. God had told him, but he had to wait until it became apparent to others, to the leadership in the Church.

Can you imagine what it must have been like when Ananias contacted Jerusalem with word that Paul had been baptized? Can you imagine Peter's and James' reactions and responses? It would be like calling up and saying, 'I just baptized the Pope; he's keeping the Sabbath and everything.' Because it was such a total shock, it was literally a matter of years before matters had settled to the point that Paul was given an opportunity to be directly used in the ministry.

He was converted in 35 A.D. and it was 42 A.D. (seven years later) when he came into the ministry as Barnabas' assistant to be used in Antioch. From that time, it was still about three and one-half years later before he was ordained, in 45 A.D., as an apostle. He was sent forth on the first evangelist journey. Even after he was in the ministry, he didn't start out at the top.

In Acts 11:25-26, Paul is brought by Barnabas to Antioch.

Acts 12 primarily deals with other things.

Acts 13 starts out with Paul's ordination. Paul and Barnabas were ordained as apostles by prophets sent down from Jerusalem.

Acts 13:1, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

"Cyrene" is an area in North Africa on the Mediterranean coast, perhaps the area of modern-day Tunisia. "Niger" was an area that would refer to West Africa. The term is still utilized in context of Nigeria or the Niger River. It was normally used to refer to West Africans as opposed to East Africans who were generally termed "Ethiopians."

The ordination of Paul and Barnabas is recounted in Acts 13:1-3 and their **first evangelistic journey** in Acts 13:3—14:28.

Acts 13:4, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch sailing to Cyprus. They went through and preached in Cyprus.

Verse 13, they sailed up from Cyprus into Asia Minor. If you have a map in the back of your Bible, you might notice the mid-section of modern-day Turkey. He went through the areas that we would term modern-day Turkey, anciently the area of Galatia. He came through, as he mentions in the latter part of Acts 13, Antioch of Pisidia (v. 14), which was part of that area, then on to Iconium (v. 51), Lystra and Derbe (14:6), areas in Galatia, central Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey.

In Acts 14:28, they completed that first journey in the area of Galatia. They had gone through Cyprus and Galatia and retraced their steps, except they didn't go back to Cyprus; they went directly back to Antioch. The first journey lasted about three years, 45 A.D. to 48 A.D.

Acts 15, Paul came back in late 48 A.D. He returned to Antioch and was there for a number of months. In 49 A.D., there was the ministerial conference in Jerusalem to resolve the issue of circumcision in the Church and to ensure uniformity of practice. The decision was made there. Paul and others had gone up to Jerusalem about the question. We have the account of that.

Verses 30-35, Paul came back to Antioch. Basically, he wintered there in Antioch.

Then Paul began his **second evangelistic journey** (Acts 15:40 through 18:22) in the late winter or very early spring of 50 A.D., perhaps February or early March, but more likely

February because of the timing a little later on and the distance it would have taken him.

Acts 15:41—16:1, this time he went overland, going from Antioch, which is modern-day Syria, up into ancient Asia Minor, the area of Galatia, what is now modern-day Turkey. He went back across through Galatia to the Churches that he had been to before. This was in 50 A.D.

Paul had been there two years earlier. He had originally helped to raise up those Churches about five years earlier. He had been there, about two years earlier, at the end of his first evangelistic journey. Now on his second journey, he started back by retracing some of the areas. He took a little different route.

Verses 6-8, he went up overland all the way across Asia Minor. He came through Asia Minor rather quickly.

Verse 9, by the late spring (around May), he crossed from Asia Minor into Europe. He came into ancient Macedonia, what is now the northern part of modern-day Greece. Actually, a portion of it is in southern Yugoslavia.

Verses 12-13, but the portion Paul appears to have preached in, Philippi, is in Greece. He crossed over from Asia into Greece, into Europe and was there around the time of Pentecost in 50 A.D. He preached in Philippi.

Verses 14-15, we have the account of Lydia being baptized. There was a synagogue in Philippi. The indication is several women who were Jews gathered outside of town in a little park-like area on the side of a river bank. They met there every Sabbath to visit and fellowship together. Paul went out there to fellowship with them and wound up baptizing at least one lady and her household.

Verses 39-40, Paul was not able to stay in Philippi very long. Great controversy was stirred up.

Acts 17:1, he left Philippi and came to Thessalonica, a little further down.

Verses 2-3, Paul went in and preached several Sabbath days; he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures showing that the Messiah must have to suffer and rise again from the dead. They understood that there was a Messiah to come, but they had not grasped the fact that the Messiah was to come a first time and suffer. They had, exclusively, focused in on the prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah coming in power and glory. Paul focused their attention on prophecy such as Isaiah 53—of the suffering servant—showing that the Messiah was to come and suffer and to be raised from the dead. Undoubtedly, he was preaching out of Isaiah 53.

The result was that it stirred up such a controversy that Paul had to flee the city.

In verses 8-9, Jason, a man with whom Paul was staying, actually had to post bond. Paul had to leave because there were about to be riots in the city of Thessalonica.

Verse 10, after Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, he went down to Berea. He preached there in a synagogue.

Verse 16, then he came down to Athens.

Verses 17-31, we have the account of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill given in detail.

Acts 18:1, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth."

Verse 2-3, he gets to Corinth and stays with a couple of Jews there. Aquila was of the same profession as he was—a tentmaker.

Verse 4, we find that shortly after he got there, he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath persuading Jews and Greeks.

Verse 11, "And he continued there a year and six months [fall 50 A.D.—spring 52 A.D.], teaching the word of God among them." By this time, we are only into fall.

If you trace it back, there's only a few weeks coming down through. He spent the summer going through Thessalonica. He was only there for about three weeks. He came down to Berea and stayed a longer time there. He spent, perhaps, a couple of weeks in Athens, a little travel time, and then he came down to Corinth, arriving there by September 50 A.D. or so. He pretty well spent the summer traveling.

Verse 5, Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia.

Let's go back to 1 Thessalonians. We find that at this point, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. He wrote it in the fall of 50 A.D., only a matter of a few months after he had been in Corinth. Our basis for saying that is that we know Paul didn't write it before this because he hadn't been to Thessalonica before and there weren't any Churches there. Paul didn't even get to Greece until around Pentecost of 50 A.D. He had worked his way down through Greece that summer and wound up in Corinth. He was there for a year and a half. Shortly after he got to Corinth, Silas and Timothy caught up with him. They were coming from Macedonia, which is the area where Thessalonica was.

1 Thessalonians 1:1, "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians...."

Verse 7, "so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe."

1 Thessalonians 3:1-4, "Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to

be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know."

Verses 6-7, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith."

What we see here in 1 Thessalonians, as we put it together with the account in Acts 17:1-15, several weeks had gone by when Paul got down as far as Athens. Paul was the chief spokesman. He was the one who was known and recognized. They all left. They had to flee Thessalonica. They had only been there about three weeks, just enough time to preach. There had been some who were baptized, and then they had to leave.

He was very concerned about that because there was a need to give deeper instruction.

These were people who, obviously, had a strong background of the Old Testament. They understood the law, the Sabbath, clean and unclean meats—those things weren't issues. But there were a lot of things they didn't fully understand. There were things that needed to be more fully explained that Paul had not had opportunity to do. There wasn't a magazine or booklets or that sort of thing. There weren't any Bible lessons or literature that he could send them.

By the time things had settled down and they got to Athens, he sent Timothy back because Timothy was not known there. Because he had not been someone who had attracted public attention in Thessalonica, he could go back and go into the city. His job was not to go back in and evangelize the unconverted. He was to go back to the Church that was meeting in Jason's house and work with the brethren. He was to instruct them, to quietly and privately deal with them and to bring Paul a report back of how things stood. That's what we read in Acts 17.

Acts 17:16, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens," He sent Timothy back.

Acts 18:1, we are then told, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth."

Verse 5, Paul got to Corinth and Timothy caught up with him coming from Macedonia.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, we read, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...”

Verse 6, “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you...”

When we put the account in 1 Thessalonians together with the account in Acts, we can see that Paul, obviously, wrote 1 Thessalonians just a short time after he got to Corinth. He wrote it from Corinth and sent it back.

Let’s understand a little bit about Thessalonica. The original name of the city was Therma; it was renamed by Cassandra about 320 B.C. in honor of his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia in the first century. It was a major trading center located on one of the main Roman roads. It held the status of a Roman free city. It was the capital of Macedonia. It was a major city on a trading route.

There was a sizable Jewish community in Thessalonica due mainly to its status of a trading center. The majority of the population followed pagan mythology, which by that time had lost its hold. The stories and the accounts of pagan mythology were such that they really did not answer the questions that people had.

There were philosophies that had arisen that had begun to have a certain amount of influence throughout the Greek world, but there was no real concept of salvation and an afterlife. The Greeks, as with many of the others, did not have much concept of the resurrection of the body. The concept of the resurrection was alien to the Greek world. Some of them following Plato had a concept of an immortal soul. The teaching of the philosophers was that the physical represented something bad and you wanted to be freed from your body. The concept that the body was going to be resurrected was a little difficult because it was so different from the ideas that most of them had grown up with.

We will see that 2 Thessalonians was basically written a short time after 1 Thessalonians. As we look at the book itself and at the message it brings, we find that there were a couple of major purposes in Paul’s writing. Certainly, he wrote to

strengthen them during persecution. There were a lot of problems, a lot of persecution that broke out that directly impacted him and spilled over to the brethren. He wanted to encourage and build them up during persecution.

1 Thessalonians 2:2, “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know; we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” He spoke the gospel in the midst of a lot of contention and problems. ‘We have already gone through problems in Philippi, but that didn’t stop us from coming down there to teach you.’

Verse 14, “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews...” He talks about how they had gone through many things.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-7, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”

Paul seeks to encourage them and to build them up in the midst of trials. Timothy came back and clearly pointed out things to his attention. The people were suffering a lot of trials and persecution, so he wanted to encourage and strengthen them during persecution. Also, he wanted to give them instructions concerning the return of Christ, about the resurrection and the proper attitude for Christians to take during the time preceding these events. This was clearly a major issue.

He spent a great deal of chapter 4 and a portion of chapter 5 dealing with instructions about the resurrection. He talks about the fact that there would be a resurrection. He discusses the Day of

the Lord and gave them instructions as to what they were to do. Chapter 5 has a lot of short exhortations and things that he did.

2 Thessalonians, which he wrote a little while later, again gives more detailed instructions concerning events relating to the Day of the Lord, to the return of Christ and to the attitude that Christians are to have. We are going to notice that there was a problem that came in.

Paul laid great stress on the fact that Christ was going to return and there was going to be a resurrection. He laid great stress on that in 1 Thessalonians. Then he had to turn around in 2 Thessalonians and explain to them that there were things that had to happen first because some were ready to “jump the gun” and figured that things were just about over. Therefore, he had to explain that there were prophesied things that had to happen first.

The other problem was that there were those who felt that with the end being that close, there was no point in them doing anything—they were just kind of “bumming” off the charity of others. Paul admonished them in 1 Thessalonians and then really “chewed them out” in 2 Thessalonians 3.

2 Thessalonians 3:10, “...If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Verse 11, he was concerned that some were just going around being busybodies and not really being productive.

If you put 1 and 2 Thessalonians together, one book stressed that, ‘Yes, Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, and there is going to be a resurrection of the saints. Our focus and attention needs to be on that, and that is the basis of our hope that brings us through trials, difficulties, stresses and things of that sort, but it’s not going to happen immediately.’

1 Thessalonians 5:2, “...the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” It will come on the *world* as a thief in the night.

Verse 4, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” He told them there were things that had to happen first. They needed to be conscious and aware of those things. Paul brings that out in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Until these things do happen, we need to be productive people, doing the things that we should do. We are to be living our lives in a responsible way and be in a position to help and share and give. God has not called us to go off and sit in a cave somewhere and wait for Christ to return.

Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to (1) strengthen them during persecution, (2) give them instruction concerning the return of Christ and the resurrection and (3) explain the attitude that we need to have in the time preceding these events.

It’s clear that the bulk of the Thessalonians Church was Gentiles.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” He said, ‘You turned to God from idols.’

When we look at the background of the Thessalonians Church, we’re basically looking at people who were Greek. Acts 17:1-4 make plain that there were some Jews. You have to realize that Greeks in some of these cities made a practice of going in and sitting in the back benches of the synagogue on the Sabbath and listening to the law being read. They were searching for something. They did not participate in the life of the Jewish community, but they recognized that the religion of the Jews had answers that they didn’t have. Their own mythology and philosophies really did not provide fulfilling, satisfying answers. It was not uncommon in many of the cities, particularly of the Greek world, that people would go in and simply sit on the back benches of the synagogue and listen to the law being read and expounded on the Sabbath. The Gentiles had a certain familiarity, but we see clearly that these were people who had turned from idolatry.

We will note what seems to have been a problem in Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a big commercial trading center and tended to attract a lot of people who were what we would term some really “smooth operators,” real “sharpies” —guys who really weren’t that interested in working hard but liked to turn a “fast buck.” Thessalonica was on a major route. It was a major area where you had trading caravans coming through from the east on their way to Rome. You had a lot of different people, different nationalities, and that was a great place for a “sharpie” to try to turn a “quick buck” because you are dealing with people who don’t speak the language very well.

There seemed to be a lot of this sort of thing in Thessalonica. The city seemed to have attracted people who had this sort of attitude—people who were not anxious to be hard workers and

productive but were anxious to make a few dollars quickly.

There's a problem with that; people tend to suspect others of being like them. We will notice in Thessalonians that people seemed to have been a little bit suspicious about Paul's motives. Paul recognized that and made a special effort to work hard while he was in Thessalonica. The first thing Paul did when he conducted a service was not to "pass the hat"; he particularly didn't do it in a place like this because this was exactly what they were suspicious of.

1 Thessalonians 2:2-12, "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Paul made a special effort there because he knew the attitude of the people. He knew they were suspicious. They were suspicious of his motives. They kept waiting for the "hook."

"When we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." In other words, it was not that Paul did not have the right to have received monetary support. He was only there for a very short time (about three weeks). Whatever he had to say on the subject and whatever instruction he gave, he evidently made a point that any monies were to be utilized there locally. He did not take any of it. He made a special point of working during the time that he was there to set an example, not

because he had to, in the sense that he did not have the right to receive monetary support. He makes the point that it was not that he couldn't have in the sight of God; it was simply that it was not the best time to stress that, "we might have made demands of you as apostles of Christ."

The prerogatives of the office were such that we had the right. That's what Paul means when he mentions in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:23 that all things are lawful but are not expedient (helpful, profitable) or beneficial. It was not necessarily going to be for the best at that particular time. Paul dealt with them in a special way because he was dealing with people who had certain hang-ups and certain problems. They were suspicious of motives. It was a city full of salesmen, a bunch of "slick operators," and as a result, people were very suspicious of everybody who came through. They kept waiting for "what's in it for him?" He wanted to stress to them that he wasn't doing what he did to get rich. That was not his motive.

There were people who only knew or became aware of Mr. Herbert Armstrong in his latter years at a time when the work had grown greatly. They looked at Ambassador College and all the things and trappings of the work and said, 'He's just in it for the money.' Well, if he was just in it for the money, why was he in it for about 30 years before there was no money? Why was he in it through the years when there was no money at all or during the years when his salary was \$2.50 a week—not an hour, but a week! Why was he in it then? The same reason Paul was.

You don't come along and do something and say, 'I know there's nothing now. I know I will suffer for 30 years, but when I am 80 years old, the income of the work will increase and I'll be able to fly places in a jet plane.' There weren't any jet planes back when the work started. Do you know what will happen 30 years down the road? Of course not! You don't even know if you're going to live for the next 30 years.

We have Paul's example. Paul did not immediately lay claim on their tithes for his livelihood. He brings out in verse 6 that he wanted to make a point that he had a right to it, but he hadn't done it. Tithing was not the first sermon he preached.

Verse 14, he admonished them, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." What did Paul do in the Gentile area? What did he do in Greece? He pointed the Churches there back to headquarters. How do they do it there? They

became followers of the Churches in Judea. They were practicing the same thing.

The commentators like to say the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath. They can't deny that the Jews kept the Sabbath. You can read the book of Acts and what James told Paul in the latter part of Acts.

Acts 21:20, "...‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...’" The Jerusalem Church and the Jews were zealous for the law. There's no way that the modern commentators can deny that the Jerusalem Church in the first century kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days. They all acknowledge that, but they claim the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath and the Gentile Churches kept Sunday. No, they didn't! Paul told the Churches in Greece to be followers of the Churches in Judea. The Churches in Greece were taught by Paul to do the same thing the Churches in Judea did. And guess what? They got the same persecution. They were just as popular with their neighbors as the Church in Jerusalem was popular.

In 1 Thessalonians 3, Paul recounts the background of how he came to write the letter and why he was doing it.

1 Thessalonians 3:13, "so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." He was warning them to be established and to be dedicated in serving God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality..." Immorality was taken very lightly in the Greek and Roman world, particularly the Greek world. All sorts of immorality including premarital sex and homosexuality were treated very casually. They were very common sins. As he writes back to the Thessalonians, Paul lays stress—"this is the will of God: God wants you to be holy. He wants you to live holy lives. He wants you to be set apart as a holy people; one aspect of that is you have to abstain from immorality."

Verse 4, "that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [how to gain a wife and how to do so] in sanctification and honor..." He says, 'There is a different way of doing it then the way you've done it.'

Verse 5, "not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God..." He's telling them that they needed to go about getting married and to conduct themselves in a totally different way than their unconverted neighbors. Their

conduct was not to be motivated by lust and lawlessness.

Verse 6, "that no one should take advantage of and defraud [KJV, margin, "overreach"] his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified." What does he mean that no man should defraud or overreach his brother? This is tied in with what he is saying about immorality. You need to know how to go about obtaining a mate in sanctification and honor. You don't do it the way the unconverted do it. You need to make sure that you don't go beyond the bounds of propriety because if you do, you are defrauding your brother. You're taking what doesn't belong to you. When you engage in immorality, you are taking from the future mate of this person that which they are entitled to. Paul laid great stress on this because the whole culture of the Greek and Roman world was, frankly, very similar to some of the worse areas of our modern world.

I guarantee you that a place like San Francisco would not have been out of place in pagan Greece. The big Halloween blast they had has been sort of adopted as "the big gay extravaganza" in San Francisco. They have big parades. It's really a desire to flaunt a lifestyle. There were some Pentecostals who got the idea that they were going to come in. They rented the Civic Center and were going to hold a big revival service and cast out all the demons of San Francisco. Well, they didn't cast out all the demons; they attracted all the demons. If you saw the news, I think every demon within 50 miles congregated outside there and it was literally pandemonium. "Pandemonium" is a Greek term that literally means "all demons." There was a chaotic, confused mess. There was a horrible sort of confrontation and things that were going on there. It was the sort of thing that was certainly a very pagan extravaganza that would not have been out of place in ancient Greece.

Verse 7, Paul lays stress on some of these things, "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness."

God called us to be different, to be clean and not to conduct ourselves the way the world does. God wants His people to be different. He wants us to exemplify a different attitude, different actions and to carry and deport ourselves in a totally different way. The world emphasizes a totally false set of values—values that revolve around the lusts of the flesh and a lifestyle that is completely at variance with God's law and the concept of holiness. We find it flaunted in

actions, entertainment, television shows, movies, music, magazines, styles of dress and grooming—in virtually every aspect of our society.

The thing to realize is that the solution is not simply changing and cleaning up of the external. We have to realize that inner values are reflected by outer actions. The two go hand-in-hand together. In some cases, people have changed their outer actions, but the inner values really remain the same. That is backwards. If we change our inner values, our outer actions will reflect a different way. It will reflect a godly lifestyle and set of values, as opposed to a worldly lifestyle and a worldly set of values. Paul laid great emphasis on this to the Thessalonians.

Verses 11-12, “that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” We see over and over where he emphasizes people need to be productive and set a good example. There was a real problem. There were too many ways to get by—panhandling and making slick deals with the traders who were coming through—doing some of these things and really not doing anything of productive value. The people had a reputation for laziness and they looked on working hard as somehow demeaning.

Verses 13-14, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” Paul talked about the coming of the Messiah. Evidently, even some who had been baptized had, perhaps, died in just a matter of months. Some were concerned, “When the Messiah comes back, what about the ones who have died? Are they going to share in it?”

Verse 15, he said he didn’t want them to be worried about those who were asleep in Jesus. We are not going to precede them.

Verses 16-17, “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. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” This is clearly not talking about being raptured up to heaven.

Zechariah 14:4, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,”

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” We are going to be with Him from then on. Where is He going to be? Is He going back to heaven? No.

“In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.” If we are with Him, then we are going to be standing there, too.

The Protestants want to read the rapture into the scriptures. Most don’t even know where they got the idea of a rapture. The doctrine of the rapture originated with a Catholic mystic during the Middle Ages who had all sorts of visions and ideas. He was the source of the teachings about the rapture; it was absorbed by early Protestant thinkers. Now they try to take various scriptures to read the rapture into them.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

My old Baptist preacher liked to quote the Bible about that point and then he would close the book. He could really kind of “warm up the fires.” “The Lord is going to come as a thief in the night. He may come back tonight. You better come down and give your heart to the Lord or burn in hell forever.”

He is going to come as a thief in the night, but upon whom? The Church? God’s people?

Verse 4, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” Paul didn’t expect that day to come upon him as a thief. A thief is someone who sneaks up unexpectedly. The return of Christ should not come upon God’s people unexpectedly.

Verse 6, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” We are to have an approach that is going to be constructive. It will come as a thief on the world, as a whole, but not on Christians who are watching and praying.

Verses 9-10, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” Death, in the scriptures, is compared with sleep. You see that over and over. The state of death is not consciousness.

Verses 11-13, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the

Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." He encouraged them to look to and to know the ministry and those who labored among them, to respect them for the work that they did, and to have peace among them.

Verse 14, "Now we exhort [KJV, margin, "beseech"] you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted [KJV, "feeble-minded"], uphold the weak, be patient with all." He admonished and exhorted the brethren or he beseeched the brethren. It was to warn or admonish those who are unruly or disorderly. There are those who need to be admonished, strongly corrected and exhorted because their conduct is disorderly. There are others who need to be comforted, encouraged and cheered up.

This term "feeble-minded" basically means "those who are depressed or discouraged." That is the sense of the original word. "Feeble-minded" has a different connotation in modern English. We think of it as someone who doesn't have all their mental faculties, but it means those who are depressed or discouraged. There are those who need to be told to "shape up" or "ship out"; there are others who need to be encouraged because they are discouraged, somewhat depressed and need to be encouraged and comforted. There are some others who are weak who simply need to have somebody pay attention to them and give them some help. Different problems call for different things.

Verse 17, "pray without ceasing." The concept of this is to never break the prayer habit. Never get away from prayer. Pray without ceasing. He exhorted them in these areas.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 begins again with Paul, Silvanus [Silas] and Timothy writing to the Church of the Thessalonians.

Acts 18:11, he was in Corinth for a year and a half. Clearly, this would have been written fairly soon after he wrote 1 Thessalonians because the problem was that some had jumped to conclusions with all his warnings about the end. **He has to let them know that there are things that have to happen first.**

2 Thessalonians 2:3, "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition..." He had to go back and explain that there were things that have to happen first. This was to help clarify some of what he was getting across in 1 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1:3, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other..."

Verses 4-5, he says that they were still going through persecutions and tribulations.

He brings out that God is going to recompense tribulations.

Verse 6, "since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you..."

Verses 7-9, "and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..."

What does "everlasting destruction" mean? The term "everlasting" here is Greek "*aionios*" and it means "age lasting." The destruction that is being spoken of here is a destruction that is to endure for the remainder of that age; in other words, the Millennium. It is a wrath that is to be executed. The lake of fire is not being referred to here. It is the wrath that Jesus Christ is going to pour out at His return on those that don't know God, those who are actively rebelling against God. They are going to be punished with age-lasting destruction. They will be destroyed for the entirety of that millennial age.

Revelation 20:5, we're told, "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished." The "rest of the dead" will rise up in the second resurrection.

But these are going to be destroyed at the return of Christ. Those who are actively opposing God and God's people are going to be dealt with. It will be an age-lasting destruction. It is not the ultimate lake of fire because that doesn't come at the return of Christ but rather after the Millennium and White Throne Judgment period (**Revelation** 20:7-16).

2 Thessalonians 1:8 shows those who don't know God. Christ is going to come back with power and glory and put the rebellion down; then they will be dealt with at a later time.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or trouble, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not

come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition...”

Two things have to happen: a falling away and the man of sin will be revealed. This individual called “the son of perdition” or “the son of destruction” is an individual whose purpose is to be destroyed—someone who is cut out for destruction. Who is this individual?

Verses 4-11, “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining [what’s holding things back], that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [or hinders] will do so [will continue to restrain or hinder] until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie...”

Who is this talking about? There are those who have misunderstood and tried to apply 2 Thessalonians 2 to various individuals. I’ve heard various ones. Some have applied it to somebody that they are upset with in the Church in a leadership capacity—most of whom have long since gone by the wayside and are not around anymore. It doesn’t refer to any of them.

This is clearly a reference to the final false prophet. I don’t care how far off track anybody in the Church gets; they are not going to be elected pope.

Verses 3-4, there will be a falling away, and the final man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition. He is going to sit in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. What does that make reference to? What does that bring to mind?

Does that remind you of what Jesus said back in Matthew 24?

Matthew 24:15, ““Therefore when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand)...” There were those who thought it was different ones in the Church leadership. In effect, what happens is

that people get mad at somebody; they get upset and then try to find something really bad in the Bible to hang on them. We don’t want to read into the Bible; we want to read out of the Bible.

Luke 21:20, ““But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.””

Mark 13:14, ““But when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it [he; “it” is not a neuter in the Greek] ought not’ (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.””

Matthew 24:15, “...spoken of by Daniel the prophet...”

What do we find? We find what’s called the “abomination of desolation.” Mark makes plain it is going to involve an individual standing where he should not. This is the abomination of desolation that Daniel spoke of. This is going to have to happen before the return of Christ. Paul brings it out here in 2 Thessalonians 2 but in different words. He says you are going to see this man of sin stand in the temple saying he is God. That’s pretty abominable. It is an abominable thing that brings about desolation and destruction.

Daniel 11:31, we find Daniel said, ““And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.”” What is Daniel talking about?

Daniel 8:11, “He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.”

Verses 23-25, ““And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand.””

We find various other places where he is alluded to. There was a forerunner. The final abomination that makes desolate is what is going to happen just shortly before the return of Christ. It is going to begin the Great Tribulation. Christ

emphasized that it would be an abomination that Daniel had talked about (Daniel 8 and 11).

In context, you find that there was a forerunner, an event that occurred in the second century B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes was the king of the area of Syria. Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Jerusalem. He came into the temple, stopped the daily sacrifices, set up an idol of Jupiter Olympus in the Holy Place. He took it into the Holy of Holies and stood there and proclaimed that he was God incarnate. "Epiphanes" in Greek meant "the glorious appearing." He claimed to be deity in the flesh; he was there as the personification of deity. He set up this idol and stopped the daily sacrifice. He had a pig slaughtered on the altar. What Antiochus Epiphanes did was a forerunner. The slaughter that he launched against the Jews is clearly referred to in context in Daniel 8 and 11. He is used as a forerunner for an individual who is his spiritual successor.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, we are also told, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Verse 8, we are looking at an individual who is going to be destroyed at the return of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:20, "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." The false prophet works great signs or wonders to impress the whole world.

Matthew 24:11, "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

Verse 24, "For false christ and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Revelation 13:13-14, "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived." We find lying wonders or false miracles; things that are so impressive and appear so right that if it was possible, even the very elect would be deceived.

When we go back to 2 Thessalonians 2, we find that there will not only be a falling away from the truth, but there will be that final man of sin who will be revealed. He will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped; he's going to stand there in the temple of God proclaiming himself God incarnate. He is going to work great lying wonders and he is going to be destroyed by Christ at His coming.

When you put 2 Thessalonians 2 together with Daniel 8 and 11, Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Revelation 13, it is talking about the same thing. It is talking about the events that relate to the abomination that makes desolate—that final false prophet. There is going to be a daily sacrifice stopped, which means that there is going to be a literal temple, a holy place. It doesn't mean the temple is going to be completely built, but certainly an altar will be dedicated in some way or another. We have to take some of these things in their context.

Events are being held back until that final false prophet is on the scene.

2 Thessalonians 2:6, "And now you know what is restraining [withheld], that he may be revealed in his own time." Events are being held back until the final individuals are in place. The man and the events have to come together for things to happen as they are prophesied to happen. There are events on the world scene that can't happen or progress too rapidly in certain areas until the right people are in place, so that when the event occurs, the response is what is prophesied.

God has a time schedule. Events are being held back until it's time. Then the right individual will appear and be in place and things will come to a head. Paul explains that.

The mystery of iniquity was already at work even in 50 A.D., which had its beginnings with Simon Magus in Samaria in 33 A.D. Things were already stirring. The groundwork was being laid for some to fall away from the Church, but that final man of sin was not and has not been so. But once that occurs, things are going to come together very, very quickly.

Paul lays great emphasis on working. It evidently continued to be an ongoing problem.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not

have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”

Some take this out of context, and say, ‘Since Paul didn’t take a salary from the Church, ministers shouldn’t do that.’ There are many other places where it is clearly shown that Paul did receive his livelihood from his ministry. We will go through them in some of his Epistles.

When Paul was in Thessalonica raising up the Church, he did certain things, “not because we do not have authority [KJV, “power”].” He did it for the purpose of setting an example. He wanted them to see a little bit of what hard work was like.

Verses 10-14, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

In other words, he is to be disfellowshipped. “You are not to have company with him” is what “disfellowshipped” means. If an individual is going to conduct himself that way, then that individual needs to be noted and you need to leave him alone. He is not free to continue in the fellowship of the Church—with the hope that he will be ashamed of himself and realize the seriousness of what he’s done.

Verse 15, “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” You are not doing it because he is your enemy; you admonish him as a brother because you care what happens to him.

Paul had to come down really hard on this because there were some who would not do what they should do. They had this kind of lazy mentality. They didn’t want to work and wanted to “bum off” of some who were working and had money. They were saying, ‘You’re supposed to have love and you’re supposed to share—so why don’t you share with me?’

It’s not that we should be weary in well doing. But on the other hand, it’s taking advantage and it’s taking it out of context to say, ‘You’re supposed to love me and share. I’m going to show up at your house every day to eat and “bum off” of you.’ As many times as Paul brought up the issue, it was obviously a problem—a

problem that affected more than one or two. People are a product of their background.

The mystery of iniquity that Paul makes reference to certainly refers to the Simon Magus followers.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, “For the mystery of lawlessness [KJV, “iniquity”] is already at work;” –The mystery religion that teaches lawlessness—it certainly refers to the Simon Magus followers, which ultimately grew into what became the Catholic Church. It is an outgrowth of the old Babylonian Mystery Religion that taught that the law was done away. It’s called the “mystery of iniquity.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14 deals with the subject of what we term “disfellowshipping.” An individual is unwilling to listen to the Church and respect admonition after he has been admonished on a serious matter, and he won’t listen. There comes a point where we simply say, ‘You really don’t have any basis for continued fellowship with those who are trying to live the right way.’ Those individuals are to be noted and simply left alone in terms of any sort of spiritual fellowship—with the idea that they will eventually wake up, realize the seriousness, repent and be restored to fellowship.

Hopefully that will give you an overview of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. There’s a lot that is packed in there.

Bible Study # 60
November 27, 1990
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Galatians

We are getting into the book of Galatians this evening. It is an important book to understand. It is one that the world frequently misunderstands. There's probably no book that the Apostle Paul wrote that has been more misunderstood, distorted and taken out of context than has been the book of Galatians. As we get into the book itself, let's **understand a little bit of the background of Galatians.**

The commentators are not even sure where Galatia was. What they're not sure about, really, is what they understand best, and it kind of goes downhill from there. They are not sure where it was located and everything becomes less clear as they go along. Why do I say that they were not sure where it was?

The term "Galatia" was used in several different ways in the New Testament period. In some cases, it was used as a broad geographical term. It referred to a specific Roman province, but even the borders of the province changed a couple of times as Roman administration (in terms of the way they administered the Roman Empire) made some alterations. The result was that there's about two or three different areas that can be labeled Galatia. All of them are in the same general area.

If you were looking on a modern-day map, it would be the central area of modern-day Turkey, and what was anciently Asia Minor. Specifically, there is what the commentators call the "Northern Galatian theory" and "Southern Galatian theory" in terms of where Paul was writing. If we simply let the New Testament be our guide, then it is pretty apparent the Churches Paul was addressing were the Churches of Southern Galatia. The only areas we have any record of Paul going, in the book of Acts, are the Churches of Southern Galatia—the area of Derbe, Iconium, Lystra and Antioch of Pisidia. Those cities are in the area of Southern Galatia. That was the area where Paul went on his first evangelistic journey and again on the second evangelistic journey. This was one of the first areas Paul preached in and one of the first areas that he raised up Churches. It's an area where he spent a lot of time. Because it's from where Timothy came, this is an area where he had close connections.

There's no record of Paul going to the area of what is termed "Northern Galatia." There's specific reference in Acts 16:6-7 to the fact that God did not allow Paul to go there. Paul was on his way up into one of those areas on the southern shore of the Black Sea, and it says the Spirit did not allow him to do that. What we find is that the area of Northern Galatia was distinctly different from the area of Southern Galatia. Southern Galatia was Gentile. Northern Galatia, up in the area of the Black Sea, was the ancient habitation of the Gauls—the tribes that moved from that area across the Black Sea up into France and gave their name to ancient Gaul. Those up in that area were Israelites. Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles, not to the Israelites. Galatia, the area where he went, was a geographical term in the New Testament. It stretched across the central portion of Asia Minor to the Mediterranean Sea on the south. The northern part was heavily Israelite—the Gauls who later migrated to France. Paul never went there.

There is a reference in Acts 16:6-7 to some of the specific geographic locations of that area in Northern Galatia, and the fact the Spirit did not lead Paul to go there.

Acts 16:6-7, "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them."

In reality, Peter went to that area.

1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." Peter is addressing the area of Northern Galatia—the ancestors of some of you sitting right here because the ancestors of the French (the Gauls) were the primary group to whom Peter addressed the book of 1 Peter.

Southern Galatia, which includes the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Derbe, was almost entirely Gentile. It was primarily Greek with a few Jews who settled in there. The Greeks moved into the area of what is now modern-day Turkey after Alexander the Great's conquest. They were major settlers in that area and were the predominant population until centuries later when the Turks invaded from Asia and gradually dispossessed them.

One thing that is very important to understand, in terms of the background of Galatia, is the background of the people in that area. In addition to the pagan mythology that was taught, there

were the Hellenistic philosophies that were extant at the time. There were Greek philosophers who had gained great prominence throughout the Greek-speaking world. One of these philosophies was Stoicism. Stoicism was a very popular philosophy in that area. Stoicism places a great deal of emphasis on astrology. It emphasized what is termed “pagan dualism”—the concept that the flesh is evil and the spirit is good.

In *Lamphear’s Classical Dictionary*, the Stoics maintained that, “man alone in the present state of his existence could attain perfection.” This was the concept of the Stoics. It was a concept of penance, a matter of enough good deeds to outweigh the bad deeds. This was the background of the people who were in the Church in Galatia.

The book of Galatians itself was written by the Apostle Paul to the Churches in the Southern Galatian area in the winter of 52-53 A.D.—December of 52 to January/February 53 A.D.—from his headquarters in Antioch, Syria. Paul had visited this area on his first evangelistic journey back in 46 A.D. He went through that area on his first evangelistic journey and spent considerable time there. Then he finally went back to Antioch. It was in the aftermath of going back to Antioch that the issue of circumcision “came to a head” and he went to Jerusalem for the ministerial conference of 49 A.D. We have that recorded in Acts 15.

Subsequent to the conference in the later winter/early spring of 50 A.D., Paul visited Galatia once more on his second evangelistic journey. He came through Galatia traveling through in the spring of 50 A.D., crossing from Asia Minor into Greece (into Europe) around Pentecost of 50 A.D. He spent quite a number of months in Greece. He was originally in Philippi, then went down through Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and came down to Corinth. He stayed 18 months in Corinth. We read that last time and saw that it was from Corinth that he wrote his letters back to the Thessalonians.

After 18 months in Corinth, he left and sailed back over to Ephesus and went back to Jerusalem for the Feast of 52 A.D.

Acts 18:21, he needed to go back for the Feast that was in Jerusalem.

Verse 22, he wintered in Antioch, which was his headquarters for the Gentile work when he wasn’t on the road. He was in Antioch the winter of 52-53 A.D. It was from there that he wrote to the Galatians. He had heard some things that concerned him. **Because he had received**

some disquieting news of events that had transpired, he dispatched this letter to answer the questions that had arisen. As we get into the book itself, we will see a little bit about what is addressed.

Galatians 1:2, “and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia...” The Churches that are specifically in the area of Galatia are Derbe, Iconium and Lystra. They are the main areas there. I have already made comment of the population of the area of the Galatian Churches.

Galatians 4:8, let me call your attention to, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.” Clearly, he is addressing people who were of a Gentile background—people who at one time had not known God and had served idols who “are not gods.” This is not a reference to Jews because they had known the true God and they had not served idols. The people Paul is addressing are people who came out of idolatry, people who had a pagan background. There were a few Jews there, but the whole came out of a pagan background. We’re all a product of our background; we are shaped and molded by certain thoughts and concepts which we have grown up with.

Galatians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)...” Paul lays emphasis on the fact of his apostleship, the work that God had done through him and the Scriptural authority he had that originated from God.

Clearly, one of the major problems in Galatia was that somebody had been in Galatia and problems had been stirred up. What was the subject of things being stirred up? One issue is that somebody had been challenging Paul’s authority. They were saying, ‘Paul is really a second-rate apostle, if you can even call him an apostle. You don’t need to pay any attention to what he says. He really doesn’t have very much authority. In fact, I have more authority because I have come from Jerusalem.’ These were self-appointed individuals who had come down from Jerusalem and had not been officially dispatched by James.

The issue of the book of Galatians has to do with access to God. What all the peripherals in Galatians get back to is how you gain access to God. What is necessary to establish and maintain a relationship with God that will ultimately result in salvation? This is why circumcision was such an issue. The reason circumcision was such an

issue in the New Testament period was because it concerned access to God. Understand what we mean.

Remember when God made the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17). The physical sign of the covenant that God gave to Abraham was the physical outward sign of circumcision for Abraham and his male descendants (vv. 10-11). At the time of the Exodus when Moses gave instructions from God to the Israelites concerning the Passover, one of the things he said was that no uncircumcised person was to partake of the Passover (Exodus 12:44-49). You had to have entered into that covenant relationship.

Paul was writing at the time that is termed the "second temple," the period of Herod's temple. There was much more courtyard to the temple than there was anything else. The temple itself consisted of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Only the priests went into the Holy of Holies. Out in front of the Holy Place was the altar of sacrifice. This was inside a courtyard that was the court of the Israelites. There was a gate that led out to the court of the Gentiles.

Remember the issue in Acts 21:26-39 that came up where Paul got arrested and it resulted in Roman imprisonment? Somebody nearly started a riot in the temple with an accusation against Paul. They accused him of bringing a couple of uncircumcised Gentiles into the temple compound, into the inner court. This provoked a near riot.

When emotions got all charged up, pretty soon the people didn't even know what the charge was, but they were mad and had a "lynch-mob" mentality. When one of the soldiers finally got him, he thought that Paul was the Egyptian robber. But he said, 'That's not me at all; they are accusing me of something else.' He didn't even know what the charge was. He thought they must have a terrible "desperado" in there that the people had cornered. Paul wasn't bringing anyone who was uncircumcised into the temple. That wasn't even true, but he was accused of it.

The point I am making is it was an issue of access. If you couldn't enter into the court of the Israelites, you couldn't offer a sacrifice because that's where the altar of sacrifice was. When the sacrifices were made, the animal was slain and the fat and some of the entrails were burned on the altar. Then the carcass was divided. The priest took some and the worshiper took some. The symbolism involved was one of communion or fellowship with God.

1 Corinthians 10:16-20, that's made reference to, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons."

I would like to call your attention to what is not obvious from the English translation. The words "communion" in verse 16, "partakers" in verse 18 and "fellowship" in verse 20 are all the same words in the Greek language. The concept of "fellowship" or "communion" is the same root word as to "communicate with." "Community" is another word that is derived from that. The point he is making is that when we all partake of the Passover symbols, there is a fellowship that we have with one another and with Christ.

"Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" They were in fellowship with the altar.

Verse 20, the Gentiles sacrificed to demons, and if you partook of that, then you were having fellowship with demons. The concept was that God's part was burned on the altar, the priest took his part to eat and the worshiper took his part. Symbolically, what you had was fellowship between the worshiper, God and the priest.

It was the picture of sitting down at a table and enjoying a meal of intimate fellowship. It was the concept of entering into a close, intimate relationship. When you have somebody at your table and you sit down and share your food with them, a particular fellowship is involved. This was the concept. That's why some of it was burned on the altar. That was in a sense what God partook of. What the individual took, he partook of and the priest partook of. There was a fellowship, a communion, a community that included God, the priest and the worshiper.

Circumcision was crucial to entering into that relationship (fellowship) because the uncircumcised couldn't come past the court of the Gentiles. You didn't have access to the altar of burnt sacrifice. The issue at stake was: What is necessary in order to have access, communion and fellowship with God? This is where things have gone astray.

We recognize that access to God is through Jesus Christ. In fact, no one had direct access to the Father. Jesus said, 'I have come to declare the Father' (John 1:18; John 5:37; John 14:7).

In the temple itself, you had the Holy Place then the Holy of Holies. There was a big thick curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The high priest was the only one who could enter into the Holy of Holies and he went in once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:34; Hebrew 9:7).

Matthew 27:51, when Jesus was crucified, there was a great earthquake, the veil of the temple was torn in two, and now the way was opened into the Holy of Holies. This symbolized the fact that Jesus Christ's sacrifice (His death) made possible our direct access to God. Access is through Jesus Christ. It still comes through a sacrifice, not through a lamb or a goat or ox, but through Jesus Christ who offered Himself as a sacrifice, one sacrifice for sin forever (John 1:29; Romans 6:10; Hebrew 9:12). We have access through Him; He is the source and means of our access to God.

The issue that came up in Galatia was that it was difficult for some to accept that access to God was that simple. You had various concepts that blended pagan ideas and philosophies with certain Jewish attitudes and ideas, and then they threw in an overlay of Christianity. People tended to accept a mixture of truth and error. There were those who were telling the Galatians that if they really wanted to guarantee and ensure access to God, they needed to be concerned about other things.

The issue that they had specifically regarded circumcision. Their approach to circumcision was as though it were a matter of penance. This is why Paul made such a major issue of circumcision and the fact that they should not do it. It got to the very heart and core of the Gospel. Paul was not opposed to circumcision from a physical standpoint. He himself had been circumcised and he had circumcised Timothy, who had a Jewish mother and Gentile father, when he took him with him in the ministry. Because Timothy had a Jewish mother, he felt that it would make a difference in terms of the way Timothy was regarded and accepted by the Jews.

But the issue was that there were those who were seeking to make circumcision a test of access and fellowship with God. They said that if you weren't circumcised, you weren't guaranteed access to God; therefore, there was no guarantee of salvation unless you were circumcised. That

was why Paul chose to make such a crucial issue of it and not to give in one inch or quarter inch. It got back to the very heart and core of whether or not the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was sufficient to gain access to God as a means of salvation, or whether there were physical things you had to do.

We need to understand that because some think you have to do "this or that" to be saved. How many Sabbaths do you have to keep in order to be guaranteed salvation? How many Passovers? How many Feast of Tabernacles? Think about it a little bit. What if somebody was baptized between Passover and Pentecost and the next year were killed in a car wreck on their way to Passover services and never kept the Passover. Is it necessary to keep the Passover to be saved? How many Sabbaths did the thief on the cross keep? He died the very day that he repented. It is not how many you have kept. The real issue gets back to the heart and the mind. If he had lived, would he have done it? Yes, he would. It's not the physical things you do that save you. It's not how many Sabbaths, Feasts, etc. that you have kept.

But if you're not willing to obey God, if you're unwilling to keep the Sabbath or Feast or do the things God says to do, then you have never repented and have never accepted Christ as your Savior. You're not on the way to salvation. It is an issue of the heart and mind. No amount of Sabbath keeping earns salvation. *Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin and through Him we have access to God and salvation.* When we accept and avail ourselves of that access, we will act on the things that God tells us to do. Acting on that access means we repent and turn away from sin and accept the Lordship and rulership of Jesus Christ in our lives. We want Him to live His life in us.

Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "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." The issue is not that we can live a life of rebellion and disobedience. No. If we are Christ's, then symbolically we are crucified with Christ and it is Christ who lives in us. He is living His life in us, so there is a yielded life, a surrendered life.

Access to God (and, ultimately, salvation) is not achieved by what you do. Your actions don't gain you access to God. Christ's action made possible your access to God. You could do everything perfectly and that would never earn you access to God. If it would, then why did

Christ have to die? If access to God can be accomplished and achieved by simply going out and becoming circumcised or by doing “this” or “that,” then why did Christ die? He died in vain. It would have been far simpler to have just said, ‘Go and do this and you will have gained access.’ That is why it is such a fundamental issue because the issue goes back to: How do you gain access to God? If there is another way, then Christ didn’t have to die. We are saying Christ’s sacrifice really was in vain. Protestants want to twist the book of Galatians and say that Galatians means that you shouldn’t keep the law. That is not what Galatians is about.

It makes plain, in the latter part of Galatians (Galatians 5:16-26), the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. There are tangible fruits that God’s Spirit will bear in our lives.

But how do you gain access?

Galatians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)...”

Verses 11-17, Paul addresses the issue of his apostolic authority. The message he preached was not something that he figured out for himself nor was it something other people told him, but it was revealed directly by God. He gave a little of his background and how Christ worked with him and taught him even after His resurrection. The resurrected Christ dealt with and taught Paul.

Galatians 2:1, “Then after fourteen years [after his conversion] I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.”

Verse 2, “And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.” This is reference to the ministerial conference (Acts 15) in 49 A.D. Fourteen years previously would date Paul’s conversion in 35 A.D. He went up to Jerusalem. Notice how he went. He went up and talked to those who were the leaders, but privately to them who were of reputation.

Verse 9, “and when James, Cephas [Cephas is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek word “*Petros*” for Peter; Cephas was the name he was commonly known by his contemporaries because it was the Aramaic form of his name. It was the name that Jesus Himself would normally have used.], and John, who seemed to be pillars,” “Seemed” is the same word that is rendered “reputation” in verse 2. Those who were acknowledged and recognized to be pillars of the

Church were James, who was the brother of Jesus and the presiding minister in the Jerusalem Church, Peter, who was the chief of the twelve apostles, and John, who was a part of the inner circle of the twelve. These were the ones who were acknowledged or recognized by others to be the pillars of the Church—to be the leading ministers. When Paul went up, he went up to those in authority; he privately conferred with them.

Verse 2, he said, “...privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.” He knew that if he was not working in harmony with the government God had set in His Church, his best efforts would be in vain. You can’t work contrary and be off in some rebellious way, doing your own thing, and think that’s acceptable. Paul recognized that and went up privately. Before he said anything to anybody else, he went to the ones who were the leading ministers. He sat down and talked it out with them because he didn’t want his efforts to be futile.

Verse 3, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.

Verse 4, there were false brethren who came in secretly seeking to bring them into bondage. The issue was not so much that physical circumcision was such a harsh or terrible thing; the bondage was that you had to earn access to God through some form of penance. The bondage was the whole concept that the Stoics, Gnostics and various philosophers of the day had of how you went about gaining access to God. There were all sorts of concepts that the pagan world had. These pagan concepts ultimately came into what became the professing Christian church, and those were not acceptable.

Verses 7-8, the decision was made at the conference that Paul was to be placed in charge of the work for the Gentiles. He would go to the Gentiles and Peter would head up the work among the Israelites. Christ sent Peter and the twelve apostles primarily to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6).

Verses 11-15, at a later time Peter came to Antioch; Antioch was Paul’s headquarters. Peter visited there for a period of time. Some have speculated this may have been a Feast of Tabernacles. The implication is that this was something that took place over a period of several days.

Certain ones came down from Jerusalem and an issue of fellowship arose. Many of the Palestinian Jews had very little occasion to have fellowship with the Gentiles one way or the other

because there really weren't any to speak of. There certainly weren't any in the Church there in Jerusalem and the Judean area. About the only ones would have been Roman soldiers and Roman administrators. It had not really been an issue there because the only ones in the Church were Jews.

Antioch had a sizable Gentile community. By this time, the Church there was primarily Gentile. Peter made an error in judgment and Paul saw that it was going to create a problem and division. He met the issue head on. Peter acknowledged that he had made a mistake and the matter was resolved. He needed to make clear that the Gentiles who were uncircumcised did not have some lesser relationship with God. Their contact and relationship with God was not on a lower "rung of the ladder." There was nothing about these matters that regulated spiritual access to God.

Verses 16-18, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law [You are not going to accomplish justification, which is what makes possible access to God, by doing physical things.] but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

It is not that we don't have to obey God and just live in sin because we're not justified by the works of the law. That's not what He said. He goes on to reiterate that because he knew people would want to take it out of context and say, 'We're not justified by the works of the law, so we can just do anything we want to.' That's not what Paul said. But the issue still is that the works of the law do not justify us.

Verse 21, "...if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Why did He go through what He went through if His sacrifice wasn't necessary? If you can do it yourself, then why did Christ die? This is the issue Paul keeps coming back to. That's the crucial point. There was a reason why Christ had to die. If access is not through Jesus Christ, then why do you need a Savior? Jesus Christ is the means by which we have access to the Father.

Galatians 3:2, "This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" How did you

receive God's Spirit? You received God's Holy Spirit when you were baptized. How did you gain that access to God? You wouldn't have the Spirit if you didn't have access to God. How did you gain that access? Was it because you circumcised yourself and you did these physical things? Did that gain you access to God? Was it because you believed the gospel, repented and were baptized? Where did you gain the Spirit? If you have the Spirit of God, then you have access and contact with God and you don't need something else in order to gain it. How did you get what you have? Where did that come from? He brings them back to the fact that they believed Paul's message, "by the hearing of faith?" They believed the gospel, repented and had been baptized.

Verses 3-5, all right, you already have the Spirit, why do you need to do this?

Verses 6-9, then he goes through and begins to explain using the example of Abraham. What gained Abraham access to God? Did circumcision gain access to God? No, Abraham had a relationship with God before he was ever circumcised. Circumcision was something that was added as a physical outward sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. It was predicated upon the relationship that Abraham already had with God through faith. Abraham's relationship with God was through faith, not through something physical. God gave him circumcision as a sign when he was 99 years old. God had been working with him for at least 24 years prior to that. God called him when he was 75 to come out of Ur of the Chaldeans and go to a land that he would show him (Genesis 12:1-4). Our access to God is ultimately predicated upon faith, and that is directed toward Jesus Christ. He makes that access possible.

Verses 10-11, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Verse 13, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law [What is the curse of the law? The curse of the law is the death penalty. What's the curse?], having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')..."

Deuteronomy 21:22-23, "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall

surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.”

The curse is they will take you out and hang you; they will execute you.

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death,” The curse of the law is the death penalty. That is the curse that the law imposes. Upon whom is that curse imposed? Upon those who obey? No.

Galatians 3:10, “...‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’” The curse is upon anyone who disobeys. And since all have disobeyed at one time or another (Romans 3:23), then everybody is under the curse. How do you get out from under it?

The works of the law, the labors imposed by the law, are labors that had to do with gaining access to God through the sacrificial system. The rituals, washings and all of these labors that were carried out were predicated on the fact that you had sinned and needed to regain access to God. When you performed any of those things, you were in effect acknowledging that you had sinned. If you sinned, then you are under the curse. The way you get out from under the curse is not the performance of certain ritual acts. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through our faith in that sacrifice and our acceptance of it. The works of the law make reference to the ritualistic labors that were imposed by the law as a schoolmaster.

Verse 19, “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions,” Is this talking about the Ten Commandments? Remember the Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments. Were the Ten Commandments added because of transgression? No. The Ten Commandments defined what transgression was to begin with (1 John 3:4, KJV).

Romans 5:13, if there were no law, there would be no sin.

Before Israel ever came to Mount Sinai (Exodus 19 and 20), remember the miracle of the manna (Exodus 16)? If they gathered extra manna on any day, it stunk and bred worms—except on Friday. On Friday, they were told to gather an extra portion. It lasted over the Sabbath and they didn’t have to go out and gather on the Sabbath. There was somebody that went out on the Sabbath because he figured it had been there the last six days; therefore, it should be there that day, too. He didn’t see why it wouldn’t be. And

sure enough, it wasn’t. The Sabbath was known. It was revealed miraculously to Israel and was being enforced by God before they ever got to Mount Sinai. The Sabbath was in effect. It wasn’t introduced at Mount Sinai.

At Mount Sinai, Israel said, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do’ (Exodus 19:8; Exodus 24:3, 7).

Galatians 3:19, “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.” The Ten Commandments were not ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator; they were spoken by the mouth of God Himself (Exodus 20:1, 19; Deuteronomy 5:22). After they were spoken, Moses went up into the mountain.

While he was gone for six weeks, they built the golden calf (Exodus 32). They transgressed the commandments they had accepted as part of the covenant. Clearly, idolatry and adultery stand out and everything else connected with it. What happened when Moses came back down? Remember what came next? Instructions for the tabernacle and the Levitical sacrificial system were given next (Exodus 36-40; Leviticus 1-7). What was added because of transgression (Galatians 3:19)? The ritual laws are the basis of what Israel went through and how they enacted regaining of access to God. There were things that were added as a schoolmaster.

Galatians 3:24, “Therefore the law was our tutor [KJV, “schoolmaster”] to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” The schoolmaster is there to teach a lesson. What was added? The law was added because of transgression, until Christ would come.

Hebrews 9:8-10, “the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.”

Here was something that was added because of transgressions, until Christ, that was symbolic of how we gained access. Four things symbolized how you gained access: 1) meat offerings (the oblations), 2) drink offerings (the libations), 3) the washings (the ablutions) and 4) the physical ceremony. The sacrifice of Christ was pictured by the sacrificial offerings burned on the altar,

the pouring out of the blood and the water that was ceremonially poured out at the altar, and the drink offerings. In order for the priest to go into the presence of God, first there was the sacrifice (meat offerings, drink offerings). Then he approached closer to the tabernacle and he went through the ceremonial washing. Then following specific ritual, he took the golden censer into the tabernacle or temple.

How do we gain access? Christ made it possible by paying the penalty. He offered Himself as a sacrifice. The meat and drink offering pointed to what Christ did.

Christ took the first step. What do we do in response? If we accept that, we then must clean up—we must be washed. Repentance is what the different washings pictured, a symbolic washing or cleansing. You can't come into God's presence dirty and unclean. Then we have to follow God's instructions to the letter and beyond the letter; we have to follow them in the spirit. The various physical ceremonies and rituals pointed to the fact that God has a specific way He wants things done.

Galatians 3:19, "...It [the law] was added because of transgression, ..." They were not the means to access. They were merely things that illustrated God's plan for how access would be given. The access comes through Jesus Christ. "It [the law] was added...till the Seed should come." It was to last until the time of Christ. It was to teach a lesson and to point out what the Messiah would do. Paul lays great emphasis on it.

Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death, ..." Death is the result of lawbreaking. If you had a need to engage in these ritualistic activities to gain access to God, then you were acknowledging that you had sinned and were cut off. The curse is on everyone who hasn't perfectly obeyed. If you ever sinned, you were in trouble, which includes all of us. We don't gain justification from sin by doing it right from now on. We gain justification by the fact that Christ paid the penalty.

Galatians 3:13, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us..." He paid the penalty in our stead.

"It [the law] was added because of transgressions."

Jeremiah 7:22-23, "'For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be

My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'"

God did not originally speak to them about burnt offerings and sacrifices (Exodus 19, 20). When they disobeyed, there were rituals added because of transgressions. This makes reference to the whole book of Leviticus.

Galatians 3:27-28, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This clearly refers to spiritual relationships, not physical relationships.

It is incredible how people will misuse and distort scriptures. I read the other day a couple of homosexuals who wanted to get married in some church—if you can even call it a church. The scripture they used to justify that was that there is neither male nor female in Christ. That is not what it's talking about. I think we all understand that. Hopefully we do.

What is obliterated is not the physical distinctions of our ethnic background, our economic status or our sex. The issue that Paul is addressing is access to God. You don't have a "leg up" in terms of how much money or how little money you have. That has no bearing on your access to God. Money will gain you access to the rulers of this world, but it won't gain you access to God one iota. You don't have a "leg up" because of your ethnic background, economic status or sex. When it comes to access to God, none of those things count for anything. That is what Paul is emphasizing.

Verse 29, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Galatians 4:10 is often greatly misunderstood and taken out of context, "You observe days and months and seasons and years." At that point they like to close the book and say you're not supposed to observe the Sabbath. If that proves you are not supposed to observe the Sabbath, does it prove that you are also not supposed to observe Sunday? It just says, "observe days," not which days. The ones who are making an issue of this are observing Sunday, Christmas, Easter—all kinds of things. That is a selective use of the Bible. You have to get the context of which days and months and times and years are being referred to. It doesn't mention the Sabbath or the Feast days.

Verse 8, "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are

not gods.” You could make a better case for Christmas, etc. These were people who came out of a pagan background, not Jewish. These were people who were idolaters.

I was just recently going through a Bible Handbook. It’s a new one and they had a quote in there in reference to Sunday. They referred to the original decree that the Emperor Constantine issued to make Sunday a day of rest. They even acknowledge that Sunday was not a day of rest until Constantine’s decree about 315 A.D. In his decree, he referred to it as the venerable day of the Sun (capital “S”). Constantine was, by background, a sun worshiper—a worshiper of the sun god, so he made this day of the sun god a day of rest throughout the Roman Empire. ‘When you didn’t know God, you served idols.’

Verse 9, “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?” Here are people who came out of idolatry who are turning back to the very same thing they came out of, “to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto you desire again to be in bondage.” People who came out of idolatry were turning back to some of the very things they had turned loose of.

Verses 10-12, “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. Brethren, I urge you to become as I am,” Now, how was Paul?

1 Corinthians 11:1, he said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

1 Peter 2:21-22, “...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth’...”

1 John 3:4 KJV, “...sin is the transgression of the law.”

Luke 4:16, “...And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.”

Hebrew 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

Acts 18:4 shows that Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.”

Galatians 2:20, the life Paul lived—it was Christ living in him.

Galatians 4:12, “Brethren, I urge you to become as I am,” How was he? Christ lived in him; Christ set an example. ‘Follow me as I follow

Christ.’ Christ hasn’t changed. Christ kept the Sabbath. Paul kept the Sabbath.

Is Paul condemning Sabbath keeping? No. Really, the primary emphasis in this section has to do with astrology. Astrology was a very major thing in the pagan and Hellenistic world. Clearly, it involves people who were turning back to Gentile customs.

Verse 10 mentions, “days and months.”

Leviticus 19:26 shows that the Jews were forbidden to practice divination or soothsaying (KJV, “observe times”). This is a reference to astrology.

“Elements” in Galatians 4:9 is explained in *The Art Gingrich Greek English Lexicon* as coming from “*stoicon*” and refers to the elemental spirits and to the heavenly bodies that were also regarded as personal beings and given divine honor. –Heavenly bodies, the signs of the Zodiac, astrology.

“You turn again to the weak and beggarly elements.” It was a reference to the things that controlled the elemental spirits of the universe, as one version renders it. It was a term that was used to refer to the pagan deities that controlled astrology. Here, they were getting encumbered and observing days and months and times (seasons) and years. What we have in Galatia is clearly what’s termed a “Gnostic” influence.

“*Gnostic*” was a Greek term that meant “we know.” It was a philosophy and a reference to an approach that mixed elements of the Stoic. They mixed together several different things of how you gain access to God. It placed a lot of emphasis on astrology and lucky and unlucky times, lucky and unlucky days—things that you did or didn’t do on certain times. It had to do with a lot of physical things you had to do to somehow gain favor.

What we have in Galatia are people who are getting caught up in a total misunderstanding of what circumcision is all about, people who were being caught up in these ideas of what was necessary for them to gain access to God. They were beginning to slip back into some of the paganism that they came out of. They were bringing some of that in to “cover all the bases.” Paul speaks very clearly in regards to this.

Galatians 4:21, we have already made reference to what “under the law” means.

Paul goes through an analogy in the latter part of chapter 4, speaking of the contrast between Hagar and Sarah, and what came naturally and what came by promise from God. In other words, what you can engender, what you can do on your own, is not where the solution lies. It lies in what

God can and will do if you trust Him and you believe Him.

Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” The “yoke of bondage” was this concept that you have to earn it by the things that you physically do.

Verse 14, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Verses 15-16, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” There are two contrary natures: the desires generated by the flesh and those generated by the spirit.

Verses 19-21, there are consequences: the works of the flesh are the sins that are enumerated, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like;”

Verses 22-23, the fruits of the Spirit are enumerated, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” We need to be oriented toward serving God.

Galatians 6:7-8, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Showing that we are ultimately going to reap what we sow.

Throughout the book of Galatians, Paul emphasizes that you can’t earn access to God through what you do. You can’t earn salvation through penance. You don’t gain access to God by the carrying out of certain works or rituals.

We have a book that is written to explain God’s law to Gentiles and to explain the relationship of law and grace to those who were filled with the Hellenistic philosophy. It is a book that has been very commonly and frequently misunderstood, distorted and twisted because of the attitudes that the world has had.

We will get into 1 Corinthians next time.

Bible Study # 61
December 11, 1990
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—1 Corinthians

We are getting into the book of 1 Corinthians this evening. I would like to comment by way of background on 1 Corinthians, particularly the background of the city of Corinth. Corinth was a city in Greece. It was, really, the commercial capital of Greece. It was a major port and it had all the major problems of ports. In some ways, it was the “New Orleans” of its day, perhaps in more ways than one. Corinth, at the time of the Apostle Paul, had a population of about 400,000, just a little bit smaller than the city of New Orleans. It was a very major world city in that day. There were only three cities that had a larger population than Corinth at the time of Paul: the cities of Rome (Italy), Alexander (Egypt) and Antioch (Syria). The population was mainly Greek, but there were others there because Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city. As a result of being a very busy seaport, the wealth and the life of Corinth were really proverbial in the ancient world.

The temple of Aphrodite, the patron deity, sat on a large hill that overlooked the city of Corinth. “Aphrodite” was the Greek name for the one that the Romans called “Venus,” the goddess of love, or perhaps more accurately, the goddess of lust because that’s what Aphrodite amounted to. The worship of Aphrodite involved temple prostitution. There were sacred prostitutes who served there in the temple. It was a climate of immorality that, in some ways, even surpassed most places today. I don’t know that it would surpass San Francisco, but it would certainly “run them a good race.” I think the cities we have today that are proverbial for their vice and immorality really don’t have a whole lot on Corinth. Corinth was quite noted for that kind of thing.

The city of Delphi was located a few miles north of Corinth. This is where the famous Delphic Oracle, the priestess of Apollo, resided. The Delphic Oracle was quite famous throughout the ancient world. People from various areas would make pilgrimages to Delphi to ask a question of the god Apollo.

The priests there had quite a show that they put on. They would begin to dance around, “hoop” and “holler,” work themselves up into this, as the historians or commentaries term it, “ecstatic frenzy.” It was kind of like a Pentecostal church;

that is about what it amounted to. They would “hoop” it up until this Delphic Oracle, a woman, would finally get so wild eyed and worked into such a state of frenzy that she would fall over and begin to babble incoherently. At that time, it was felt that she was speaking in the language of the gods. Speaking in, as the Greeks termed it, “an unknown tongue”—the tongue of the gods.

The priests would dutifully take this down and then claim to interpret what she said. Basically, they would say whatever they wanted to say and claim that this was the interpretation of what she had said. They were quite noted for coming up with some enigmatic interpretations.

One of the most famous was back several centuries prior to the time of the Apostle Paul. A king who was contemplating an attack on the Persian Empire traveled there to the Delphic Oracle. He was told by the priest who claimed to interpret what the oracle had said, ‘If you attack Persia, a great empire will be destroyed.’ He assumed that meant he would win. In reality, he lost. They said, ‘That’s what we said. We didn’t tell you which empire.’ They were kind of noted for “playing both ends against the middle” on their prophecies. You could take it a variety of different ways.

People are affected, shaped and influenced by their background and by the things that are around them. The people in the Corinthian Church grew up in a city that was noted for its wealth and luxury. It was a commercial center. There was a lot of trading and a lot of ships that came and went. Since it was a major port, the people were materialistic; they tended to think in material terms. It was a comparatively wealthy area.

They were influenced by the very casual attitude toward immorality. Immorality was taken very lightly. Many had grown up in a religious background where immorality was even utilized in that context. They were influenced religiously. We are going to notice the impact of the surrounding area, even the impact of the Oracle of Delphi a short distance away.

One of the things important to understand is that the word for “tongues” in the New Testament is very plain. When you go to Acts 2, the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit was the gift of speaking in foreign languages. The individuals in Jerusalem from other countries were able to understand in their own language. “*Glossolalia*” in the Greek is translated “tongues” and means almost exactly what our English word “tongues” means. In the Greek language there are three different connotations. It was used in three

different ways: (1) the physical organ in the mouth. James 3:5 says your tongue is a little member but boasts great things. (2) It refers to foreign languages. Acts 2 clearly refers to people hearing the sermon in their own language. We sometimes refer to “my native tongue,” using tongue to refer to a foreign language. (3) It is also used by the Greeks to refer to the so-called ecstatic speech of the Delphic Oracle. There were other lesser oracles, but realize that ecstatic speech (speaking in tongues) played a role in pagan Greek religion. There were aspects of pagan Greek religion that would have not been dissimilar to a lot of Pentecostal meetings. That’s not commonly recognized, but it was, nevertheless, the case that existed.

When you hear a word, you understand and interpret that word on the basis of the way you have heard it used. What it means to you is not necessarily what it means to the person who said it. That’s one of the reasons that people have a lot of problems sometimes in reading the Bible. We have grown up with certain false religious teachings and we tend to read those into the Bible. We have things to unlearn.

Many of the so-called “difficult scriptures” that people come up with are only difficult because we have a preconceived idea of what it means. It doesn’t “square” with the truth, but the verse seems to say that. Yet, if someone just looked at it objectively, it wouldn’t say that at all. But it says it to us because we have had a background of where that has been, perhaps, misused or misapplied. This “colored” some of the problems that existed in Corinth.

We are going to see that the latter part of the book of 1 Corinthians deals with the subject of tongues. In reality, there are several chapters. Chapter 14 specifically deals with the subject, but chapters 12 and 13 lay the basis for what Paul is going to say in chapter 14.

Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians. He came to Corinth on his second evangelistic journey in the fall of 50 A.D. We went through that last time. Paul, after the ministerial conference of 49 A.D., returned to Antioch. Then, leaving in the spring of 50 A.D., he traveled across Asia Minor, and finally entered into Greece (Europe) on Pentecost of 50 A.D. He came from Philippi, up in northern Greece (Macedonia), down through Thessalonica, Berea, down a little further to Athens, and finally wound up in Corinth. He stayed there 18 months. It was from there that he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then he left just in time to return to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles in 52 A.D. (Acts 18:21).

In Acts 19, we find that Paul came to the area of Ephesus on his **third evangelistic journey**. If you have a map, you might check. Ephesus is right on the coast of modern-day Turkey, right on the edge of Asia Minor, just across the water from Corinth. It is a little over 100 miles away by water. Ephesus was a major port. There were ships that went back every day. Roman cargo ships carrying mail made that journey, leaving Ephesus several times a day. Paul came back to Ephesus on his third journey and he stayed there in Ephesus quite a while. It was toward the end of his stay in Ephesus that he wrote 1 Corinthians, which would be dated to the Days of Unleavened Bread 55 A.D. I will show you why we would date it to the Feast of Unleavened Bread of that year.

The thing that we immediately see in the book of 1 Corinthians is that it was written in response to problems.

1 Corinthians 1:11, “For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.” You can imagine this went over really well. Chloe was evidently a wealthy lady who lived in Corinth, and there was a congregation that evidently met in her home. There were perhaps two or three similar home congregations that met in the greater Corinth area. They perhaps all assembled together only on Holy Days and special occasions. This was probably one of the things that created a situation where there was more divisiveness. There did not seem to have been a resident local pastor in Corinth at that time that had the oversight of the whole city. Problems existed.

Someone from the house of Chloe had been dispatched over to Paul with some news. They had evidently caught a Roman cargo ship out of Corinth to Ephesus. The trip would have taken a couple of days. They came to Ephesus and told Paul some things that were going on. Paul, in turn, wrote this letter.

He starts off by saying, ‘I’ve heard some news and I’m not really happy about what I’ve heard.’ You can just know all the people were in a “wonderful” attitude when they found out that some of Chloe’s people had gone over and told Paul what was going on. People always tend to like that sort of thing.

They had divisions beforehand and, knowing human nature, they probably had a few more for a little while. There were problems with divisiveness. There were a variety of problems. There were problems addressed in chapter 5 with immorality. There was an individual in the

Corinth Church who was living in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Nothing was done or said. There wasn't any Church discipline that was exercised in the matter. The people sort of prided themselves with their broad-minded outlook and all the love that they showed. They had a misguided understanding of what love is.

God is not broadminded and tolerant toward sin. God is very merciful and forgiving to repentant sinners, but there is a vast difference between being broadminded and tolerant of sin and being merciful toward repentant sinners. A repentant sinner is one who has turned away from sin.

This individual had clearly not turned away from sin because he was living in sin. Repentance is not a matter of sinning every night and repenting every morning. That is not repentance. This wasn't a situation that was acceptable. It was brought to Paul's attention, which he had evidently not known before, but was common knowledge in the Corinthian Church.

1 Corinthians 5:2 "And you are puffed up," Paul said, 'You're actually proud of yourselves about how tolerant and broadminded you are.'

Some were taking each other to court. 1 Corinthians 6 deals with that.

They had written to Paul at an earlier time.

1 Corinthians 7:1, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me." He was perhaps in the process of answering the letter when he really got stirred to action by some things that were brought to his attention, so he answered in the course of their letter. There were some questions they asked about marriage and divorce.

In chapter 8 and again in chapter 10, he addressed some issues that they had raised about things offered to idols.

In chapter 11, we come to the fact that there had been problems at Passover. There were serious problems—to the point that people had gotten drunk. Verse 21 indicates that. It was a real mess.

In chapter 12, there were misunderstandings about spiritual gifts. This was a spin-off of a lot of the divisions, and it probably aggravated a lot of the divisions and divisiveness. There was great misunderstanding about spiritual gifts and what is real spirituality. Paul had to deal with this in chapters 12, 13 and 14.

There were really serious problems that were brought to Paul's attention. The impetus of the letter seems to have been several of these things—particularly the Passover abuses and the fornicator who was there in the congregation—which prompted him to write when he did.

We date it to the Days of Unleavened Bread on the fact of chapter 5.

1 Corinthians 5:7, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

"Since you truly are unleavened." How can someone be unleavened? What does that mean? There are two ways you can take it. He either meant it physically or he meant it spiritually. Were they spiritually unleavened? Is that the way he meant it? He had just said in verse 2 that they were puffed up. They weren't spiritually unleavened. Spiritually they were puffed up. They were the very opposite of being unleavened spiritually.

The only way that they could have been unleavened was physically because it's very plain from Paul's use of the term in chapter 5 that they weren't spiritually unleavened. He could only mean it in the physical sense. He was writing during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

There had been a problem at Passover and this had brought matters to a head; this was the "icing on the cake." Someone had been dispatched from Chloe's household. They had caught one of the Roman mail cargo ships the next morning. Within a couple of days (by the second Day of Unleavened Bread), they'd have been in Ephesus. If Paul took a couple of days to compose his reply and they caught the boat back (let's say on the fourth Day of Unleavened Bread), they would have been back in Corinth by the sixth day. This letter could have been read in the congregation on the final High Day. I think this is perhaps the most likely scenario. The context of chapter 5 makes plain it was written during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In chapter 11, you read that there were problems at Passover; it was this previous Passover. Now was the time to correct it. It was fresh and he really "lined them out." The Days of Unleavened Bread are all about putting sin out, and by the time they got through reading 1 Corinthians, they found out about two or three that they needed to put out. They had only unleavened physically; they had not unleavened spiritually. That's the need that Paul addressed.

In 1 Corinthians 1, he addresses the subject of division and the importance of unity. The division was that people wanted to choose their own champions and do their own thing.

Verses 26-29, he emphasized our calling.

In 1 Corinthians 2, he brings out the fact that his preaching had not been some clever manipulative way of impressing them. He did

not try to impress them by the things that the Greeks were impressed with or by man's wisdom and great philosophies.

1 Corinthians 2:4, "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power..." Paul wanted their faith to be anchored, not on the cleverness of men, but on the power of God.

He addresses something that is important to understand.

Verse 11, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."

We are told that there is a spirit in man. The spirit in man is what sets apart the human mind from the animal brain. It enables us to function on a human level. "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man?" If it wasn't for the spirit of man that enables us to function on a human level, then we would be functioning on an animal level. You understand things on a physical level because of the spirit of man. The spirit of man, which is in you, enables your brain to function on something above an animal level. It imparts to you that "spark" that raises humanity above the level of animal concept. In the same way, there are things on the spiritual level. "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." If God's Spirit is not working with someone, you simply can't grasp spiritual things.

I can't read over this without thinking about Mr. Herbert Armstrong going over and over this. He said you couldn't go out and teach arithmetic to a cow because it doesn't have the spirit of man. In the same way, it takes God's Spirit working with us to enable us to grasp and to comprehend on a spiritual level.

In 1 Corinthians 3, he addresses the spiritual state of the Church; their spiritual state was that they were carnal.

1 Corinthians 3:3, "for you are still carnal." They weren't spiritual.

Verses 1-3, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

If you read through 1 Corinthians and this is the "milk" of the word, I'd hate to have been on the receiving end of the "meat" because Paul has

some pretty "tall" stuff here in 1 Corinthians. Here were people who were not maturing spiritually. We grow and mature physically and, in the same way, we have to grow and mature spiritually.

Verse 9, "For we [referring to the ministry—himself and other ministers] are God's fellow workers [together with God]; you [the congregation] are God's field, you are God's building."

Verses 10-11, "According to the grace of God...I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Then he discusses what is built on the foundation.

Verse 12, "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw..." Paul uses the analogy of a building project.

It's kind of interesting. The Greek word that has been translated "bishop" in the New Testament comes from the Greek word "*episcopa*," which literally means "an overseer." The analogy that is drawn is that God has a building program. God is constructing a spiritual edifice, a spiritual temple.

Ephesians 2:20, Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. The prophets and apostles comprise the foundation.

In 1 Peter 2:5, Peter uses the analogy and compares us to being living stones.

Paul tells us in Hebrews that the things that were done, relative to the tabernacle and the temple, all had a spiritual counterpart and were types of the heavenly. They were all typical of something. Have you ever given consideration as to why, when you go back to 1 Kings 6:7, it was stressed that when Solomon built the temple, there was not the sound of a hammer or chisel that was heard on the temple site? While it was being built, all the stones were exactly precut to where they exactly fit when they were constructed. You can go back and read the account of the building.

It was a very unusual building site. Normally you go to a building site and hear all kinds of noise and racket, hammering and beating away. It was a pretty quiet building site. In other words, everything fit. Why did God insist that it be done that way? One of the primary reasons is to serve as a type of a spiritual temple. It was to teach us a certain lesson.

Hebrews 8:5, as Paul says, "who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses

was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" These were analogies of the heavenly.

Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ has not entered the holy place made with hands, which are copies of the true, ..." That's why God had it done according to specific instructions.

When the spiritual temple is assembled at the resurrection, that's not when Christ is going to get out the hammer and chisel and start working on some of us to make us fit. We are being quarried right now, and sometimes it hurts to get a few of the knots knocked off as we're "squared off."

Christ is the Chief Cornerstone. In the ancient practices of building, the cornerstone was crucial because it was laid and everything was measured from it. Things were measured out using the plumb bob and the plummet. The cornerstone was the basis by which everything else was set. The cornerstone was the orientation in terms of the exact direction or configuration of the building. Everything was measured off the cornerstone. If the cornerstone was out of kilter, the whole building was going to be out of kilter.

We all have to fit in around Christ. He's not changed to conform to us; we're changed to conform to Him. The cornerstone is laid and then everything else is fit in. Everything else has to be cut to measure, to fit the configuration that is determined by the cornerstone.

1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul draws this analogy and he says, "For we [referring to the ministry] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." The term "*episcopos*" means "bishop" or "overseer." The analogy is that the ministry was pictured as being in the role of a construction site overseer.

We're told, in Ephesians 4:11-13, that one of the jobs of the ministry is the building up, the edifying, of the body of Christ. "Edifying" simply means "building up." It's the analogy of a construction project going on.

1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it." Paul said that was his role.

We could say in terms of this work and this era today that Mr. Herbert Armstrong laid the foundation. God used him to lay the foundation for this phase of God's work. Others have in turn built on that foundation. Various ones come in

and may build different parts; maybe some are working on this area and some on that area. We're working together to build up a temple fitly framed together (Ephesians 2:21-22; 4:16). Paul uses this analogy.

He talks about the construction material.

1 Corinthians 3:12, "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw..." He talked about the components that made the temple. The temple consisted of cut stones, precious and semiprecious stones, gold and precious metals. You might contrast that with something built out of wood, hay and stubble. By the time you get down to the hay and stubble, you don't have something that's going to last. If you light fire to it, it certainly isn't going to last very long.

"But let each one take heed how he builds on it."

Paul is addressing the ministry. In context, it applied to those in Corinth, but it's a warning that God has given to His ministry down through the centuries through the pen of the Apostle Paul. You had better take heed what you build and what kind of construction material you are utilizing. Will it stand the test of fire? Fire is used as descriptive of the Tribulation or of fiery trials. In other words, when the pressure is on, what's going to happen? Is it going to go up in flames or is it going to be purified and refined?

Paul says, "I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it." Those of us in the work today have to be careful what we build because the Day will ultimately declare it.

"Each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." As we move toward the consummation of the age and the Great Tribulation, it is going to become apparent how well things have been constructed. The quality of the work of the ministry, in any given area, is going to be revealed as the pressures and trials come.

We've gone through some serious problems in the Church over the years in times past. Serious trials and difficulties came up. Some areas were devastated and lost large numbers of people; some were barely scathed. To an extent, part of it was a reflection of the quality of what had been built in that local area. When an area is devastated, it becomes apparent that there's been an awful lot of wood, hay and stubble that went into the construction and not as much gold, silver and stone.

There is a point that applies here. It applies to the ministry in Corinth. Problems and trials, things that were going to come, would try the Church at that time, and it was going to be apparent what others had done. Paul had laid a foundation and had gone on. Others were responsible to build upon that foundation. If they didn't do it in a sound way, when the problems came, it would be revealed.

Verse 13, "each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it," It applied then, and it has applied down through the centuries. It applies down through the history of God's work in our time as far as the ministry is concerned, and it applies on further out. Also, by analogy, we can apply it in our lives. It involves the quality of the character that we build. Certainly, the analogy is a valid one, though in context, it more specifically referred to criteria by which the ministry was being judged, and the quality of workmanship becomes apparent.

We're told the importance of respecting the temple of God.

Verse 17, "If anyone defiles [destroys] the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." It is important that we recognize the sanctity of what God has made holy. That applies in our own lives and it applies in terms of the Church as a whole.

Verse 16, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

1 Corinthians 4:1-2, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." Paul uses the example that the ministry is pictured as God's stewards. One of the great criteria of a steward is that he is faithful.

Verses 3-4, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you.... For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." Paul says, 'I am not worried about your judgment. I am not accountable to you. I am not your steward. I am God's steward; I am accountable to God.'

The greatest criterion of a steward is that he has to be faithful. When you hire someone to manage your affairs, if the guy is a crook, this is the quickest thing that will disqualify him from serving as a steward (manager). Paul says, 'I am accountable to the One whose steward I am.' Paul tells the Corinthians their opinion is not what concerns him. 'God's opinion is what I'm

thinking of and what I am concerned about because I know that I am going to have to give an account to Him. It's not your opinion that counts, and it's not mine—it's God's opinion. I'm going to have to give accountability to Him; I'd better be faithful with my charge. If I'm not, then I am going to be held accountable.'

He is setting the stage for what he gets into.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." Paul really begins to "lay into" them. He says, 'You don't seem to know what to do about it.'

Verse 3, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed."

'I'll tell you exactly what to do.'

Verse 5, "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In other words, this individual was to be put out of the fellowship of the Church and from the benefits and blessings of God's Church. If you want to live like the devil's world, then you're a part of the devil's world. Just turn him over to Satan in the hope that what he goes through, no matter how painful physically, it will serve to wake him up spiritually and he will ultimately come to repentance.

Verse 13, "...put away from yourselves that wicked person."

Verses 9-10, "I wrote to you in my epistle [this was not the first time he wrote] not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world."

If you didn't associate with immoral people in the world around you, you'd have to live in a cave somewhere. Paul said, 'That's not what I'm writing to you about. What I meant was that this kind of thing can't go on in the Church.'

Verse 11, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person."

You can't have this kind of tolerance of sin because a tolerance of sin cheapens the sacrifice of Christ. If sin is such a big deal that God had to

give the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty of it, then sin is a very serious matter. To trivialize sin is, in effect, to regard the sacrifice of Christ as cheap and contemptible. God made the ultimate sacrifice. Sin is a big deal. We have to take sin seriously or we trivialize the sacrifice of our Savior. Why do we even need a Savior if sin is not serious business?

We can't have a casual, careless, tolerant attitude toward sin. God's attitude is an attitude of great love and mercy toward repentant sinners because when we repent, God removes our sin. It's not that you have to live under this guilt forever because of sin. God makes it possible to have the guilt removed. Christ paid the penalty.

When we get to 2 Corinthians 2:6-11, we will see that the individual that Paul had to deal with very severely repented and was then received back with open arms. Paul said to make him welcome, confirm your love toward him. It's not a matter of something held against someone. God's way is a way of mercy upon repentance. But judgment precedes mercy. It sets the stage for mercy. If there was no judgment, then mercy is trivialized. It becomes of no account. It becomes your due rather than of grace.

Paul had to deal with them. It was a very fundamental concept of the Days of Unleavened Bread. They really didn't grasp the concept of the importance of putting out sin.

"And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned." You should have been really grieved and bothered by this. Ezekiel talks about those who sigh and cry for the abomination in Israel (Ezekiel 9:4).

Paul is very explicit. He is just getting warmed up.

1 Corinthians 6:1, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" Why weren't some of these matters, disputes that came up, settled in the Church? Why do we hear of members airing their dirty laundry before the outside?

Verse 6, in fact, brother was going to law with brother. Christians with legal disputes should not go to worldly courts. The matter should be settled in the context of the Church.

Verse 7, "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded?" Why wouldn't you rather suffer wrong than contribute toward open scandal for the Church? You should have an attitude where you would suffer wrong and you would put up

with something that is not right. You would suffer wrong before you would contribute toward giving the Church a "black eye."

Verse 8, "No, you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and you do these things to your brethren!" Instead of not being willing to suffer wrong, you are doing wrong.

Verse 9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites..."

Verses 8-16, he really begins to "line them out" on this. He stresses the matter of immorality.

Verse 18, "Flee sexual immorality."

In 1 Corinthians 7, he gets into the questions they had raised about the state of marriage and issues involving divorce.

Verses 1-5 address the issue about the fact of a married couple having proper relations with one another and not defrauding one another.

It's kind of an amazing dichotomy that you have in some of these societies such as Corinth. On the one hand, you have rampant immorality; on the other, you have those who want to swing to the opposite end and say that celibacy is the way to go. That just sets the stage for other problems as far as morality. Paul laid stress that marriage is the proper approach.

He then deals with several specific issues.

Verse 8, he addresses the issue of those who are unmarried and those who are widows. He says that it would be good if they remained that way, even in the way that he was.

Verse 9, if it was a problem for them to remain single and they wanted to get married, they were to go ahead and marry.

He mentions a little further the present distress.

1 Corinthians 7:26, "I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is..." It was a time of trial—a time of impending trial and persecution in which whole segments of the population may have to literally flee for their lives. In the area where they were and with the circumstances, this was really not the ideal time to be establishing a family and taking on family responsibilities.

Verses 28-29, however, it is not a matter of sin. If you feel like it is going to be a problem, then go ahead and get married. But he was just warning them that they were entering a time of a lot of pressure and difficulties and persecution.

Verse 8, he addresses those who were unmarried or widows.

Verse 10, "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from

her husband.” The context is clearly that both mates were in the Church. His emphasis is that the husband is not to put away the wife and the wife is not to depart from her husband.

Verse 11, “But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”

If she does depart, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled. There can’t be divorce and remarriage within the Church. That just flies in the face of what Christ said. He says, ‘Don’t depart.’

He recognizes that there may be certain circumstances where, at this point in time, they simply can’t live together. He recognizes that there are grounds for separations that are not grounds for divorce and remarriage. There may be grounds for not living together. “But if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” When two are in the Church, you either work it out or live alone. Those are the two options.

Verse 12, “But to the rest I, not the Lord, say [In other words, he was not directly quoting Jesus Christ as he had the previous verse.]: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.” This is referring to being married to someone who is not a believer. The fact that she is an unbeliever is not grounds to dissolve the marriage.

Verse 13, “And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.” She does not have grounds to leave him.

Verse 14, he continues and stresses the unbelieving mate and children are sanctified, set apart, by the believing mate. There is a benefit and a blessing that is extended to the whole family.

Verse 15, but if the unbeliever initiates the separation, is unwilling to continue the marriage and leaves, then in that narrow circumstance the brother or sister is not bound.

Verse 16, it goes on to stress the fact that people can change.

Verse 17, “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.” Basically, whatever our circumstance when we’re called, we just need to make the best of it. Then he addresses the subject of those who were divorced when they came into the Church. He addresses several different subjects.

Verses 27-28, “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed [don’t seek a divorce]. Are you loosed from a wife [are you divorced]? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.” This is based on the fact of the present distress he had mentioned in verse 26.

Verse 20, the point was that as he addressed earlier, “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.” Basically, make the best of your circumstance. But then farther down, he addresses that he didn’t mean it to be taken out to the extreme in terms of marriage because he said that if you’re called and married, don’t seek to end the marriage. If you’re called and you have been divorced, he is not advocating that you go and seek marriage. But if you do marry, there’s not a sin involved because the sins that were a part of the previous relationship were washed away at baptism and you have a chance for a fresh start. In the same way, someone who has never been married is certainly free to marry. Paul is not forbidding marriage. He is simply counseling that in the context of the present distress, marriage may not be a really good idea. But it’s not a matter of sin. It is just the circumstances that are involved.

Where married couples are both in the Church, they are not free to divorce and remarry. Divorce and remarriage is not permitted inside the Church. There may be circumstances where they are not going to be able to live together. In that case, they will have to be single. They are to remain unmarried or become reconciled. For those who have been divorced before they came into the Church, marriage is permitted though not necessarily recommended because of certain problems. When an unconverted mate is unwilling to live with the mate in the Church and terminates the marriage, the converted mate is not bound in that case.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses the issue of things offered to idols. The greatest emphasis is the importance of not letting your liberty become a stumbling block to others.

1 Corinthians 8:13, “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” The issue was food offered to idols. It is important to grasp the circumstances.

In many of the Gentile cities in the major areas, much of the meat that was available in the meat market had been slaughtered earlier that day at an idol’s temple. When sacrifice was made,

whether to God or to an idol, it didn't mean that the entire animal was consumed on the altar. Normally, only a small portion of the blood was poured out or some of the fat or entrails were used. A certain portion was reserved for the priest, but most of the meat was basically available. Now, in most of the idol's temple, the priests got a lot more than what they could consume, so they would sell it. It would be sold through the meat market. It was actually a source of income.

1 Corinthians 10:14-17, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."

He talks about the Passover cup and bread, how it has to do with the communion or fellowship of the Church with Christ, and we're all partaking of the same thing.

Verse 18, "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" The same root word is translated "communion" in verse 16 and "partakers" in verse 18. The terms "communion" in verse 16, "partakers" in verse 18 and "fellowship" in verse 20 are all the same word in the Greek language.

The point that is being made is that there is a communion (a fellowship) that is entered into when ancient Israel sacrificed. They were picturing a fellowship, a meal, a close communion and fellowship with God that involved the one that offered the sacrifice, the priest and God. And as they all partook of the same meal, so to speak, it was a picture of an intimate, close relationship.

The Jews understood this concept. For that reason, they viewed partaking of anything that had been offered to an idol or that had been connected with an idol's temple as meat that was forever tainted and polluted; it had been rendered "common."

That's the difference, by the way, between "common" and "unclean."

Acts 10:14, Peter said, "...For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." There is a difference, though most don't realize it. "Common" simply means it "wasn't kosher." Food can be clean and still not be kosher—not meet the standards of slaughter and bleeding, etc. Primarily, the issue at that time would have involved meat that had been offered to an idol.

The reality was that when you went into a meat market, the slabs of meat were hanging and you couldn't tell which had been offered to an idol. There was nothing intrinsically that had been physically changed in the meat. Some of it hadn't been offered to an idol, but probably a large part of it had. When you looked at it, you had no particular way of knowing one way or the other. As a result, in most areas, if the Jews did not have a source of kosher meat slaughtered by someone who was skilled in ritual slaughter, they simply abstained from meats rather than take a chance on eating meat that had been offered to an idol.

It became an issue because the Christians were not to partake in idolatrous worship and meat offered to idols was to be avoided. But to what length did you have to go to avoid it? The Jerusalem conference said to avoid meat offered to idols (Acts 15:29). Some tried to say that Paul contradicted the Jerusalem conference. He didn't at all.

1 Corinthians 10:21, he makes it very plain, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons."

Verse 20, "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons." Paul is very plain and speaks out extremely strong on that. But to what extent do you have to go to determine whether the meat was sacrificed to an idol? Do you have to go to the length of avoiding all meat unless you could be 100 percent sure it wasn't sacrificed to an idol?

Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 8:4 that the problem is not that the meat has been polluted. The idol is really nothing, and the problem is not the meat itself.

The point that he makes in chapter 8, when you put it together with chapter 10, is that you have to be conscious of your example. The problem is not the meat. If you eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol and you didn't know it, there's not a problem. The meat has not been hurt, and there's not some intrinsic act of worship. But if you knowingly and consciously partake of an idolatrous feast or in an idolatrous ceremony, that's not right because you're going to set a bad example and you're going to create a problem.

What if someone not in the Church invites you to eat and you decide to go?

Verses 27-28, "If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to

go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake;" By the way, the issue is not clean and unclean meat. The issue is food offered to idols.

The Jews would not eat with a non-Jew on the basis that there was a chance that they may be served something that was offered to an idol.

Acts 10:28, that's why Peter said to Cornelius, "... 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.'" The Jews didn't simply do it on the basis that the Gentiles were so mixed up in idolatry that there was no telling what they were going to "run past them."

Paul said that's not necessary. Sit down and enjoy the meal. But while you're there, if somebody brings it up and says, 'By the way, did you know that this came from the idol's temple?', then at that point, you don't eat it. Once it comes to your attention and you know it is connected with idolatry, you're going to give the appearance of compromise with idolatry. At that point you need to back off.

Don't do something that is going to create a stumbling block for others (1 Corinthians 8:9-13). This was a problem to some. Be concerned about the effect of your actions on others. Everything that is lawful for you to do may not always be a good idea. It's not always expedient or helpful (1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 10:23).

The most important factor is to consider the impact on others. Some things will look bad and may give a wrong impression. Paul was not watering it down and saying they could eat things offered to idols. What he is saying is that you don't have to go to the lengths that the Jews do of avoiding anything. The problem is not that the food has been hurt. You're not taking part in some idolatrous service. There's no harm done in eating a hamburger or piece of steak. But if the issue of religion comes in, and because issues of conscience have been brought up, then you avoid it and back off. Don't let our liberty become a stumbling block for others (1 Corinthians 8:9). Be concerned of the impact of our example.

1 Corinthians 9 deals with the issue of money. The Corinthians were materialistic; evidently some of them were griping about money. Accusations were being made about Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:1, "Am I not an apostle?"

Verses 4-5, "Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a

believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord [James and Jude], and Cephas [Peter]?" All of the others do.

Verse 6, 'Is it only Barnabas and I who can't do these things?' Paul clearly indicates here that he was the only one of the apostles who was unmarried.

The Catholic teaching on celibacy and marriage is completely contrary to the Bible. If Peter was the first pope, how is it that Christ healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:30-31)? If he had a mother-in-law, that means he was married. If he was the first pope, then didn't he know that popes weren't supposed to be married? He wasn't the first pope and there wasn't anything wrong with marriage. That was ordained of God.

Verse 8, "Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?" Is this just my opinion or doesn't the law say it also?

Paul brings out a couple of different things in terms of quoting from the Scriptures. He gives the example from Deuteronomy 25:4 about muzzling the ox.

Verse 9, "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about?"

This should teach us several things. Do you think the only reason God says that is because He's worried that the oxen won't get enough to eat? There are principles that are to be derived from various statements in the Scriptures. While they may have a literal application, many times there are principles that can be derived through other circumstances. There are principles that apply.

Paul gets more specific when he refers to the Levitical priesthood.

Verses 13-14, "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." The Levitical priesthood received their livelihood from the tithes of the holy things—the sacrifices. In the same way, that's what God's ministry does. Paul is addressing the fact that it was appropriate for him and the other ministers to receive compensation from the Church. The other apostles did it; they were all married and took their wives with them on trips at Church expense.

1 Corinthians 10 makes reference of a pagan religious service.

1 Corinthians 10:14, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." He talks about some of these

things that, as a Christian, we're not going to involve ourselves in, things in what the Bible would term "idolatrous worship." In other words, if you want to be plain and blunt about it, you are not going to go and take communion at the Catholic Church. This is a pretty apt description right here.

Verse 24, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being [interest or good]." Be concerned about others.

Verse 25, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market [KJV, "shambles"], asking no questions for conscience' sake..." You don't have to go in there and quiz them about whether this came from the temple of Zeus or not.

Verses 27-28, but if an issue is ever made, then do not eat it. As long as an issue is not made, you just eat it. Take your chances on it because you're not buying it in order to worship the idol. You're not seeking out meat offered to idols. You don't know that it was offered to an idol. It hasn't been hurt, and you're not engaged in any overt kind of worship.

1 Corinthians 11 starts out with what God has given as an indication of respect and submission to His government and an acceptance of the government that God has established, which extends down to the home. It specifically gets into the outward sign or identification of masculinity and femininity. A couple of these verses are sometimes misquoted on the premise that a woman should wear a hat in church. The issue is not a hat or a veil; the issue is hair length.

Verses 4-5 talk about a man having his head uncovered and a woman having her head covered. It discusses back and forth having his head covered or uncovered. That doesn't mean that men should take their hats off when they come into church and women should keep their hats on, which is, by the way, where the social custom derived. Men or women don't wear a hat very commonly any more, as they did back a few years ago. Hats began to go out when John Kennedy broke tradition and didn't wear a hat to his inauguration as President. You can date it to about 1960.

It's kind of interesting when you look at old pictures. Some of you can remember back. Men, who were out in public in the 50s, 40s or the 30s, always had a hat on. John Kennedy broke tradition. Because a hat messed up his hairstyle, he didn't wear a hat on his inauguration day. Hats are just not that commonly worn anymore. This is just a little interesting footnote.

The common tradition was that men would take their hats off when they came into a building or a church. Women didn't take off their hats. The social custom went back to a misunderstanding of the verse that a man should have his head uncovered and a woman should have her head covered.

1 Corinthians 11:14-15, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering." The covering that is being discussed is hair. It is long hair that covers her head that is a glory to her. If a man has long hair, it is a shame to him. Long hair is an outward sign of a woman's appreciation and acceptance of her femininity and her role in the government of God. A lot of people say men used to wear long hair. No, they didn't. Long hair on men came in as a social custom, basically lasted through the 1600s and 1700s, and then went out. It was not the custom previously and it hasn't been the custom since.

The custom derives from Louis XIII who was a transvestite. The king of France was a homosexual and liked to dress in women's clothing. He grew his hair long and everybody else tried to copy it. His father, Louis XIV, had his own problems. He tried to go even further in more ways than one. People follow the customs. That's why what leaders do is so important. They set styles and trends, even in matters of dress and grooming that sometimes last for decades. People have forgotten why they did it. They did it because they were copying somebody else. Styles come and go.

Verses 17-34, the subject of Passover is discussed.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul then addresses spiritual gifts. He is setting the stage for chapter 14 where he addresses tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:1-2, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led." He said, "You have misunderstood a lot of things because of your background; you have been influenced by things like this Oracle up at Delphi and various places to where you really don't understand spiritual gifts. You know what kind of things have "paraded" as spiritual gifts and what has been called spiritual gifts in your society. Because you have been carried away with idolatry, the very words that are used to describe various spiritual gifts, in some cases, have a wrong connotation to you because you

have come out of a idolatrous background and have heard these terms used to describe other things.’

Just like the term “communion.” For any of you who have come out of a Catholic background, when I say “communion,” you think of mass and communion in church. That’s not what the word means. That’s the way it was misused. The word has to do with fellowship and what binds us together as a community, which is our common acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ. It has been misapplied and misused.

Verses 4-5, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.” There are many different kinds of gifts, but there’s one body. There is a unity. The problem of those who tend to get carried away in problems of this area is that they tend to look for something that has outward show and that points them out as being spiritual. It goes in for a lot of emotionalism, so-called ecstatic utterance and things of this sort. They get carried away with that and think that’s the only thing that counts. Paul said there are a lot of different kinds of spiritual gifts.

Verse 31, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” ‘Let me show you what’s most important.’

In 1 Corinthians 13, he says, ‘I don’t care what kind of tongue you speak with.’

1 Corinthians 13:1, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” There’s no evidence in the Bible of God ever giving someone the gift of speaking in the tongue of angels, but evidently that’s what some of the Corinthians claimed they were doing. Paul says, ‘I don’t care if you speak with the tongues of men and of angels; if you don’t have love, you’re just making a lot of noise.’ He is setting the stage. He’s saying that there’s hollowness to what you’re doing; it’s like an empty shell.

Verses 2-13, he goes through and shows that love is the most important Christian virtue.

1 Corinthians 14:1, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” Desire spiritual gifts, but the most important spiritual gift is to speak an inspired message. Then he begins to draw a contrast between someone who is speaking an inspired message and someone who is speaking in what the Corinthians were calling a “tongue.”

Verse 2, “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks

mysteries.” Paul is quoting what the Corinthians were saying and doing. Now, anybody who is doing that is not speaking to people; nobody understands what he is saying. The Corinthians’ excuse was that he was not speaking to men but speaking to God. These things are coming out, and it’s a mystery to everybody (nobody knows what’s going on).

Verse 3, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” If somebody is speaking under the inspiration of God and speaking an inspired message, then he’s speaking it to people. He’s building them up, exhorting them and comforting them.

Verse 4, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” If any of you are speaking in some kind of tongue, as the Corinthians were using the term, you’re just building yourself up. If you speak an inspired message, you’re building up the Church.

‘I wish you all had the gift that God gave in Acts 2, the gift of languages.’

Verse 5, “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.”

Verse 6, “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?” In other words, ‘If I come to you, it doesn’t matter what language I speak in or how many languages I speak in or what kind of sounds I make if what I’m saying doesn’t make sense. If it’s not a valid message—if it doesn’t help you, if it doesn’t instruct, comfort, exhort or edify you, if there’s not some substance to it—what’s the point?’

Verse 7, “Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?” You can play a musical instrument, but if you don’t play a tune, nobody knows what’s going on.

Verses 9-11, “So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.” There are a lot of languages and all of them have significance,

but if you don't understand it, then it doesn't mean anything to you.

Verse 12, "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." –Getting carried away with some of this nonsense and thinking you really have something. You need to concentrate on something that's going to build you up and help somebody else—not something that points you out as being some great thing. That's not what God does.

Verses 13-16, if somebody thinks that they have a miraculous gift of speaking in another language, what they better be able to do is interpret and explain it to the Church in a language that everybody can understand; otherwise, how can they say "Amen" to it.

Verse 19, "...I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." Paul says, 'I would rather speak five words that are understandable and that are going to help somebody else than 10,000 words in something that nobody understands.'

Verse 20, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." Grow up and be mature.

Verse 32, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." He probably "hit it on the head." Someone had been saying, 'You know the spirit just grabs me and I have to say it.' No, not if it's from God. The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet, so if it takes control, you have the wrong spirit.

There is another way that you know if you have the wrong spirit.

Verse 33, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace,"

Verse 34, another way you know if you have the wrong spirit, "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak;" It's interesting. Most of the charismatic churches, Pentecostals, had women preachers years before any of the other churches thought of it. They like to take two or three verses out of context in 1 Corinthians 14, but they always skip verse 34.

The one chapter in the Bible they like to quote, God put the verse in here that "nails" them because what they want is this emotional free-for-all. God said through Paul things need to be done in an orderly way.

Verse 37, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the

commandments of the Lord." Paul says, 'If anybody thinks he's a prophet or spiritual, then he had better realize I'm giving instructions from God and he had better follow them.'

Verse 40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

1 Corinthians 15 deals with the subject of the resurrection and explains the misunderstandings about that.

1 Corinthians 16:1 winds up with the collection for the saints.

1 Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." This does not mean you drop your money in the collection plate on Sunday morning.

I remember years ago when I went to the Baptist Church, our little offering envelopes had a portion of 1 Corinthians 16 printed on them: "On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him." They put a period. The only thing is there's not a period there; there's a comma.

"That there be no collections [KJV, "gatherings"] when I come." This is concerning the collection for the saints. He was taking up an offering of foodstuffs, and it was going to be hauled back to Jerusalem. It was read on the Sabbath. He said, 'First thing tomorrow morning [the last Day of Unleavened Bread came on a Sabbath that year], you guys "get out" and "hit it." Get in the field and get this stuff gathered up. Start filling these things so that there will be no gatherings when I come.' They were going to get out and do a hard day's work on Sunday morning—not pass the plate.

Verse 8, "But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost." He was going to remain in Ephesus. That's the way we tie it in with Acts 19 and know the "when" he says he was going to be there. Because he was writing it during the Days of Unleavened Bread, that would give them about six weeks. He would be there right after Pentecost. 'I am going to stay here till Pentecost, and then I'm coming. So, you guys be gathering everything up starting tomorrow morning. Don't put it off. Get it ready because I am going to come and check on you, see what you've done based on what I told you, and we will dispense matters.'

We will get into 2 Corinthians next time.

Bible Study # 62
January 8, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—2 Corinthians

We are into the book of 2 Corinthians this evening. Let's understand a little bit about the background. We have already addressed some of this in our study on 1 Corinthians. The background of the cities is the same. There is a similarity in terms of the background of the book because they were written within close proximity of one another.

Let's go to Acts 18, 19 and 20 because I think it is good that we **understand how we can date some of these particular books.** Last time we saw that Paul had remained in Corinth for about eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Then, verse 21, he was anxious to keep the Feast in Jerusalem. This would have been the Feast of Tabernacles 52 A.D. He left so as to arrive in Jerusalem in time for the fall festival. He landed at Caesarea, went up ("up" is an expression referring to going to Jerusalem) and saluted the Church and then, verse 22, went back down to Antioch.

He spent some time there. He would have, undoubtedly, been wintering there. Normally, winter was a difficult time to travel either overland or by sea. The weather became more unpredictable and traveling was more difficult, so he stayed in Antioch. Antioch was sort of Paul's headquarters of the Gentile work. He wintered there the winter of 52 A.D.—53 A.D.

Then, Acts 18:23, we find that he left and went on his third evangelistic journey. He traveled through what is modern-day Syria and went up into ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He began to go overland through the peninsula, going through Galatia and that area, and then headed west toward the coast of Asia Minor. Over a period of time, he worked his way through and came to Ephesus, which was on the coast.

He found certain disciples there, and we find, Acts 19:8, he continued in the synagogues speaking there for three months. He arrived in Ephesus somewhere between Passover and Pentecost. If he left overland as soon as traveling became permissible, it would have probably been in the very early spring, maybe the end of February or the first of March. He probably spent March, April and May (about three months) working his way through to Ephesus. He wasn't in a giant hurry, trying to go straight through. He was staying in the various Churches for a week

or two, preaching and spending some time, working his way across. The implication is that he was in Ephesus until around Pentecost (latter part of May). He stayed there three months, which would coincide with the summer.

Verse 9, we find that he rented a school. We're not the first ones to rent a school for services. Paul rented a school that was nearby because they kicked him out and wouldn't let him keep speaking in the synagogue.

Verse 10, he went next door, utilized this school and continued there about two years. This would be from the late summer or early fall of 53 A.D. to the beginning of fall of 55 A.D. that he stayed in Ephesus. Acts 19 describes various things that were going on.

We saw last time that he wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. We dated it to the Passover season of 55 A.D., which would have been about six months before he left Ephesus. Because of the references that are there, we find that Paul ran into problems.

Verses 21-40, there wound up being a riot that broke out in Ephesus and there was quite a bit of difficulty.

Acts 20:1-3, "After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. [This would coincide with winter; undoubtedly, he wintered in the area of Greece.] And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia."

He had intended to sail directly from Greece back to Antioch, but when he found out there was a plot to assassinate him if he had taken the boat, he decided to retrace his steps overland to go back to Macedonia.

Macedonia is northern Greece. That's where Philippi is. If you have a map, you may find it easier to follow by consulting it. Otherwise, it can get a little bit difficult going from this city to that city (all these places) and it kind of jumbles up.

He went to Ephesus, which is on the coast. He crossed over the straits (we call it the Dardanelle) into northern Greece (what was anciently called Macedonia) to the city of Philippi. He started up in northern Greece and worked his way down through Greece into Greece proper, which is the area where Corinth is. He spent about three months there. Undoubtedly, he wintered there the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D. Then he was going to return

directly to Jerusalem by sailing a direct route, but when word reached him that there was an assassination plot, he decided he would just retrace his steps. So, he went back overland up to Philippi.

Verse 6, “But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread,” He had wintered down in Corinth (the southern part of Greece), retraced his steps during the month of March and worked his way up to Philippi, stopping and preaching in several Churches on the Sabbath along the way. He spent a short time in Philippi. Then it was time for the Passover, so he stayed for the Days of Unleavened Bread and then left.

Verse 16, he caught a boat that was taking him back to Jerusalem in order to reach Jerusalem for Pentecost. These were the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Pentecost in 56 A.D.

We saw that he had written 1 Corinthians during the Passover season of 55 A.D. from Ephesus. When he wrote 1 Corinthians, he sent Timothy to check things out.

In 2 Corinthians 1:1, Timothy has rejoined Paul. There are a couple of things to date it.

In Acts 20:1-2, we are told that Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia and worked his way down by land into Greece.

1 Corinthians 16:5-6, “Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). But it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you,”

Verse 8, “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.” He stayed on until a little while after Pentecost. It was hard to break loose from Ephesus, but he did. A riot broke out and that solved the problem of when to leave Ephesus. This was his plan when he wrote 1 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:1, we find, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ...” Timothy was with him at that particular time.

Acts 19:21, what we had seen earlier, “...Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem,” That was what he told the Corinthians. He planned to go to Philippi, come down to Achaia (Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia) and then go to Jerusalem.

Verse 22, while he was still in Ephesus, “So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.”

He wrote 1 Corinthians shortly thereafter. He sent Timothy and Erastus over there to follow up. He wrote the Corinthians a letter. Remember in 1 Corinthians, he really “chewed them up one side and down the other.” He told them he was going to visit. In fact, he was going to spend the winter there because he thought it was going to take more than one week. He was going to utilize the help and the financial resources from there to take him further on his journey. It was a relatively wealthy area. Putting it together with Acts 19, we find that he had sent Timothy on before, and he stayed in Asia for a while. Then there was a riot that came up and there were problems.

Acts 20:1, “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.”

Now when we get to 2 Corinthians, we find that Timothy has rejoined Paul because Paul mentions Timothy in the salutation in 2 Corinthians 1:1. Paul is in Ephesus and he writes 1 Corinthians. A little while later he dispatches Timothy. Then he, himself, leaves Ephesus that summer and goes on over to Macedonia. When he gets to Macedonia, he meets Timothy. Timothy comes and reports to him. He tells him how his letter was received in Corinth and brings him up to date on the situation. Paul then writes 2 Corinthians from Philippi, the area where he is. He has to dispatch it. He tells them in 2 Corinthians that he is coming to them. He is planning on coming to where they are.

2 Corinthians 9:1-2, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints [the offering taken up for the Jerusalem Church], it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians,” Paul says, ‘I am bragging about you up here in Macedonia. I have “laid it on pretty thick.”’

Verses 3-4, “Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.”

Paul says, ‘You had better really do well because if some of those from Macedonia come with me, you are going to be embarrassed if we get down there and you have some little paltry offering.’

Corinth was probably the wealthiest city in Greece. They were capable of doing more than any of the other places. But the reality was that some of the poorer Churches, such as Philippi, were really the ones who were giving sacrificially. In Corinth, they wanted to keep

what they had. Paul was trying to stir them up a little bit because he knew that they had a tendency to be a little selfish. He was using a little psychology in the right way to embarrass them into doing what they should do.

When we put it together, it is pretty clear that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians a matter of a few months after 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during Passover season 55 A.D. He probably wrote 2 Corinthians at the end of the summer or, let's say, the early fall of 55 A.D.—about six months later. Then, after he wrote, he worked his way down through Greece, arriving in Corinth perhaps a couple of months after he had written the letter. If he wrote the letter in what we would term early September, spent the fall festivals there in Philippi, worked his way down through the rest of Greece the remainder of October and November, then he would arrive in Corinth about December—and that's where he wintered. It gives a little bit of an idea.

Acts 20:1-6, he went back up to Macedonia, stayed through the Days of Unleavened Bread of 56 A.D.

Verse 16, he sailed from Macedonia back to Jerusalem in time to be there for Pentecost 56 A.D. That's where he was arrested. It gives us a little bit of a feel for the time flow when we put Acts together with these epistles.

As we look into 2 Corinthians itself, Paul has to address several things that seem to be major issues. Paul spends a lot of time in 1 Corinthians defending and emphasizing his apostolic authority. Why did he do that? Obviously, it was because it was being challenged. We tend to make an issue of those things that are challenged. In his letter to some of the other Churches, he doesn't make that nearly the issue. We will notice as we go through 2 Corinthians the fact that he was an apostle.

It reminds me of some of the things that we confronted in the Church around 1979, 80 and 81. For those who have been in the Church for a number of years and have a perspective, you realize Mr. Herbert Armstrong laid emphasis on Church government and his apostolic authority in a way he had never done in the 60s and early 70s (particularly in the 60s) because it was not an issue at that time. He virtually never raised the point in the 60s because nobody ever questioned it. The issue had to be made when it was questioned. When the state of California tried to come in and take over in some of these things, then the issue needed to be made. How does God work? Through whom is he working? –Things of that sort.

That's what Paul was doing here in Corinth. There were, obviously, some people who were seeking to challenge and undermine Paul's authority. 'Who does he think he is, telling us these things?' They were seeking in some way to put down and demean his authority.

We find in 2 Corinthians that Paul spends a fair amount of time emphasizing his office in a way that you don't find him doing in the book of Ephesians or Philippians. 2 Corinthians and Galatians stand out as the epistles where you know that Paul was under attack in Galatia and Corinth. There were people who were seeking to undermine his credibility and his claim to authority. Some, perhaps, did it in more subtle ways, others overtly. There were various motives that came in.

First he spends some time emphasizing his apostolic authority. **Second**, he also is involved in making the decision to readmit this fornicator to fellowship. This individual by this time had repented; fruits of repentance had been evidenced. The issue came up as to what should occur. Paul explained it, and he was readmitted into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

Third, 2 Corinthians 1:15-17, he also had to explain why he had been unable personally to come to Corinth. He had intended to come to Corinth earlier than what he had. Originally, he had told them that he was going to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then he was going to come. When you put it together with Acts, you find out that he stayed longer than Pentecost. He pretty well stayed the summer. There were other things that came up. Some were saying he never intended to come. Since people had their various attitudes and accusations, he had to explain why he had not been able to get there earlier. It was not something that he had just lightly said, but there were other things that came up. Sometimes there are matters that arise in terms of fulfilling the responsibilities that he had.

Fourth, 2 Corinthians 8:1-24—9:1-15, he also wanted to again lay emphasis on the collection for Jerusalem that he was taking up because he was going to transport it with him when he went to Jerusalem. His original intent had been to sail directly out of the port of Cenchrea there at Corinth. As it was, he went overland back up to Macedonia and sailed out from there (Acts 20:1-16).

As we go through 2 Corinthians 1, we find that Paul mentions why he had been unable to come. 2 Corinthians 1:15-17, "And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to

Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly?" Paul says, 'I intended to do that. My intent was to sail out of Ephesus and come to Corinth. I intended to come see you first and then go up to Macedonia. I was going to come back and winter with you and then sail out. That was my intent, but I obviously haven't done that.' He is writing to them from Macedonia. 'By now you realize my plans have changed. Some of you are saying that I never intended to come anyway.'

Verse 17, continuing, "...Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?"

He says, 'Was I fickle in my promise? No, that's not true. I make my plans, but I am a human being. Sometimes there are things that occur over which I am powerless that change those plans.'

Verses 18-20, 'You were preached to; Silas and Timothy came. God is consistent and He can keep His promises, whether we may have to change our plans or not.'

Verse 23, in fact, he tells them, "Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth." He says, 'I was still pretty "steamed" from what I wrote in 1 Corinthians, and I decided I would give you a little longer to get this thing straightened out. I decided to spare you.' It gave Timothy a chance to meet up with him in Macedonia and report back to him as to what was going on before he decided to go down there.

Verses 21-22, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit." KJV, "who has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

There are a couple of things we are told here about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the means by which we are sealed and it is the earnest of the Spirit.

It's important to understand those two things. A "seal" is that which authenticates genuineness. If you have a legal document, you may get it notarized. One of the things the notary does is he affixes his seal to that document. You can feel that raised seal. The purpose of that is to authenticate genuineness. That's what the notary does. He is authenticating that this is the genuine article. He is authenticating that the individual named on the document really did sign it. That seal is the mark of authenticity. In ancient times,

it was very common that kings and rulers wore a special signet ring, a ring that had their seal. Today we use the same principle—the notary seal, the seal of the United States or the seal of the State of Louisiana that is affixed to official documents. Many times you may have to get a copy of something, and it has to be a notarized copy. You can't just go in and give them any old Xerox copy. They want one that has that notary seal.

God's Spirit seals us. It authenticates that we are the genuine article. It is the means by which we are sealed. We are authenticated as being God's people. It identifies us. God's Spirit seals us and it is also the earnest of our inheritance. We use that term.

If you bought a house, one of the things you did when you made a proposal (if you wanted that property taken off the market), you put earnest money. You put a small portion to prove that you really intended to come back and pay the whole thing. You made a promise and gave them something to demonstrate that you were earnest that you really meant it.

God's Spirit is the earnest [guarantee] of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). It is, in that sense, the evidence and the proof that God really is going to transform our mortal bodies into a spirit body. God, in giving us His Spirit, sets us apart. He authenticates us as the genuine thing, a real Christian. What's the proof (the evidence) that somebody is a real Christian? The Spirit of God is the proof.

Romans 8:9, "...Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

Verse 11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who [which] dwells in you."

In 2 Corinthians 1:22, we are told that the Spirit seals us and is the earnest.

Paul then goes on and talks about the fact that the correction he had given had been motivated by love.

2 Corinthians 2:4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." He was concerned for them.

Too many times people have the misconception that there is love and there is discipline. If somebody is viewed as being a disciplinarian, that means they don't have a lot of love. Paul had a tremendous amount of love. The discipline that Paul imposed on the Corinthian Church and

on this individual who was living in sin was motivated by love.

Hebrew 12:6, “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If God doesn’t chasten us, it’s because He doesn’t claim us. That’s what it says in Hebrews.

Verse 8, you’re not sons; you’re illegitimate. God doesn’t claim you.

The point is that Paul was motivated by love. He cared too much for them to just let them drift into the lake of fire without trying to shake them and wake them up.

Now word had reached him. Evidently, Timothy had told him that this man who had been singled out in 1 Corinthians 5 had, over a period of months, really demonstrated a marked change.

2 Corinthians 2:6-8, “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.”

Verse 11, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” Here, the point is made that this individual had learned a lesson and had repented. Paul said, ‘Now that he has repented, receive him back with open arms.’ Judgment and mercy are fundamental issues.

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus said that those two, together with faith, are the weightier matters of the law. Judgment has to do with drawing proper distinctions. Judgment and mercy—the two go hand-in-hand. The balance between the two is very crucial.

So many times people don’t understand the balance. The Corinthians, on the one hand, had been doling out mercy when judgment was called for. When you dole out mercy when judgment is called for, then what you’re really doing is turning grace into license. That’s what they had done and that’s what Paul had rebuked them for in 1 Corinthians 5. They were allowing this to just go on. Nobody did anything and the situation continued. Here was an individual just openly living in sin. It was common knowledge in the congregation and it was just accepted. Their concept of love was much distorted.

On the other hand, when an individual learns his lesson and repents, then his past is not to be held over him. He doesn’t go through life having to drag his past like a ball and chain after him.

Too many times people want to show mercy when they should show judgment. If discipline is

imposed on somebody, they feel sorry for them and want to miserate with them. They say, ‘You surely got a raw deal.’

Then, on the other hand, somebody repents and they come back. People kind of view him and think, ‘You’ve been gone for a while; wonder what you did?’ Then they want to gossip about him, judge him and wonder whether he’s repented. ‘He says he’s repented, but how do I know?’ –This sort of attitude.

There’s the wrong kind of mercy extended when judgment should be imposed; then there’s judgment (the wrong kind) imposed when mercy should be extended. That’s backward and it’s an important concept for us to understand. The whole purpose of judgment, whether it is directly visited by God or whether it is in the context of Church discipline, is for the purpose of bringing an individual to repentance so that mercy can be extended. God desires to extend mercy, but mercy is available to those who repent. God does not extend His mercy and forgiveness in a way that is going to perpetuate us in our sins. That wouldn’t be love. That would just serve to confirm us in a way of life that is destructive and painful.

Paul is now addressing the issue. If the man repents, receive him back lest he should be swallowed up over much sorrow. Now that he has really come to see it, he really hates the whole thing and has deeply repented. You need to encourage him because the tendency is for the pendulum to swing. The guy can become discouraged and depressed and just feel like this is so bad and terrible that God will never forgive him and he can never look anybody in the eye again. This is just horrible. He becomes all discouraged and is ready to give up.

We don’t want Satan to get an advantage with us. We are not ignorant of his devices. Satan can take advantage either way. A person can be swallowed up over much sorrow. They can become so depressed and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt as to become deeply depressed and discouraged. Satan can take advantage of that and pull a person down. On the other hand, a person can have a flippant, casual attitude toward sin and treat it in a very cavalier fashion and go “sailing” right along. That’s not good. Either way takes us to destruction. There is an appropriate balance to learn. Paul is seeking to teach the Corinthians and, through this letter, to also teach us.

2 Corinthians 3:1, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some

others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?"

Some were asking, 'How do we really know that Paul has all of the authority that he says, and that he's really an apostle? Have you ever seen any proof or any evidence of that? What credentials did he have to prove that? Have you ever seen any letters signed by James and Peter? How do you know?' Somebody was evidently coming into Corinth saying that and trying to "stir things up."

Paul said, 'Do I need that kind of thing? Do you want to know what my credentials are?'

Verses 2-3, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."

He said, 'You want proof? The fact that you exist as a Church is proof of what God has done through me because it's through me you heard the gospel. It's through me that the Church was raised up. You received God's Spirit, either through the laying on of my hands or other people on whom I have laid hands.'

It's a very apt comparison to those who wanted to challenge Mr. Herbert Armstrong back several years ago. The very existence of the Church, the institution, the knowledge and the things that we had came directly or indirectly as the result of God's work through him.

Someone in the Church wanted to ask, 'Where are your credentials?' Well, Paul says, 'The fact that you exist as a Church, that you have God's Holy Spirit and the fact of your conversion are proofs that God has worked through me. Because if God hasn't worked through me, how did you learn the truth, how did you become converted, and where did you get God's Spirit? Either I taught you, baptized you and laid hands on you or someone I taught, taught you, baptized you and laid hands on you. You are my epistle. What more do I need? I don't just have something written by ink; I have something written with the Holy Spirit.'

2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We will age and eventually break down and die.

Verse 2, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven..." He didn't say that we are going to heaven to get it. He is going to come and His reward is with Him.

Revelation 22:12, "'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'" Eternal life is what He is going to bring. We look forward to that.

As we go through trials, difficulties and adversities and as our body begins to "grind down" and decay, we begin to recognize how temporary it is. We begin to earnestly desire to be clothed with something permanent. When you're young and think you have all the energy in the world, you figure you are going to last forever and you don't see the point. But as the years pass, we all become more and more convinced; those who are older among us are more convinced of that need. That's just a part of it. God has designed that to make us more and more deeply aware of how temporary and transitory we are and how much we need what He has to give.

2 Corinthians 5:4, "...that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

Verse 7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Hebrew 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith and sight sometimes contradict one another. Faith is based on what God says, what He promises. Sight is based on physical evidence, what you see. If you have to make a choice in believing what God says or what you see, which do you choose?

We look around at the world; the things we see around us look pretty firm, strong and substantial. God says this world, this orderly arrangement of things, is going to pass from the scene and a new age is going to come. There will be a new world order, and it will not be one that President Bush or Gorbachev put together. That is not the new world order that is going to come about. The real new world order that is going to come about is the one that Jesus Christ brings about. The devil may try to run his counterfeit; in fact, he is. It's called Mystery Babylon the Great. That's the counterfeit of the new world order. But the real new world order is the fact that Christ is going to return and He is going to establish it.

What's the evidence, the proof? The evidence that Christ is going to return isn't based on scientific evidence that you can measure, taste and feel. It's based on the promises of God. We walk by faith, not by sight. As a Christian, we have to live our lives predicated on faith, on what God says. We either believe God or we don't. We deepen our relationship with Him as we walk with Him. If we walk with Him and

spend time with Him, we deepen our relationship with Him.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live not longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” Christ died and gave Himself for us. When we recognize that, our lives need to be devoted to Him.

Verse 17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” We don’t want the old man and the old way. We become a new creature and old things have passed away. You don’t want to go back or drift back into the things you got rid of, put away and stopped when you came into the Church. You don’t want to drift back into the things of the world. We want to go forward in newness of life. We want to be a new creature, not drift back into the world or never come out of the world. Recognize that a new creature has to do with a whole new set of priorities, a new set of values and a new set of what’s important to us.

Verse 18, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...” Understand where the reconciliation is. We are being reconciled to God; it doesn’t say that God becomes reconciled to us. There’s a difference.

When you get a bank statement, you can go through and reconcile your checkbook to the bank statement. You better do it the right way. If you start reconciling the bank statement to your checkbook, you may wind up in trouble. The bank really won’t be impressed with that.

Reconciliation done the wrong way won’t do anybody any good. God is reconciling us to Himself through Jesus Christ. He didn’t say He would become reconciled to us—‘I guess you’re never going to change, so I will just adapt to you.’ God says ‘no,’ and God is right. Now the bank may occasionally make a mistake, but God doesn’t even occasionally make a mistake. God never needs to be reconciled to us. We always need to be reconciled to Him. He is the standard, and we have to become reconciled to Him. We have to come to match Him, to be brought into harmony with Him. We can be brought into harmony with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ makes possible our being brought from a state of disharmony into a state of harmony with God. We have the ministry of reconciliation.

Verse 19, “that is, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself,”

Verse 20, “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ,”

Verse 21, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He paid the penalty to make possible our reconciliation to God. The whole purpose of God reconciling us to Himself is to change and transform us to make us like Him, so it is important that we understand the concept of reconciliation and what it means. It is not that God says He will meet us halfway or that God is going to water down His standards. If we surrender to Him, God makes it possible for us to be brought into harmony with Him. That’s what He desires in our behalf.

2 Corinthians 6:1, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” God extends His mercy. Don’t receive it in vain; use it for a good purpose.

He begins to talk about being unequally yoked together and about our relationships. He talks about our relationship with God and how that renewed relationship is made possible. Then he begins to talk about our relationship with society around.

Verse 14, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” —“Yoking together.” Primarily oxen were yoked. Why were animals yoked together?

Some of us are familiar with horses or mules being hitched up. You would have a wagon pulled by two or maybe four. When you look at the way animals are harnessed together, it is so that they have to pull together. If they are not tied together, then one can go in one direction and one can go the other. Any mules I have known, that is exactly what they would do.

What if you have two creatures that are vastly unequal? In the Old Testament, they were told not to yoke an oxen and an ass together (Deuteronomy 22:10). You have a tremendous amount of disparity. When two creatures are yoked together, the larger the disparity, the more difficult it is for them to pull together. They can’t pull together on the load. Animals that are different sizes have different steps. One has a big step, the other a short step. And there is disparity in strength. It’s just a problem. It is never going to work well. It’s going to be difficult and will be hardship on both.

God utilized a physical principle that He gave to ancient Israel, but there was a spiritual lesson that was intended when He said that an ox and an ass couldn't be yoked together. It wasn't just because God was concerned about donkeys and oxen, though obviously, His tender mercies are over all His works as we are told in Psalm 145:9. God is certainly concerned about the physical creation and the animals, but His primary concern was the fact that there are spiritual lessons and implications. If God gave instructions even for animals, there were principles that applied to people.

When He said the ox and the ass shouldn't be yoked together, it had to do with trying to tie together, to pull together through life, something with great disparity. You want to be able to pull together, so anything that involves the need to pull together, you make a mistake to yoke up with someone who is not going to be pulling in the same direction. There's no way you can pull together.

The principle would apply to business partnerships, marriage and various things. In some cases, people find themselves in circumstances as they come into the knowledge of the truth. They are already yoked in a way that is unequal. Sometimes people have to make the best of a situation. But the principle is that if you're not yoked, don't seek an unequal yoking. Seek an equal yoking, a yoking that is going to enable people to pull together. Two working together—when they are really pulling together—can accomplish far more than either individually. Two working together can more than double what either individually can do because it consolidates and maximizes that effort.

Verse 17, "Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate,'"

Verse 16, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God." There is a relationship here.

2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We are to go forward and become like God. We're to recognize the importance of partnerships in any sort of thing.

Verses 8-10, Paul begins to address the issue of repentance and the fact that there are two different types of sorrow. Being sorry and being repentant are two totally different things. Being repentant is different than being sorry. There are two different kinds of being sorry. One of them

leads to repentance, the other doesn't. Even godly sorrow is not repentance of and by itself. It leads to repentance. There is worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow works death; it is a one-way street.

I think that the clearest illustration or example that I know to illustrate the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is the response of Peter and Judas. Judas betrayed Christ. When he realized that they were actually going to go through the crucifixion, he was sorry. He even took the money back (Matthew 27:3-5). But it was a worldly sorrow. Whatever idea he had in mind didn't work out that way. He became despondent, went out and committed suicide. That was worldly sorrow.

On the other hand, Peter denied Christ three different times.

Matthew 26:75, when the cock crowed and what he had done dawned on him, Peter felt horrible. His sorrow was a godly sorrow because it produced a change in his life.

With worldly sorrow, any time you get into trouble it's easy to be sorry. Ever notice that? From the time you were a little kid, any time you got caught, you're sorry—sorry you got caught. That's normal and that's natural—sorry for the penalty, consequences and sorry we're in trouble. Sometimes we're sorry and wish we hadn't done this or that.

But godly sorrow goes beyond that. Godly sorrow is not just sorry for the consequences. It is not even that you wish you hadn't done this or that particular thing. It's a sorrow for what we are on the inside. We have come to see ourselves. Godly sorrow produces repentance.

It enumerates the qualities of godly sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:11, "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

"Diligence" (KJV, "carefulness") is a desire to really be careful. We have confronted sin in its enormity. We don't want to cut right along the edge anymore. We don't want to live kind of skirting the edge of the cliff.

"Clearing of yourselves" is a desire to have the guilt cleared away, which means we go to God and we confess it.

1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The way to clear yourself is not to make excuses and use self-

justification. It is to admit it to God; go to Him and really acknowledge it and ask God to clear it away.

“Indignation” is really being stirred up and indignant when we see sin for what it is. We are stirred up about it.

“Fear” is reverence and awe for God.

“Vehement desire” is a yearning and earnest desire to do what’s right and that earnest yearning for more of God’s truth. We are told by Peter in 1 Peter 2:2 to desire the sincere milk of the word just like a newborn baby. Have a craving for more of God’s way.

“Zeal” is really being stirred up, really being on fire.

“Vindication” (KJV, “revenge”) means, literally, “an avenging of wrong.” In the context, it would be best understood as making restitution. In this context, it doesn’t mean going and doing something to somebody. We recognize that we are the one who has done something wrong. We avenge the wrong and make it right—a desire to make restitution.

You might look at an example. Remember Zacchus, the publican?

Luke 19:2-8, he was a little short guy who wanted to see Jesus and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could get a good view. Jesus saw him and told him to come down. ‘I am coming over to your house to eat, so you had better get down out of the tree so you can “beat it on over there.”’ Jesus talked with him. Zacchus told Him that he really saw what he had done and the way he misused his office. He was willing to give half of what he had to the poor. Anybody that he cheated, he was going to make restitution to them plus “square things up.” He evidenced the qualities that are shown right here in 2 Corinthians 7:11. One of the things Zacchus did that convinced Jesus that he was really repentant was this attitude.

Luke 19:9, when he got through telling Christ what he was going to do, Christ said, “...‘Today salvation has come to this house, ...’” What if Zacchus had said, ‘I know I’ve been a crook; I know I have cheated a lot of people. But I tell You what, why don’t we just have kind of a clean slate? I will quit cheating people, but I get to keep everything that I have stolen so far. Can I cut a deal with You? Would You okay it if I quit cheating and stealing from people, but I get to keep everything I have stolen? We will call it even.’ What do you think Jesus would have said? Do you think Christ would have been really impressed and said, ‘Zacchus, you really have the big picture’? Somehow I don’t see Jesus

having been really impressed with that sort of an attitude.

It’s kind of like in the Old Testament—if you stole a sheep from your brother or neighbor, you couldn’t just come and offer a sacrifice. You had to make restitution for the sheep (Exodus 22:1-4). If you defrauded your neighbor, you couldn’t just go to the priest and say, ‘I really cheated that guy. I’m sorry, let me offer a sacrifice and we will call it even.’ No. You need to offer the sacrifice, that’s right, but first you go and get reconciled to your neighbor. You give him back those cattle you rustled. You can’t just keep his herd, offer one of them to square you up with God and keep all the rest. You have to make restitution. It was evidence of repentance. Repentance has to do with a changed direction. Christ brought this out.

2 Corinthians 7:6-9, Paul said, ‘You have evidenced that you don’t just have worldly sorrow. Titus has told me that there has been some real changes [fruits] that has taken place. I see that there have been some significant changes, and I’m very glad of that. I’m not glad I made you sorry. I don’t like to be corrective and I’m sorry that I had to do it, but I’m not sorry that you’ve changed.

I think that any of us as parents can understand what Paul meant by that. I don’t think any of us enjoy having to be sternly corrective to our children. Sometimes you really feel badly; on the one hand, you had to be corrective. Yet, on the other, you’re not sorry because you know that they needed it. You just feel badly that you had to. That’s the way Paul was. He felt badly that he had to, but he wasn’t sorry for the results. He now finds some changes.

In 2 Corinthians 8, he begins to address the subject of giving and the example of the people in Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 8:5, “And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” That’s what God desires. God doesn’t want what we have; He wants us.

Verse 12, “For if there is first a willing mind, ...” The issue with God is not nearly so much the amount as it is the attitude. God wants us to develop His nature, His attitude of giving and helping and sharing.

2 Corinthians 9:1-4, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the

brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.” Paul said, ‘Some Macedonians are probably going to come with me, and we don’t want to find you unprepared.’

Verse 5, “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time,” He’s on his way and this is going to be taken up.

Verses 5-7, he talks about giving and God loving a cheerful giver.

This was a big issue in Corinth. The Corinthians were able to do a lot. They were a very wealthy area, but the tendency so many times in areas that have a lot of material things is that the people can be pretty possessive and covetous of that. They needed to use what God had given them as a blessing, rather than to have the attitude they tended to have.

2 Corinthians 10 continues to address certain issues with them.

Verses 3-5, he talks about changing and casting down imaginations (arguments).

He talks about the fact that he’s not going to get in a “match” with some.

2 Corinthians 10:12, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” We’re not out to do that.

2 Corinthians 11:2, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

He is concerned.

Verses 3-4, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.”

Verses 13-14, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

You have several things going on. You have those, even in the time of the New Testament, who were clearly false apostles. Simon Magus and those who were in league with him, those

who were seeking to subvert a congregation to their own use, were clearly false apostles. They claimed an office they never had. The heresies that sprang from them ultimately developed into what became the Catholic Church.

There were others who had various brands of heresies. All of the heretics who gave Paul problems were not necessarily united in perfect order. There was a certain amount of confusion. There were certain brands of heresies that converged in Rome that became the basis of the teachings of the church at Rome. The teachings of the church at Rome ultimately became the standard brand of “Christianity” that Constantine enforced throughout the Roman Empire. There were various groups and various ones who had their “axe to grind.” They were seeking, for whatever their reasons, to make comments about Paul.

Verses 13-15, he talked about the fact that there were going to be false ministers, those who were in reality ministers of Satan but don’t show up claiming that. The devil doesn’t show up wearing a little red suit, a pitchfork and a sign around his neck saying, ‘I’m the devil and I’m here to deceive you.’ He appears as an angel of light. He claims to be that which he is not. That’s always the way of it. Paul addresses a little bit of his credentials and some of his background in the latter part of chapter 11.

In 2 Corinthians 12, he deals with a vision of heaven that he had. He tells it in the third person.

2 Corinthians 12:1, “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord...” It is not something that he wants to focus attention on him in a wrong way. This would have been to address the subject of a vision.

Verse 2, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—” If Paul was writing in the fall of 55 A.D., 14 years earlier would have been the fall of 41 A.D. It’s interesting that this would have been only a few months before he entered the ministry. Paul had been sent back to Tarsus after his conversion and time in Arabia. The apostles basically sent him back home to Tarsus. They told him to go back, get a job and go to work. “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” He stayed there for four years. Barnabas went and sought him out and brought him down to Antioch to assist him. That was in 42 A.D. The timing of this vision would have been, maybe, just a few months prior to that. You think maybe God, in preparation for the job that He had ahead for Paul, wanted to encourage him because Paul had to learn patience waiting for God to work

through His government. The timing on this would have been just very shortly before Paul entered the ministry.

Verse 2, continuing, "...whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven." God gave him this vision of the third heaven.

The Bible speaks of three heavens. The heaven of the earth's atmosphere—scripture talks about the clouds of heaven or the birds that fly in the midst of heaven. Heaven can be used just to refer to the earth's atmosphere. Sometimes it is used to refer to outer space—the stars of heaven. That would be the second heaven. The third heaven is the heaven of God's throne. So, there are three different heavens. The term "heaven" can be used in different ways. It depends on the context. God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The implication is referring to the stars, sun, moon, all that, along with the third.

Paul mentions a thorn in the flesh that he had.

2 Corinthians 12:7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." He had this revelation, but God didn't want him to get puffed up. Even though he had a very special relationship with God, there was a particular thorn in the flesh. We are not told what it was; it was something that he felt really hindered him.

Verses 8-9, on three specific occasions he really sought God with prayer and fasting; God never chose to remove that particular problem. It was something Paul needed to learn to live with through God's help. Sometimes God removes the problem. Sometimes He gives us the grace and the strength to survive through it.

Verse 13, "For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!" In other words, Paul had not taken wages of Corinth previously, though he planned to do so. He had said earlier that he was going to come to them and let them bring him on his way back to Antioch. In other words, he would do so when he came. But he had not done so previously in the time that he had been in Corinth earlier because money had been such an issue. He allowed the money to be used there locally in Corinth; he did not take a wage from them while he was there. Paul said, 'How have you been inferior to other Churches? The only way I treated you any differently than the

others is I didn't collect a salary from you. Forgive me.'

He may, by this time, have had some second thoughts and felt that maybe he was too gentle with them to begin with. It maybe gave way to some of the problems that had developed. He had allowed all the funds to be utilized there locally and not taken any of it. He had either worked or received supplies and sustenance from the Churches in Macedonia while he had been in Corinth. Now he makes allusion to that.

We have already seen why he wrote 2 Corinthians. In chapters 3, 11 and 12, we found Paul defending his apostleship.

In 2 Corinthians 3:1-3, he talks about what commendations do we need; what credentials do we need? You are our credentials.

In 2 Corinthians 11, he talks about false apostles and all the things he had gone through in the latter part of the chapter.

In 2 Corinthians 12, he continues that same theme, defending his apostleship. That's one reason he wrote the book.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11, the second reason he wrote the book was to reinstate the repentant sinner who had been disfellowshipped in 1 Corinthians 5.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, he dealt with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This was the third reason he wrote the book.

There were evidently several accusations made against Paul. Some had charged that he was fickle in his intent to come to Corinth.

We saw that earlier in 2 Corinthians 1:17 where he said, 'No, it wasn't with lightness that I said that.'

Some, evidently, made disparaging comments about him personally, that his speech was contemptible and his bodily presence weak. He was not very impressive.

2 Corinthians 10:10, "'For his letters,' they say, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'" They said, 'Yeah, he sounds pretty impressive when you read those letters, but he's not much to look at.' Some were making disparaging comments of that sort. Some had evidently made allusion to the fact that he perhaps was not really on a par with the other apostles because he really didn't have the authority to take salary or wages from the Churches.

2 Corinthians 11:7-9, "Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was

present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”

This, evidently, had been “thrown up” to them. Some of the false apostles had come in and were trying to use that as proof. ‘See, Paul really isn’t an apostle because the others that have come have received salary and livelihood from the Church. Now Paul never did that. You know why he didn’t? He didn’t have that authority.’ Some were trying to twist and distort.

Paul said, ‘I took wages of the other Churches.’ He didn’t take it of Corinth while he was there because of the issue that existed. Their tithes and offerings were used there locally. He didn’t want to be subject to the accusation that he was in it for the money. We saw that some were accusing him of lacking proper credentials.

In 2 Corinthians 3, there were various accusations that were being leveled against him, none of which were really valid or applied.

2 Corinthians 12:14, finally, he ends up telling them, “Now for the third time I am ready to come to you.” Paul says, ‘I am finally coming to you.’

2 Corinthians 13:1-2, “This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.’ I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest that if I come again I will not spare...”

Verses 3-4, “since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 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.”

‘I want you to know that when I get there, I am going to see how things are. I hope that I can come in kindness and in gentleness, but if I have to come in power and authority, I will do that.’

Verse 5, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.” ‘Really check yourself out. Are you really what you say you are?’

Verse 11, “Finally brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

He desired to come in a gentle way, a kind and encouraging way. Yet, at the same time, he recognized that there were some very serious

problems that threatened the very existence of the Church, as God’s Church.

There are a lot of things packed into 2 Corinthians. Paul had to deal with some serious matters as he wrote 2 Corinthians. Obviously, there had been some changes since 1 Corinthians. Things seemed to have settled out. He wrote this letter, which still had correction in it, but it was more encouraging and not as stern.

Then he came down to Corinth, spent the winter there and left things in a lot better stead. While he was in Corinth, he wrote the book of Romans. He wrote to the Church in Rome, which is what we will go into next time.

Then he left Corinth, going back to Philippi, sailing back to Jerusalem for Pentecost where he was arrested and spent several years in prison. So, things are getting close to that. We will see some of those events next time.

Bible Study # 63
January 22, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Romans

We are getting into the book of Romans this evening—moving through our Bible study series. This is the halfway spot in this series of the Life and Letters of Paul. After this evening, we will be halfway through this particular series. **We are focusing this evening on Paul's letter to the Romans.**

Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. It was the great city of the ancient world. At the time of Paul, Rome had a population in excess of 1.2 million. It was the largest city that existed up until modern times. I think London surpassed this population somewhere around 1800. London was the next city to reach this sort of population. Rome went into a decline in later years. During the period of the Middle Ages, the population was dramatically lower than this. After the decline of the Roman Empire, it was all the way up into the 1800s before London, and later Paris, reached a population of this magnitude.

Rome was a sizable city. A city of a little over a million people is a large population. Rome had a population about like Houston, Texas—only it was more compact. You'd have trouble getting around in Houston if you had to depend on horses and chariots. Even in being more compact, it was a big place. With that many people together, it still had to be somewhat spread out because you didn't have the multi-story buildings that we have now.

The size of the building was limited up until the late 1800s when two things were discovered. One was the use of interior steel girder construction where they went up multi-stories. Another was the elevator. This made possible the skyscrapers. Up until then, there was much more of a limit that was imposed in terms of the height of buildings and what it was practical to do. At that time, you had to go out rather than up. There is only so far out that you can go and still have a city that's going to get over a certain size. Then you have to go up, too. Rome was a very sizable place.

It had a pretty sizable Jewish community. Over half of the population of Rome were slaves. This was a part of the economic base of Rome and the empire. The first settlement of Jews in Rome had been somewhere around 70 B.C. At least, it was the first documented settlement of any size.

The Christians in Rome were more of what we would think of as a loose-knit Bible study rather than a fully-organized Church. There was no record of any Church having been officially established in Rome. There were individual Christians in Rome who met together. They assembled together at homes. There were probably different groups of them because, again, if you have a city of over a million population spread out, just getting from one end to the other, if you're depending on walking, can be a pretty sizable distance even though things tended to be more compact.

Rome would naturally have had Church members because it was a large metropolitan area. There were people continually coming in and out of Rome. It was the center of the empire. Because of trade, commercial reasons and a variety of things, there were people who were coming in. There were Jews from Rome who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost 31 A.D. They are specifically mentioned in Acts 2:10. Some of them were converted. What happened to them?

Well, eventually, they went back to Rome. People tend to move into a place like Rome. So, over a period of time, you had people from Rome who had been converted elsewhere. They had been somewhere else for a short time on business. The Jews were very much involved in trade, commerce and business, as many of them are today. These things took them to different areas and then they returned to Rome.

The nucleus there was Jewish converts. There were others who had come in contact with the Church through either friends in the synagogues or through members. Not only did the Christians in Rome have Jews among them, there were also a number of Gentiles, many of whom had come from Antioch, Greece and various places in the surrounding areas. There were individuals who had congregated there.

We are going to notice when the book of Romans was written. We can show from the context that Paul wrote it from Corinth in the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D. Phoebe, who was a deaconess in the Church in Corinth, carried the letter to Rome. She was evidently a widow who had considerable property and was traveling to Rome on something related to business. She took the letter with her. Paul entrusted that to her and she delivered it when she got to Rome.

There is one thing that I really want to focus in on because it has to do with a very basic claim—the claim for papal supremacy, the claim of the pope as the Bishop of Rome. His “claim to

fame” is that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome. As Bishop of Rome, he was the Successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Bishop of Rome is part of his title. Some of the titles that he claims for himself are Pontifex Maximus, the Successor of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of St. Peter and the Prince of the Apostles. He goes through a long list. Someday, I will bring a copy of his titles; all the titles he claims for himself takes up about six or seven typewritten lines.

The point is that the whole basis of papal authority and the authority of the Catholic Church gets back to the claim that Peter established the church at Rome. They claim that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and that all subsequent Bishops of Rome have been successors of Peter; therefore, they have primacy over all other bishops worldwide. This was the basis of the claims to papal authority that were made, even anciently.

What we are going to see, very clearly, is that Peter was not in Rome. The Catholic Church dates Peter being in Rome to 42 A.D. We’re going to show that there’s no way in the world that Peter had been in Rome for the last 12 years when Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans. I’ll show you what I mean by that.

How do we date the book of Romans? As we have gone through this series, I’ve tried to cover the books in relationship to the book of Acts. Let’s go to the book of Romans and we will see a little bit of how we date the book internally.

Romans 15:24-28, “whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.”

Notice the timing; we are told the timing right here. This is when Paul is getting ready to leave and go to Jerusalem. He is going to Jerusalem to take the offering from the area of Macedonia and Achaia (Greece)—Corinth and Philippi. He’s getting ready to take that back to Jerusalem.

That’s where we were in 2 Corinthians, where Paul told the Corinthians Church that he was on his way to come to them.

2 Corinthians 9:1-5, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he was getting ready to go to Corinth and collect the foodstuffs he had told them about earlier.

Acts 20:1-3, we tie this in with, “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece [Corinth] and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”

Verse 4, there accompanied him these various individuals. We find that Paul was in Corinth.

Remember the story we went into last time. Paul had written 1 Corinthians in the spring of 55 A.D. from Ephesus. Then in Acts 19, we see how he had to leave Ephesus. He went on over, crossed into Macedonia up to Philippi. When he got to Philippi, he met Timothy whom he had sent down to Corinth to check up and see what the results from the letter were. Timothy reported to him, so he sent a letter (2 Corinthians) back.

He told them he was coming to see them. That’s when he left and came through Greece and stayed there three months (Acts 20:3). This time of year is wintering months (December, January, February), which are very difficult months in which to travel. He wintered there in Corinth. He was originally going to sail, but he traveled overland back up to Macedonia. This is when he is leaving to go back to Jerusalem in the spring of 56 A.D. to be there for Pentecost.

Acts 20:16, “...for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.”

We find, here, the story of Paul’s return to Jerusalem. But when Paul wrote Romans, he had not left to go back to Jerusalem. He was telling

the Romans that he was planning to come visit them. He said, 'I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. I am going to take this offering that I have from Greece to Jerusalem, and then when I get through with that, I am going to leave. I am planning to go to Spain and stop and visit you on my way to Spain' (Romans 15:24-28). We have the setting. The setting is right around the time before he left to go back to Jerusalem.

We know he wrote it from Corinth because he makes reference to that in Romans.

Romans 16:1, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea..." The word "servant" in the Greek is "*diakonos*." It is the feminine form of deacon. She is a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea. Cenchrea was a suburb of Corinth. It was the port of Corinth. Phoebe was a deaconess from Corinth. He told the Church at Rome, 'I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a deaconess here at Corinth.'

Verse 2, "that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."

Paul is sending this letter from Corinth by Phoebe. He is sending it right at this particular time. We can pretty well date when Paul is doing this. It would have been the time during the three months that he was wintering in Greece (Corinth, Acts 20:2-3). It was probably towards the end of that because it was approaching the time he was going to leave and it was also approaching the time Phoebe was going to be able to set sail. He wrote the letter and since she was going to Rome, he entrusted it to her that she would deliver it.

We know that Peter wasn't in Rome as the Bishop of Rome. The Church at Rome wasn't even what we would call an "established" Church.

Romans 1:9-11, notice what Paul says, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you might be established..." Paul wanted to come and impart to them a spiritual gift so that they could be established. That says they weren't established.

Now, if Peter had been there as the first pope for 12 years, that would be kind of an insult. If that

was the case, it would be like if a minister in an adjoining area wrote a letter here to Lafayette and says he is anxious to come and visit you because he would really like to establish you as a Church. That would be a little odd. We have been a Church here for years. I might take a little bit of exception to that.

This is what it would have been like if Peter had been there for the last 12 years. **Paul writes a letter and says he is really anxious to come and visit the people so that he can impart a spiritual gift to the end that they may be established.** That's not all because, as we come back a little further in the book of Romans, we find something else.

Romans 15:19, "in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

Illyricum is an area north of Greece. It would be a portion (just the very bottom tip) of what is now modern-day Yugoslavia. It is right on the Adriatic Sea across and just east of Italy. Italy comes down as a boot. There's a sea that comes down. You have Yugoslavia and then Greece down on the bottom. Well, Paul had gone up as far as Greece and even north of Greece, but he had never been over into Italy. He says, 'I have gone all the way from Jerusalem, over to north of Greece and I have fully preached the gospel.'

Verse 20, "And so I made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation..." Paul says, 'I have been preaching the gospel all the way from Jerusalem up to the north of Greece. I haven't gotten to you yet. Wherever I have gone, my purpose has been to go into areas where Christ has not been preached, so that I am not building on someone else's foundation. It's my job, my commission, to lay a foundation. Other men come in and build on that foundation.'

Paul is telling them he desires to come and see them to the end that they may be established. He's telling them that he's not in the position of going in and building on other men's foundations. He goes in and preaches in areas where the gospel has not been proclaimed. Now, if Peter's been in Rome for the last 12 years, he must be doing a "slow boil" about this time because this is quite an insult—saying Peter hadn't established them, hadn't preached the gospel and hadn't laid a foundation. That would really be insulting.

Romans 16:1-3, "I commend to you Phoebe ... assist her in whatever business she has need of

you; Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus...”

Verse 5, “Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” Priscilla and Aquila were friends of Paul that he had met at an earlier time. They were Jews from Rome who had been expelled from Rome at an earlier time. There was an expulsion of Jews from Rome that had occurred; Priscilla and Aquila had been caught up in that and had been affected by it.

We’re moving back in time several years earlier, going back about six years from the time Paul is writing Romans 16. Let’s turn the clock back six years.

Acts 18:1, “...Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.” This was the first time Paul went to Corinth.

Verses 2-3, “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.”

Paul had gotten acquainted with them because he had stayed with them and they had worked together being of the same craft. It started out as a friendly relationship where he was rooming with them. He was probably renting a room in their house, working, doing piecemeal out of Aquila’s shop. They had taken an interest in the Church and had become converted. In the meantime, the Jews had been allowed to return to Rome.

The reason they had left Rome was because Claudius had expelled all the Jews. Ever so often the Roman emperors would get “hard up” for cash, so they would expel the Jews. They would confiscate and liquidate their assets. It was a good way to raise a little ready cash and kind of blame somebody for all the problems going on.

This is an old story that’s been going on for a long time. Politicians always like to blame somebody else for all the problems. They like to have a scapegoat. There have been different scapegoats at different times. The Jews have traditionally been a popular scapegoat; they are easy to blame.

Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome, and there was evidently a group of Christians who were meeting at their house.

In Romans 16:5-15, Paul greets the Church there at their house. He starts listing all these various people, a number who had come from Corinth. He names off a gigantic list of people. But when

you go through the whole list, one of the things you find is there’s no mention of Peter. Paul names more people by name in the book of Romans than he does any other book. He says “Hello” to everybody that he knows in Rome. He tacks it on the end of his letter. But there is never a mention of Peter. Now, if Peter was there as the pope, you talk about being insulted! Paul ignores him totally.

Paul says, ‘I need to come over and establish you. The foundation hasn’t been laid. I go and preach where nobody has preached yet, so I’m going to come to you people and preach. I don’t build on another man’s foundation. And you need to be established. Say “Hi” to everybody I know, starting out with Priscilla and Aquila, in whose house the Church is meeting.’ He kind of works his way down. There’s no way that you can truthfully and objectively look at the book of Romans and think that Peter was in Rome as the Bishop of Rome.

The whole basis of the claim of authority that the Catholic Church has absolutely collapses on the basis of an objective look at the book of Romans. It collapses on several other bases as well. We don’t have time to get into all of those. We will get into some of them at a later time. I think it’s important to understand this because it is a major issue. The claim of papal supremacy is the claim of supremacy of the Bishop of Rome because he is the successor of Peter. Peter is not in Rome. Peter didn’t establish the Church in Rome. He was not in Rome up through this time. This is made plain.

Let’s get on into more of the book of Romans. There were Jews and Gentiles in the Church at Rome—the Gentiles being primarily the Greeks and Romans. There were some problems as there traditionally are. They all had a problem with each of them looking down on everyone else. The Jews knew that they were superior to everybody else because they had the Bible. Since they were God’s own special people, this obviously made them better than everybody else. On the other hand, you couldn’t convince the Romans of that. The Romans knew they were the superior people; they were the master race because they ruled the world. That was pretty much evidenced.

The Greeks knew that they really were the ones who were superior to everybody else because they were the ones who conducted the schools to teach the Romans. In their minds, that proved that they were smarter than the Romans because they were employed by the Romans to teach them. The pagan religions of Rome and the great

philosophers all quoted Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the great Greek philosophers. The Greeks' claim to superiority was their culture and philosophers.

The Romans claimed the superiority because they ruled everybody else. That should make them number one. And the Jews looked down on them and said, 'Neither one of you really has what we have. We're number one. We are the ones on speaking terms with God. The rest of you are not.'

You have people in the Church who have come out of these backgrounds—each of which kind of looked down a little bit on the others and figured what they had made them better than the others. They all took pride in certain things. Paul begins to address that subject.

The first thing he started with was the Greeks and Romans. He really "chewed them up and spit them out."

Romans 1:18-22, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools..."

Paul blasts the philosophers of the Greco-Roman world in about as strong terms as possible. He says they are a bunch of fools. Paul says, 'The things you take pride in are your great philosophers, your great educational system. Let me tell you about the great educational system; the people that founded it were fools.' You can imagine a few people were probably squirming in their seats about that time. They maybe thought he had quit preaching and gone to "meddling" because he was really beginning to take apart the things in which they had pride.

Verse 24, God gave them up to uncleanness.

Verse 28, he begins to go through and talks about how God had given them over to a debased (KJV, "reprobate") mind. You don't have to dig very far before you realize what a major role the sexual sins, sexual perversion and homosexuality played among the intellectuals and the intelligentsia of Greece. There were vile things that were a part of some of these things. Paul really begins to go through and "rake them

over the coals" for the things in which they took pride.

This is being read orally. About the time we've gotten down this far, some of the Jews are sitting there feeling pretty smug because this is what they thought all along.

Then he gets on down.

Romans 2:11, "For there is no partiality with God."

Verses 13-15, "(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, ..."

The Gentiles didn't have the Ten Commandments given to them. Moses didn't come to Rome or to Athens and give the Ten Commandments. 'You Jews are pretty proud of that; He gave them to you. But let me tell you something. It's not the hearers of the law that are just; all you Jews have heard the law. It's the doers of the law.'

Which do you think God is most pleased with: a Roman who never heard the Ten Commandments that didn't commit adultery or a Jew who heard them and did? Which do you think God is the most pleased with: a Jew who heard the Ten Commandments yet worked some shady deals and stole, lied or murdered, or some Greek or Roman who never had the law taught to them (in terms of the Old Testament), but figured out you shouldn't lie or steal or murder somebody?

You have nice people all over the world, whether they are Arabs or Chinese or people in Africa or South America. You can go anywhere in the world and find some nice people, the kind you would like to have as next door neighbors. They don't go around raping, murdering, pillaging and doing all kinds of terrible things. Just because somebody's not in the Church doesn't mean that they are a thief, murderer and rapist. The point he's making is that the Jews were smug.

He says, 'Let's understand; it's not the hearers of the law but the doers.' There were people in Rome of Greek and Roman background. Even though the law was not delivered to them as a codified canon of law, if they understood and did some of these things, God was pleased with that.

Verses 17-20, "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are

confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.”

‘You Jews are pretty proud of yourself, aren’t you? You rest in the law. This really gives you “one up.” Well, let me tell you something.’

Verses 22-24, “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.”

Oh, now, all of a sudden, the Jews are the ones squirming in their seats. They’ve been sitting there looking pretty smug until a few minutes ago. Now, as the letter proceeds to be read, Paul says, ‘You Jews, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of your lousy example. You rest in the law and make your boast in the law and you’re not keeping the law. People know the kind of example that you’ve been setting and the name of the God of Israel is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of your lousy example.’

About this time, there are some who are uncomfortable and squirming in their seats because they weren’t really comfortable either. He says, ‘Look, where does righteousness come from?’ The Jews’ “claim to fame” was that they were circumcised; they’re the seed of Abraham. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant; they’re identified as the children of Abraham (Israelites) to whom was delivered the law. This was the basis of their claim to a relationship with God. They had this patronizing approach toward the Gentiles, which in turn, some of the Gentiles (particularly the Greeks and Romans) had a pretty patronizing approach toward everybody else. They said, ‘Maybe you have a few things, but after all, we’ve developed this wonderful educational system and we’ve produced this great culture and civilization.’

Greek and Roman civilization was a major accomplishment. There are many beautiful things. Look at some of the great architecture and art. Many great things come from the Greco-Roman civilization. It is the basis of much of western civilization. These are positive things, but the problem is that’s the basis of people’s confidence.

Verse 25, “For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become

uncircumcision.” Paul says, ‘Look, you know what circumcision profits? If you keep the law and you’re doing what God says, it is fine.’

Verse 26, “Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?” If he’s doing what God says, that counts a whole lot more than someone who is a Jew who is not doing what God says.

Verse 29, “but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, ...”

He’s gotten through “slamming” the Gentiles and the things they were proud of. Then he turned around and “slammed” the Jews and all the things they were proud of. So, nobody had anything to be proud of. This is the point that Paul wanted to make.

Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Paul says, ‘You’re all in the same boat. You Gentiles and Jews don’t have anything to be proud of. You’re all sinners. You’re all in the same boat, and the question is how to get out of that boat and into another.’ This was Paul’s approach in dealing with a situation where there was a certain amount of rivalry and friction—this sort of attitude and problem that some had towards one another.

Now he needs to come back and address the subject of the advantage of being a Jew.

Romans 3:1, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?” Is there an advantage to being a Jew?

Verse 2, “Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.” Yes, there is one great advantage because to them were committed the oracles of God, the Word of God. The Jews were given the truth—the Bible.

Verse 3, even if some didn’t believe it, their unbelief will not make God’s faithfulness of no effect. In other words, God faithfully preserved His word through them, even if some of them didn’t believe and practice it. There was a tremendous advantage they had. They had access to the written and preserved Word of God.

The oracles of God basically consist of three things. Some of it was written; some, not written. The oracles of God consist of the Old Testament Scriptures preserved by the Jews. You know two other things the Jews preserved? They preserved the knowledge of which day is the Sabbath.

Exodus 20:8-10, you can read in the Old Testament, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.”

But if somebody had not been keeping every seventh day, how would you know which day is the seventh? The Jews preserved the knowledge of which day is the seventh. If there had not been a people keeping the Sabbath consecutively every week through every generation, then how would you have kept up with it?

We pretty well use one standard calendar in the world today. Anciently, that was not the case. Every nation had some calendar. The Jews preserved the knowledge of which day was the Sabbath. The Old Testament preserved the knowledge that the seventh day is the Sabbath, but which day is the seventh day? The Jews preserved the order of the days of the week.

Another thing they preserved was the knowledge of how to calculate the calendar. That was another part of the oracles of God. God tells us that the Passover comes on the 14th day of the first month. That's great. But how do you figure that out? That didn't mean that the 14th of January was Passover, did it? It is not the 14th day of the Roman calendar but the 14th day of the first month of the *sacred calendar*. Who preserved the calendar? The Jews did. That's why it is called the Jewish calendar or the Hebrew calendar.

The oracles of God consisted of: (1) the Old Testament, (2) the knowledge of the seventh-day week and (3) the knowledge of the sacred calendar and how to compute it. The Jews preserved that information.

And according to what Paul said here in Romans 3, they preserved it faithfully. Even though some of them didn't believe it, in the full sense of the word, God used them to preserve that knowledge. That's a tremendous advantage.

Romans 3:10-12, but the point is, "...There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." Everybody's culture and civilization has gotten off the track. 'Greeks, Romans and Jews—you've all missed the point. You've all sinned. None of you have an inherent "leg up" in terms of a relationship with God.' This was important.

We get into the concept of law and grace. There's a lot about that in the book of Romans.

Verse 28, "...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

Verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Again, we get back to the issue of circumcision. Circumcision revolved around the issue of access to God. We went through this in greater detail in the book of Galatians. This was what the whole controversy was about. This was the thing that was difficult to grasp. How do you gain and maintain access to God? What is the basis of our relationship with God and of having access to God? Is it simply a matter of ceremonial requirements?

If you go into the Old Testament, there were requirements in terms of circumcision and even in terms of serving in the temple—things of that sort. There were certain bodily impairments that someone was not able to have and serve in the temple. There were physical things of uncleanness that would temporarily exclude you. There were physical things that determined your access to the sanctuary and to proximity to God.

But those were simply to teach a spiritual lesson. The issue that had to be understood was that the basis of our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship. It is not simply the performance of a ritual or a penance or doing certain things. Grace is not conferred through the seven sacraments. That's not where you get God's grace. Those of you who were Catholics know that's not the way grace is conferred.

Grace is God's gift, and Paul makes plain that our relationship with God is predicated on faith. It is a spiritual relationship.

Verse 31, a spiritual relationship does not make void the law. This does not tear up the Ten Commandments and throw them away. It is not the performance of a ritual that determines access to God because we are looking at a spiritual relationship.

The Jews needed to understand that they didn't have some inherent, automatic relationship with God simply because the ritual of circumcision had been performed. That was not the basis of a spiritual relationship with God. Circumcision was the outward, physical sign that identified them as the covenant people, the descendants of Abraham. That was fine, but it did not give them a "leg up" toward inheriting the Kingdom of God.

As the covenant people, they did have access to the Scriptures and knowledge of the truth. That's well and good, but you still have to act on it. It's not the hearer of the law that is going to be justified (Romans 2:13). The fact that you sat in the synagogue and heard the law read doesn't put you one "leg up" on anybody else, unless you have acted on what you have heard.

The same can be brought down and applied to us in the Church today. It doesn't matter how many years you've sat in the Church or if you grow up in it or if your parents were in it before you were born. It doesn't matter how many generations of your family has been in the Church or how long or how short a time you've been in the Church. It's not the hearers of the law that are going to be justified; it's the doers. It's not how many sermons you've heard; it's what you've done with the ones you have heard. A person who has only heard one and acted on it is a whole lot better off than the guy who has heard 1,000 and hadn't really gotten around to doing anything with any of them. It's not how many; it's what you've done with the ones you have heard. This is the key, and Paul is bringing this out.

Then he gets into the matter of justification. Again, justification is the basis of our relationship with God in the sense of gaining access to God. How are you justified? Was Abraham justified before God by circumcision? Was that the basis of Abraham's spiritual relationship with God?

Paul says, 'Let us go through and analyze.'

Romans 4:2-3, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" Genesis 15 says this, which was before he was circumcised.

Verse 10, "How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." He says, 'Look, he was uncircumcised when he believed God and acted on it.'

Verse 11, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, ..." Paul is trying to explain a concept to them.

Abraham's relationship with God was not established by the performance of the ritual of circumcision. That's not what gave Abraham his relationship with God. God established that as a covenant sign with Abraham, but there was a relationship with God that Abraham already had for over 20 years. God made the promises to Abraham before circumcision was ever mentioned.

He uses this to illustrate to the Jews who had trouble turning loose of the fact that you really couldn't be assured of access to God if you were uncircumcised. This was based on the fact of physical exclusion from the court of the Israelites. Remember, around the tabernacle and later the temple, there were courts. There was an

outer court, the court of the Gentiles, beyond which someone couldn't pass unless he was a circumcised Jew.

We will see it in the next Bible study or two, Acts 21, when Paul went back to Jerusalem. He was arrested and charged with bringing uncircumcised Gentiles into the temple precinct. The issue of access is the whole thing. The issue is not doing away with the law. The issue is: what do you do that gains access to God? How do you gain access to God? What is the basis of your having access? Paul is explaining that here.

What is the promise to Abraham?

Verse 13, "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." What is the promise to Abraham? He would be the heir of the world. God didn't promise to Abraham that he was going to go to heaven. He promised him he would inherit the earth.

Galatians 3:29, if he is going to inherit the earth, that's why we are told, "And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Which promise? The promise God made to Abraham, the promise that he would be the heir of the world. We spiritually all become accounted as the children of Abraham and we inherit through him, in effect, as his spiritual offspring. The promise was that he would be heir of the world.

Matthew 5:5, therefore, it shouldn't surprise us when Christ said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Revelation 5:10, it should also not surprise us when we read, "And have made us [margin, "them"] kings and priests to our God; and we [margin, "they"] shall reign on the earth." The earth is what God promised. Abraham was going to be the heir, the inheritor.

Romans 4:20-21, "He did not waver [KJV, "stagger"] at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." This was the basis of Abraham's relationship with God. He believed God. He trusted God. He developed a relationship with God based on confidence. That needs to be the basis of our relationship with God.

Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, ..." How do we gain access to God? Through

Christ we have access by faith. Christ made the access possible, but we have to believe it. We have to act by faith, and it is through Him that we have access through faith. He discusses this and shows that God took the initiative in establishing our approach to Him.

Verse 6, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Verses 9-10, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

We’re reconciled by the death of Christ; we’re saved by His life. There was an old Protestant hymn, “Saved by the Blood.” We are not saved by His blood; we are saved by His life. We are reconciled by the blood—by the death and by the shedding of blood. Restitution for sin was made that paid the penalty. We have the opportunity to live because Christ not only died, He lives again and became the Author (KJV, “Captain”) of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

Again, we get into this issue of reconciliation, this issue of justification. God took the initiative to bring us into a relationship with Him. We were cut off. We were alienated by sin. Whether we are Jews, Gentiles or whatever—regardless of our ethnic origin—we were all in the same category and alienated from God through sin. God took the initiative to bring us into a relationship with Himself. That initiative was taken through Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship, and it is not based on performance of physical rituals.

Let’s notice one thing. The question comes up about the Ten Commandments existing between the time of Adam and Moses.

Verses 12-14, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses,”

If there had been no law, there would have been no sin. If there had been no sin, there would have been no death. Right? That’s what it says, ‘Sin entered into the world and death entered by sin. Death spread to all men because all have sinned.’ The Ten Commandments were in effect between Adam and Moses because sin was imputed—sin was counted. It was still a sin. When Joseph, back in the book of Genesis, was tempted to

commit adultery by Potipher’s wife, he said, ‘How could I do so and sin against my master and against God. How can I do this sin?’ Joseph knew it was a sin to commit adultery. How did he know that? If there is no law, there is no sin.

That’s the way they want to solve the crime problem. They want to do away with some of the law. We have a big drug problem. If we make it all legal, then it won’t be a crime anymore and crime will go down. Right? If you legalize murder, you can say the crimes of murder have dropped to zero because it’s not a crime anymore. What if you abolished the speed limit? Then you wouldn’t have the speeding violations anymore.

Up until the energy crunch in the 70s, Montana didn’t have a speed limit during the daytime on the major highways. There simply were no speed limits. There were practical reasons for that. You could probably drive 50 miles and not see another vehicle. You would have to go to some trouble to have a wreck.

The point is that if there is no law, there is no sin. We know that there was sin between Adam and Moses; therefore, there was a law. Paul had to deal with some of the misunderstandings that had arisen. He’s bringing out how we’re justified and the basis of a relationship with God is not predicated on the performance of physical ritual. Some want to “jump into the other ditch” and say, ‘It doesn’t matter about sin and keeping the law because grace comes freely; we can do whatever we want to do and God will just give more grace. Since God likes to give grace, the more we sin, the more God can give grace. God’s happy and we’re happy.’ That’s not the way it works.

Romans 6:1-2, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” He said, ‘What do you mean? Do you mean that you can just keep on doing whatever you want to do because, after all, God will give grace? Don’t you realize that when you become a partaker of grace, you died to sin? You turned from sin.’ You said, ‘I don’t want that way anymore.’ There’s a difference between living in sin and tripping up and making a mistake sometimes. There’s a difference between missing the mark and not even aiming for the target.

It is interesting. The primary word that is most commonly used for sin, both in Hebrew and Greek, refers to sin in the sense of mistakes that Christians make. It comes from words in the original that basically mean to miss the mark. In

the Hebrew, it's the word that was once used to refer to an archer who was able to shoot a target and not miss the mark. What it's talking about is missing the mark, not quite hitting the bull's eye. It's talking about conduct not quite being on target. Paul is bringing this out. There's a difference between missing the mark and not even aiming for the target. Missing the mark is predicated on the fact you were shooting at the target. You were aiming, but you don't always hit it "right on" as you should.

But shall we continue in sin? No. We died to sin. We're not trying to live that way anymore. We may miss the mark sometimes, but in terms of sin as a way of life, we've turned our back on it. Verse 4, he goes through that we're to walk in newness of life.

Verse 6, we're not to be slaves of (KJV, "serve") sin.

Verse 12, sin is not to reign in our mortal bodies. Verse 16, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slave whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?"

Verse 23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We are not under the law in the sense that we're not under the penalty of the law. We've died to that. We're delivered from the penalty of the law.

Romans 7:6-7, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'"

Paul said, 'I wouldn't have known sin except God had spelled it out in the law.' The purpose of the law is to define sin. You wouldn't know right from wrong if God didn't tell you. You don't know what the speed limit is unless there's a sign posted. This is the purpose. This is what the law serves.

Verse 12, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." The problem is not the law.

Verse 14, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." The problem wasn't the law; the problem was with the people.

Verses 18-21, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is

present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good."

What am I going to do? In my flesh dwells no good thing. I have made up my mind that I desire to serve God, but the pulls that I have inherent within me are taking me in the other direction.

Verse 22, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."

Verse 24, "...Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

God will through Jesus Christ.

Verse 25, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." With my mind I have made a decision and I'm locked on to serving the law of God. As long as I am in the flesh, I am still battling the pulls that can take me in the other direction.

Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." He is talking about not continuing to walk after the flesh. We have a battle going on. We're pulled in two different directions, but we've chosen the direction we're going in. We're going in that direction even though there may be pulls and may be occasional slips in terms of completely and perfectly walking the way of God.

Verses 6-7, "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Carnally minded is being primarily motivated by the pulls of the flesh that is pulling and taking us in a direction contrary to God. In the flesh we can't please God; we need the Spirit of God.

How do you know if you're going to be in the Kingdom? Here's the key.

Verse 11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who [that] dwells in you." How do you know if you're going to be in the Kingdom? –If you have the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 1:13-14, "...you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who [which] is the guarantee [KJV, "earnest"] of our inheritance

....” It’s the proof that God intends to do what He says.

God doesn’t give you His Spirit and then takes it back and then gives it back—on and off again like a light switch. That’s not the way it works. When God gives you the Spirit, you have the Spirit. You can drift far enough from God to finally come to the point of the unpardonable sin. There can finally come a point of no return when God would take His Spirit from you. But it’s not something that just goes back and forth. Once you have it, you have it as long as you use it, exercise it and seek it. Sometimes you may be on low supply because you haven’t been renewing it. But it is something that we have as a gift of God and God does not desire to take it from us. He desires to give us more.

1 Peter 5:5, “...‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

Romans 8 goes through a very powerful section of Scripture.

Verse 14, we have received the Spirit of sonship.

Verse 16, we are God’s children.

Verse 17, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Verse 23, we have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Verse 31, “...If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Verse 35, nothing can separate us from God’s love and God’s power.

In Romans 9, Paul begins to address the subject of Israel. Israel as a whole is not being converted now. That was a mystery to many trying to understand.

Verse 3, Paul had a great desire to see his countrymen converted, but he explains something.

Romans 11:25-26, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, ...”

Verse 32, “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

He is bringing out to the Gentiles that it’s not because they were somehow inherently smarter or anything else. God has blinded or allowed them to be blinded temporarily. He’s concluded them in unbelief that He may have mercy upon all. He will deal with them in His time. Israel is not converted right now because they are blinded.

God goes into the fact that He chooses whom He will call and when.

Romans 9:16, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” He chooses upon whom He will have mercy and who will be blinded. That’s God’s choice. You and I understand what we understand because God has opened our minds to understand. It’s not because there may be others who are not somehow inherently worse than we are. It’s not because we were smarter than everybody else or because of some inherent quality of us. God in His mercy chose us; we have to understand the credit goes to God, not to us. God chose us. We didn’t take the initiative in our relationship with God. He took it with us. It’s not that we didn’t do our part in terms of seeking and searching, but if God had not revealed Himself, we could have never found Him. God revealed Himself. Paul goes through and explains some things.

There is one scripture that I always took a lot of encouragement in. I remember back at some “low times” in the state of the Church back in the 70s when there didn’t seem to be very much being accomplished and there were a lot of things that shouldn’t have been. This was one of the verses that I zeroed in on and took a lot of comfort from.

Verse 28, “‘For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.’” God is going to finish His work. He’s going to finish it and He’s going to cut it short in righteousness. That’s something to understand. God knows who’s who and He knows what’s what. He has a job to do and He’s going to finish His work. He’s going to cut it short in righteousness. He’s going to make a short work.

The full prophetic implications of that short work is something that I think we will just have to wait and see in terms of what God is going to classify as the short work. I don’t think that term would necessarily apply to the entire length of this age (era).

There have been various periods in the overall phase of the work. There have been times of great activity and accomplishment and times of somewhat of a lull. That’s been the state of things. It is one of those enigmatic statements that become clearer at the appropriate time. But it is a basis of faith and of confidence that God knows what He is doing. I think this has to be the basis of our relationship—*God knows what He is doing*.

If you take a bus or plane trip somewhere, you have to operate on the basis that the pilot knows how to get to the destination. If you don’t think

the pilot knows how to get to the destination, then you better find a different bus or plane. I'm not going to get on a bus and tell him every turn to make, when to slow down and stop. If I don't think he can drive, I am going to get off the bus.

The basis is: you identify where God is, where He is working, and then you trust Him to do it. And if you don't see why He's made that turn or this turn or why He's doing that or this other, just realize you are not the one who is driving. You don't have a road map. We have a general idea. In one sense, you can say the Bible is a road map. But all the details, prophetically and exactly everything God is going to do, you can't second-guess God. God has things in mind that go beyond our ability to entirely perceive.

Romans 11:2, "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."

Verse 8, "...God has given a spirit of stupor [KJV, "slumber"], ..."

Verse 26, "And so [eventually] all Israel will be saved, ..."

You can tie this in with Ezekiel 37 and other places that show a future time when there will be a time of salvation. God is not a respecter of persons, as Paul makes plain earlier in the book of Acts (Acts 10:34, KJV). If the time is coming when all Israel will be saved, then the time is also coming when all the Gentiles—all the nations—will also have their chance for salvation. That is made plain.

Matthew 11:24, Christ alluded to that in the instructions to the Pharisees when He said, "...it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you."

Matthew 12:42, "The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

Matthew 12:41, "The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."

Some of these people have acted more and have done better with the chance they had than you've done with yours. They are going to rise up in judgment with you and they are going to ask, 'What's wrong with you? If we'd had the chance you had, we would have done something with it.' Christ made plain that there's coming a time when all Israel is going to be saved. Since God is not a respecter of persons, there's going to be a time when they also shall have that opportunity.

Romans 12 talks about our relationship to God as one of total sacrifice; we are to be a living sacrifice. We belong to God. We are His possession. We are to recognize that we are in the body (Church) where God has placed us and we are to carry out and serve in whatever opportunities we have available to us.

Romans 13 says we are to be subject to the civil authorities.

Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." We are not to be involved in civil disobedience. We are to be subject to the civil law, realizing that God holds the civil government accountable and He deals with them. A Christian's job is not to be out trying to lead a revolution somewhere. We are to seek to live peaceably, to pay our taxes and to do the things that we should do. We are to try to be a good citizen and be respectful to government authority.

The one debt that everybody has is made plain.

Verse 8, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." We owe a debt of love.

Verse 7, "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." We are to show proper respect and proper deference. We are to show the appropriate signs of respect. A Christian is not going to be out burning the flag, whatever country he lives in. We are to be paying our taxes. We are to show respect and honor to individuals in authority and the symbols of that authority. The one thing we owe everybody is to love one another.

Verses 9-10, he explains a little bit of what love is.

In Romans 14, there was a problem concerning meats. But the issue was not clean and unclean meats. The issue was not that some were eating unclean foods and Paul didn't think it made any difference. The issue concerns vegetarianism.

Romans 14:1-2, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables." What does it mean that one believes he may eat all things? Does it mean ground-up glass, arsenic, poison ivy salad?

1 Corinthians 10:27, what about the verse, "...eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience's sake." A poison ivy

salad—are you going to eat that? That’s not what it is talking about.

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.” The issue is eating meat or not eating meat. The reason some were not eating meat was not because they were following Ellen G. White’s vision, the Seventh Day Adventist “star.” Some say she had a vision that meat in the latter days was going to be polluted. Yeah, it is “shot” full of chemicals, that’s right. So are your vegetables; so is your water and your air. Anybody who lives along the Mississippi River is in trouble. What are you going to limit yourself to that doesn’t have any pollutants?

I am not saying that we shouldn’t try to be careful of what we eat and that we shouldn’t obtain the best that is available to us. I certainly believe that we should be careful of our health and our diet and obtain the best that is available to us. But a little bit of common sense and balance has to come into the matter, too. You may die from breathing polluted air, but you are going to die a whole lot quicker from not breathing air at all. You’ll last years longer breathing polluted air—minutes not breathing air. If your choice is between polluted air and no air, then you better go for the polluted air. Now, if your choice is between polluted air and good air, then go for the good air. Go for the best you have available. Use a little bit of common sense.

But their issue was not some crackpot theory in those ways. The issues had to do with the fact that it was meat offered to idols. Paul goes on and addresses the subject.

Romans 14:14, “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [KJV, margin, “common”] of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

“There is nothing common of itself.” Now the issue is not food that is unclean but food that is common—and there is a difference.

Remember when Peter had his vision in Acts 10. He saw the sheet and all the four-footed creatures.

Acts 10:13-14, “And a voice came to him, ‘Rise. Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’” Common and unclean are two totally different things. Food can be clean and, yet, not kosher. “Common” simply means it “wasn’t kosher.” Generally it was because it had been offered to an idol. That was the primary reason.

Also, there were certain matters of ritual slaughter.

What it amounted to was that in the major metropolitan Gentile areas, to obtain meat at the meat market or the places you went to buy meat, many times it was difficult to obtain meat that was kosher. There was no guarantee that meat that you obtained at the major meat markets was kosher. You could not be assured that some of it hadn’t come from an idol’s temple where it had been offered in sacrifice.

They slaughtered the animals, burned the entrails there on the altar, poured out the blood and the meat was carved up. The priests had a lot more than what they needed, so they sold it to the meat markets. A large part of the meat the meat market had was bought from various idols’ temples that morning.

A really strict Jew, unless he could be absolutely and totally assured that this meat had not been offered to an idol, wouldn’t eat it. They viewed it as having been polluted. It had become a major issue. Some of the people were saying they didn’t see that it was a problem for them to eat meat offered to idols. ‘If I go down to the store and buy some meat (some of the meat was not offered to idols), I don’t know if it’s offered to an idol. I’m not buying it to participate in the idol’s service.’

[Tape ends. Notes added come from another Bible study or a sermon given by Mr. Ogwyn.]

Romans 15:23-24, “But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.”

Paul had planned on going to Rome and then to Spain after he delivered the aid to the Jerusalem Church. But he was arrested and brought to Rome (Acts 22:25—28:31). He dwelt two whole years in Rome in his own rented house (Acts 28:30). At that point the Biblical record of Paul’s life ceased.

Evidently, from what Paul had said, his plans were to go from Italy to Spain, and there is every reason to think that he did so. He said he would in the book of Romans. Secular history and tradition maintains that he did. From Spain he went on up to Britain, which was the furthestmost outpost of the Roman Empire. He spent some time there, and then by the mid 60s, he returned to the Mediterranean area, particularly to the area

of Ephesus, for a short period of time. He then left Ephesus and went over to Macedonia. From there he was arrested and taken back to Rome. Next Bible study we will cover the book of Colossians and the book of Philemon.

Bible Study # 64
February 12, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Colossians and Philemon

In the last Bible study, we **came up to the fact of Paul's Roman imprisonment** in the book of Acts. We noted in Acts 19 and 20 that Paul, after a great length of time in Ephesus, wrote the book of 1 Corinthians during the Days of Unleavened Bread of 55 A.D. This was his third evangelistic journey. Then a little later after Pentecost, there came up a great deal of difficulty and problems. Paul left Ephesus and sailed across into Macedonia to the area of Philippi. He stayed there a while then came down through the area of Greece. He came down further south through Athens and into Corinth. He wintered there. He spent the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D.

When he crossed from Ephesus to Philippi (Macedonia), perhaps in the fall of 55 A.D., he wrote 2 Corinthians. He wrote 2 Corinthians about six months after he wrote 1 Corinthians. Timothy reported back to him as to how the first letter had been received and what had transpired. He made his way down over the course of the next couple of months to Corinth and wintered there.

The last Bible study we saw how he wrote the book of Romans from Corinth in the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D.; perhaps we would date it around February. It was written just prior to the time that navigation occurred once again in the Mediterranean, after the three winter months when there wasn't normal shipping. The book of Romans was taken from Corinth to Rome by Phoebe when she sailed from Corinth. This perhaps would have been in March of 56 A.D.

We see in Acts 20 that Paul had originally intended to sail directly back to Jerusalem, but he changed his mind because of rumors of a plot against him. He went overland back through Philippi and left after the Days of Unleavened Bread. Then we find that he took the boat to Jerusalem, stopped over and met the Ephesian elders on the way.

Verse 16, he was in a hurry to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. It's interesting. You can go all the way through the book of Acts and you never read where Paul was in a hurry to get somewhere in time for Christmas. But he was in a hurry to get somewhere for Pentecost.

In verse 6, we find that he didn't leave until the Days of Unleavened Bread were over. People go

through the book of Acts and want to claim that the Holy Days and Sabbath, 'Well, that's just Old Testament that doesn't apply to us.' You go through the book of Acts and you find that Paul thought it applied to him. He kept Pentecost and the early New Testament Church kept it. It's good that we note this.

I have made a point over the years that everywhere in the book of Acts, when I come across the word "Sabbath" or the name of a holy day like Days of Unleavened Bread or Pentecost, I have taken that word and colored it in red. As I flip through the book of Acts, all these red words every couple of pages just stand out. You come across Sabbath or Pentecost or the Feast or the Days of Unleavened Bread or Passover over and over. When you do something like that, you realize, as you turn through, how frequently the issue of the Sabbath and Pentecost comes up, or whatever festival it may be they were celebrating.

Paul did get back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. You read of that in Acts 21. We find that Paul, in fact, was arrested in the temple on Pentecost weekend. As he was there on that occasion, he was arrested on a "trumped-up" charge. The Jewish religious leadership had a great deal of animosity against him. Acts 22, 23 and 24 all deal with aspects of his trial.

In Acts 24, Paul is before Felix, the Roman governor. He winds up staying in jail two years because the governor didn't want to make a decision. He didn't want to turn him loose and antagonize the Jews, and he didn't want to convict him because he knew he was an innocent man.

We find that Felix would have done well in an elected office in Louisiana.

Acts 24:26, "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." This sounds like some recent ones we have had. Felix hoped that money would be given him by Paul so that he might release him. He wouldn't be the last one that did that kind of thing. It simply shows that human nature hasn't changed. Since he was hoping that somebody would pay him off, he just let it "sit" until the next guy came to office. It's known as "passing the buck."

In Acts 25, Paul is on trial before Festus. Because he tried to "pass the buck" to King Agrippa, this matter drags on even further. Finally, Paul gets sick and tired of it.

In Acts 26, Paul appealed to the "Supreme Court." He wanted this case tried in Rome at the

court of Caesar. They didn't have to make a decision; they just loaded him on a boat and shipped him off.

Acts 27 is the account of Paul sailing to Rome in 58 A.D.

Acts 28, he shipwrecked in Malta. He wintered there the winter of 58 A.D.—59 A.D. and finally came to Rome in 59 A.D.

Verse 30, he spends two years there in Rome under house arrest. He was able to live in a place he rented but chained to a Roman soldier. He is allowed to receive visitors but not to go anywhere. He remained there for two years, 59 A.D.—61 A.D.

This is the point at which the book of Acts ends. We will talk more in a future Bible study as to why Acts ends there.

This brings us to where we are this evening because we are **at the point of some of the letters Paul wrote while he was in prison in Rome 59 A.D.—61 A.D.**

Colossians and Philemon were evidently written at that time. We are taking these two books together. The reason is that Philemon is a short little book and the two go together because Philemon lived in Colosse, and the books were written at the same time. It was, undoubtedly, carried by the same messenger. **One was a letter to the Church; one was a letter to a Church member. We will take the two of them together because the background ties together.**

Colosse started as a Greek colony. It is located in Phrygia, which is a portion of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It is in the general area where the Churches were to which John wrote in Revelation 2 and 3. Colosse is right in there. In fact, it was just a few miles from Laodicea. When John wrote Revelation 2 and 3 under God's inspiration and addressed the seven Churches of Revelation, those seven were not the only congregations of the Church of God in that area. There were many others. Colosse and Hierapolis were right in the vicinity (kind of in the middle) of those seven. They were certainly on the same mail route.

The point to understand is that those seven Churches were specifically selected because they typified something—they illustrated certain things that God wanted highlighted. There were some things that had prophetic significance, so they were selected for that reason. It was not just a general letter to all the Churches there, addressed in a random fashion; they were selected because of special significance.

Colosse was in that area. It was located on the main road between Ephesus and the Euphrates River. That made it a city of commercial importance because the main Roman road connected Ephesus, which was a major port there on the coast. It had great significance in terms of trading with Greece. Colosse lay right on the main overland road or route from Ephesus across to the Euphrates River.

There was a Jewish community in the city. There were various Greek schools of thought. There were the Stoics who were a major Greek philosophical school. There were their ideas and various other ideas.

We have to realize that many times the problems that existed in some of these Churches were not simply because some group of outside troublemakers came in and stirred up trouble. People tend to be susceptible to certain types of things because of their own background and experience.

The people in Colosse grew up with a certain religious and philosophical background that was common to the Roman world. They had a certain mindset. Stoicism certainly influenced that quite a bit. Not that all of them were Stoics, by any means, but it was a major philosophical school of thought that heavily influenced the thinking of a large number of people. Whether they actively tried to practice all the tenets or not, it still affected the way they thought.

We are going to talk a little later about another group of people, the philosophical school called the Gnostics. It's kind of like "agnostic," the word we use today. "Gnostic" means "we know." They were proud of their knowledge. They had an inside track. Now, we've made a lot of progress today; we now have "agnostic," which means "we don't know." After 2,000 years, we have come from where the intellectuals prided themselves on what they knew to what they don't know. "Progress" marches on.

Neither of the groups knew, but the Gnostics thought they did. The Gnostics represented a blend of mysticism—Jewish and pagan thought all mixed up together. There were various schools of Gnostics. Many of the early writers give credit to Simon Magus as having been the father of the Gnostics. This is mentioned in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Eusebius makes reference to that.

Eusebius was a Catholic Church historian of the fourth century. He was contemporary with the emperor Constantine. If you are looking for something that is a blend of pagan and Jewish thought with a lot of mystic ideas, it shouldn't

come as any surprise to find something like that originating in Samaria. After all, didn't the Samaritans appropriate a lot of the trappings of Jewish religion and pay lip service to certainly accepting the first five books of the Bible? Didn't they acknowledge and utilize the name of the God of Israel and call themselves by that name?

We are told back in 2 Kings 17 that the Samaritans were, in reality, Babylonians by origin; they worshiped the Eternal and served their own god. They paid lip service to the God of Israel. They acknowledged orally, YHWH, the God of Israel, the Eternal, but in reality, they just continued the same old pagan religion. They practiced a mixing. The technical term was "synchronism." It's like pouring it all into a pot and mixing it all up—a little bit of this and that. It's kind of like making a gumbo, and it was just as unclean as some of the unclean gumbos of today.

They borrowed things from a variety of different religions. There was an overlay that had biblical overtones in the sense that biblical terminology was used. There was a certain tie-in to the Old Testament, but it was really more Babylonian pagan religion—the Old Babylonian Mystery Religion—with the addition of much of the Greek philosophy of the day that was kind of all mingled with it. Simon and many of his followers accepted Christ.

Remember Acts 8:13, 'Simon believed.' There were many of his followers who had this sort of acceptance, at least outwardly. They paid lip service to Jesus Christ being the Messiah.

They had an influence that began to pervade in many areas in the New Testament congregation. At first it was simply various competing ideas inside the Church. There were people inside the Church who were a part of this or were heavily influenced. Some were, perhaps, direct followers and disciples of Simon Magus and they influenced others. You have various shades of opinion. There were many in the Church who were influenced by these things. At first, they were a part and seemingly indistinguishable in the Church. It ultimately came to a point that there was a division and a distinction—a separation—between those who were truly the people of God and those who were not.

By the time we get to John's writings in the 90s A.D., in some cases, some were actually being cast out of the Church. When John wrote in 1 John, he is writing to the very area of Colosse, the area of Asia Minor. There is a lot of evidence of the Gnostics and many of their teachings

that come out in 1, 2 and 3 John. The background of 1, 2 and 3 John tie in very directly with the background of Colossians because you're looking at the same geographic area. John is 30 years downstream, so he's another generation removed. Things had degenerated quite a bit from the time Paul had written.

Paul is addressing the Church of God, but there was clearly an element that was a part of the Church that had brought in many of these ideas. It was having an influence on many of God's people. I don't want to go into great details, but I will mention a few concepts of the Gnostics. We are going to cover it in quite a bit of detail. When we finish the Life and Letters of Paul, we will have a Bible study on some of the heresies of the first century—some of the things that actually gave rise to what became the Catholic Church.

We need to understand, just a little bit, because it sets the background for why Paul stressed the things he did in Colossians. When a sermon is preached or a letter is written, not everything that can be said on the subject is said. What you tend to do is focus in on the issues that have been raised. You focus in on the questions that have been asked and you stress certain things.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong may have stressed proving the fact that the Sabbath was in force and effect today, in a way that Peter or Paul did not have to stress that in their sermons because it was simply not an issue. The audience to which they were preaching understood that the Sabbath was in effect. That was not the question. The question was: Is Jesus the Messiah?

Most people today don't have a problem with the fact that, yes, Jesus is the Messiah. The problem today is: What did He teach? Now that is an issue. But the issue that He Himself was the Messiah is not that commonly debated, at least among the professing Christian world. We tend to stress, in the context of the truth, those things that are issues and those things that are misunderstood and need to be clarified. Paul stressed certain things about the person of Jesus Christ—about His divinity and the things that He did—in his letter to the Colossians because these things were being challenged.

The Gnostics had this sort of idea that went back to a pagan dualistic approach—the idea that the spirit is good and the flesh is evil. Then the idea was, if flesh is inherently evil and spirit is inherently good, how can God who is inherently good make something that is flesh, which is inherently bad? How can something good make something bad? That created a problem for them.

They came to a solution but not a correct solution. They decided that God had created other spirits that were pretty good but were not quite as good as He was. They were the first things that emanated out from Him. They were kind of a step below Him. And they in turn gave rise to the next spirit realm that was a step below them. They went down through what they called “24 emanations.” They kept getting a little further and further down and finally got down to something that was so far removed from God that it could come into contact with flesh—and that’s what made man.

They developed this elaborate hierarchy of angels, demons and all these crazy things. They identified it with astrology, with all the names of the stars and astrological significance and various groups of angelic order and demonic order all the way down. They identified the God of the Old Testament with something that was pretty far removed from what actually gave rise to people.

If you operate on the premise that the flesh is inherently evil, then what you need to do is punish the flesh. Anything that is physically pleasurable is obviously suspect. This is not that far removed from us today.

The Catholic Church has vows of poverty, chastity and humility. The monastic vow was the idea that if you’re really holy, if you’re really going to be a saint, then everything that would be enjoyable, you forswear. You certainly would never marry. You would never enjoy a physical husband-wife relationship. That involves fleshly pleasure. Since you couldn’t be holy and do that, you have to make this vow of celibacy. You couldn’t sit down and enjoy a good meal or enjoy nice beautiful things.

You get to the basis of all the monastic orders and their vows of poverty, and it kind of trickled down to the masses. By that time, it got down to meatless Fridays. They figured they couldn’t really give up very much, so they give up a little bit. Now, we get down to where people give up chocolate, or whatever it is, for Lent and they figure they are really mortifying the flesh. These are vows of “giving up”—this great asceticism.

You had groups of Jewish thought that absorbed some of these concepts from the pagan world around them and were somewhere between the Jews and the Samaritans in terms of their concepts. You had all these little obscure groups.

The Essenes were one. They were very, very ascetic; they had many of these things that they got from pagan thought. These were pagan

concepts because they didn’t come from God or out of the Bible. If you didn’t get them from God, where did you get them? God is the only source of truth.

Even if they were absorbed into a small sect of Judaism (these groups of varying shades), certain concepts were popular. This concept of asceticism (self-denial) and the concept of penance somehow made you holy. Some of these attitudes of the Gnostics and the concept that was a part of Gnostic philosophy certainly seemed to have impacted the Church in Colosse.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome. We would date it about 60 A.D. Evidently, Epaphras, the minister who had been instrumental in raising up the Churches in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis, had journeyed to Rome to visit Paul, and it made him aware of certain problems in the area.

Paul dwelt a long time in Ephesus. He had not been to Colosse, though he had met and dealt with many of the people. Some of the individuals in Colosse, certainly some of the long-time Church members and certain ones who had probably traveled to Ephesus, knew Paul.

Philemon, for instance, had evidently been personally taught and baptized by Paul. He was a wealthy individual and would have, undoubtedly, traveled to Ephesus on numerous occasions just on business. Paul had not actually been to Colosse, and there were certainly many brethren there who he did not personally know. But word came to him that there were problems that were creating some misunderstandings and difficulties there in Colosse and through several of the other Churches around there. Laodicea seems to have been impacted.

Paul must have written a letter to the Laodiceans about the same time because he specifically made the request in Colossians that he would like them to read the letter he wrote to the Laodiceans and to let the Laodiceans read the letter he wrote to the Colossians. This tells us Paul wrote many letters.

The idea that Paul wrote only 14 letters in his life doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. There’s no telling how many letters Paul wrote. There are certain ones that God selected to be preserved for the Church at all times. It was not necessary to preserve every word Paul wrote. All of it didn’t have a universal message to it. Some of the letters dealt with things that would have been a certain amount of repetition. God selected those things that He wanted preserved. God selected the things that were going to have value for the Church at all times.

At the time this book of Colossians was written, it seems that Archippus was perhaps serving as a local pastor there in Colosse. This seems apparent in the way that he was addressed. It appears very likely that he was the son of Philemon. Philemon was an elder. He was what we would term a “local elder” there in Colosse. He was a wealthy individual in the Church, and they actually met in his home. It was perhaps a Roman villa type of place. He was perhaps a wealthy merchant, and the Church met in his home. He was not the Church pastor, but it’s very likely that his son, Archippus, was the Church pastor.

We find in Colossians that Paul is seeking to smash this philosophy. Understand that the term “philosophy” was a general term that basically referred to “any school of thought” or to any school of thought that was current in the world at that time. It could refer to not merely two or three specific Greek philosophical schools of Stoics or Epicureans, etc., but even the varying groups among the Jews were sometimes designated as philosophies. “Philosophy” was kind of the general term.

He wanted to smash these philosophies that had grabbed hold and were influencing the Church away from the simplicity of Christ. He wanted to expound certain principles of Christian living and also to explain what the mystery of the gospel really was because these Gnostics really went in for the “mysteries.” They would initiate you, and through the secret knowledge, the initiated could move up step-by-step. They could progress by degrees up to a relationship with the supreme god. But you had to be “in the know,” and they had this sort of inner knowledge.

Let’s also look at **Philemon**. It is a short little book. We are going to notice Philemon first and then summarize Colossians.

Philemon was a resident of Colosse. He was a local elder whom Paul had originally baptized. The book was written by Paul from Rome at the time that he wrote Colossians, and it seemed to have been prompted by the conversion of Onesimus who was Philemon’s runaway slave. There are several things that come out in the book of Philemon.

The story seems to be that Onesimus had run away, as was frequently the case. Rome was filled with runaway slaves and people from throughout the empire. Rome was a big place, and if you wanted to get lost, what you did was to go to a big city. There is certain anonymity in a big city.

Onesimus had gotten away and had come to Rome. Somehow he had met up with Paul. He had probably known Paul, maybe not personally, but had known of him. He was somewhat familiar with him because of Paul’s impact on the family of Philemon. At some point, perhaps he wound up “down-and-out” in Rome. Whatever it was, at some point he met up with Paul.

Paul talked and counseled with him. He worked with him over a period of time and ultimately brought Onesimus to conversion. He was baptized, stayed on for a period of perhaps months and served Paul by doing things for him. Paul was confined to the home, and Onesimus probably took care of all sorts of physical duties—going out and shopping for food, fixing things, and running errands—just being a very valuable assistant and servant who was a lot of help to Paul.

Epaphras had come to Rome and had discussed the situation in Colosse. Paul was preparing to write this letter to the Colossians. He knew that Onesimus had been in Rome for a period of time and he needed to go back and “face the music.” He had run away from Philemon and perhaps had stolen some money when he did. That’s the logical thing; you don’t run away broke. It was important that he take responsibility for his actions. He needed to go back to where he had been. Yet, he was apprehensive. He was afraid of what kind of trouble he was going to be in.

Paul was concerned on his behalf. He felt that Onesimus had repented of any sins that had been involved in his actions. He was prepared to follow Paul’s advice and go back to the household of Philemon. **But Paul wanted to do what he could to ensure that Onesimus was not going to be severely dealt with.** He wanted to ensure that he was going to be kindly and gently dealt with and not punished for the problems in the past.

He wrote a personal letter to be sent to Philemon. There are a lot of things we can learn from that. We can learn about proper psychology and tact. Paul was involving himself in what was a personal matter. He didn’t choose to just get in and start ordering Philemon around.

Philemon 1, “Paul, a prisoner [This is part of the basis for knowing he was in Rome.] of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer...” This gives us an indication that Philemon was ordained an elder.

Verse 2, “to the beloved Apphia [a woman’s name and most likely Philemon’s wife],

Archippus our fellow soldier [The indication would be someone that was a part of the household, most likely a son; he is addressed as a fellow soldier, which would indicate that he was part of the ministry.], and to the church in your house...”

When you go back to Colossians, we find the last admonition Paul had.

Colossians 4:17, “And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’” Archippus is addressed as a minister, undoubtedly as the pastor of the Church there in Colosse. He is addressed in the final admonition of Colossians, as the pastor there, to follow through on the things Paul had told the Church and to fulfill his ministry. When you put Colossians 4:17 together with Philemon 2, we would conclude that Archippus was most likely the pastor of the Church there, and based on Philemon 2, he was very likely the son of Philemon.

In Philemon 2, Philemon and his wife are addressed, as well as Archippus and the Church that meets in Philemon’s house. That would be the Colossian Church. Paul addressed and greeted them.

Philemon 4, “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers...” He says, ‘I always thank God for you.’ He starts out in a very nice, kind, gentle and positive way. ‘I’ve been praying for you.’

Verses 5-7, ‘I’ve heard a lot of the things you have done and how you have helped and served many people.’

Verses 8-9, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ...” He says, ‘I realize that I could start giving you orders as an apostle, but I don’t want to do that. I’d rather, for love’s sake, just ask you a favor. I’m an old man. I’m in jail and I’d like for you to do me a favor.’

Verse 10, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains...” This would certainly be a reference to the fact of Onesimus having been baptized by Paul while Paul was in a Roman prison.

Verse 11, “who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.” Paul says, ‘I know in times past he was unprofitable to you, but now he’s profitable to both of us.’

Verse 12, “I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart...” ‘I have sent him back to you and I want you to receive him.’

Verse 13, “whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.” ‘I would have liked to keep him with me. He was helping me. He was serving me and taking care of a lot of needs that I had. He was really kind of taking your place here because I know that if you had been here, you would have been anxious to help, to serve me and do whatever you could. It’s like he’s been doing it in your stead. He’s your servant and he’s been here; that’s kind of like you being here doing it.’

Verse 14, “But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.” He tells him, ‘I wouldn’t want to do anything without instructions from you because then your service would be of necessity, not willingly. I started to keep him, but any service you were rendering to me would have been because you were “between a rock and a hard place.” And I wanted any service to be willingly, not because you couldn’t get out of it.’

Verses 15-16, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but now much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

‘I am going to send him back to you. Maybe the whole point of his running away and coming here was lessons he had to learn. Now, he can come back and enter back into a relationship with you that is going to last forever—not simply as a servant, but above a servant, a brother. He is beloved to me, but I know more so to you because you have known him for a long time.’

Verses 17-18, “If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account.” This is an allusion to the fact that he may have stolen some money when he left. Paul says, ‘Put it on my account; charge it to me.’

Verse 19, “I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.” He says, ‘I will repay it. Though I am not going to mention to you how you owe me even your own life. If he stole the 20 bucks, charge it to my account. I’ll repay it if you want me to pay it. And I certainly will never mention to you how much you owe me.’ About this time, it’s going to be kind of hard for old Philemon to be too upset at Onesimus.

Verse 20, “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.” ‘I really want to hear some good news.’

Verse 21, “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” ‘I know you are going to do a whole lot more than what I am suggesting. I’ll leave to your imagination ways that you can do this.’

Verse 22, “But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.” He says, ‘I would like for you to prepare a room for me because I know you’re praying that I am going to be released from prison; as soon as I get out, I am going to come visit you.’ That carries the very subtle implication—‘I am going to know whether or not you did as I suggested. Because you’re praying for me to get out, I’m sure God is going to hear your prayers, and when I get out, I am going to come see you. Then I will really know whether or not you did as I suggested for you to do.’

He ends up with conclusions. He mentions various others who were there with him.

There is a lot of tact and wisdom used in Philemon. We can certainly learn an important lesson in tact and gentleness in dealing with people about personal matters. **That’s one of the most important lessons we can learn from the book of Philemon in terms of how to deal with people in personal matters.**

We now get on into the book of **Colossians**.

Colossians 1:7-8, Paul mentions, “as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” Epaphras was the one who had told them these things when he had come there. He remained there in Rome with Paul. He is referred to as a fellow prisoner with Paul in Philemon 23.

Colossians 4:12-13, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” Very likely, he had actually been the one to raise up those three congregations.

When Paul was based in Ephesus, he had various ones working with him whom he sent out and they raised up these congregations. Certain ones, particularly some of the leading ones, probably

traveled to Ephesus and were personally instructed by Paul.

Epaphras had traveled from Colosse and had come to Rome. He told Paul what was going on.

Paul’s writing in Colossians is based on what Epaphras had said was going on in Colosse.

Paul was sending back Tychicus.

Colossians 4:7-9, “Tychicus, who is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.”

Paul sent Onesimus back and Tychicus to accompany him. Onesimus had a legal obligation to go back to Philemon. Paul did not presume to start interfering in some of those things, though he wanted Philemon to learn some lessons and to deal with things in a godly way. There are responsibilities depending on the state in which we find ourselves in society. That is why in Colossians Paul gives admonition both to servants and masters.

Colossians 3:22, “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.”

Colossians 4:1, “Masters, give your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” Just coming into the Church doesn’t change all the physical and social relationships and things that exist. The point Paul makes is that there is a transformation of those relationships. If someone was in a position of a master, what he needed to realize was that he had a Master, and he had better deal with those who were his servants the way he hoped God would deal with him.

That would certainly transform the relationship, wouldn’t it? Then you have a relationship that is based on love, giving, serving and helping. You have a transformation from a despotic tyrannical overlord sort of relationship to a relationship like God has with us. God expects us to do what He says, but God deals with us in love, kindness, gentleness and mercy—all these attributes.

Paul addresses husbands, wives, parents, children, servants and masters. He addresses the whole social fabric of the world. He addresses the fact that when we become a Christian, it should transform relationships because the basis of the way we treat others has changed.

In Colossians 1:7-8, he mentions that Epaphras is the source of his information.

Colossians 1:10, Paul's desires for the congregation are given, "that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God..."

Verses 12-13, "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love..." God the Father has already done this. It's not a matter that you have to work yourself up by degrees, as the Gnostics taught, from darkness to light. God has already translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son. He has already delivered us from the power of darkness. You don't work your way up degree, by degree, by degree.

It's an interesting aside. If you were to read in the writings of the Masonic Order, they have their 33 degrees, 32 of which are earned degrees. They will tell you in the official writings of the Masonic Order that they trace their system of degrees back to the Gnostics philosophers. The whole basis of working your way up by degrees goes back to that concept. They readily acknowledge that.

I have a book that is the official standard. It's not some book written against or about them. It is the standard work, morals and dogma of the Masonic Order. Most Masons have no idea that's the case and would probably deny it. If you have ever seen the book, you would realize that most Masons have never read it. It's a great big thick book. For most, the Masonic Order is a social or fraternal matter. They go through the degree work just as so much "mumbo-jumbo," never realizing where some of it went back to. There are a lot of things that go back to these concepts. Most involved in that today really don't take it seriously as the way of salvation. However, if you look at what it says, that's what it purports to be.

Paul makes plain that we have already been delivered out of the power of darkness. You don't have to work your way out degree by degree.

Verses 14-16, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." All of that didn't

emanate one out from another. Everything that exists was created by Jesus Christ as the instrument of creation.

Verses 17-19, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell..." This really blows the minds of some of these philosophers because the idea that all the fullness of deity would dwell in flesh was kind of beyond them. That flew right in the face of what the Gnostics would have taught.

Verse 20, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." In other words, He brought everything into harmony with Him.

It's important to understand the direction that reconciliation works. We are to be reconciled to God. God does not bring Himself to be in harmony with us. We have to come to be in harmony with Him because He is right and we are wrong. Why should God change to be like us? Why would God say, 'I'll meet you halfway'? Then He'd be half wrong, and half wrong is as good as being entirely wrong. It's kind of like drinking half poison. Generally, it doesn't even take that much to "finish you off." He made peace through the blood of His cross. He paid the penalty for sin. The reason we need to be reconciled is because we have sinned.

Let's go through the context.

"To reconcile all things to Himself."

Verses 21-22, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight..."

Notice what Paul is saying. We were at one time alienated from God, enemies in our mind because friendship with the world is enmity with God. You can't be the friend of the world and the friend of God.

James 4:4, "...Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." The world is not on God's wavelength. We were, at one time, friends of the world. We were comfortable with the world and the world was comfortable with us. The only problem was that when that was the case, we were alienated from God. The reason we got along well with the world was because we lived like the world and acted like the world. We were motivated by the

world's set of values. We blended in as a part of the world. We fit in. We don't fit in anymore.

You can't fit in with God and with the world. That's why we're here and not down on Bourbon Street in New Orleans this evening. You don't fit in down there. If you do, then you don't fit in here. If you would feel right at home and in place down there tonight, in the midst of all that Mardi Gras revelry, well, you wouldn't entirely feel in place here. And if you took some of that Mardi Gras crew from down there and stuck them here, they wouldn't feel comfortable. Their mindset is different.

God is going to solve the problem by sending Jesus Christ to condemn sin in the flesh and to pay the penalty for sin to make possible the reconciliation of humanity to God. Paul stresses this to the Colossians. He stresses that we have been reconciled in the body of His flesh. When you understand the overtones of the concepts they had, as far as the distinction between flesh and spirit, this really went against the grain for them.

Colossians 1:23, "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." Paul mentions that you have to continue in the faith, grounded and settled, not being stirred up and going off on some tangent. You have to keep anchored on the hope of the gospel.

Verse 24, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, ..."

Verses 25-26, "of which I became a minister according to the stewardship [KJV, "dispensation"] from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints." The Gnostics talked about mysteries. He is going to explain the mystery.

Verses 27-28, "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 mystery has to do with Christ in us, the hope of glory. Jesus dwells in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He lives His life in us.

Galatians 2:20, that is what Paul said, "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." Paul explained that to the Galatians. The mystery that has been hidden for generations, the mystery that had never been understood before, was the mystery of conversion and of Christ dwelling in us through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be transformed from the inside—renewed and transformed from within.

Colossians 2:1, "For I want you to know what a great conflict [KJV, margin, "care"] I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh..." This is an indication that he had not actually been to those cities. He knew a number of the individuals personally. He had a special concern for some of these areas that did not have the same personal relationship with him.

Verses 2-3, "[desiring] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Where are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Are you going to find that in some of these various philosophies? No. It is hidden here in God the Father and Christ.

God consists of the Father and of Christ. Just in terms of the trinity, can you imagine a Catholic epistle leaving out the so-called third person of the trinity?

Colossians 1:2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Over and over you go through Paul's epistles, and it's always "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The pope would never write anything that way. It would be 'from Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (or Ghost).' There would always be the trinity.

If it had been left out of one or two verses, it wouldn't be so bad. But if the Holy Spirit is a person, it should be getting its feelings hurt by now because it got left out here. Why didn't Paul mention it? Maybe Paul didn't know that. Maybe he hadn't read the Nicæan Creed. He was about 300 years too early. He only knew what Christ had said. He hadn't found out what Constantine and the Bishop of Rome had come up with.

Colossians 2:6, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him..." Stick to the trunk of the tree.

Verses 7-8, "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware

lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Verse 10, “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” What he is saying “flies in the face” of what some of these people were saying, introducing various philosophical ideas. They weren’t coming in trying to teach against Christ. The Gnostics that came in were not trying to say, ‘Don’t be a Christian anymore.’ They were saying, ‘That’s fine. We are Christians, too. Simon Magus claimed to be a Christian, didn’t he?’ They said, ‘We have some deeper understanding; there are some things that you haven’t heard. There’s a way. We have the “inside track” to spiritual growth and to enlightenment.’

Paul says that you need to be “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught.” You need to be anchored and steadfast. Beware of this philosophy, vain deceits, from the society around that didn’t originate with Christ.

Verse 9, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...” –Which is the idea that the fullness of the Godhead could dwell in flesh—something that flew in the face of the Gnostic teaching.

Verse 10, “and you are complete in Him,”

Verse 11, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands [the circumcision of divine origin], ...” The expression “made without hands” signifies divine origin.

In Daniel 2:31-35, Daniel saw the great image, and then at the end, a ‘stone cut without hands’ smashed the image on its toes and the whole thing turned to dust. “A stone cut out without hands” means that it was “not of human origin.” It was of divine origin.

The circumcision “made without hands” is a circumcision of divine origin.

Colossians 2:11, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...”

Evidently circumcision was a factor here. There was a misinterpretation of the significance of circumcision. The Samaritans practiced circumcision. That was one thing they acknowledged because that was mentioned in the first five books of the Bible. They did acknowledge that was right. Many of the Jewish philosophical groups did that. But we find that those in Colosse who were discussing

circumcision completely misunderstood or incorrectly taught what it was all about.

Verses 12-14, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses [KJV, “sins”] and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” If you look up this term “handwriting of requirements” (KJV, “handwriting of ordinances”), most of the commentaries will bring out that the Greek expression, the sense of it, is a technical term that has reference to a bond of indebtedness.

It is a reference to a handwritten bond of indebtedness, a bill of debt, which is what Christ blotted out. He blotted out our bond of indebtedness, our handwritten “IOU,” as it were, as a result of our sins. This is what was against us—our sins. It was contrary to us. He nailed our sins to the cross. He didn’t do away with the law. Why would He do away with the law? The law was not against us or contrary to us. What He blotted out was our sins. He blotted out the bond of indebtedness, the catalog of our sins, the things that are against us.

Verse 15, KJV, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” He triumphed over Satan and his entire realm.

Verse 16, KJV, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days...”

As a result of what Christ has done, of blotting out our sins and taking them out of the way, having triumphed over everything, don’t let anybody call you into question in respect of matters of eating and drinking.

“Eating and drinking” is the sense of the word “meat”; it is translated meat and drink. My margin says, “for eating and drinking.” It’s not so much “food or drink” as it is the act of eating and drinking. Our sins have been taken out of the way and blotted out. Christ has triumphed over everything. Don’t let somebody call you into question in matters of eating and drinking or in respect of Holy Days or a new moon or Sabbath.

Verse 17, KJV, “which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Don’t let somebody call you into question in these regards. He specifically mentions eating and drinking, as

well as other aspects of these festive occasions. The one thing Holy Days, Sabbath and new moons all had in common (new moons were never commanded as holy time) was they were festive occasions. They were occasions that were normally accompanied by eating and drinking, a time of festivity. The festive nature of all these things looked forward to a time when Christ is going to make a feast of fat things for all people (Isaiah 25:6).

Verse 18, KJV, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind...”

This gets into some of these mystic ideas of the Gnostics. There were various sectarian groups and the influence of many of the Samaritans. Many of them were influenced by the pagan thought that filtered through the Samaritans and influenced other little groups of Jews with all this sort of mystic ideas. ‘Don’t let anybody beguile you in this, intruding into things with all these human ideas and these dogmas.’ He summarizes what they are.

Verse 21, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle...” That’s pretty much the equivalent of the ascetic vows of touch not (being a reference to celibacy), taste not (this ascetic forswearing of meat or wine and milk—some of these ascetic groups gave up all sorts of things, living on very rigorous diets, which were all human ideas) and do not handle (giving up or forswearing physical wealth).

Verse 22, “which all concern things which perish with the using— ?...”

Verse 23, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” These things all look impressive to the world. People are impressed with that. They look at somebody who sits cross-legged wearing nothing but a loincloth and lives on grapes. They think that this is a holy man. The term referring to these men in India is “faikers.” I think they are closer to the truth than they realize. They are “fakers.” It’s a distorted concept of holiness and of sainthood.

If you want to get some laughs about the misunderstanding of what is a saint, go to a library and get a Catholic book on all the saints. You will come up with the craziest things you can imagine. One guy stayed perched on top of some tall obelisk for so many years that this really made him a holy man. People made

pilgrimages to come and hear his “wisdom.” Just crazy! But the pagan world has gone in for that, whether it’s the Catholic world or you can go over to Asia and the Buddhists.

Paul said not to let someone call you into question about these festive occasions. These things foreshadow; they are a shadow of Christ. The whole festive nature of God’s celebration and the things that God’s people did, all look forward—they foreshadow a reality. Don’t let them trick you out of your reward by getting you to go and do all these things, getting involved in worshipping angels and all this silly mysticism that they have and not focusing on Christ, the Head.

Verses 19-20, “and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...” If you are no longer a part of this world, then why get tangled up in some of these concepts. These things that look impressive to the world certainly require a lot of willpower and tremendous exercise in self-discipline, but that’s not the way to salvation. They miss the whole point. It’s a distorted concept.

Colossians 3:1, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above,” That’s the point.

We realize that if our lives are wrapped up in Christ, then, verse 4, when He appears, we are going to be like Him in glory, just like He is.

Verses 5-9, therefore, what you need to mortify, get rid of, are the old ways of living. We are to put to death the sexual uncleanness and the covetousness, the things for which the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. We may have formerly done those things, but we are not to do them any more. We have to get rid of the anger, malice, wrath, blasphemy and the filthy communication. Don’t lie to one another. You’re getting rid of the old man.

Verses 10-11, “and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge [the real knowledge] according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

From a spiritual standpoint, the physical divisions are not relevant. From a physical standpoint, our ethnic origin or our social status does not impact our relationship with God. Paul

is not talking about a physical revolution in the sense that some have tried to distort it. There are crazy ideas like communal living, having everything in common. Certain communes share everything: wives, property, etc. People want to read things into what the Bible says.

Verses 18-25—4:1 speak of wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants and masters. Physical relationships still exist in the physical realm, but they, themselves, are transformed. Our relationship with God and our opportunity to be a part of God's Kingdom is not based on our physical standing, either from an ethnic standpoint, gender, economic status or social status.

Colossians 3:10-12, we are to put on the attitude of God.

Verse 13, "bearing [KJV, "forbearing"] with one another, and forgiving one another," This is one thing we all owe one another. This is the attitude we are to have: if a misunderstanding or a dispute arises, "Forbearing and forgiving one another." "Forbear" means "to put up with." Sometimes that's all you can do with some people. But then, God puts up with us. That should tell us something. God forgives us. We should forgive one another.

Verse 14, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." That's what binds us together.

Verse 15, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

He talks about the transformation of physical relationships that should take place. Our lives as a Christian should be different.

Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." What does that mean "seasoned with salt"? Sometimes we have heard the reference of somebody being a "salty" character. This is not what you think of. What does it mean? When we think of salt, most of us think of a flavor enhancer. Salt enhances the flavor.

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Bible Study # 65
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Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Ephesians and Philippians

We are continuing our survey of the Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul, covering the books of Ephesians and Philippians. They are both very short little books, and, yet, there is a lot that is in these books. They were written during the time of Paul's Roman imprisonment. Some of the modern commentators choose to disagree with that. Some of them just like to come up with anything that is different from what everybody else has always said. They figure their "claim to fame" is to have something different to hear—some new thing.

We are going to notice, as we go through, that there's certainly reference to the fact that Paul was in prison in Rome. In Philippians 4:22, he mentions Caesar's household and in Philippians 1:12-13, the fact of those before whom he was coming as certain evidence it was written at the time when he was in prison in Rome.

Ephesians 6:20 mentions, "for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." He specifically mentioned that he was chained.

Verse 21, he mentions that Tychicus was the bearer of this letter and would make known the details when he came there to the Church in Ephesus. This Tychicus is also mentioned in Colossians 4:7 as the individual who bore the letter to the Colossians. Ephesus and Colosse were near one another. It is certainly very likely, based on this, that Ephesians was written at about the same time as Colossians. It was clearly sent by the same individual, Tychicus. Reference is made there.

Ephesus was a major city. It was the capital of what was called Roman Proconsular Asia. When we say "Asia" today, we think of a whole vast continent. "Asia," as the term was normally used in classical Greek and Roman history, had to do with a portion of what is today modern-day Turkey. There was the peninsula that is called Asia Minor and there was a Roman Province of Asia, which was where the Churches were located that the Apostle John addressed in Revelation 2 and 3—the letters to the seven Churches. Those Churches were all located in that general area of Asia or Asia Minor. The Roman Province was the western portion, the western edge of Asia Minor.

Ephesus was a major trading city. It had sea connections with Greece. It had connections with both Achaia, which is southern Greece down where Athens was, as well as Macedonia, which was up in the northern part where Philippi was. There were overland connections from Ephesus, coming down overland through what is now modern-day Turkey to Syria. It was a major trade route because it was located close to the sea. It was just a matter of a few miles away from the coast. It was involved in a lot of trade. It was kind of a connecting point, a jumping-off point, for Greece and Europe to the west, as well as an overland route to cut through to the Euphrates River or down through to Syria.

The worship of Diana, one of the goddesses of the Romans and Greeks, was the state religion. A huge statue of Diana dominated the Ephesus harbor. The city had an ancient origin as a Greek colony. That's the way it had originally been established. There was a sizable Jewish population as well as an established synagogue there.

Philippi was in Macedonia. Macedonia is northern Greece and actually extends up into a portion of what is today southern Yugoslavia. Philippi was built and named by Philip of Macedon, who named it after himself. It's amazing how many people build things and name them after themselves. The world is filled with "humility."

It's kind of like the nation of Saudi Arabia, which takes its name from the father of the present king. His name was King Saud. He thought that was a nice name and just named the whole nation after himself. Philippi was named by Alexander the Great's father; he named it after himself.

There had originally been an ancient Phoenician city there. It was a very strategic trading location. The Phoenician city had been wiped out, but Philip of Macedon built a Greek city there. It was later rebuilt by the emperor Augustus. It's a very fertile area. There was a gold mining industry in that area, about 12 miles from the coast. It was a major Macedonian mercantile center because it was on one of the major Roman roads.

There were, however, very few Jews in Philippi. There was no synagogue.

Acts 16:12-13, the evidence from the book of Acts was that there were only a few women who met on the Sabbath out by a riverbank out of town. It was sort of a secluded park-like setting. The indication is there was just a handful.

Verses 14-15, Lydia who was a seller of purple, we are told, was the first convert. This was the first area where the gospel was preached in Europe.

Paul had spent quite a bit of time in Ephesus on his third evangelistic journey.

Acts 19:10, he spent two years in Ephesus. Since the Apostle Paul was there that length of time, the Church was very solidly established and very well organized.

Acts 20:1-3, Paul left Ephesus and went on to Greece. Remember he spent several months there, went through Macedonia, spent three months wintering in Corinth and came back up to Macedonia.

Verse 16, then he left to go back to Jerusalem in order to be there for Pentecost of 56 A.D.

Verses 17-18, he made arrangements to meet with the Ephesian elders. It was obviously a well-organized Church. There were elders and deacons, and Paul had utilized the time there. It seems to have been, in many ways, sort of the leading or headquarters Church of the area of Asia Minor. In fact, in later years after the destruction of Jerusalem, it was the area where the Apostle John (the last of the apostles living) lived in the latter years of his life. In that sense, the true Church was centered in Ephesus.

The Ephesian Church was the heart and core of the Church of God in the last portion of the first century because the Jerusalem Church had been destroyed by that time. There were remnants of the Church in Pella, but it was scattered. We find the Apostle John living there until almost the end of the first century. In the second century, we find Christians who were keeping the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—observing the Holy Days. There are specific references to that.

When we pick up the story (those events were many years after what we read here in the Bible in the book of Ephesians), it would tell us that if the Ephesian Church was that strong at a later time in history (50, 75, almost 100 years down the road from when Paul was writing this), then it would certainly tell us that it would have been a strong, well-established Church that stood the test of time for another generation or so.

The Philippian Church was also one in which Paul had spent a pretty fair amount of time. It was a well-organized Church. It seems to have been very generous and spiritually mature.

We will notice there is not a lot of correction in Ephesians and Philippians. They did not have the sort of problems that Corinth or Thessalonica had. Paul, in some of his epistles, was very

highly corrective. He did not have to be so here because these were areas that were not encountering major problems.

Some Churches encountered problems in terms of lifestyle. In Corinth, there was a tendency toward immorality. Not just immorality, but also a tolerance of immorality. There was a tolerant attitude toward immorality in the congregation. In other areas, such as Galatia and Colosse, there was a tendency toward heretical movements and towards ideas and concepts that “smacked” very strongly of the Gnostic influence and things that ultimately gave rise to the Catholic Church. Some Churches had their problems with lifestyle; others, with doctrine. Ephesus and Philippi seemed to not have had those major problems.

Paul dealt with some deep spiritual and philosophical concepts. He wrote both of these epistles pretty close together. He dealt with a lot of things.

Notice **Ephesians**. Before we get into it, just to set the stage, one thing I might mention is what was known in history as the “two-church theory.” Maybe you have never heard of the two-church theory, but there is a progression that people use to reason themselves astray.

One of the early Catholic historians makes reference to the Millennium. He said that what was at first routinely and commonly believed everywhere, became by degrees simply one opinion on the subject, and then ultimately became viewed as heresy—as a superstition. In other words, there was a progression on the doctrine on the Millennium.

At one time everybody was in agreement. That’s the way it was. When you moved 50 to 75 years down the road, it was merely an opinion that some held. It was a tolerated opinion. There were those who literally believed in the one thousand-year reign of Christ, and there were others who didn’t believe it was to be taken literally. By the time you progress another 50 to 75 years down the road, it had come to be viewed as an error and superstition and something of which the proponents were to be persecuted for and driven out of the Church. There was a progression in terms of how some of these things came about in the first century.

We recognize there was a fundamental problem concerning the law. How do we know there was a fundamental problem concerning the law? We read what Jesus said and did in the gospel accounts. When we read the book of Acts, we find a Church that kept the law. Acts 21:20, James referred to the headquarters Church and

those who constituted the Church in Jerusalem as zealous for the law. When we are introduced to the Church of God in the New Testament, we are introduced to a Church that kept the law. When we meet up with the earlier incipient Catholic Church (as the curtain begins to rise in the third century), we find a church that wasn't keeping the law. How did they make a transition? How do you make a transition from keeping the Sabbath and holy days to not keeping the Sabbath and holy days? One of the major ways that this progression was made was by a doctrine that began to be promulgated.

We will notice from the book of Ephesians that it was already getting started at that time. Some of the Gnostics that we met up with in Colosse were already getting some groups that were propounding this. It did not really become a popular doctrine until right around the end of the first century. Really, it began after the destruction of Jerusalem and in the last years of the Apostle John's life. Once he was dead, it became the ascendant doctrine and the official teaching of the church at Rome, and then it became absorbed elsewhere.

The so-called two-church teaching was that there was one set of rules for the Jews and another set for the Gentiles. The original transition was the Sabbath and the holy days. They said it was fine that the Jews continued to do it, but the Gentiles didn't have to. They said the Gentiles were not obligated to observe the law, although the Jews were. In areas of Judea or areas where the Jewish population was the majority, this was fine, but Gentiles didn't need to observe the law. It wasn't necessary because those things only applied to the Jews.

Their original doctrine was one of tolerance. That's fine; they didn't try to interfere with the Jews keeping the law—it's just that it didn't apply to the Gentiles. They sought to make a distinction between what God expected of Jews and what He expected of Gentiles. There was a great emphasis on different sets of standards that they had that was clearly beginning at the time Paul wrote Ephesians. By the end of the first century, the idea that there was a different set of standards that God expected of Jews and Gentiles was a major controversy in many areas. As they ultimately got the ascendancy and the power, then it was the fact that not only should the Gentiles not keep the law, but also the Jews shouldn't be doing it either.

Then there began to be an open hostility toward the law and toward any who kept the law. There was an attempt to stir up persecution against it as

the Roman church moved closer to becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. There was a gradual shift between a tolerance of the law and, yet, teaching that it was not necessary for Gentiles to keep it. In many areas where there were Jews, it was fine to go ahead and do it, but in areas where it is just Gentile congregations, they said it was not really necessary.

This was the original excuse of the group at Rome—some of the followers of Simon Magus and others. This was their explanation of why they didn't keep the law. They said it wasn't necessary because they were centered in the Gentile areas. They sought to spiritualize away the law saying it was not to be taken literally. They said a lot of it was allegory and there was also a difference in what was expected of Jews and Gentiles. They confused the fact.

The Jews continued to circumcise their children, and there was nothing in the New Testament that expected them to do otherwise. The emphasis of the controversy of circumcision was the fact that it was not a matter of spiritual salvation. Gentiles who were being converted and coming into the Church were not required to be circumcised in order to be received into the Church. The controversy over circumcision had to do with access to God. But it was a physical sign of the covenant of the people of the descendants of Abraham, and there was no expectation that Jewish Christians would cease doing so—nor did they.

All the way on up to 135 A.D., the statement was made that the Church in Pella, which was the remnants of the Jerusalem Church, was presided over by circumcised Jews. All of the leadership and ministry there were circumcised Jews. This was all the way up to 100 years after the time of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. It was never an issue among the Jewish population.

Some of these Gnostic teachers and other early heretics sought to make a distinction. They said, 'Some of those things, the Jews do it, but it doesn't apply to us. Really, none of the law, the Sabbath, all of these matters of the law, these things really don't apply to Gentiles. If we are living in a Jewish area, it's fine to go to church on the Sabbath, but there's no point for us to do it. We are not expected to do it.'

Paul stresses in the book of Ephesians that this was just getting started. It didn't really become full blown until several decades later, but Paul could see it already beginning. These heresies of the "two-church theory" were already beginning to be promulgated. **Paul lays great emphasis in the book of Ephesians on the fact that it is one**

body. There is no distinction. There is no basis of spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles. That is not valid. There is no spiritual distinction to be made whatsoever.

Ephesians 1:1-5, notice, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, [He greets them.] to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us [the Church] in Him [Christ] 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...”

God has preordained. Here, we come to predestination or election or choosing. The world does not understand predestination.

The followers of John Calvin emphasized predestination and their belief in election. Because others emphasized their beliefs in free will, they had great controversy. None of them understood either subject; that is what it amounts to. You can't understand predestination if you think that today is the only day of salvation.

The universal lie that is believed by all of them is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. If the soul is immortal, you have to do something with it when it dies. You have to send it somewhere—heaven, hell or the Catholics who are stuck in purgatory. The Protestants had to get rid of purgatory because they couldn't find it in the Bible. If they had looked a little harder, they couldn't have found going to heaven or hell either. But if you hold on to the immortality of the soul, you have to send the soul somewhere. And if you have to send the soul somewhere when you die, then that means it is all over with; that is when judgment is made.

You can't understand predestination or elected or chosen if you think that the issue is whether or not you will be saved. God has not predestined some to be saved and others to be lost. What He has predestined is that there will be a Church—firstfruits. He predestined that before the foundation of the world—God knew where He was going before He started.

Can you imagine somebody setting out to build a house and he doesn't have any house plans? He doesn't know the dimensions of the house, doesn't know the details of how it is going to be built, what the pitch of the roof is going to be and what materials he is going to use, etc. I have

seen a house or two that I suspect was built that way, but that's not really the best way to do things. There's a lot of work and effort that goes into planning out what you are going to have before you ever get started. God didn't just kind of start creating a few things, throwing it out and saying, 'That looks pretty good; maybe I'll stick something else over here.' Before He ever started, God knew where He was going. He had a great master plan.

It's just like the seven-day week. God didn't work as hard as He could for six days and, finally, at the end of it, He was tired and had to rest. Then afterwards He thought, 'That's a pretty good idea; I think I'll just have everybody do that from now on.' That's not the way it happened at all. It took six days because God determined that it would take six days. He had determined to sanctify the Sabbath because He was illustrating a great master plan—“with the Lord one day is as a thousand years” (2 Peter 3:8). He had a plan in mind.

The festivals, which were not introduced to the Church until the time of Moses, were nevertheless in mind.

Revelation 13:8, we are told, “...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” In other words, before God ever started, He had a plan in mind and that included the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, and the whole works. God had a plan. He knew where He was going. The first law of success is to have a goal.

There was a little book written for young people back a number of years ago. The title of it was a little catchy title, *If You Don't Know Where You Are Going, You Will Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. That's the way a lot of people are. They don't know where they are going and, sure enough, they end up somewhere else. Well, God hasn't ended up somewhere else. He is going to end up exactly where He intended to end up because He had a plan to begin with.

'He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.' Before He ever got started, He had in mind that He was going to call out firstfruits. That doesn't mean that God had plotted out the genealogy of every human being that would ever be born and every combination of parents that has occurred since Adam and had that planned out ahead of time. No, that's ridiculous. Start thinking through what would have to be done to do that.

God planned out an overall scope and scheme of things. That doesn't mean that predestination

means that everything you do is already preprogrammed.

The statement was made of Judas that ‘this betrayal was done to fulfill the scriptures, but woe be to him by whom it is done’ (Matthew 26:24, 54-56). It was determined that somebody was going to betray Him. That’s not hard to predict. You put the right people in the right place and somebody’s going to do something like that. God knew that some of these things were going to happen, but He didn’t pick out and make somebody fulfill that prophecy against his will.

The Beast and the false prophet are going to arise on the world scene, but God’s not going to make somebody fulfill that role against his will. It is a matter that those roles are going to be fulfilled. God has predetermined and will move things around, but there can be various individuals who, if they got the opportunity, would jump for the chance. God doesn’t have to really look too far for volunteers on most of that. It is just a matter of letting the right person get into the position.

I’ll use the illustration with the prophecy where it talks about the king of the South. God wouldn’t have to look very far for volunteers. Saddam would like to volunteer. If God is taking volunteers, he has his hand up. He’d like to be the one, whether he will be or not. But you know, if he’s taken out of the way, somebody else will be there—‘Let me be next. I would like to do it.’ It isn’t a problem. God doesn’t have to force someone into fulfilling a role against his will. It’s just that circumstances that are conducive come along, and God allows these circumstances.

God talks about a final stage in the history of the Church that is characterized by a lukewarm, watered-down attitude. That’s a part of prophecy, just as much as the coming together of the Beast power. God hasn’t picked out you or me and said, ‘I am going to make you become lukewarm.’ We just live in a society that is conducive to that. God knows that is going to be the tendency. That doesn’t mean He has picked out somebody, and it doesn’t matter how much you pray and study and fast, you are going to have to be lukewarm because God is going to make you lukewarm. No, that’s not what predestination means. It doesn’t mean that God is going to make you fit into a role that you don’t choose.

But God has predetermined ahead of time that there’s going to be a Church. He’s outlined a basic history and development of that Church. He made decisions before He ever got started.

Predestination involves firstfruits who would be holy, who would be without blame, who would become His children.

Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, ...” We have redemption through Christ’s blood.

Verses 11-12, continue, “in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things according the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Verses 13-14, talks about ‘being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’ and ‘the guarantee (KJV, “earnest”) of our inheritance.’

God gives us His Spirit, and He likens that to being the earnest of our inheritance. That’s the guarantee that ultimately He is going to change our mortal bodies from flesh to spirit. Jesus Christ is described in the book of Colossians as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). None of us has been born from the dead yet. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. Now, if He’s the firstborn, that means there are others who will be born later.

1 Corinthians 15:50, “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. God gave us His Spirit, and we are ultimately going to be born into His very Family. Not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth. We are sealed, set apart and authenticated as genuine, and that is the guarantee of our inheritance. It is the proof that we are going to be born into His very Family.

Just like if you are going to buy a house, you put down earnest money, which tells the owner that you are going to come back and pay for it. God gives us a little bit of His Spirit; that’s the earnest of our inheritance. We haven’t received that inheritance yet, but we have the guarantee because God is going to fulfill what He says.

There are many scriptures in the book of Ephesians that relate to the Day of Pentecost. I am going to come back and tie in with that.

The book of Ephesians probably relates to, expounds and explains the spiritual significance of Pentecost more than any other single book in the New Testament. In many ways, you could correlate it with the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. We will notice the correlation of a tie-in with the book of Ruth.

Ephesians 2:1-3, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of

the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

We were a part of the world; we lived like the world. We fit in with the world and were comfortable with the world. We shared the world’s values and priorities and we fit in with it. We were as good as dead because of sin. God has had mercy and has given us the opportunity for life. When we walk according to the course of this world and not in the paths of righteousness, the course of this world is motivated and determined by the prince of the power of the air, Satan the devil. He’s the same spirit that works in the children of disobedience.

Verses 4-5, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”

Verses 8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” It’s not a matter of you earning your salvation. ‘By grace we are saved; we are His workmanship.’ God is making something out of us. He is transforming and changing us.

Verse 11, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands...” The Church that Paul is addressing here is a Church that was primarily Gentile.

Verse 12, “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” He reminds them of their state. You were cut off; you didn’t have connection. You were without Christ and were outside of the physical commonwealth of Israel. You were not a descendant of Abraham; you were not an heir of the promise. You were outside the scope of what God had promised. You had no hope; you didn’t know God.

Verses 13-14, and yet, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our

peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us...”

In the temple, there was a wall of partition, a wall that separated the court of the Israelites from the court of the Gentiles. Unless the Gentiles were circumcised and had undergone the conversion rite of Judaism, they could not enter into the area where sacrifices were made. They didn’t have access to God. Jesus Christ has made peace. He’s made both Israelites and Gentiles one. He broke down the middle wall of partition between us, the things that made for separation in the spiritual sphere.

Other statements in Colossians and Galatians make similar statements.

Colossians 3:11, “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Obviously, we still are male and female in the physical sense. We still are whatever our ethnic origin or economic status in the physical sense, but those things, in terms of our relationship to God, have no relevance. Whether you are a man or a woman, whether you are Gentile or Israelite, rich or poor, these things only have meaning and significance in the physical realm—in the physical society and community. But in terms of the Family of God and in terms of being a part of God’s Kingdom, those distinctions have no relevance to our relationship to God. Whether you are a male or female—regardless of any other physical factor—we can all have the same access to God.

There was a court of the women in the temple. The court of the Israelites, if you wanted to be technical, was the court of the Israelite men. You can go back and you had the varying distinctions that were made. The point Paul is making here is that access to God no longer has physical distinctions. Physical distinctions have no bearing in terms of access to God.

Ephesians 2:15-18, “having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

We all have access to God through Christ. It doesn't matter how much money you have or who your ancestors were; that's totally irrelevant to our access to God. We all have to enter (our access to God) through the same One, which is Jesus Christ. Paul is stressing this.

Verses 19-22, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

What we have is a spiritual unity, which is in direct contrast to this so-called two-church doctrine that was being promulgated—the idea that there was one set of rules for the Jews and another set for the Gentiles. Paul is making plain that we all have access to God through one Spirit, through Jesus Christ. Our access is not based on these physical distinctions. Our access is based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nobody had a "leg up or down." We are all on the same "leg" when it comes to that.

Ephesians 3:1-2, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you..." It was because of some of this that there had been so much enmity stirred up by some of the Jews in Jerusalem—not the converted ones, but others who really resented the teachings that Paul had. Remember the original charge they had against him was that he had brought a couple of Greeks into the court of the Israelites at the temple, which he had not done (Acts 21). It was ultimately because of Paul's teachings in these areas that "trumped-up" charges had been brought against him.

Verses 4-6, "by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel..."

Verses 9-12, "and to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the

principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him."

Verses 14-21, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

He talks about a mystery, which has to do with the fact that all human beings (Jew and Gentile) may, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, become begotten children of God to ultimately be born into the Family of God. That is something the world does not understand.

"Fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise."

Verses 3-4, he mentions "the mystery."

"The fellowship of the mystery." –Things that haven't been understood.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts."

"To know the love of Christ." We have a covenant relationship that is brought out here.

The Church is being built up as a spiritual temple.

Ephesians 2:20-21, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord..." The prophets were the writers of the Old Testament; the apostles were the writers of the New Testament.

Verse 22, "in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." God is carrying out a vast construction project. The physical temple was to be built according to a certain specified way. The reason why it was so important to follow the instructions is because all of those physical specifications were representative (illustrative) of the spiritual plan

that God is working out. We have this description that is brought out here.

In Ephesians 2:15, we commented earlier on how Christ had abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances. In other words, He abolished the things that made for artificial separation between Jew and Gentile, the artificial separation in spiritual matters. In terms of access to God, He abolished the things that made for artificial separation and distinction. In terms of access to God, it was illustrated by this partition in the temple that separated those who were circumcised and those who weren't. Christ abolished that.

He abolished the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. It came down at the time He was crucified—at the time He died (Matthew 27:51). It was symbolic of our direct access to the Father. It is through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice that all of us share access to God.

This was one of the great issues of the early New Testament period and why circumcision kept “cropping up.” The whole issue had to do with how you gain access to the presence of God. It is ultimately the presence of God that is the source of holiness. What makes us a holy people is the indwelling of the presence of God. This matter of the basis for access to God was a difficult concept for some to grasp.

I mentioned Ruth. We have explained in sermons and Bible studies that the book of Ruth is the book the Jews traditionally read at Pentecost. Ruth is the story of a marriage between a Gentile and an Israelite. Ruth was a Gentile; she was a Moabite, which meant the same basic family of Abraham. The Moabites were descendants of Lot who was Abraham's nephew. But they were not circumcised. They were not heirs of the promise to Abraham.

They were Gentiles, therefore, outside of the covenant even though it was a similar family and came from the same basic stock. Lot followed Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldeans, but God didn't make the covenant with Lot. Lot's family—even though they were related, a kindred people—were still outside the scope of God's promises and outside the scope of the covenant. The covenant did not apply to them. The same thing with Ishmael; Ishmael is a descendant of Abraham. He was a son of Abraham, but the covenant didn't apply to him. It only applied to Isaac. Isaac was the son of promise. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. But the covenant didn't apply to Esau. He was outside the scope of it. It only applied to Jacob

and his 12 sons. That's part of God's election, God's choosing.

Why are you in the Church and your neighbor isn't? –Because God decided to call you and decided that He wouldn't call your neighbor right now. Why did God make His covenant with one group of people and not with another? –Because He chose to! It's part of the sovereignty of God. God is Sovereign of the Universe and has the right to make choices, and He does. He chose to call you and me now and not our neighbor, friends or relatives who may be just as good, maybe better persons, than we are. It's not a matter of what you deserved. God made the choice because He decided to. He has His reasons and He doesn't have to explain them to us.

Do you know why, exactly, He chose to call you right now? I don't know why He chose to call me right now. I would like to ask that someday. I'm glad He did. I can look around and think of a lot of people He could have chosen. But He didn't choose to. God has the right to make choices, and that's what “election” is all about. “Election” is what we think of as one man, one vote. This is one Man, one vote in the literal sense. God has the only vote. That's the way the election is—God electing or choosing. The term “election” simply means “choosing.” The “elect” are those who are “chosen.” God has chosen us as His people.

The story of Ruth is the story of a marriage between a Gentile (one who was without the promises of God and outside the covenant and election) and a prince of Israel. She was married to Boaz who was a prince of Israel. Because of the marriage, Ruth became an inheritor of the promises to Abraham. The Jews have traditionally read Ruth at Pentecost. Pentecost is representative of the covenant, of the marriage relationship, between Old Testament Israel and Christ, and later on, between the Church (New Testament Israel) and Christ.

Ephesians 2:22 explains Gentiles become part of spiritual Israel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you read Ephesians 2 with the story of Ruth in mind, you find that was Ruth's category and situation.

Verses 11-12, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers

from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

She made the choice.

Ruth 1:16, “...your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”

She embraced the covenant of God. She married Boaz and actually became an heir of the throne of David and of Jesus Christ. In that way, that story was read at Pentecost to symbolize the fact of God calling His people out of the world, joining them into a marriage covenant with Him through which they could become heir of the promises. There was a symbolism that the book of Ruth illustrated.

The book of Ephesians explains the spiritual significance of the story of Ruth. The Jews could read it and understand it was a nice story, and they could see a few parallels to God calling Israel and the marriage covenant at Sinai, the Old Covenant. But Ephesians 2 explains the spiritual significance. It was really a type of the relationship of Christ and the Church because all of us were, at one time, in this category.

Ephesians 4:1, as we come on back through the book, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling [KJV, “vocation”] with which you were called...” Being a Christian is a full-time job.

Verses 3-6, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

There are not two churches. There’s not a Jewish and a Gentile church with different sets of rules. There is one body and one Spirit, and we are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Verse 8, “...‘When He [referring to Christ] ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’”

When did Christ ascend on high? The Catholics work up quite a deal on this. I know a number of you were Catholic prior to coming into the Church. According to the official Catholic teaching, Abraham and David and all the patriarchs of the Old Testament, none of them went to heaven. Did you know that? The Catholic Church doesn’t teach that any of them went to heaven. They went to a compartment of hell. But it wasn’t the bad part of hell. They claim there are a lot of parts of hell and they went to a part called “*limbus potrim*,” which is limbo—this vague existence—the limbo of the fathers.

Their teaching is that when Christ was in the grave (or his soul in hell), they believe that He went down there; then when he ascended up to heaven, he took Abraham and all the others with Him. He led them out and limbus potrim is empty now because He emptied it out. They had been held captive, and He took them up to heaven. This is their explanation of that. That’s incorrect; that’s not what happened. The simple proof texts are in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:29, 34, days after Christ had finally ascended to heaven and taken anybody He was going to take, Peter said, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.... For David did not ascend into the heavens...” That didn’t mean Christ had forgotten him. What is the ultimate captivity? Death!

1 Corinthians 15:54-55, “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”

The point of Ephesians 4:8 is it refers to Christ’s activity on the day of the wave sheaf, the day during the Days of Unleavened Bread. He was resurrected at basically sunset at the end of the Sabbath, three days and three nights after He was buried. Early the next morning, prior to the time the wave sheaf was offered in the temple, He was seen by Mary Magdalene, but He didn’t allow her to touch Him.

John 20:17, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father;’” Later on that day He allowed the disciples to embrace Him because He had ascended to the Father (Matthew 28:9). He was the wave sheaf, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20), ‘the firstborn from those who have died’ (Colossians 1:18). He ascended to the Father to be accepted as the first of the firstfruits. “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.”

1 Corinthians 15:54 tells us about a time when death is swallowed up in victory.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57, “‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades [Grave], where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are given the victory through Jesus Christ. We read here about death being swallowed up in victory.

Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?”

Verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...”

John 8:32, ““And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.””

Verses 34-36, “...‘whoever commits sin is a slave to sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’”

Ephesians 4:8, “When He [Christ] ascended on high, He led captivity captive,” He triumphed over death.

1 Corinthians 15:54, “...Death is swallowed up in victory.” Death is the ultimate captivity from which no one can escape.

In the early decades of this century was a very famous magician, Harry Houdini. He was the Amazing Houdini, the great escape artist. He could escape from anything. This was his “thing.” He had debunked a lot of fortune-tellers, mystics and all this sort of thing. He was always intrigued by that and wondered if somebody could come back from the dead. Shortly prior to his death, he had a private conversation with his wife. He gave her a secret code or signal, and he told her he had never met anything he couldn’t escape from. If it were possible to escape from death (the grave) he would do that, too. He was sure a lot of these fortune-tellers were going to try to claim he had come back, and this code was going to be a way that she would know that it was really him. And, of course, Houdini never escaped. That was the captivity that he couldn’t get out of. He had escaped a lot of captivities, but he couldn’t escape that one. That is the captivity that nobody, not even the great escape artists, could escape from.

But Jesus Christ “led captivity captive [He triumphed over death], and gave gifts to men.” Why did He tell the disciples it was to your advantage (KJV, “expedient”) for Him to return to the Father? –John 16:7, so that He could send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

What are the gifts?

Ephesians 4:11-12, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping [KJV, “perfecting”] of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...” This is why there is a ministry. “Perfecting” is the fully furnishing of the saints. “The work of the ministry” is serving God’s

people. “Edifying” is the building up of the body of Christ.

Verse 13, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” We are not going to totally come into the unity of the faith until Christ returns. We are not going to totally come to understand everything the same way and be totally unified with Christ and with God the Father until Christ returns. But the purpose of having a ministry in the Church is to work towards that end.

Verse 14, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive...” –To produce a certain level of stability.

Verses 22-24, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.”

Ephesians 5:1, “Therefore be followers of God as dear children.”

Verses 3-5, he enumerates putting away the various works of the flesh. Then he goes into a description of husbands and wives and the marriage relationship.

Verse 22, wives submitting and adapting themselves to their husbands.

Verse 25, husbands loving their wives.

Verse 32, but he compares that to the relationship of Christ and the Church. Ephesians 5:32 makes plain that Christ and the Church is the model for the relationship of husbands and wives. He goes on to instruct in other physical relationships. Physical relationships are transformed when we come into the Church. They don’t impact our access to God, but we are still physical creatures.

Galatians 3:28, “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” –But that’s only in the spiritual sphere. I think we understand that.

Certain homosexuals in San Francisco have tried to take that verse out of context to say that it is okay for men to marry men. People can twist and distort scripture. That’s not what it is talking about. I trust we all understand that.

Physical relationships remain on the physical realm, but it is not a determining factor in terms of spiritual relationships. Physical relationships are transformed when you come into the Church

in the sense that our relationship as a husband, wife, parent, child, employer or employee—all of those physical relationships—are transformed in that the fulfillment of them takes on a deeper spiritual implication than we ever contemplated before. We should, as a Christian husband, parent or child, etc., be different than we were. It should make a difference in our lives in the way we fulfill our appointed role in society.

Ephesians 6:11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Verses 13-18, he describes the armor.

Verse 15, “and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...”

Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who bring glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Maybe you never thought of yourself as having pretty feet.

Ephesians 6:15, this analogy is used, “having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...” We need to be doing something. We need to be doing the work. This is what is being addressed right here.

Verse 20, “for which I am an ambassador in chains;” The implication is that Paul is in prison at the time he wrote this. The Ephesian Church was very active in their prayers for the Apostle Paul and known for their generosity.

The book of **Philippians** is a shorter book and a book that has several themes. To a great extent, **it is a “thank you” and an encouragement. It was an exhortation to humility and the avoiding of striving. It was a warning about the circumcision.** In the same way as Colosse, there were individuals who were seeking to undermine the truth of how we gain access to God and how we maintain that access. **It was also a general exhortation on Christian living.** Philippians 1:1 starts out addressing the saints in Philippi with the bishops (elders) and deacons. This shows a very organized, fully-developed and organized Church.

Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...” God started a work in you and He intends to finish that work. That’s important to realize.

Verse 11, he goes on here through the book of Philippians, desiring to see them “...filled with the fruit of righteousness...”

Verses 12-13, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of

the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard [Praetorium], and all the rest, that my chains are in Christ...” This is a reference to the court of the Praetorian Guard or Caesar’s Court. The Praetorium was the court of Caesar’s elite guard. Paul, in his imprisonment in Rome, was well known in “high circles.”

Verses 23-24, he talks about the fact that he was hard-pressed (KJV, “in a strait”) between two things: having a desire to depart and be with Christ or to abide in the flesh, which was more needful for them. Paul didn’t mean he thought he was going to go to heaven when he died. He knew that if he died, his next split-second consciousness would be in the Kingdom of God. He was kind of torn “betwixt and between.”

He was in jail. He had gone through a lot of trouble and difficulty. He thought, on the one hand, it would be nice just to lie down, go to sleep and wake up in the Kingdom. He was undergoing a lot of stress and difficulty. From a human standpoint, he looked at it and thought going to sleep would be good. He had certain desires for God to just let him go to sleep. And yet, on the other hand, he looked at the Church and the needs of the Church and knew he still had a work to be done.

Verses 27-30, he admonishes them.

Philippians 2:3-6, in terms of humility he says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery [thought it not something to be grasped or seized] to be equal with God...”

He did not cling to His equality with God and the Godhead.

Verses 7-8, rather, “but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” He divested Himself of that relationship He had shared with the Father from eternity. He did not have this attitude of ego. Some people would never give up something that was prestigious for something that was less prestigious. Jesus Christ exemplified an attitude of service, willing even to divest Himself of the glory of God and come down and take upon Himself and live a human life.

Hebrews 2:16, KJV, we are told that He took not upon Himself the nature of angels but the nature of the seed of Abraham. He took upon Himself our nature. He didn't go down one notch—just kind of move down from God to angel. He took upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham. Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Verses 12-13, Paul admonishes them, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” God is working in you. You need to go forward and to finish up. Allow God to finish in you what He has started.

Verses 14-15, “Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”

Verse 17, Paul went on and talked about what he was going through and the fact of various difficulties that he was facing.

Verses 23-24, “Therefore I hope to send him [Timothy] at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.” He still did not know exactly what was going to be the outcome of his imprisonment, but he still had faith that God was going to release him and let him come.

Philippians 3:1, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.”

‘Be aware of some of those who were stirring up trouble.’

Verse 2, “Beware of dogs, !... ” This is not talking about cocker spaniels and collies. “Dog” was a slang term that was used to refer to “false ministers.” It was a term that had its origin in Hebrew, in the Old Testament. The priests of the pagan temples who practiced the immorality and the things that were generally associated with Baal worship were called “dogs.” There are obvious implications if you give it a little bit of thought. It was a term that the Jews used to refer to an idolatrous priesthood—the leaders of false religion. This was the term Paul used.

Verse 2, continuing, “...beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation [KJV, “concision”; “cutting”]!” –Those who were seeking to invest in circumcision. That was something God had never intended.

Verse 4, he talks about having confidence in the flesh. Their emphasis was on what you could do to guarantee your relationship with God.

The point is that if you could do something to guarantee your relationship with God, why did Christ have to come and die? If you can guarantee your relationship with God through circumcision or by some physical thing—if that's going to gain you access to God—why did Christ come and die? That would have been much simpler. It undermines the full significance and impact of the sacrifice of Christ. That's why Paul emphasized it so much.

Verses 8-10, he talks about knowing Christ and having Christ in us.

Verses 12-13, “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...”

He's talking about the things that had been his sources of pride in the past, the things that had given him status and were sources of pride in the past. He had forgotten those things; He was not concerned about those things. That had nothing to do with his standing with God. The things he had trusted in times past to give him standing with God—he has forgotten those things, which are behind. The things he mentioned earlier in verses 4-6, the things he had that would have given him status or access, as far as they were concerned, he had forgotten about those things, the things he used to place his trust in.

Verse 13, continuing, “...and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...”

Verse 14, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” He was reaching forth for the promises of God and pressing toward the mark.

Verse 17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”

Verses 20-21, notice, “...we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,” At the resurrection, we are going to put on immortality.

Philippians 4:1, “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.”

Verse 4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”

Verses 6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Verse 8 gets our minds on the things that are excellent and good and positive and uplifting.

Verses 11-12, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.”

Verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” ‘I can do all these things.’

Verse 19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

It is very apparent, as you go through, that Philippians is a very powerful little book. It’s short, but it has a lot of strong encouragement. It’s a very encouraging book, focusing in on the power of God. We have to realize that Christianity and conversion are not so much what we can do for God as it is what God can do in and through us as we yield ourselves into willing instruments. We yield ourselves to Him, desiring Him to change, shape and mold us, to fashion and form us, to make us conformable to His image. That’s really what conversion is all about. It has to do with a transformation in our values, our priorities and every facet of our lives.

I mentioned earlier the allusion to Pentecost. These books very directly relate to Pentecost because Pentecost has to do with conversion and with God giving His covenant. There are many, many sections—particularly in Ephesians—where you can go through and find it talking about the elect, about being chosen as firstfruits, those who first trusted in Christ. In Ephesians 2, it talks about being called out and made a part of the commonwealth of Israel. It talks about Christ dwelling in us. He talks about the relationship of Christ to the Church as a husband-wife relationship—all these things. The working of God’s Spirit has to do with the spiritual meaning of Pentecost—one of God’s festivals.

There’s an awful lot that’s packed in Ephesians and Philippians. It was clearly written in Paul’s imprisonment. They contain things that are helpful for us. We only got an overview of it this evening.

As you have gone through and had a chance to study them on your own, hopefully, you have

gotten a taste of some of the depth of content that God, through His Spirit, packed into these books. We have tried to hit some of the high points on them this evening. Many of the significant things that Paul wrote he wrote during the time that he was in Roman imprisonment.

Next Bible study, we will go through the book of Hebrews, which was also written during the time of Paul’s Roman imprisonment. An awful lot is packed into the book of Hebrews. I think these things can give us a little bit of depth and insight into, not simply the historic teachings of the Apostle Paul to the early New Testament Church, but principles that each of us need to be aware of and relate to in our lives today because God’s Word is a living Word. It applies to not only the people to whom it was written at that time, but it is preserved for us. It has a message that directly applies in our lives today.

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Hebrews

We are getting into the book of Hebrews. This is a very important book. There is an awful lot packed in here, and we are going to try and cover it. **We will focus on an overview of God's great plan and purpose: the primary emphasis of the role of Jesus Christ, His role as our High Priest, our Mediator, the role of the priesthood and a transition to take place. We will also notice the theme of perseverance.** It plays a major role in Scripture.

Hebrews was written to Israelite Christians in general but particularly to those of Jewish background. It was evidently written at the end of Paul's first imprisonment. We will note some places that give us indication of that. You will find that many of the commentators want to dispute the fact that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. This is something that is commonly done today. There's a reason for that and there's a reason why we would accept Paul's authorship. In fact, I **can give you seven reasons for accepting his authorship, and I will explain why many of the critics don't want to accept Paul's authorship.**

(1) Who was better qualified than Paul to write a book like this? One-third of the book of Hebrews is a direct quotation out of the Old Testament. Whoever wrote it was thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament, in the intricacies (the "ins and outs") of the Jewish religion, the symbolism and all the things connected with the temple, priesthood, the tabernacle, all the various ceremonial aspects, sacrifices, etc. Who was better qualified than Paul? He was more highly educated than any of the other apostles. He was more qualified to explain the intricacies of Judaism. He was a student of Gamaliel, the foremost Jewish teacher of the day. Most likely, just in terms of qualifications, there was no one who was better grounded in the Old Testament than Paul to write a book like this.

(2) We find that the author of the book was writing from Italy.

Hebrews 13:24, "Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you."

Verse 19, "But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you sooner." Here is a reference of someone writing from Italy and who was in prison. The author was not at liberty; he

was in prison in Rome, which of course, Paul was.

(3) Whoever wrote this, Timothy was his companion.

Verse 23, "Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly." Here was someone writing at Rome. He and Timothy had been there. Timothy was now at liberty and was hoping to be shortly restored to them.

(4) Peter testifies of a book that Paul wrote like this.

2 Peter 3:15, "...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you..."

1 and 2 Peter address basically the same audience.

1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." Israelites dispersed in Gentile areas. This is the same audience that Hebrews is written to—people of the Dispersion.

2 Peter 3:15-16, "...as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Peter acknowledges to the audience he addressed (the Israelites of the Dispersion) that Paul had also written a letter to that group. Now if Paul didn't write Hebrews, then he had to have written a letter addressed to that group that has been lost because Peter testifies to it.

(5) The letter has Paul's style. I won't go into all the reasons for that, but there are many aspects of it to show that. The critics write that off as someone trying to copy Paul's style.

(6) The unanimous tradition of the early Church recognizes Paul's authorship. The earliest writers (up through the second century) and any tradition in the Greek world are pretty unanimous in acknowledging that Paul wrote this book. It was only in the aftermath that these questions began to come in. The reasons for the questions was to undermine the authority of the book because there's no book in the New Testament that more clearly speaks of tithing, Sabbath keeping and various things like this. It is a book that has a "Jewish flavor."

Frankly, the real objection to Paul's authorship by some of the early so-called "church fathers" was simply an effort to undermine its authority in the canon. Some of the later critics, and even some of the early Protestants, reject Paul's authorship. It kind of "fed on itself." They

quoted Augustine and various ones. Augustine didn't think Paul wrote it. Of course, he didn't! Augustine really didn't want the book in the Bible because it contradicted what he taught and was a little harder to wrest and twist than some of the other things. So, they objected to it on that basis.

The reality is that while the Catholic Church likes to claim the credit for "giving the world the Bible," they had nothing to do with it. The only thing they tried to do was take it away. They didn't put it together. It was already in existence when they came on the scene. The church council didn't put the Bible together. They simply recognized the canon that was already in existence. The only thing they argued about was how they could get books out of it. Primarily, they desired to somehow discard James, 1 and 2 John, Hebrews, the book of Revelation and various ones like that. They looked for ways to try to get rid of anything that had a few pointed hints at them.

However, the books were simply too widely known and recognized to be effectively discarded. The reality is that the Apostles Peter and John were responsible for creating and providing the canon of the New Testament. The earliest Church sources and records recognized Paul's authorship. It didn't begin to be questioned until later.

(7) If the book of Hebrews was not written by Paul, it would totally break the pattern of "seven" in the New Testament and in Paul's writings. Counting the book of Hebrews, Paul wrote 14 books. In the sequence, the order that was preserved by the Greek Church, it comes "sandwiched" in with Paul's epistles. The order that the Greek Church preserved (the order that we have commonly called the inspired order) consisted of four parts or divisions: the Gospels and Acts (the historical books that told the story), the General Epistles (James, Peter, John and Jude), Paul's Epistles, and fourth came the book of Revelation.

Paul's Epistles were arranged. First are his nine letters to the seven Churches beginning with Romans and ending with 2 Thessalonians. Then came the book of Hebrews and the Pastoral Epistles (Timothy, Titus and Philemon). In that order, Hebrews is "sandwiched" in with his epistles. If you take it out, you don't have 14. If you take it out, you mess up the sequence because you have four divisions: the Gospels and Acts, General Epistles, Epistles of Paul and Revelation.

When you take the four divisions of the New Testament and add it to the three of the Old Testament (the Law, Prophets and Writings) that Christ discussed (Luke 24:44), you have seven divisions. There's completion in the New Testament. The Jews counted 22 books of the Old Testament and the 27 in the New Testament. That's 49—seven times seven. When you take out the book of Hebrews and try to rearrange it or assign it to somebody else, you mess up a consistent pattern that runs all the way through the Bible, a pattern that "smacks" of God's design and purpose and the fact that there was an order and harmony to it.

Let's understand a little bit about the audience to whom he is writing. If Paul is writing toward the end of his Roman captivity, we're looking at about 62 A.D., which means the destruction of Jerusalem was only a few years away. The deaths of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter and the other apostles were coming very quickly. In fact, if James was not dead when the book of Hebrews was written, he was probably executed right around that time or very shortly thereafter because he died in the early 60s. He was thrown from the precipice of the temple; he was thrown over and dashed on the rocks below.

You have to put yourself in the situation a little bit. At the time Paul was writing, probably around 62 A.D. during his Roman imprisonment, there was a situation where you had many of the people to whom he was writing who had been in the Church 25-30 years. There were a number of those who were receiving this letter who were there on the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. and when the thousands were converted during those early weeks. Primarily, the book of Hebrews is written to old-time Christians, long-time Church members, people who were in the Church for 25-30 years. Here were individuals who came into the Church in those earliest days of exuberance, excitement and miracles; individuals who came in with that eagerness, anticipation and sense of urgency; individuals who sacrificed for the work. Remember in the book of Acts, in 31 A.D., many of those who were in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost came only for the holy day season. They came into the Church and all the excitement was going on, the gospel was being proclaimed, great miracles were being worked. There was a sense of imminence and urgency and they didn't want to leave. Many of the people who were based there in Jerusalem liquidated property; they converted their property into money and gave it to the apostles. They gave everything they had. This was the situation.

There was a sense of imminence and urgency of Christ's return. That was the last question the disciples asked Jesus when He ascended to heaven.

Acts 1:6, "... 'Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?'"

Verse 7, "And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'" He didn't tell them the time setting.

What happened? A couple of years later, in 33 A.D., Stephen was stoned. Stephen was the first in the New Testament Church to suffer martyrdom. Many there in Jerusalem began to be scattered as time went on.

Acts 12, when Peter was arrested and put in jail, God sent an angel and brought him out. Great miracles occurred even to the point that when Peter's shadow passed over someone, they would be healed (Acts 5:15). But 30 years had gone by and Paul had now been languishing in jail for years. James, the brother of John (one of the twelve) had been executed years ago. Some of the other apostles were scattered and some were dead. James, the brother of Jesus was at the point of being executed.

What had happened? Well, there was an erosion of that first love, of that zeal and intensity. There were some tired old Christians—people who had sort of lost that sense of zeal and urgency. Individuals who, when they first came in the Church, never anticipated that they were running a marathon and would still be around for 25 or 30 years.

I think we have to understand that Hebrews has some special significance for all of us if we stop and put it in that perspective. I saw a man who was in college with me back in the late 60s. Did he expect to be here in 1991? I didn't. Various ones of you started hearing Mr. Herbert Armstrong way back in the 50s and 60s. We didn't expect to be sitting here in the 90s. The 90s seemed forever away. But they are here.

Paul is writing to people who were in that circumstance. He is writing to people who were maybe in their 20s and 30s when they came into the Church and who were now getting on up into their 60s. People were going through and experiencing things that they hadn't expected.

There were heretical movements that were beginning to make inroads. There were various ideas floating around. In Revelations 2:4, we are told that the Ephesians era of the Church ultimately lost its first love. We find Paul dealing with some of those things.

Notice the way he starts out.

Hebrews 1:1-2, "God who at various times and in different ways ["many different times and many different ways" would be the more literal rendering from the Greek] spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds..."

Paul is writing with a couple of major things in mind. **First**, he wants to clearly explain and establish the rank and function of Jesus Christ and the Melchizedek priesthood in relationship to the Levitical priesthood. **Second**, he wants to exhort old-timer members to persevere to the end.

Think about it. Most of the Jewish element and those in Jerusalem had been accustomed to continuing to go up to the temple and participate in temple service. They would go up to Jerusalem for the Feast or many of the Festivals. It was common that they would travel to Jerusalem and take part in the temple service. The temple had continued to function. It seemed a part of the eternal order of things. It would have been very difficult to imagine that something would happen to it. It was certainly hard to imagine that something would happen to it and that Christ wouldn't instantly return, but that was going to be the case.

There was going to come a transition. The temple was going to be destroyed and the Levitical priesthood was going to cease to function. Yet when we go through the book of Acts, we find that many in the Church (particularly there in Jerusalem and Judea) continued to take part in certain of those things. There needed to be an explanation of the transition; a transition had already been made on a spiritual level and needed to be understood on that level by those in the Church there.

Paul starts out by showing that in different ways and different times God had spoken in the past through the prophets.

Verses 2-3, "has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, ..." The word translated "express image" is "character" in the Greek language. In fact, it is spelled the way we spell it. What it really means, the sense of the word in the Greek language, is something that is engraved or etched very deeply into your character—the traits that are fundamental to you and are etched deeply into you. Jesus Christ reflected exactly the character of the Father. He

was the engraved image. He reflected exactly the same attributes.

Verse 3, continuing, "...and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high..."

Verses 4-8, "having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'? And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.' And of the angels He says: 'Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.' But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.'"

He shows that Jesus Christ possesses a rank far above any angel. He is not an angel. He is the express image of the Father. He is the Son of God and holds the rank of God.

We are told that angels are ministering spirits.

Verse 14, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" The world has a distorted idea that if you are good when you die, you will go to heaven and become an angel—you sprout wings and have a halo, etc. It's a pretty vague idea, and you don't find anyone anxious to go do this. They don't seem really excited about trying to hurry up and get there.

That's not where angels come from. Human beings were not created to become angels. Human beings were created to become God. Angels are ministering spirits. They are servant spirits—spirit beings created for service. They are sent forth to serve those who will be the heirs of salvation. We are not going to rise to the level of spirit servants. We are inheritors. We are heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We become heirs of salvation. We will inherit because we literally become a part of God's Family and will literally be born into God's Family.

Hebrews 2:1, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away [KJV, "let them slip"]."

Now he begins to exhort a little bit.

Verses 2-3, "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast [referring to the Old Covenant], and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, ..."

Verses 4-5, "God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels." The world that then was, the world that has been and is, has been under the subjection of angels. Satan the devil is the god of this age (KJV, "world") (2 Corinthians 4:4). But the world to come will not be put in subjection to angels.

Verses 6-8, "But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels [You made him temporarily lower.]; You crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him."

He is quoting the Old Testament from Psalm 8. — All things being put under man. But he makes the point, "But now we do not yet see all things put under him." When God created man, He gave him dominion over all things (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:6).

Man, right now, is a little lower than the angels because man can die and the angels can't. He kind of leaves us hanging.

Verse 9, then, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death..." He was also temporarily made lower for the suffering of death. When Jesus came to this earth, He was made lower than the angels where it was possible for Him to die.

Verse 9, continuing, we see Him now "...crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."

Verses 10-11, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren..."

We are all of one; we share one Father. We literally become partakers of the divine nature. Peter tells us that in 2 Peter 1:4. Our sonship is in God's Family. "*Huiothesia*" is a term used in Hebrew that was a common term for adoption in the Roman world. If you take the word literally, it means "sonship"; "*huio*" is the normal Greek word for "son" and "*thesia*" means "position of"

or “rank of.” The word literally could be rendered “position of a son” or “rank of a son” or “sonship.” It was the term commonly used for adoption in the Greek and Roman world. Our relationship with God is “adoptive” only in the sense that we are “chosen” sons. It goes beyond the relationship of an adoptive child with his adoptive parents. The adoptive parent can bequeath property to the son; he can bequeath his name, all things, but the one thing he can’t bequeath is his own genetic inheritance. You do not become a partaker genetically of the nature of the adoptive parents.

2 Peter 1:4, that’s where the adoption analogy breaks down because Peter tells us that we become “partakers of the divine nature.” That’s what God’s Holy Spirit is. It’s the mind of Christ in us.

1 Corinthians 15:50, there is actually a transformation that takes place at the resurrection because “...flesh and blood can’t inherit the Kingdom of God; ...”

Verse 53, ‘this mortal puts on immortality.’ We make a transition from physical to spiritual. We step into eternity. That’s why Jesus Christ is called the firstborn from the dead.

Colossians 1:18, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,” If He is the firstborn from the dead, then that means there are others born from the dead. We will be born from the dead—not an obvious human physical birth but into the realm of immortality. Jesus Christ became flesh, as we are flesh. He did not become an angel or an angel in disguise.

Hebrews 2:16-18, “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted [tested].”

Verse 14, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil...” Jesus Christ became flesh. He took upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham. He became born as a human being. He lived life. He knows what it is to be a human being because He went through the things that we go through as a human being.

Verse 10, “...to make the author [KJV, “captain”] of their salvation perfect through

sufferings.” The sense of the word “perfect” is “completely mature, fully developed or matured.”

Christ learned through the things that He suffered. He learned what it felt like to suffer pain. He learned firsthand what it’s like to be a human being. He went through that experience and therefore is able to lead us to salvation. Christ’s role is described and the fact that He has gone before—He is the firstborn from the dead; He is the captain of our salvation—but we can ultimately share life with Him on the God level, the God plane. We can literally be born into the very Family of God, having and becoming in this life a partaker of the divine nature, and ultimately transformed completely from physical to spirit. Right now the process begins—the transformation, the conversion process.

We speak of “being converted” or “when we were converted,” but I think we realize that in the true and full sense of the word, we are not completely converted until we are born of the Spirit into the Family of God at the resurrection. That will be when all the change takes place. “Conversion” simply means “change.” There is a level of conversion that takes place at the point we make the commitment. We are baptized and God places His Spirit within us. That begins the conversion process, and He begins to write His law in our hearts and in our minds through the power of His Spirit. That’s the beginning of conversion, but it’s only the beginning.

You’re not completely converted are you? Is God’s law completely written in your heart and mind to where the only way you ever react to anything is spiritual? I wish it were completely written in mine, but I’m sorry to admit to you it’s not. It’s in the process. In that sense, the new covenant will not have been completely made until the resurrection. At that point, we will have been completely converted from flesh to spirit.

God begins the conversion process with our minds to change the way we think; He ultimately changes us from mortal to immortal, from flesh to spirit. He can accomplish that “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). But what can’t be accomplished like that is the mind because if God changed your mind that way, you would lose free moral agency. Your mind has to change because you choose for it to change. You voluntarily surrender your will to God and want Him to take control. You want His Spirit. You want Him to write His laws in your heart and mind. You want Him to change and transform you and make you something that you’re not.

You can't make yourself that way; you can't convert and transform yourself. It's not a matter of human willpower. You have your part to do; you have to follow. But it's the power of God to transform, and that transformation process will not be completed until the resurrection.

Christ has a function now as our High Priest.

Hebrews 3:1-2, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house."

Verses 3-5, then he goes through and talks about how Moses was faithful.

Verses 7-8, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness...'" He is quoting from Psalm 95, which in turn is quoting Exodus 16 and 17.

Paul begins to go into an exposition of Psalm 95. Psalm 95:7-10, "...Today, if you will hear His voice: 'Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, and as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they proved Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.'"

It is a Psalm of David that takes the lesson of Exodus 16 and 17 and develops it from a spiritual standpoint. Paul quotes it in Hebrews 3 and 4 and develops it even further. He is quoting the Psalm, which in turn is alluding back to what Moses said. Paul is expounding the spiritual significance of it.

Verse 11, "'So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

We find in Deuteronomy 12 and other places (Joshua 1, 21, 22, 23) a reference to the fact that through Joshua the children of Israel ultimately entered into rest. They spent 40 years walking through the Sinai. When they got to one place and they didn't have to pick up and move the next day, this was rest. If you have been on the move for 40 years and somebody finally lets you sit down, you're going to think you've entered rest. All you have been doing is camping.

I have gone to Big Sandy many times and camped there and I enjoyed it. But I tell you what, by the time eight or nine days were over with, I was kind of glad to have something a little more permanent than a tent.

For 40 years! We're not talking about eight or nine days. We're talking about 40 years. It took them six years to subdue the land; the seventh

year, which was the Sabbatical Year, they moved into the dwellings where the Canaanites had lived. They now lived in fixed homes and dwellings and ate the crops that had been harvested the previous year. They weren't on the move. They weren't fighting. They were settled. They finally had rest. They could finally stop. In that sense, Joshua gave them rest.

They were denied rest because they didn't believe Joshua and Caleb. They could have had it almost 39 years earlier than what they had, but they wouldn't cross the Jordan. They wouldn't go into the Promised Land because they didn't believe Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13-14). They believed the ten spies and as a result, they wandered in the wilderness 40 years.

Hebrews 3:10-11, God said, "'Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

God said, 'This generation that doesn't believe will not enter into rest. They'll never know what it is to just dwell in one place and be able to settle down. They are going to die on the move in the desert. And the next generation will enter into rest.' This is just a matter of history. It is alluded to in Deuteronomy 12:9 and Joshua 1, 21, 22 and 23. David quotes that and uses some of that terminology in Psalm 95. It talks about entering into God's rest.

Paul then begins to quote it here in Hebrews 3 and 4.

Hebrews 4:8, he says, "For if Joshua [KJV, "Jesus"]..." "Jesus" is derived from the Greek spelling of "Joshua." In the New Testament, instead of "Elijah," it will say "Elias." It's just a matter of a different spelling. "Jesus" is simply our English spelling of the Greek form. In the Old Testament, we translate it "Joshua" because that's the English rendering of the Hebrew form. But it's the same word and the reference is to the Joshua of the Old Testament. A lot of modern translations for the sake of clarity render it "Joshua" because when we see "Jesus," we think of Jesus Christ.

We have to realize that was a very common Jewish name. There are many Jews who were named after Joshua. The name had significance. "Joshua" means "the Eternal is Savior." All the names had significance and had meaning. It had special significance for Him because He was literally, in the flesh, the Eternal who was the Savior. But there were many Jews who were named after Joshua, the hero of the Old Testament.

Verse 8, continuing, what Paul is saying, "...if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day." The point he is making is that it's true that Joshua gave them rest. The Israelites entered into rest under Joshua, but was that all God was talking about when He talked about the promises and entering into rest? If he did, Paul says, 'then why (writing over 400 years later) did David talk about listening to God? If you listen to God, you can enter into God's rest.'

David wouldn't have been talking about it in the future tense 400 years later. The account we have in Deuteronomy and Joshua was a literal account, but it was a figure, a type of something that had significance for us. He quotes Psalm 95 and shows the ultimate rest into which God's people may enter; the Kingdom of God is the rest.

Right now we are pilgrims, sojourners. We are travelers through this world. When we enter into the Kingdom of God, we will finally enter into rest. The rest into which ancient Israel entered through Joshua of old was merely a type of the permanent and eternal rest that the people of God can enter into.

It's interesting. All the way through Hebrews 3 and 4, Paul keeps using this word "rest" over and over and over again. It is the word "*katapausis*," which means "rest" or "repose." But what's not obvious in most English translations (some have marginal notes) is in Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 4:9, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." The word "rest" in verse 9 is totally different than any other place in Hebrews 3 and 4. It's the word "*sabbatismos*." You don't have to be a Greek scholar to figure out that "*sabbatismos*" kind of sounds like "Sabbath" and that's what it means. It means "Sabbath keeping," "a Sabbath rest." "There remains therefore a Sabbath keeping to the people of God." Paul uses play on words because in the Hebrew, the word "*shabat*" came from a word that meant "rest." "There remains therefore a Sabbath to the people of God."

Hebrews 4:4, the example and what he is using here is a reference to, "For He has spoken in a certain place [in relationship to rest] of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'..." The rest Joshua gave the Israelites, which, interestingly enough, if you go through the chronology of Joshua, was entered into in the seventh year. The Sabbath which God rested on (the seventh day) was a type of the Millennium, the Kingdom of God, the one thousand years. The first 6,000

years are a time for man's work, effort and endeavor, but finally in the seventh one thousand-year period, it's a time of rest.

Isaiah 14:7, that's why we are told, "The whole earth is at rest and quiet;" That is ultimately God's rest—His Sabbath rest. The seventh one thousand-year day is the millennial Sabbath, the Millennium. There remains therefore a Sabbath keeping to the people of God.

Hebrews 4:10, "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." If you're entering into the eternal rest that God promises His people, then you quit doing your work on the Sabbath just like God quit doing His work on the Sabbath. There remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God because when you keep the Sabbath, you are being reminded of the rest that God's people will ultimately enter into.

When you really go through *Hebrews 4*, it is one of the strongest places in the New Testament to clearly prove that there remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God. It's about as plain as you can get. The Protestants and commentators claim they're not sure what Paul meant by this. What do they mean they're not sure what he meant? If he had said, 'There remains a Sunday keeping to the people of God,' I'll bet they would be able to figure that one out.

1 Corinthians 5:8, that's kind of on the par when he said, "Therefore let us keep the Feast," and they say they don't understand exactly what Paul meant by this. What if he had said, 'Therefore let us keep Christmas.?' They would understand that one. They wouldn't have any trouble figuring that one out. But when Paul says, 'Let us keep the Feast,' they say, 'Paul must have meant something by this, but we're not quite sure what he meant.' Why don't we just figure he meant what he said? That's a good assumption. You just kind of start from the premise "people mean what they say and they say what they mean." This is one of the reasons why some desire to dispute Paul's authorship of Hebrews. They would have liked to conveniently dispose of Hebrews altogether because it's a little bit inconvenient.

Hebrews 4:11, in fact, we are told (it's kind of a play on words), "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest," KJV, "Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest," Let's work to enter into rest. You appreciate rest when you have been working. The Sabbath means the most to somebody who's been working hard for six days. Then you really appreciate the Sabbath.

Christianity involves work, but it's not our effort that does it. Let me give you an example. It's like a power tool. You plug in your power saw to do something. What if we plugged in the saw and sat back under the shade tree and watched? How many two-by-fours would that saw cut? It wouldn't cut a whole lot. What if you didn't plug it in at all? You could work hard all day and not cut very much.

What's the point? If you're not plugged into the power source, it doesn't matter how hard you work, you are not going to accomplish anything. If you are plugged into the power source, you can't just sit back under a shade tree and wait for everything to happen. You have to work hard, but no matter how hard you work, if you're not plugged into the power source, it is of absolutely no avail.

When we receive God's Holy Spirit, we are plugged into the power source. We are tapping into all the power we need, but we have our part. If we don't exercise the Spirit and do what we need to do, the Spirit is not going to do it all. But on the other hand, it doesn't matter how hard you work, if you're not plugged into the power source, you might as well be trying to vacuum your floor without plugging in the vacuum cleaner or trying to use a power saw without plugging it in. It's only usable if it's plugged in *and* if the individual picks it up and does something with it. It takes the two together. You can't have one without the other and get anything accomplished. We have to labor to enter into that rest, but our labor is not what does it. It's Christ in us. But we can't sit back under a shade tree and wait for Him to do it all.

The world wants to go to one extreme or the other. Some have the concept of work and penance—that you do it yourself. Others have the concept that it's all done for you and all you have to do is sit under the shade tree and wait for it. Neither is true.

Verse 12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,"

Verses 14-16, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest.... For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Hebrews 5:1-2, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion

on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weakness."

Verse 4, "And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was." The point he makes is that the priesthood is not something you take to yourself. A priest was taken and ordained as an intercessor between God and man. His role has to do with making access to God possible through the offering of sacrifices and gifts. He deals with people and is able to mediate between God and man. He is able to have compassion on people because He was a human being and He knows what it is like. In fact, the priesthood of Aaron had to offer sacrifices for their own sins.

What he is explaining here in Hebrews 5, 6 and 7 is the transition of the priesthood. He starts out by explaining the priesthood of Aaron and then showing that there is something on beyond the priesthood of Aaron.

Verses 5-6, "So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'..." It refers to Christ being a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Who is Melchizedek? The only place you run into Melchizedek is back in Genesis 14 where Melchizedek, the king of Salem, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings. He just kind of "pops up" there, and we are not introduced to anything else about him. None of the commentators understand who He is.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote an article on that many years ago. If we just take what it says in Hebrews 5, 6 and 7, it is very clear who Melchizedek is.

Hebrews 7:1-2, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace...'"

"Melchizedek" means "king of righteousness." "*Melek*" is the Hebrew word for "king" and "*zedek*" is the word for "righteousness." He's also the king of Salem. "Salem" is derived from the Hebrew word "*shalom*," which means "peace." He is the king of righteousness and the king of peace.

Paul interprets His name here to the Greek speakers because he wants them to understand that the meaning of the name was significant. If the meaning of the name is significant, if that

title legitimately belongs to this individual and He is King of Righteousness and King of Peace, that doesn't sound like any human being I know. It refers to the Messiah as being Prince of Peace. Are you going to call some human being the king of peace or the king of righteousness?

Verse 3, this is the clincher, "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually." If Melchizedek abides a priest forever, didn't have a father or mother, is without beginning of days or end of life and is the king of righteousness and the king of peace, that doesn't sound like any human being I ever met.

Hebrews 5:6, "... 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'..." Melchizedek abides a priest forever, and Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:4, "Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils." "Spoils" are what Abraham took from the kings in Genesis 14.

Verses 5-7, "And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who received the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, ...; but He whose genealogy is not derived from them [He preceded them.] received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better."

This Being was a lot greater than Abraham. Which human being was greater than Abraham? None. This was clearly the One who became Jesus Christ, manifesting Himself in the role of Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God.

Verse 8, "Here mortal men received tithes, but there He receives them, of whom it is witnessed that He lives."

Paul is explaining the transition because we are told in Acts 6:7 that there were a great many of the priests that believed. The law in the Old Testament was very clear. Who did you pay your tithes to? -To the Levites, the priesthood in the temple. There was a specific place to take it. There were specific individuals to give it to.

The Jews in the Church had grown up understanding and doing that all their lives. They came in the Church and continued doing that because they were doing what the law said right now. There were a number of the priests who believed. They needed a clear understanding that God's people should no longer be giving their

tithes to the priesthood of Levi but rather to the priesthood of Melchizedek, which had prior claim.

What you have to do is explain a transition to people who would go back to verses in Numbers and places like that, to where God said very explicitly that the tithes were to be given to Levi for ministering in the sanctuary. Paul is explaining, 'Yes, God did say that, but there was a prior claim that the priesthood of Melchizedek had. That's the priesthood of Jesus Christ and that priesthood is functioning today.'

Within a short time, the priesthood of the Levites was going to cease to function entirely. The temple was going to be destroyed. The scriptural basis for the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant needed to be explained and clarified in detail. There is nothing comparable today because we are under the New Covenant. This was a unique generation because it was the generation of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The changes that are described are the changes that were being made from the administration of death to the administration of the Spirit—the administration of the Old and the New. The only other comparable period will be when Jesus Christ returns and there is a transition made from the way things are now.

The Church is called out of the world to function as God's people in a world that is Satan's world. There will be a transition when Jesus Christ returns and He takes over the rulership of the world and Satan will be put away. There will be a transition in the way that God's people will function. We are given insight into the government being set up and things being administered, judgment being rendered, things that we don't do today. There will come a transition as we move to that point.

This was the transition period between the Old and the New Covenant. There were many things that had to be explained, particularly to those who had been observant Jews who were doing what the Bible said, or what they had understood it to say. There were explanations that needed to be given to make the transition to what we, in a sense, take for granted but what was new to them.

He spends this time focusing on the role, rank and position of Jesus Christ and how He came as God in the flesh. He became a partaker of the nature of the seed of Abraham. He lived as a human being, died for our sins, was resurrected and is at the right hand of the Father. He is our High Priest, the One through whom we go and

through whom we have access. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Paul talks to the people to whom he is writing. One of the things he gets after them for is in Hebrews 5.

Hebrews 5:12-14, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [those who are mature], that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ [the beginning of the doctrine of Christ], let us go on to perfection [completion, maturity], not laying again the foundation...”

There are actually seven basic doctrines of the Church. The seventh one is listed first—going on to perfection, to spiritual maturity and completion. We need to go on to become like God. There are six things that are necessary before Christian growth. Going on to spiritual completion and maturity is the final point.

Verses 1-2, continuing, the first six are: “...the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” You need to be coming to a point where you are concentrating on going on to become like God, to become like Christ. You need to be going on to spiritual maturity. But instead, you have to go back and figure out the first foundational things (the first six).

He says, ‘You should be able to teach; yet I have to go back and explain simple things to you.’ Here were people who had been a little shaken and affected by things and were not as solid as they needed to have been.

Verses 4-6, he encourages and reminds them of the danger of falling away once they have really known the truth.

Verses 10-12, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish [lazy, slothful], but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Verses 13-15, God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham patiently endured and obtained the

promise. The point he is stressing is endurance because there were people who had been around a long time that had gotten tired and were letting down. Various ideas were creeping in. There were various heretical movements around the periphery of the Church. Some of these people were being a little bit affected by certain things. Paul is saying, ‘As much as you have done and as far as you have gone, you can’t afford to let it slip now. Don’t be lazy. Hold fast. Remember God makes a promise. It doesn’t come instantly. Remember how long Abraham had to wait. God promised him a son. In fact, God promised to make his descendants like sand of the seashore, and Abraham had to wait 25 years for one son. He had to patiently endure. If you have to wait for a while, what’s the big deal? Haven’t all of God’s people had to wait?’

Hebrews 7:21, he then goes on into more depth on Melchizedek and shows how Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:24-28, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

Hebrew 8:1, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens...”

Verses 2-6, then he goes through and explains the spiritual significance of the sanctuary, how it was patterned after heavenly things, that Christ has a more excellent ministry, He is the Mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises.

There was a fault with the first covenant; the fault was with the people.

Verses 8-10, “Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because

they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

God is in the process of doing that right now. When God began giving His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, He began the process of making the New Covenant. That process won't be completed until we are born into the Kingdom of God at the resurrection, but it is in the process of being done. God, through His Spirit, is changing and transforming us in the way we think. This is the New Covenant.

Hebrews 9 explains a great deal about the spiritual significance of the covenant and the fact of sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:28, “so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”

Hebrews 10:1, “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” The ceremonies and rituals of the law simply foreshadowed the reality, the substance of Christ. It was a reminder. That's why it was called a “schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” (KJV, Galatians 3:24).

This is ultimately the covenant that God says He is going to make.

Hebrews 10:16-19, ““This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...” We have access through Christ to come right in to the Father.

Verses 22-27, “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth,

there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”

He is warning to be faithful and zealous, of the danger of drifting into willful sin and the consequences of turning our back on God's calling once we have known and understood.

Verses 31-32, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings...” He tells you to remember back when you first learned the truth. Remember the things that happened, the things you went through and the problems you faced. Remember the things that happened and all the things you went through.

Verses 34-38, “for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

He goes on and explains what faith is.

Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Then he shows how all the men and women of God have gone through and endured, faced all the things they had and “hung in there” through faith.

Hebrews 12:1-3, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [all the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11], let us lay aside every weight [things that weigh us down, discourage and beset us], 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.” Consider what He went through.

Verse 4, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” Christ, that final night, prayed so intently that He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). None of us have done that.

Verses 5-6, “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’”

Verses 7-11, God deals with us for our benefit. We are warned and exhorted in Chapter 12. We see that Paul places great emphasis to stir up and exhort the people.

He concludes in Hebrews 13 with a reminder to the people as to what to do. They are to look to God.

Verse 5, they are not to be covetous, recognizing that God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Hebrews 13:6-7, “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” He refers to the leadership of the Church.

Verse 17, he brings out, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

There is ultimately an accountability that the ministry has. That’s why there is a certain government in the Church. There is a responsibility that the ministry has of teaching God’s people and teaching God’s truth. God is going to hold us accountable for what we do and for being faithful. He emphasizes these things.

There’s a tremendous amount that is packed into the book of Hebrews, a tremendous overview of God’s great plan and purpose. There is a primary emphasis on the role of Jesus Christ, His role as our High Priest, our Mediator, and the role of the priesthood. The transition is explained to people who are going to be going through and experiencing that transition.

Verse 14, he even makes the point, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” Jerusalem was going to cease to be the center point of the Church within a few years after he wrote this. You have to realize to what extent this was going to come as a shock to a lot of people. Things had been a certain way all their life. They had been in the Church for years. These things in terms of Jerusalem—the temple, the priesthood—all these things had been functioning for centuries before they ever came on the scene. Yet, prophetically there were things that were going to be swept away. They needed to understand the transition.

There was going to be great change as the outward manifestation and functioning of the Old Covenant was swept away. It ceased. God’s people needed to understand how that fit in with Scripture and the fact that it was not permanent. It was a shadow of things to come. It was simply something that foreshadowed the reality and the substance of what Jesus Christ did. There remains a priesthood and that is Jesus Christ. He is our Priesthood. There is one Mediator between God and man and that is Jesus Christ. That’s the role of the priesthood.

In the Catholic Church, the priest is the mediator between God and man. That’s where the doctrine of transubstantiation comes in. According to Catholic doctrine, the priest literally transforms the host (round wafer bread) into the reality of the body of Christ; you are literally partaking of the body of Christ. They claim there is a literal transformation that takes place. There is a “miracle” that takes place and that is the basis of your being able to commune with God in communion. They claim the basis of your fellowship with God is that you have to partake of this host that has been magically transformed into the body of Christ by the priest exercising his power. The priest becomes the mediator between God and man. You have to go to him and confess your sins. He has to remit those sins and has to give you of the consecrated host for you to have communion with God. You don’t have access to God unless you go through him because that’s the function of a priest.

We have a Priest in the Church, but it’s not me or any leader at headquarters, etc. It’s *Christ*. He’s alive. We go to God through Him. God’s ministry is just that—it’s a ministry. They are servants. That’s what “minister” means—servants of God, of Jesus Christ and of God’s people. They may function in the role of elders, counselors, advisors, pastors, shepherds, bishops or overseers. They ultimately function in the role of ministers as servants, but they are not priests. They are not mediators between God and man. They are not intercessors through whom you have to go when we are to have access to God.

We have a Priest, a Mediator, Jesus Christ. Paul expounded and explained that. You see the balance here. On the one hand, he expounds the role of Jesus Christ, the role of the Priesthood, the things of transition, as well as an exhortation to people who were tired and for whom the tendency was to let down and to feel like they lost that “spark.” We have to be on guard against that. The longer we have been around, the easier it can happen to us. If we are not careful, we can

take it for granted and sort of lose the “sparkle” and the newness. This is what was on the verge of happening to this first era of God’s Church.

Paul wrote this letter as an exhortation to those people. This letter is very important and is preserved for us.

We will conclude our Bible study in Hebrews. Next Bible study we will be going through the books of 1 Timothy and Titus.

Bible Study # 67
April 9, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—1 Timothy and Titus

We are getting into the books of 1 Timothy and Titus this evening. We are going through the Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul. We have been focusing in on the period when he was in prison and the letters that he wrote from prison.

The book of Acts ends abruptly.

Acts 28:30-31, at the end of Acts we will note, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

Paul was under arrest. He was confined. Indications are he was actually chained to a Roman soldier. But he was allowed to dwell in a residence, a rented house, and be under house arrest. He was not allowed to go out and travel, but he could receive visitors.

We will focus in on the abrupt ending of Acts. Virtually all the books of the New Testament end with “Amen.” This is not the end of Paul’s life. This is a period that everything sort of drops out of sight. There are reasons for that. Evidently, Paul was released from prison at the end of this time. He was released from prison in Rome in the spring of 61 A.D. He had spent two full years there.

While there, his influence had extended even to the Praetorian Guard and its commander Burrus. The Praetorian Guard was the palace guard of the emperor Nero. It was a very powerful force. It was so powerful that, in many cases, it raised up and deposed emperors. The Praetorian Prefect, the man who was the commander of the guard, was a man by the name of Burrus. He was very, very powerful in terms of influence in Rome and held not only the supreme military and judicial authority but also even legislative power and control of the finances for the province. He was a very powerful man. The Praetorian Guard had a great deal of influence.

Burrus, together with the Roman philosopher Seneca, held great influence over Nero. Burrus died in 62 A.D. Once Burrus died (there are indications that he may have been the victim of a poison plot by Nero’s wife) and was out of the way, Seneca, by himself, was no longer able to be a restraining influence on Nero. Things really

went from bad to worse as far as persecution for the Christians.

It is significant to understand what happened because in the aftermath of some of this, we have the account of Rome burning. Nero was implicated as perhaps being responsible for having originally set the fire. He’s famous for “having fiddled while Rome burned.” He considered himself a great artist. He was putting on a concert and didn’t want to be interrupted. He got quite a bit of bad publicity out of it, particularly when rumors got around that Nero may have even been responsible for starting the fire. He wanted the opportunity to rebuild great sections of Rome and to sort of glorify himself as the great builder and artist that he considered himself to be.

So, what does a politician do when he gets in trouble? He immediately tries to shift the blame to somebody else. And the best thing to do is to figure out some unpopular group and blame them. You want to pick a group that is well enough known, that everybody knows who they are, but few enough in numbers that it’s not going to impact most people. Previously, Nero and other Roman emperors had “picked on” the Jews. They were good ones to “pick on.” Most people didn’t like the Jews.

We read earlier in the book of Acts of a time when his predecessor had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Generally, if the Roman emperors got “hard up” for money, they would come up with some pretext, cast out the Jews and confiscate their property. That would sort of alleviate the “cash crunch.” The “rub” on that—this time around with the fire—was that Nero’s mistress was a Jew. She exercised a little influence on him in terms of not blaming the Jews this time. Well, Burrus (who was the Praetorian Prefect) and Seneca had a great deal of influence on Nero and they had been favorable toward the Apostle Paul. Paul had influence that had gone all the way up that high.

Philippians 1:13, “so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ...” This is one of the prison epistles. He is writing from Rome. The term “palace” in the Greek is “Praetorium,” “the court of the Praetorium Guard.” He was well known in the Praetorium, in the area where all this was going on.

Philippians 4:22, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.” At the time Paul was writing the letters that we’ve been reading, he was in his Roman imprisonment. Paul had influence that went all

the way to the top of the Roman government. There were converts right there in the palace. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house. Nobody appeared and accused him. Roman law was that if two years went by and there was no formal accusation brought and you hadn't been brought to trial, charges were dismissed. At the end of two years, charges would have been dismissed against Paul because there was no real basis in Roman law to hold him. We have the book of Acts ending abruptly at the time of Paul's release.

What happened following his release in 61 A.D.? We are told in the book of Romans where Paul had intended to go when he wrote to the Church at Rome. He had written this prior to coming to Rome as a prisoner. That wasn't originally the way he had intended to come, but that was the way it had worked out.

Romans 15:28, "Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain." Paul told the Church in Rome that his plans were to come through Rome and go from there on to Spain. Now, when the book of Acts ends, he is in Rome. He had spent two years there.

Every indication is that he traveled on to Spain from Rome. There are plenty of secular historical accounts that show that he went on to the island of Britain, which was a part of the Roman Empire at that time. He returned to the area of the Middle East, perhaps around 63 A.D. or 64 A.D. He came back to the area around Ephesus in Asia Minor and then went on into the area of Macedonia, which is northern Greece. When he left Ephesus, we have a gap of about three years.

Paul left Rome. His imprisonment was over. No accusers showed up, charges were dismissed and he left Rome. Within a matter of a few months, his protector at Rome, Burrus, the Praetorian Prefect, was dead. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, was out of business. He had lost his "hold" when he didn't have someone there to sort of support and back him up.

At that point, intense governmental persecution from the Roman government against the Christians began. You have to realize, prior to that time, persecution against the Christians had primarily been on a local level and had generally been stirred up by the Jews. At this point, after the death of Burrus, the official government persecution of Christians began in Rome. They became the new scapegoats. If Paul had not left when he did, he would have never left. He would

have been executed. That was the tenor of things within six months after his departure.

But the situation was that he did leave. He went to Spain, left Spain and went up to Britain, left there and came back into the Middle Eastern area. It's possible that he went to Antioch, but we don't have any direct reference of that. We know that he went to Ephesus and stayed there for a period of months. He left Ephesus, sailed across that little narrow stretch of water over into Macedonia in northern Greece.

When he left Ephesus, he left Timothy in charge. Timothy was a young evangelist by this time, perhaps in his 30s. Paul went on to Macedonia.

Paul then writes this letter of **1 Timothy** to Timothy from Macedonia. It was written before Paul's second Roman imprisonment. Paul was arrested again in Macedonia and transported to Rome. He was probably arrested in about 64 A.D. 1 Timothy was written a short time prior to that while he was in Macedonia.

The main purpose of this book is to give Timothy instructions in his ministerial duties regarding ordinations, the administration of Church funds (such as the third tithe fund), dealing with heresy and related Church problems. Timothy was a young evangelist that was now in a situation where he was on his own. Paul probably realized that the circumstances were such that it was very likely that he might find himself under arrest. He knew that if he ever went back to Rome again, unless God just supernaturally intervened, he would never come out alive. Undoubtedly, at this point, Paul felt the need to put some things in writing that would give instruction to Timothy on his own that Paul may have done under other circumstances, but now he writes it. He gives us a written record. **We are going to focus on some of that.**

Titus was written at about the same time. It was written to Titus who was in charge of the work in Crete. Crete was a little island down in the Mediterranean, a little ways down from where Paul and Timothy were. **We will notice that the subject matter to Titus is similar to 1 Timothy, but there were some different statements.** These letters were, basically, instructions to the ministry. Paul wrote them at a time prior to his final imprisonment.

1 Timothy 1:1-4, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, to Timothy, my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some

that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

We are told right here where Timothy was; he was in Ephesus. That’s where Paul told him to stay. When he left and went on into Macedonia, Paul told him to stay in Ephesus. Very likely the scenario was that Paul returned from Britain, sailed across the Mediterranean and landed in Antioch, which had been his headquarters, his “jumping-off” point for previous journeys. Then he left to come back to Ephesus. It’s possible that the situation in Antioch was such that he went directly to Ephesus.

There is one thing to realize about Ephesus. In the latter period of the New Testament time, Ephesus became more and more the focal point and was really the headquarters of the New Testament Church. Right around this time (64 A.D.), after James was executed in Jerusalem, it really stirred things up. By 69 A.D., the Christians had fled Jerusalem, and by 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed. This really marked a major cutoff.

Ephesus was a Church Paul had raised up. It was a Church that he left Timothy in charge of. In the last period of the first century, we find that the Apostle John lived in Ephesus. He died and was buried in Ephesus. He wrote letters to the Church, which was addressed in the book of Revelation and other places.

The interesting thing is that in the second and third century, where do we find the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread being kept? We find them being kept in Ephesus, which was primarily a Gentile Church. The remarkable thing is—the people who think that Christ and the apostles did away with the Sabbath and holy days—why do we find the Ephesus Church keeping the Sabbath and holy days?

The Ephesus Church was a Church that Paul raised up and personally taught and pastored, a Church that Timothy was left in charge of, a Church where the Apostle John spent his last years all the way to the very end of the 90s A.D. Why do we find that Church and the area around there as the ones who were keeping the Passover, observing God’s festivals and Sabbath? –Because they were doing what John, Timothy and Paul had done. There is a very clear record of history in the area. Ephesus had major import. It is used in the book of Revelation, figuratively, to symbolize the first stage or era of God’s Church. And interestingly enough, in the period of that era or first phase, the Church was

headquartered in Ephesus. We see that it was the residence of the last apostle, John.

Timothy is there and is being instructed.

Verse 5, “Now the purpose [KJV, “end”] of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith...” Some completely misunderstand that and say the commandments are done away—that they are ended and all you have to do is have love. That’s not what this verse says at all. The sense of “the end of the commandment” is “the end result.” You can look it up in any of the commentaries or books that bring it out. One of the commentaries renders it “the goal, the true end to be reached.” The goal of the commandment is love out of a pure heart. What is the end result? What is the purpose? What is the end focus? Where does the commandment lead? Where does God’s law lead? God’s law leads to “love from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from sincere faith.” In other words, you are doing what you should do. You are not a put-on or pretending. You really mean it. God’s law reflects itself because what is the love of God?

1 John 5:3, “For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome [KJV, “grievous”].” God’s law and God’s love go hand-in-hand together. When lawlessness and a disregard and disrespect for law grow, love grows cold.

1 Timothy 1:6-7, Paul talks about certain individuals who desire to be teachers of the law who didn’t understand what they said or what they were teaching.

1 Timothy 1:8, “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully...” What was the law made for? It was made to define right from wrong. It was made for those who are breaking the law.

Verses 9-10, “knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine...”

The whole point of the law is to define what is right from wrong. These are the things that the law is focused on.

Verses 15-17, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy,

that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Notice the word “immortal” is used referring to God. You can look through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you will never find the phrase “immortal soul.” The words “immortal soul” are not anywhere in the Bible. You find “immortal” and “immortality” only mentioned a few times. We are told that God is immortal. We are told in terms of immortality that God only has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). We are told that we will put on immortality at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). God is the source of immortality. God is immortal. We’re not; we are mortal. We are doomed to death. It is only through Jesus Christ and God’s promises that we can receive immortality.

Verse 18, “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare...” Paul uses the metaphor of the Christian life being like warfare. He told Timothy to fight a good fight.

Verse 19, “having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck...”

1 Timothy 2:1-2, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Paul said to pray for the leadership, the rulers, for those in authority. What was it they were praying? Well, the primary thing Paul told Timothy, ‘Pray for the leadership, the leaders. Pray that they will leave us alone. Pray that we can live a quiet and peaceable life and pray that God will deliver us from persecution.’

Verses 3-4, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

This certainly proves that God has not ordained or predestined some to be lost. There are some who totally misunderstand what predestination is all about. They claim God has predestined some to be saved and some to be lost. They read about predestination. They assume that since you have an immortal soul, when you die you have to go to either heaven or hell and if God predestined anything, then He predestined some to be saved and others are to be lost. That’s not true.

Predestination only has to do with *when* God chooses to call. Some are called as the firstfruits; some are called later. But God’s will and purpose is to have all men to be saved. That’s God’s desire, but each in his own time. God’s purpose and God’s desire is to have all come to a knowledge of the truth.

Verses 5-6, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time...” There is one Mediator, one go-between. That’s what a Mediator is.

In some cases, when you have a labor strike, they bring in a federal mediator. He sits down and talks with management for a little while and then goes and talks with labor. He mediates the strike and tries to work it out. A mediator is a go-between.

There’s one Mediator between God and man. There’s one go-between the Father and us—Jesus Christ. It didn’t say there are two, Christ and Mary. It didn’t say one mediatrix. It didn’t say there are many saints that also do a little mediating on the side. Let’s face it, if you pray to somebody else—if you pray to Mary or one of the saints—you are in effect looking to some other mediator. You are asking somebody to go to God on your behalf. We are told right here there is only one Mediator.

There are two problems with praying to Mary or the saints. First is the fact that they are dead and in their graves and are not hearing your prayers because Ecclesiastes 9:5 tells us the dead know nothing. It’s not doing any good from that standpoint. Second, we are told right here that there is only one Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Verse 8, “Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, ...” What does it mean to “lift up holy hands”? What do you do the things you do with? Good or bad, you do it with your hands. You work with your hands; you play with your hands. All the things you do, you use your hands. That is the symbol of action. The things we do, we do with our hands.

If we’re going to pray to God and, in effect, lift up our hands to God, they need to be holy hands. They shouldn’t be hands that are dirtied by practicing sin. I can’t be out doing a lot of things I shouldn’t do and think that I can go to God and that’s okay. I can’t be living a lie. Paul says, ‘I want men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands—hands that are not dirtied and sullied by the practice of living in sin.’

Verse 8, continuing, “...without wrath and doubting...” In other words, we are supposed to

be what we say we are. We go to God as His children. We are trying to practice His way of life. We are not trying to practice all the things the world does.

Verse 9, “in like manner also [referring to what he had mentioned earlier], that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation [KJV, “shamefacedness” and “sobriety”], ...” The word “shamefacedness” is sort of a funny word. It’s not a term that we use in modern English and gives sort of an unfortunate connotation because when people read that, they think in terms of being ashamed. That’s not what the word means.

It is a term that’s very difficult to translate into English with one word. It has to do with a sense of modesty, an inner attitude that is displayed outwardly and, in many ways, even by the way we look. We reflect our attitudes and our feelings by the look on our face. We can display many different things. It is not talking about being ashamed of yourself, hiding your face behind a veil like some of the Moslems do and only their eyes peeping out. That’s not what it is talking about. It is an inner attitude of modesty and respect for God. It is an attitude of humility, a demeanor and a way of carrying ourselves that shows out in the expression in our face.

If you look at someone, you look him in the face. Basically, where do you look? You look at the eyes and the mouth. Those are basically the areas that display the inner person, and you can tell a lot about somebody. If you notice, sometimes a person may put a smile on their face. They say something, and you look at their eyes. They may be smiling with their mouth but not with their eyes. You know something is wrong. The inner person, the inside of us shows out. Our face is the expressive part of our body. You don’t look at somebody’s elbows; you don’t show expression with your elbows. You can be in a good or bad attitude and your elbows look the same, but your face doesn’t. The sense of it is a word that just means an outward manifestation of an inner attitude, an inner attitude of modesty. What it details here is the concept that God values—women adorning themselves in modest apparel and show from their faces a spirit of modesty.

Verse 9, continuing, “...not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing...” If you read some of the Bible helps, they describe some of these big elaborate gaudy sorts of styles, faddish-type styles that were done. Basically, what it is talking about is a Christian woman is not trying to call undue attention to herself. She’s not

trying to copy the haughty demeanor of a model off the cover of *Vogue* or *Glamour* or something. You wouldn’t read verse 9 and really apply it to some of those models. There’s an attitude that just sort of shows forth in everything, even from the way they carry themselves. It says here that there is a set of values that, in God’s sight, is of great price—a set of values that God thinks is valuable, but the world does not consider valuable.

Various churches are getting into the subject of ordaining women. There is even a controversy in the Catholic Church—‘Why can’t women be priests?’ The Episcopal and Methodist Churches have ordained some women priests. Various ones have and various ones haven’t. I attended a funeral a few months ago (because of some Church members) which was conducted by a woman Episcopal priest. They didn’t get this out of the Bible. They think Paul is old fashioned. What they didn’t know is that Paul really didn’t originate all of this. God did.

Verses 11-12, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

Verse 14, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Eve was conned by Satan. Adam really wasn’t deceived on it. He was just weak-willed and went along with what she wanted to do.

Verse 15, “Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control [KJV, “sobriety”].” The point is that a woman does not have to occupy man’s responsibilities in the Church in order to have just as high a salvation and just as high a reward in the Kingdom as a man. It’s not that men get to do all these things and women don’t, so how can they have any reward in the Kingdom?

If we carry out the responsibilities that we have, in whatever sphere of life we are, God is pleased with that. God is pleased to see us do what we can do and the best we can do to put His principles into action, to live His way of life in whatever our sphere or whatever area of life represents our calling. It does not have to be a matter of everybody doing the same thing or occupying the same office or position in order to achieve anything of value or worth. That’s not true.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul discusses the issue of ordinations. He talks about ordaining a bishop or elder—an overseer.

1 Timothy 3:15, “but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Paul didn’t know how long he was going to be tied up. Timothy was being left to take responsibility and Paul said, ‘I am leaving you these instructions so that you will know how to carry it out and how to go about doing it.’ He enumerates qualifications for an elder.

Verse 2, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach...” Many of these qualifications are also quoted to apply to a deacon, except this term “able to teach.” The primary responsibilities of an elder are in the area of teaching God’s people. This may be in counseling—in one-on-one situations, in teaching situations or it may be preaching. All elders don’t necessarily have to be able to preach, but they do have to be able to teach—and there is a difference. Some elders are able to do both. Some are very effective in terms of teaching and counseling in one-on-one situations and small group circumstances; yet they would not be nearly as effective, perhaps, in preaching to a large group. But there is that ability to teach, to convey and explain God’s principles.

Verse 3, he describes personal characteristics.

Verses 4-5 talk about being able to properly administer our own household, realizing that’s a pretty good indication of what we are going to do with the Church. The way we rule our home is a pretty good indication of how we are going to rule in the Church.

Verse 8, we focus on the deacons. They also must have high spiritual qualifications. It is a physical office that requires spiritual qualifications.

Verse 10, “But let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.” They are to be proved. They have to have been serving and practicing these things.

Verse 11, “Likewise their wives...” The word literally is “the women.” It’s not a reference to deacon’s wives because there’s no reference to the wives of elders. You wouldn’t have separate qualifications for the wives of deacons and no qualifications for the wives of elders. Rather, it is talking about the qualifications of special service for the women. This, as even the commentaries bring out, must be a deaconess, not wives of deacons. It is from this basis that the Church has understood for many, many years that there is an ordained office that can be and is utilized and set

apart that women can have. It is not an office of public instruction and teaching in the Church in terms of men and women, but it is an office of service.

Verse 12, then we are instructed once again about the deacons and their example in their own family.

1 Timothy 4:1-3, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

There are a couple of applications of this. This prophesied of what became of the Catholic Church. What two things did the Catholic Church introduce early on? The doctrine of priestly celibacy (forbidding to marry) and the abstinence from meats on Fridays and the Lenten season. In many of the Monastic orders, there were vows that abstained from meat entirely—that sort of enforced vegetarianism. They are labeled as doctrines of demons.

God created certain meats to be eaten. Now what does it say? Some want to say this means you can eat pigs, oysters, shrimp and everything. They will quote part of a verse.

Verse 4, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused...” Or, “Every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving.” All you have to do is say the blessing and “dig in” to all the shrimp and catfish you can eat. That’s not what it says. You have to read the whole sentence.

Verses 4-5, it says, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for [the sentence goes right on] it is sanctified [set apart] by the word of God and prayer.” What meat is set apart by the word of God? –Read Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 13.

“Nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving.” “By those that believe and know the truth.” What is truth?

John 17:17, “...Your word is truth.” If you know the truth—which means God’s word, the Bible—and you realize that everything God made is good (buzzards are good, pigs are good), everything is good. It is good for the reason it was made. Horses are good, cows are good, dogs and cats are good. But this still doesn’t mean I want to barbecue my cat when I go home this evening. He’s good. He serves a useful purpose.

The horse is good, but that doesn't mean I want to mount up my cow and go chase down my horse to slaughter it and put it in the freezer. God made horses to ride and cows to eat and to milk. He didn't do vice versa. It's not an accident that we don't ride the cows in order to herd up the horses. We ride the horses to herd up the cows.

God made certain things for certain purposes. Certain creatures were created as the garbage collectors. The buzzards serve a useful function, but that doesn't mean I want to eat one for Sunday dinner. Fried buzzard! Every creature is good for the purpose for which it was created. It's all good, but it's not all good for the same thing.

1 Timothy 4:5, the key is if it is sanctified by the Word of God, set apart and made holy by the Word of God and prayer—it takes both. When you put the whole thing together it becomes clear.

1 Timothy 4:6-8, “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

He uses an example. Bodily exercise is good for you temporarily. It's good for a short time and for the short term, but godliness is profitable forever.

Verse 12, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Set an example. You are young, but don't conduct yourself in a way that causes others to look down on you.

Verse 14, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” This is speaking of that extra measure of God's Spirit given in ordinations.

He instructs Timothy in terms of dealing with members in the Church.

1 Timothy 5:1, “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers...” He explains the way you deal with people. He told Timothy, ‘For those who are older, deal with them with respect. Show them the kind of respect you would to your own father. Deal with the younger men in a little different way, more on a peer level as brothers.’

Verse 2, “the older women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity.” He explains

the way we deal with one another. Timothy was instructed in terms of appropriate conduct, ways of handling things and showing proper respect.

Verses 3-4, “Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.” He is talking about the fact that widows who are really needy are to be helped by the Church. But if a widow has children and grandchildren, it would be a good idea for them to give a little help. That's the starting point. Widows who are widows indeed, who are desolate, who don't have any other means of support are to be helped by the Church.

Verse 8, we are told, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” He is speaking of the responsibility we have. We are not to be negligent and careless in providing for our own. We have a responsibility. This, obviously, is not meant to make reference to those who are injured or incapacitated in some way or physically unable to go out and do what they normally would. It has to do with people who are irresponsible, people who don't take seriously their responsibility to take care of their family. And that certainly carries on over into elderly parents and things of that sort.

Verses 9-12, “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.”

There's a special enrollment of widows in some sort of service in the Church and, perhaps in this particular case, for Timothy and some of the other ministers. There's an indication that Timothy was not married at this time. Paul made reference that the widows involved in this specific enrollment should be age 60 and above, primarily so that there would be no taint of scandal involved.

This probably had to do with some matters of personal service. Maybe some who were receiving livelihood from the Church were helping out with cooking, housekeeping and

things and matters of this sort. They were able to render service to Timothy and to some of the other ministers who perhaps did not have their own wives or some ministers who were traveling. This would be the case. They were traveling on a circuit. You couldn't just pop into a restaurant and buy something. There was a lot of preparation involved in food. There were some widows who had a chance to serve because of specific opportunities and needs.

Paul gave Timothy instruction. He said, 'Be careful with it. You don't want to get some of the younger ones involved. It can look bad. It can give a wrong connotation.'

Verse 14, his desire was that the younger women think in terms of marrying, having children and learning to guide their own household. Learning to be responsible in that way was something they should do, rather than thinking that this special service in the Church was something they should do.

Verse 16, "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." He said there are those that are dependent on the Church and Church funds should be used to relieve them. Those who have family members who can take care of them—charity begins at home—let the family do some things so that the Church's funds aren't used up for those who have other means of support. The Church can concentrate its efforts on those who are totally dependent upon it. This is clearly a reference to the third tithe fund providing for the widows.

Verse 17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." The word "honor" that is used here is a word that really has to do with pay. In fact, some of the translations render it that way. The New English Bible renders it "stipend." It is a term that has to do with "the laborer is worthy of his hire."

Timothy was responsible for administering to a large area. There would have been many ministers under his jurisdiction. He would be responsible for setting salaries, for making decisions and determining the way in which some of these things were set. Paul gave him instructions. It was appropriate that Timothy not consider everybody under the employ would just automatically receive the same amount. Those who were doing an outstanding job, those who worked harder and did a lot more, it was not inappropriate that they receive more. Paul is instructing Timothy. He is a young man now on

his own. Paul may not have much dealing with him in the future. Paul didn't know exactly what was going to happen, so he is giving him instructions as to how to administer the Church.

Verse 22, Paul admonished him, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure." Don't jump in. Don't ordain someone too suddenly. Know what you are getting into.

Verse 24, "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later." He cautioned him not to be hasty in dealing with people.

In 1 Timothy 6:1-2, he continues and admonishes servants to show proper respect to those that they are under.

Verses 6-12, he deals with the matter of materialism and what our priorities should be.

1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," He didn't say it was the only root.

You know what a root on a plant does. The root is the source of nourishment for the plant. Materialism, a preoccupation with money, has been a root that has fed just about every evil that you can think of. What is it that people have never done for money? People have murdered, stolen, lied, committed immorality, sold out on everything they believed and sold out friends, family and country for money. People have done just about anything you can think of for money. That's what he means when he says the love of money is a root of all evil. If somebody is preoccupied with money and their great goal in life is to get rich, this can be trouble. If you love money too much, it can lead you into just about anything that a person can ever do. He warned to have a balanced perspective.

We are told of God.

Verses 15-16, "...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen." Only God has immortality. You don't have immortality. How can people say we have an immortal soul? Here it says, speaking of God, only He has immortality. If you have an immortal soul, you have immortality, too. How did you get it? God is the only One who possesses immortality inherent within Himself. We will put on immortality at the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:53, isn't that what we are told, "...this mortal must put on immortality." We don't have it on yet.

1 Timothy 6:20, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge [KJV, “science falsely so called”]...” It sounds like they had evolution already stirred up back then. Is that “science falsely so called”? Actually the word “science” is a word that just means “knowledge.” Certainly it could apply to false knowledge in the sense of evolution, but it just has to do with knowledge. He told Timothy to hang on to the “trunk of the tree.” Avoid getting off on some of these tangents and some of what purports to be knowledge and really isn’t.

Now we are going to notice the book of **Titus**. It’s a little shorter than 1 Timothy. **It deals with similar things and was written right around the same time.**

Titus 1:1, “Paul, a servant of God...”

Verses 4-5, “To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you...”

Paul had left Titus in Crete. Crete is a little island down in the Mediterranean.

He left Timothy in Ephesus and he went over to Macedonia. Now Paul never came back to them. Paul was arrested in Macedonia and transported to Rome. He didn’t know, but perhaps God had given him a premonition that he was going to be arrested at this time. He wanted to give detailed instructions for these ministers he had left behind and left in charge. He gave these younger men, who had been under his direct supervision, a written letter to give them instructions as to how to carry out their job. And these instructions have been preserved as a part of the Bible. These are instructions to God’s ministry, all the way down through the centuries, as to how to carry out responsibilities.

He describes the elders who were to be ordained. Verse 6, “if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.” The terms “elder” and “bishop” are used interchangeably. Verse 5 says “elder”; verse 7 says “bishop.” The word “bishop” simply means an “overseer,” a spiritual overseer.

Verse 7, “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money...” A steward is someone who

manages something in behalf of someone else. He is there as God’s manager.

Verses 8-11, “but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.”

Verses 14-16, “not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”

Titus 2:1, “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine...” How is sound doctrine described? Sound doctrine is described in the next few verses as the way we live. It relates to a way of life, not just to a list of abstract beliefs. Sound doctrine should be the way we live.

Verses 2-3, “that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things...” We find a variety of things given here.

Verse 4, “that they admonish [KJV, “teach”] the young women to love their husbands, to love their children...” –To have a set of priorities. It’s not that women can never teach. Specifically here, older women were to teach younger women. Teaching does not have to be done merely in a formal classroom setting. Some of the most effective teaching is done by example and one-on-one situations.

Verse 5, “[teach them] to be discreet [which simply means to be decent, modest, to be using good judgment, to be chaste, to be pure and innocent], chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”

Verses 6-7, “Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded [self-restrained], in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility...” It has to do with a way of life, a way of conducting ourselves, a way for men and women, young and old to conduct

themselves and to set an example. These are things that lead to sound doctrine. This is what sound doctrine is all about—a way of living the Christian life, a set of priorities, and a set of values that is quite a bit in contrast to the values of the world.

Verses 9-10, “Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering [stealing], but showing all good fidelity [honesty], that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” In other words, it’s a matter that we should be faithful in carrying out the responsibilities that we have.

Verses 12-15, “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”

We need to keep our eyes set on the reality of the Kingdom of God, but we need to be living our lives here and now in a responsible way. We need to live a life that denies ungodliness, denies worldly lusts and is a right example. We’re living our lives as Christ would live in us, with our focus, our attention, our hope set on the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, to buy us back, to release us from all iniquity (lawlessness). That’s why Christ gave Himself for us, to bring us out of that. We are to be purified as a peculiar people, a special people. We are to be different from the world. We are to be zealous of good works. If there is nothing different between the world and us, then we are in trouble.

Titus 3:1, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work...” Show respect to the government.

Verse 2, “to speak evil of no one [don’t be out stirring things up], to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”

Verses 3-4, there was a time when we were involved in all kinds of things, but our lives should be different after we have been called.

We’ve been called and set apart.

Verse 5-6, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom [which]

He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...”

We’ve been baptized, and the Holy Spirit is the source of renewing and regenerating. There is a cleansing effect that is brought out and described here. It is a reference to the beginning of a new life. When it talks about “generate,” it has to do with starting. If something is generated, that means it’s begun or started. Generate, used in the sense of life, has to do with beginning a new life. “Regeneration” has to do with a beginning of a new life, but a second time. The physical life, that we now live, had a beginning. Life began in us when we were conceived. It had a generation. It was originally begun and it continues on to this day.

Paul is talking about another life that begins at the time of baptism—a new beginning spiritually. We have a new beginning when God places His Spirit within us. We are in the beginning of that now. We will completely put on the spiritual at the resurrection when this mortal will put on immortality. We will, at that point, be completely a part of the Kingdom of God and the Family of God forever. This began at baptism. It began with a washing, a renewing. It began what represented a spiritual new beginning.

Verse 7, “that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We are not yet inheritors. We are heirs.

Verse 8, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” What is the real sense of this? The expression is best rendered in the New English Bible, which is simply, “those who’ve come to believe in God should see that they engage in honorable occupations, which are not only honorable in themselves, but also useful to their fellow man.”

Again, it gets back to the way we live our life. Paul says, ‘This is something that is faithful and I want you to constantly affirm it.’ If we believe in God, we need to conduct ourselves properly. Those who come to believe in God should see that they engage in honorable occupations, which are not only honorable to themselves, but also useful to the community. A Christian needs to maintain good works by the way he conducts himself, even in his daily life and daily business. There are jobs a Christian simply shouldn’t have. For instance, I would have trouble reconciling this verse with getting a job as a blackjack

dealer in Las Vegas. I wouldn't have trouble reconciling that with being in an occupation that was honorable in itself and also useful to my fellow man. In other words, what he is saying is a Christian needs to be a productive member of the community. He needs to do something that is of value. A lot of things can be of value. There's a place for many things, but I think it's something that we need to examine.

On this basis, for instance, we have counseled people who come into the Church from certain areas of the country (let's say Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina) who are involved in tobacco farming. This is a verse that they need to consider. There are things on this basis that our members, who have done that, go into other kinds of farming; they farm something else—a different cash crop. As a Christian, we need to be careful to maintain an honorable occupation, which is not only honorable in itself, but is useful to our fellowman. There's some value to it. We want to examine the things that we do in this way. There's value to a wide variety of things, but there are some things that are very questionable and some things that are more than questionable.

Verse 10, "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition..."

It continues and describes some detailed instructions.

Verse 14, "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful." There is an emphasis here on being a productive person. God wants his people to be productive, to be useful, and to set an example in the community. This is important. The thing we come down to is—from a Christian standpoint—Christianity is a way of life and has to do with all of the things we do and the way that we live. One of the things stressed in 1 Timothy and Titus is that Christianity is a way of life. It should impact us in our regular life. In whatever area of our life and whatever our circumstances, there are many principles and things that apply.

Paul wrote these things in the latter portion of his life. He had not yet been arrested for his final imprisonment.

We are going to be going through 2 Timothy next time. 2 Timothy was written during Paul's final imprisonment in Rome, just prior to his execution. In the aftermath of 1 Timothy and Titus, within a matter of months, perhaps six or eight months after Paul had written these, he was arrested and transported to Rome. Next Bible study we will go through 2 Timothy and we'll

see the final admonitions that Paul stressed. There's a great deal packed in here. We are almost at the end of our study of the Life and Letters of Paul. I hope that the study has been helpful to you in focusing in on various bits of instruction that were given in God's word.

Bible Study # 68
April 23, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

Life and Letters of Paul Series—2 Timothy

This evening we are continuing our series on the Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul. In fact, we are virtually to the conclusion of it. We **are focusing in on the book of 2 Timothy this evening, which was the last book the Apostle Paul wrote.** We will have one other Bible study, which will serve as sort of a wrap-up to the material of Paul's life. We **are in this final period of Paul's life in this book of 2 Timothy.** Last Bible study we went through the books of 1 Timothy and Titus. We found that the Apostle Paul had been released from his Roman imprisonment. We found that the end of the book of Acts ends abruptly with Paul's release. We found the fact that he dwelt two whole years in his own rented house at Rome and that came to an end. At that point, the Biblical record of Paul's life ceased. The book of Acts did not continue.

The obvious reason is that there were details and things that God simply did not choose to have recorded for us. That could be the subject of an entirely different Bible study—a study about where the rest of the apostles went and why certain things dropped from the scenes after a certain period in New Testament history. There are some very interesting stories and background that tie into that.

Evidently, from what Paul had said in the book of Romans (put together with secular tradition that has continued down), he went to Spain. Paul said that he planned to go from Italy to Spain, and there is every reason to think that he did so. He specifically said that in the book of Romans (Romans 15:22-28) and secular history and tradition maintains he did that. From Spain, he went on up to Britain, which was the furthestmost outpost of the Roman Empire. He spent some time there, and then by the mid 60s, returned to the Mediterranean area. He returned to the area of Ephesus for a short period of time. Then he left Ephesus and went over to Macedonia. From there he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then at some point after his writing of 1 Timothy and Titus, he was arrested and taken back to Rome.

The situation in Rome had drastically changed. The emperor Nero had made Christians the new scapegoats. They were being blamed for all the problems. Politicians have long made use of scapegoats. Unpopular minorities come in very

handy for that. You blame all the problems on them. The Christians served as the newest unpopular minority there in Rome. Nero had previously blamed it on the Jews. But since he had taken a young Jewish woman as his mistress, he was looking for a different scapegoat. The Christians were good ones on which to blame things.

The situation had really turned nasty since Paul had been there during his previous imprisonment. Some of the ones who had befriended Paul and had been impressed with him and the message he had brought had subsequently died, been demoted or had fallen out of favor. It was a different group of people even though only a few years had transpired.

2 Timothy was written fairly soon after the start of his second Roman imprisonment, perhaps during the summer of 67 A.D. In writing this final letter to Timothy, it was clear Paul realized this to be the final letter of his life. From a Church standpoint, it served as a summing up. He knew the situation had changed and that he would not leave Rome alive.

One of the major things that Paul did in the final period of his life, undoubtedly, involved the collecting together and the final editing of his own letters. We will see a reference to that in 2 Timothy. It is only logical that Paul would have been involved in doing that—who was the logical person to edit and put into final form the letters that he had written.

Peter was, at this point, in the process of compiling the first New Testament canon, which ultimately consisted of 22 books. The only others to be added were the five that John himself wrote. John and Peter were entrusted with the responsibility of sealing up the New Testament and giving it to us in the form that we have it—in the form that the Greek Church preserved it. Undoubtedly, the Greek Churches of Asia Minor (particularly Ephesus) were the repositories of the canon in the form that was put together. We will get into some of that at a later time.

One of the things that becomes obvious, as we read 2 Timothy, is the extent to which the New Testament Church was in a crisis condition. We read the story and are aware of how things worked out. But when you are in the process of living the story, you don't know what is going to work out, except through faith. When you are in the midst of it, it is hard to see it in perspective.

There are many things in our own lives that we can look back on and see in perspective. There are things in the history of God's work that we have lived through in our lifetime that we can

look back and see in perspective. Certainly, we can look at and see, in perspective, the events that transpired and are recorded in the Bible. Yet, in each of those cases in the process of going through it, that perspective is not so easily obtained.

Take, for example, the crisis the Church went through back in January, 1979. Most of you in the Church at the time remember the state of California's lawsuit against the Church—the receivership that was announced and all sorts of accusations and rumors flying every which way. There were those who panicked and decided, 'This thing is all over with. They are taking over; they are going to shut it down. It's over with.' There were some who immediately started trying to sort of protect themselves and ensure their future as they thought.

What we find when we go through 2 Timothy is a similar situation. You have to realize what's happening. By the time Paul wrote this, most of the original apostles were dead or in prison. Paul himself was now in prison. Peter probably knew that his days were numbered. Those who weren't in prison were already up in age, into their late 60s or early 70s. They were at a point in life, even if imprisonment didn't take place, that they knew the productive years they had left were very limited. Most of them were already dead.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the New Testament Church was a short time away. Within three years, Jerusalem would be totally destroyed. Within two years, the New Testament Church would be gone from Jerusalem because it left at Pentecost before the destruction. The Church fled Pentecost of '69, prior to the destruction in the summer of '70.

We have a crisis situation. You couple that with the fact that various ones who, in some cases, had actually left the body of the Church and were teaching their own doctrine. Others were clinging to fellowship in the body of the Church but were introducing other various ideas. There were things that the apostles had been combating. Things were in a crisis situation.

There was a real crisis atmosphere and Paul perceived, through God's inspiration, that things were going to get a lot worse. **He writes the book of 2 Timothy, encouraging and instructing Timothy on how he was to function and carry himself during this time of impending and approaching crisis.** He realized that things were going to get considerably worse before they would get any better, and many of the others were going to live through things that he would not be around for. He had sought to

combat certain ideas and keep the Church on track during his lifetime. Now, his departure was at hand.

There were final admonitions that he had for Timothy. We will find in 2 Timothy that heresy was rampant, especially the idea concerning grace into license. This was something that was already being twisted out of context and misapplied. Church authority was being ignored. Many ministers, as well as many members, were just simply "checking out." They were "dropping by the wayside."

Paul exhorts Timothy, individually, in the midst of these troublesome times. There were difficulties and things that were being faced. He gave him instruction and advice as to how he was to function as a minister in the midst of a worsening crisis in the Church. Paul also gave him specific instruction on what he needed him, personally, to do in terms of specific service that needed to be rendered, particularly involving the manuscripts that, undoubtedly, had to do with the final canonization. Timothy had been left behind in the area of Asia Minor. We saw that in 1 Timothy.

Paul admonishes him in terms of holding on, of keeping the deposit of truth and handing it to others. This sort of exhortation is there. Already people were twisting and distorting the things that Paul himself had said.

2 Timothy 1:1-3, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day..."

Verse 5, "when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."

It's interesting to note that Timothy grew up in a circumstance where one of his parents was in the Church and the other was not. Timothy's father was not at all favorable toward either the Jewish religion or Christianity. That is apparent by the fact that Timothy was not circumcised and could not participate in the life of the Jewish community until the time the family had already come into the Church and Paul was going to take him with him. Everyone knew that his mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek.

Understand what that did. That meant that Timothy had never been able to partake of the

Passover service, which was a center point of Jewish life. Timothy had never been able to partake of that because in Exodus, the instruction was given that only those who were circumcised could partake of the Passover (Exodus 12:43-49).

It's clear that Timothy's father wished Timothy to be imbued with a Greek and Roman pagan approach to life. He wanted him to have a pagan outlook, the outlook of the Greek and Roman world, as opposed to the outlook of his mother. We don't have any particular record of Timothy's father other than that clear implication. He is not mentioned, and we are not told whether he had died or had simply divorced Timothy's mother.

But at the time we pick up the story in Acts, Timothy is an older teenager of perhaps age 17 or so. His mother and grandmother had come into the Church. I think it should be an encouraging example for those in similar circumstances to realize that, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, Timothy's mother and grandmother had a tremendous impact and influence on his life. Paul mentions them specifically.

"When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." Their example had greatly influenced Timothy.

Then he reminds Timothy to stir up the gift of God.

Verse 6, "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." What gift is he referring to? Clearly it was the gift of the Holy Spirit—in context, that added measure of the Holy Spirit that came through ordination. But certainly, the principle would apply in any context of the Holy Spirit.

The analogy he draws is to stirring fire. Most of us don't think in those terms. We turn on the butane, turn up the thermostat on central heat or we turn up the knob on our electric heater. But the reference Paul is making is an analogy drawn from a wood fire. The fire and flame die down and you have embers and coals. With a wood fire, every so often you have to stir it up. That's what Paul is describing.

The gift of God's Holy Spirit hasn't gone out, but the tendency is for it to become lukewarm. When the flames die down and gradually dies away, it has to be stirred up. What happens when you stir it up? Air and the oxygen get to it. Maybe you add some more fuel and it blazes up.

That's what happens to the gift of God within us. It has to be stirred up. More of God's Spirit has to get in there. It has to be stirred up. Paul admonished Timothy not to become lukewarm and lethargic but to stir up the gift of God's Spirit.

Verse 7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Verse 9, he continues to discuss the state of things, "[speaking of God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began..." God didn't call us because of what we are. He called us because of what He is.

Verse 10, "but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..." Here's another proof that you don't have an immortal soul. Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to life through the gospel. Only God has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). Immortality is brought to light through the gospel. It is clearly preached that we can also have immortality as a gift from God brought to light through the gospel.

Verse 11, "to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles."

Verses 13-14, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who [which] dwells in us." It's an interesting play on words here when he talks about "that good thing which was committed to you." The term that is used for "commit" or "committed" is a term in the Greek language that had a technical meaning. It always implies the situation of one who has to take a long journey. He deposits his money and other valuables with a friend and trusts him to restore it on his return.

Back in those days, they didn't have banks and safety deposit boxes, credit cards, traveler's checks and all the things that we do. Many times they would deposit valuables with a trusted friend. Now, it better be a trusted friend because if you deposit very much with him, you can come back and he is long gone. This was a common thing that was done. If you went very far, it was a long journey because you walked or rode on a donkey or sailed in a boat. You didn't have to go very far for it to be a long journey. It

was not uncommon for it to last several weeks or even months.

Paul knew he was going to die. He used this term, this expression, referring to the truth of God having, in effect, been committed. 'The most valuable treasure I have, I am leaving on deposit with you, Timothy. I am committing it to you. It is your responsibility to [as he brings it out a little later] pass it on to other faithful men.'

That is the circumstance, the situation that was being dealt with. Timothy was going to have to contend and preserve the faith once delivered because there were already various ones who were trying to water down and distort. There were the beginnings of what was, in a couple of centuries, clearly recognizable as the Catholic Church. In fact, within a century, what was clearly recognizable as the Catholic Church was already on the stage. Paul had already mentioned it years earlier.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, he said, "For the mystery of lawlessness [KJV, "iniquity"] is already at work;" It was clearly at work and then gained quite a bit of ground by the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy.

Jude was writing at the same time Paul was writing 2 Timothy. In Jude's writing, he admonishes the brethren.

Jude 3, "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." The 'faith once delivered' was in danger of slipping away at the time. This was in the period of the New Testament.

2 Timothy 1:15, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes."

Verses 16-18, he beseeches God for mercy on the house of Onesiphorus who had shown Paul much kindness in times past.

We are going to see a little later that quite a number had forsaken him. They had left, headed out, saying, 'This thing is over with. It's about to fold up and I'm getting out while the getting is good.'

We will notice in chapter 4 that Paul mentions several ministers who had left and gone back where they came from. In times of crisis, there are those who panic and throw in the towel. There are those who say, 'I didn't realize there were going to be trials and troubles. I didn't realize that I wouldn't always be able to walk by sight.' There are others who walk by faith. In times of crisis, it is only with God's help that we can maintain a proper perspective.

We read the story and think, 'I'd sure hate to have my name mentioned in the Bible.' How would you like to be Phygellus or Hermogenes? The only time you get mentioned is when you "flaked out." The only thing anybody knows about you or remembers you for is the fact you turned away from Paul. That'd be kind of embarrassing. The only thing that any of us know about those two individuals is that they didn't do what they should have done. They didn't respond in a period of crisis the way they should have. It's an important thing to keep in mind.

How would we like to be summed up that way when periods of crisis come? And they will come. You can't read the things Christ said in Matthew 24 and think that we will never have any crisis in the Church. We can't think we will always have smooth sailing in the Church and that things will always be really simple and easy. If you think that, you simply have not read the New Testament. What will the summation say about us? Will our names be mentioned like theirs or will we be mentioned in the way that Timothy is or some of the others.

2 Timothy 2:1-2, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Paul had mentioned earlier, 'Hold on to that which has been committed to you. You have to hold on and diligently look out for and commit to the truth – the same truth I taught you (not changed, not watered down, not turn aside from the right hand or the left)—the same thing I taught you in the presence of many witnesses. Pass it on to faithful men.'

It needed to be faithfully transmitted, not changed, turned around and all sorts of things. When you read early Church history, you realize how quickly so many things were taken out of context, misapplied and completely turned upside down.

Verses 3-5, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

Verse 7, "Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things." Paul did not want to amplify his explanation of these points, for whatever reason, but he alludes to several things. He basically stresses

the conditions of true service. It involves wholehearted devotion to the job. It involves loyalty to the rules and hard work. You have to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. How do you do that? He warns him that if you go to war, you don't entangle yourself with the affairs of this life. The word "affairs" used here is the term for business (literally, negotiations, transactions) by which men earn their livelihood. It involved simply that the fulltime ministry was something that involved abstinence from secular trade.

You can't serve two masters (Luke 16:13). If Timothy was going to faithfully carry out his responsibility that Paul had given him in terms of the ministry, he couldn't be getting preoccupied with various secular trades. God made provision for the Levitical priesthood and later for the New Testament ministry and their livelihood.

Verse 5, "And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." Paul said, 'Don't try to take shortcuts.'

Verse 6, "The hard-working farmer [KJV, "husbandman"] must be first to partake of the crops." It's the one who works hard that would be first partaker of the fruits. You have to work hard.

Verses 10-13, "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." It doesn't matter whether we believe it or not; God's word endures and will prove sure.

Verse 14, "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers." There were those who were striving "about words to no profit." People wanted to wrangle about all sorts of things and get out on all sorts of "twiggy" points. Paul admonished Timothy about that. The Jews, particularly, and many of the Gnostics would go into great complicated things that they would read into certain words.

One of the things about it, in the Greek and Hebrew language, every word has a numerical value. When we were kids in school, most of us learned Roman numerals. We learned that certain letters had numerical value to the Romans—"V" is five, "X" is ten, "I" is one, "L" is fifty—this sort of thing. The number system that we use (the so-called Arabic numerals) didn't become

common in the western world until the time of the Middle Ages.

In the ancient Greek and Roman world, the letters of the alphabet doubled for numbers. There was numeric value to those letters. That meant you could go through any word and figure a numeric value to it. For example, take the word "life": "L" is 50, "I" is one, "F" and "E" don't have numeric value—that equals 51. Some of these Gnostic sects would go through and make a great deal of figuring out the numeric value of certain words and attaching significance. If a word added up to 21, that made three times seven, etc. They would go off on all sorts of farfetched tangents and really completely miss the point. They would get so "buggy" trying to figure some hidden significance.

Paul is telling Timothy, 'You need to put people in remembrance; you need to remind them to stick to the "trunk of the tree" and not go charging off and getting all bogged down in a bunch of silly stuff.'

Verse 15, "Be diligent [KJV, "study"] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Really stick to it and properly apply the Bible.

Verses 16-17, "But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort..." It's just going to eat away and that's not good.

Verse 18, there were those who had erred or strayed concerning the truth and had come up with some crazy idea that the resurrection was past. Where did they get that? I don't know, but people have come up with crazy ideas down through the years. The thing is that other people are crazy enough to believe them, so I guess that makes the people who believe them even crazier than the guy that came up with the ideas.

Verse 19, Paul gives the bottom line, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'" The bottom line is that you don't fool God. The foundation stands sure. The Lord knows those who are His. God knows who's who and what's what. Sometimes people have gotten all worried because they thought "so-and-so" was getting by with something. God knows those who are His, and those who names the name of Christ had better depart from iniquity—had better leave behind lawlessness. We can't live in sin. We

can't make sin our habitual practice. We have to depart from, turn away from disregard for the law of God. Turn away from lawlessness.

Verse 20, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor." In a great big house, you have fancy china and gold and silver vessels; you also have some old scrub pots, cracked bowls that you put the dog scraps in or whatever. He is using the analogy of the Church being a great house. Take note of the fact that there are vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. Everybody and everything is not always what they claim to be. This is what Paul is saying.

Verse 21, "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." We will be something that Christ will use, but we have to be purged from lawlessness. We have to be cleaned up.

Verses 22-24, "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient..." There is a way to deal with people. He admonishes Timothy in that regard—be gentle, be able to teach, be patient.

Verse 25, "in humility correcting those who are in opposition [KJV, "those that oppose themselves"], if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth..." The people who were becoming entangled in these things were, in reality, opposing themselves. They were hurting themselves. There were those who claimed to be part of the Church and were not living godly lives. They simply were not God's. God knows His own. We see that.

2 Timothy 3:1-2, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, ..." Dangerous times will come; they are times that involve a preoccupation with self.

It's interesting. One of the commentaries brings out the main thought that love of self will lead to neglect of the duty to others and God and eventually to active wrongdoing, too. The true center of life has changed. Self has taken the place of God. So, all sense of the duty to others, whether to man or God, disappears. That's a very apt description, a very apt statement. I think that is very characteristic of our society, of the latter 20th century western world. The true center of

life has changed. The self has taken the place of God; therefore, a sense of duty to other people and to God disappears. People become wrapped up and absorbed in what is convenient to them. We are, perhaps, in the most convenience-oriented society in the history of mankind. He describes this sort of thing.

Verses 2-3, continuing, "...lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving [KJV, "without natural affection"], ..." I can't help but believe that, in some ways, this is a clear reference to the abortion controversies that exist today and the emphasis on that because clearly the most natural affection that there is, is the love of a mother for her young. That exists even in the animal world. That is natural. That is nature. That is, certainly, an example of natural affection. Certainly, it can apply to other things as well, but I think it is certainly descriptive of that.

Verses 3-5, "...unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"

In this nation, we like to pride ourselves for being a godly nation. We like to think of ourselves (the United States) as a religious people. We have churches all over, and over 85 percent of the people will tell you that they believe in God. In fact, in a recent Gallup poll carried in *U.S. News & World Report*, the majority of the people even admit to believing in the devil. The majority of people claimed to believe in hell, but none of them thought they were going there. They must figure that is reserved for somebody else.

They have "a form of godliness," but the real key is that they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. If people had a choice between going to some sporting activity or church on a particular weekend, which would they go to? They are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." They don't want God ruling in their lives. They claim to believe in God.

James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" If all you do is believe in God, you're not even "one step up" on the devil. At that point, you are where Satan is. If all that someone has going for him is that he believes in God, he is not even "one up" on the devil. It is a form of godliness, but it denies the power and authority

of it. This is the sort of thing that entangles people and gets them messed up.

2 Timothy 3:6 describes various ones.

2 Timothy 3:7, “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Verses 8-9 liken them to Pharaoh’s court magicians who withstood Moses. It says their folly is ultimately going to be manifest.

Verses 10-11, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endure. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.” He said, ‘You know the things I went through and God delivered me.’

Verses 12-14, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them...”

‘Remember what you learned and where you learned it.’ This was Paul’s admonishment to Timothy and certainly would be God’s admonishment to us. What did you learn and where did you learn it? Very important! You hold on, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of. You have proven it. You know it. Don’t be fickle in your faith and your understanding. Hold on to the “trunk of the tree” and remember where you learned that precious knowledge.

Verses 15-17, “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

From childhood, Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures. What Scriptures had he known? Was he conversant with the New Testament when he was a child? Did he grow up memorizing John 3:16? No, it wasn’t written until 30 years after 2 Timothy was written. He hadn’t even read it at the time Paul was writing this, much less having known it as a child. The only Scripture that existed in Timothy’s childhood was the Old Testament. This doesn’t in any way take authority from the New Testament, but the point that I am making is that various ones want to disparage the authority of the Old Testament.

They say, ‘That’s back in the Old Testament; that doesn’t really count.’ Paul thought it did. Paul is the one that they all thought did away with the Old Testament.

There is an interesting article in the last issue of the *U.S. News & World Report*. There’s a little section on the Apostle Paul. One of the things they claim is that Paul did away with all the requirements of the law. They say he changed the Church. They say Christ started it out, but it never would have grown very much if Paul hadn’t come along and did away with the law. Once he did that, things started growing, and it was one of the great moments in history. Well, Paul didn’t know that. He told Timothy, “the Holy Scriptures which you have known from childhood.” In other words, the Old Testament, the law, “is able to make you wise for salvation.” That would shock a lot of people. A lot of Protestants don’t think you can learn anything about salvation from the Old Testament.

In Acts 8:26-38, what did Philip preach out of to the Ethiopian eunuch? –The book of Isaiah, the Old Testament. He was able to teach him enough about salvation out of the book of Isaiah that he baptized him. The Holy Scriptures certainly includes the New Testament, but in context here, it is specifically referring to the Old Testament that “is able to make you wise for salvation.” They are able to reveal God’s plan.

“All Scripture...” includes the Scripture Timothy had known from childhood and clearly focuses on the Old Testament and certainly includes the New Testament as well. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” It is God-breathed. “Inspiration” clearly means “God-breathed.” And it is profitable for doctrine. It says so right here.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” God’s word is God-breathed. It is inspired by God and for our benefit.

2 Timothy 4:1, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom...” When is the time of judgment? It is at the return of Christ. He didn’t say we would go off to heaven when we die. The time of judgment will be when Jesus Christ returns.

Verses 2-3, he charged Timothy, “Preach the word [stick to the Book]! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching [doctrine]. For the time will come when they will not

endure sound doctrine, ..." Paul could already see the "handwriting on the wall." He told Timothy, 'Look, don't be surprised. The time is going to come when you are going to find people who do not want to endure sound doctrine.'

Verse 3, continuing, "...but according to their own desires [lust], because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers..." They are going to have itching ears. They are going to want somebody who is going to "tickle their fancy" and say what they want to hear.

Verses 4-7, "and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." He said, 'It is over with for me.'

Verse 8, "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." When did Paul think he was going to receive his reward? Was he expecting to die and go to heaven? No. He said, 'I have fought a good fight. I know there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord is going to give me on that Day.' Which day? Well, 'not to me only, but to all of them that love His appearing.' -To those whose hope is anchored on the return of Jesus Christ and on the establishment of the Kingdom of God. He told Timothy, 'Look, it's over with for me. I have finished mine; you have to hang in there and finish yours.'

That is an echo of what God's servants have said down through the centuries. That's the admonition as one generation passes and the other carries on. That's what Paul admonished Timothy. That certainly was the equivalent of the admonition that Mr. Herbert Armstrong gave to us at the end of his life. 'I have finished my fight. I've endured. Now it's for the rest of you to continue.' That's always been the continuing story of God's people. As God's servants of one generation pass from the scene, then it is the responsibility of others to carry on. Timothy had to carry on.

Verses 9-11, he told Timothy, "Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get

Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."

Various ones had left. Even Titus is mentioned here as having left. Evidently, they thought it looked like the "ship was sinking." 'We had better get out of here quickly. Maybe they will throw me in jail next.' What's going to be our response when trials and persecutions come? How are we going to respond? He said, 'Luke is the only one here with me.'

He said (KJV), "Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." A commentary brings out that this literally could be for a personal service. He needed Mark to do something or to perform a service. There is not a definite article in the Greek, "he is profitable to me for the ministry" or, literally, "for service."

Verses 12-13, "And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments." What is he referring to? Two different words are used here. The commentary brings out that the "books" would refer to papyrus letters, possibly copies of his correspondence. What is called the "parchment" is a term that probably refers to the scrolls of the Scripture. The term that is used for "parchment" is a term in the Greek language referring to a writing material made from the skins of animals. Vellum comes from the membrane (the skin) of the animals.

Membranous was a parchment type of thing. It was much more expensive writing material and was only used for things of permanent value, things that would endure for centuries. It was harder to work with. It was harder to make a good copy on it, but it had an enduring quality. Vellum was expensive and only used for things of great permanent value. It was what the Scriptures were kept on. Papyrus was used for normal letters, correspondence and everyday business.

Paul wants two sets of things brought. What it amounts to is that Mark was Peter's assistant. We find in 1 Peter 5:13 that Mark was normally with Peter. Timothy was told to bring Mark. Paul needed him to do something. He gave him instructions to go to Troas. He was sending someone else to Ephesus. He told Timothy to bring the parchments and the scrolls. He needed Mark to do something for a service. This is, undoubtedly, a reference to the fact that Paul, at the end of his life, was going to put his manuscripts in final form. He was going to send the final and official copy of his manuscripts by Mark to Peter. Peter had, undoubtedly,

been in correspondence with Paul. They had communicated the fact that as their departure was at hand (the passing from the scene of the original apostles), there was need to provide the Church with an official canon of Scripture.

There were many false gospels, false letters and things that were written. There were things that were taken out of context. Already, these sorts of things were beginning to surface and would get more so. As the first generation was passing, it became apparent that an official canon needed to be provided for the Church—an official canon as to what represented authoritative teaching and what did not.

Peter and Paul had, undoubtedly, communicated on the subject. Peter had communicated with Paul the need to get copies from him, an official copy that would be included in this. This was Paul's part in sending it via Mark to Peter to put in final form.

That's why in 2 Peter 1:12-15 (which was written perhaps within the year after Paul had written 2 Timothy), Peter says that he was ensuring that after his death, the Church would be able to call to remembrance the things that he had said and the truth of God.

He makes reference in 2 Peter 1:19 to preserving for the Church a complete and accurate record, a "sure word of prophecy" (KJV). He said that he and John were the ones who had that sure word of prophecy. Peter was responsible for that first canonization. About 30 years later, John added the final finishing touches, primarily by adding his own five books.

Paul concludes and admonished Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:21, "Do your utmost to come before winter." He was admonishing him to hurry up and get there. There were things that needed to be done. According to tradition, Paul was executed the following spring; he was executed in the spring of 68 A.D. Peter was perhaps executed in the summer or fall of 68 A.D. Peter and Paul finished the job that God had given them to do.

Next Bible study we will go into information on the battles against heresies in the New Testament period. It will be sort of a wrap-up and a tying together of several of the things that surfaced in our study of Paul's epistles—things that we did not have time to go into in great depth. We will go back and tie it together and bring in several of these things.

It is important as we go through and study to realize that God's Word is a living Book. The stories, the examples and the illustrations are there for our benefit. As we read it, we need to

put ourselves in the place of the individuals who were living it and to realize that as we also encounter trials and tests, we will come up against adversities. We will come up and find ourselves in the midst of things. How are we going to make it? The same way they did—by walking with God, by walking in faith, by committing our lives into the hands of Him who judges righteously, by turning it over to God, by focusing in on the truth of God and on what God has given us to do, by focusing on what God has revealed to us, by holding on, persevering, enduring to the end, being faithful, putting one foot in front of another and following where God leads in the paths of righteousness. As we focus in and get a perspective, as we look and see the things that other men and women of God contended with, we realize our part in learning from their examples and dealing in a faithful way the tests and trials that will come upon us.

Bible Study # 69
May 14, 1991
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Battle Against First-Century Heresies

This evening we **are going to be wrapping up some of the things from Paul's letters.** What we are covering is not directly a letter that Paul wrote. It is sort of a wrap-up of the background with which he dealt and many things that were issues that arose. **We are going to deal with some of the battles against first-century heresies that the Apostle Paul had to carry out and that he certainly was a leading part in, and then going on from there.**

I wanted to start out by reading an excerpt from a book entitled *The Story of the Christian Church*. It is a book that gives a little bit of background and history. It makes a very interesting statement. Chapter 5 is entitled "The Age of Shadows, From the Martyrdom of St. Paul, 68 A.D., to the Death of St. John, 100 A.D."

He makes the statement in this book: "We name the last generation of the first century from 68 to 100 A.D. "The Age of Shadows," partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church, but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is the one about which we know the least. We no longer have the clear light of the Book of Acts to guide us and no author of that age has filled in the blank in the history. We would like to read of the later work by such helpers of St. Paul as Timothy, Apollos and Titus, but all these and St. Paul's other friends drop out of the record at his death. For 50 years after St. Paul's life, a curtain hangs over the church through which we strive vainly to look, and when at last it rises about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church, in many aspects, very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul."

Now, that is quite an amazing and remarkable admission. When the curtain rises with the writings of the earliest church fathers in 120 A.D., the author says, 'We find a church, in many aspects, very different from the church in the days of Peter and Paul.' The reason that the curtain rises on a church that is far different is because when the curtain rises, what is seen on stage is a different church. It not only appears to be different and it not only looks different—**it is a different church.** It is sort of an old conjurer trick. You see one thing and the curtain rings down; when the curtain rises, you see something

else. You are given the impression that one was changed into the other, when in reality, that was not the case.

The Church of God did not become a different church. A different church—this other group that had its beginnings at the time when Peter, Paul and other apostles passed from the scene—took over and became the visible professing "Christian" church.

Let's get a little background on it. We will start out in Thessalonians because the earliest books Paul wrote were 1 and 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians was written in the fall of 50 A.D.

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8, "For the mystery of lawlessness [KJV, "iniquity"] is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."

The mystery of iniquity, Paul said, was already at work. Things would be held back in such a way that things would not fully emerge. The final wicked one (that man of sin), the final false prophet, is not going to come up out of the midst; he is not going to be revealed until the appropriate time. But Paul was explaining to the Thessalonians in 50 A.D. that the mystery of iniquity was already at work. The mystery of iniquity has to do with the mystery religion, the Babylonian Mystery Religion that works lawlessness. It works iniquity, and this was already at work.

In fact, let's go back a little further to the book of Acts. In Acts 8, we pick up the story of a man that we are introduced to later on in secular history. But we are first introduced to him in the book of Acts.

Acts 8:5, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them."

Verses 8-11, "And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time."

Here, we are told that there was in Samaria a certain individual who was a great religious leader. According to verse 10, he was one who was acknowledged by the Samaritans as being the great power of God. He was a great religious leader of the Samaritans. He was one to whom they all gave heed. Everyone was impressed with

him; yet, the source of his power and influence was not of God. It was of Satan. He was a sorcerer. He is known in history as Simon Magus.

“Magus” is the Greek word for “sorcerer.” It is the word from which our word “magician” derives. He is called Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer. Simon the Magician was the great religious leader of the Samaritans. We are told that when Philip came to Samaria and preached, Simon heard him and was deeply impressed. He was impressed by the message that Philip brought and by the miracles that he saw. Simon knew this was something more impressive than any of the tricks he had worked.

Verses 14-17, then the apostles came down. Peter and John laid hands on the brethren and they received the Holy Spirit.

Verses 18-23, “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion [KJV, “lot”] in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’”

Peter had some very stern words for this individual. Peter could perceive his heart and his attitude.

What did Simon seek to purchase here? Simon sought to purchase an apostleship. That’s what Simon is asking for. He is seeking to purchase the office of apostle.

Paul said, “You have neither part nor portion in this matter.” What does that mean? That expression is used one other time in Scripture.

Acts 1:15-20 is the story of how Judas had committed suicide and there were only 11 out of the 12 apostles left. There was a need to round out the number to 12 because 12 was the foundational number, the number of organized beginnings. They were going to choose a 12th member. This is prior to the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 21-22, it needed to be someone from among the group that had followed and heard Jesus from the beginning of His ministry.

Verses 23-24, they narrowed it down to Justus and Matthias and prayed and asked God’s guidance.

Acts 1:25-26, “to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

They cast (KJV, “gave forth”) their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias that he might take part of the ministry and apostleship. The term “part” has to do with “a part of the ministry,” and “lot” has to do with “an apostleship chosen by lot.”

When Simon was offering money, Peter understood what he wanted. He wanted the office that Peter held. Peter said, ‘You have neither part nor lot in this matter. You don’t have any part in our ministry and apostleship. You haven’t been chosen by lot to share a part in our ministry or apostleship because your heart is not right in the sight of God. You had better repent because I know what you are thinking in your heart. You had better repent of the thought of your heart that you may be forgiven. I see in you, Simon, I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness. You are poisoned with bitterness and you are in the bond of iniquity.’

Simon was the slave of lawlessness. Simon was the great religious leader of the Samaritans. He was the one ‘to whom all of the Samaritans paid heed, from the greatest to the least.’ He was someone who was acknowledged and recognized by the Samaritans. He was looked to as though he were some great one. They said he was the power of God.

In this particular book that I have here, *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius, a Catholic historian in the fourth century A.D. at the time of Emperor Constantine, gave a history of the time up until Constantine. It has a chapter in the book devoted to Simon Magus. He talks about Simon on page 63:

“Simon, however, we have understood to have taken the lead in all heresy; from whom also, down to the present time, those that followed his heresy, still affected the modest philosophy of the Christians. From this, however, they appeared again to depart and again to embrace the superstitions of idols, falling down before the pictures and statues of this selfsame Simon....”

At this time, the Catholic Church hadn’t yet fully adopted some of those things.

Did you read the article on the Pope this morning? He’s been to Portugal and he met with the last of the three little Portuguese children who saw the vision of Fatima back in 1917. There’s one of them left—an elderly lady who is a nun there near Fatima in Portugal. The Pope met with her privately. There is a statue of Mary

there at Fatima and this statue is crowned. The bullet that the Pope was struck with at the assassination attempt years ago has been placed in the crown of this statue at Fatima as an offering of devotion, giving thanks to this idol for having delivered him and spared his life. That's the whole sense of it. They had a big deal. The bullet is up there in the crown because she is being given the credit for having saved his life. He came to consult this elderly nun who had seen this apparition in 1917. That's been almost 75 years ago. These sorts of things are interesting.

Eusebius mentions how Simon was the one who brought in and encouraged his followers (calling themselves "Christians") to embrace the superstitions of idols, falling down before pictures and statues.

A lot of you have come out of a background where you are not unfamiliar with people falling down before pictures and statues. We see a lot of that. You can drive down the road and people have these little shrines in their yards. They have a little covering for the idols to sit under so they won't get wet.

He also says of Simon Magus on page 62, "The faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, having now been diffused abroad among all men, the enemy of salvation devising some scheme of seizing upon the imperial city for himself, brought thither Simon, whom we mentioned before. Coming to the aid of his insidious artifices, he attached many of the inhabitants of Rome to himself in order to deceive them. This is attested by Justin who was one of our distinguished writers, not long after the times of the apostles..." He continues talking about Simon.

There is an article on Simon the Sorcerer in the old 11th edition of *The Encyclopedia Briticana*. It labels that he was the father of the Gnostics—Gnosticism sprung out from him.

Let's understand a little bit about the Samaritans themselves, of whom Simon was the religious leader even prior to his adoption of Christianity. In 2 Kings 17, we read of what we term the "Samaritans." Originally, Samaria was the capital city of Northern Israel. It was where the northern ten tribes were. Northern Israel sinned against God, and God let the Assyrians come in and take them into captivity (721 B.C.).

2 Kings 17:6, "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."

If you look at a map, it's up in the area between the Black and the Caspian Sea. It's up in the area above Turkey and Iraq and the southern part of the Soviet Union that is between the Black and Caspian Sea. They were a little further south than that. They were down in the area where Iraq, Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union come together—all this area in here. They settled them in that northern area, from whence they subsequently migrated across the Black Sea, then up the Danube and the Rhine and into the heartland of Europe at the appropriate time. This is where he settled Israel.

Verses 7-15, the children of Israel sinned. It goes through and recounts all the things that they did.

Verse 16, "So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal."

Verses 23-24, "until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day. Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities."

In the process of this, there was a lag of time. What happens when you depopulate an area? Very quickly it becomes overgrown; wild animals begin to reproduce, multiply and invade areas that formerly were villages and fields. You have an area laying for a matter of a few years time, pretty well depopulated because they didn't just load them up on train cars, take them all out and show up next week with a new batch. We are looking at a period of several years of depopulation—of moving them out. There was some lag time, and then colonists began to move in.

Verses 25-26, the lion population had increased and there were wild animals that came in. The people were superstitious and they decided the problem was that they did not know the manner of the god of the land. They needed instruction.

Verse 27, "Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, 'Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.'" Now, what kind of job is he going to do? He is one who helped to get them into trouble to begin with. The whole

reason they went into captivity to begin with was because they weren't serving the true God. They had been worshiping the golden calves.

They brought in all these Babylonians and then a renegade priest to teach them how to serve the god of the land.

Verse 28, we are told, "Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord." You know he was going to do a "good" job of it.

Verse 29, notice, "However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt."

Verses 32-34, "So they feared the Lord, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel..." He says they feared the Eternal and served their own gods.

Verse 41, "So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day." What did they do? They continued the same old Babylonian Mystery Religion, but they changed it by introducing the name of God into it. Now they were calling it by the name of the God of Israel. Now they were utilizing the name of YHWH—the name of the God of Israel, the Eternal God, but they kept the same old pagan customs. They just sort of "baptized" them. It's kind of like "there's nothing new under the sun." The same old idolatry is being practiced in a lot of places. You find that the only thing that was changed was the name—the Virgin of Fatima (Our Lady of Fatima) in Portugal and down in Mexico, they have the Virgin of Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe). If you go back to the ancient Indians—the Aztec—the area of Guadalupe was a great religious center, and they had a goddess they worshiped there. When the Spaniards came in, the Indians had this big religious shrine in Guadalupe and they were worshiping the goddess. The Spaniards just let them keep doing the same thing; they just

changed the name. Now, they were not paying homage to the goddess of Guadalupe but to the Virgin of Guadalupe. They just kept the same thing, identified it with Mary, and went right on along. They let them keep doing the same old pagan superstition; they just called it by God's name.

In Rome, they continued to observe Saturnalia, the pagan festival that was observed there at the winter solstice. But instead of calling it Saturnalia, they thought "Christmas" had a little better sound to it—the mass of Christ. They said, 'We will do the same things; we will have it at the same time. We will have many of the same customs and things associated with it. We will just change the name. Also, we won't call it Lupercalia anymore; we will call it St. Valentine's day.' What does a saint have to do with little cupids shooting arrows at people?—And all this sort of things.

To set the stage, you have the Samaritans (who were Babylonians) who continued to practice their pagan religion, but now they introduced the name of God—the true God—the God of Israel. They used the right name for the wrong things.

Now we move about 700 years down in history and we come to the Samaritans in Acts 8. We find their religious leader, a man who was acknowledged by all of them as the great power of God, who used the name of God and paraded as God's representative—a man by the name of Simon the Sorcerer. He believed when Philip preached. He was really impressed by what Philip had to say and he wanted to buy an office of apostle. Peter recognized what was going on, rebuked him for it, and said he was in the bond of iniquity. He was a slave to lawlessness.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, "For the mystery of lawlessness [KJV, "iniquity"] is already at work; ..." We find that the mystery of iniquity was already at work. The mystery religion, the Babylonian Mystery Religion that promoted lawlessness was already at work. This was at the time Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians. We are looking at perhaps 17 years after Simon's encounter in Acts 8.

Let's notice a little bit of the other things Paul has to say.

Galatians 1:6-7, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." Here, Paul is writing two or three years after he wrote 2 Thessalonians and he is talking about churches having another gospel being preached, which he

says is not another gospel (in the sense of an alternative that is just as good), but it is a perversion of the true gospel.

There are other places. Let's go back to 2 Corinthians 11.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness," Here, we are told there are false apostles, deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

That's what Simon was doing. Simon was a false apostle. He transformed himself into an apostle of Christ. He didn't go around saying, 'I am a false apostle and I am here to preach a false gospel to you. You guys loosen up because I want to deceive you.' He appeared as an angel of light; Satan appears as an angel of light. Paul was discussing a problem now extant in the mid-50s A.D., when there were false apostles who were preaching a false gospel.

Verse 4, "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it." The false gospel is going to be tied in with the mystery of iniquity. It's going to be tied in with the mystery religion, with iniquity and lawlessness. We see the stage that Paul was dealing with.

It had reached that point by the time Peter was dealing with the subject in the late 60s A.D.

2 Peter 2:1, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." Peter was talking about the fact that there were false apostles and false prophets who were going to come in among God's people. He describes these individuals.

Verse 15, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."

Notice back in the book of Jude, which was written approximately the same time that Peter was writing 2 Peter.

Jude 3-4, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you

to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness [lawlessness] and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jude admonished Christians of his day to 'earnestly contend for the faith once delivered.'

By the late 60s A.D., we are seeing an escalation. It started out that Paul said 'the mystery of iniquity was already at work.' A couple of years later, he said, 'There is a false gospel, and I am amazed that you are being turned aside to another gospel so quickly.' A couple of years later, he tells the Corinthians there are false apostles out there claiming to be the apostles of Christ when they are not. He said that shouldn't shock them because Satan claims to be what he is not. By the time we pick it up a dozen years later, Peter is talking about false prophets. Jude told the Church to 'earnestly contend for the faith once delivered. Certain men had crept in unnoticed who were seeking to turn the grace of God into lawlessness.'

The whole issue ultimately involved the law of God. You can have matters of peripheral questions on various things that are not fully clarified, but when you start talking about the law of God, then you are talking about something fundamental. You are not talking about a minor technical point somewhere that someone is attempting to understand. You are talking about the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath and the Holy Days. You are talking about the fundamental law of God. They were attempting to turn the grace of God into lawlessness, to equate grace with doing away with the law and to claim that the law is not in force and effect any longer.

John had to deal with the issue. By the time he was writing 30 years later, he was discussing the matter of what had to be dealt with throughout 1, 2 and 3 John.

1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Many false prophets had gone forth.

1 John 5:2-3, John added a little later, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." We find that the issue involved the law of God.

2 John 7, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” I will make a little comment about the issue they were disputing.

Verses 10-11, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Verse 12, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.” He had other things to say, but he didn’t want to put it in writing.

3 John 9-10, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”

Now, by the end of John’s life, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the visible church that was emerging was actually being controlled by false prophets—individuals who didn’t want to accept the authority of John and the original apostles.

You know how they did that? How can you get by doing something like that? How do you excuse it? There are a couple of techniques they used. One technique was an ingenious doctrine they came up with known in history as the “two-church theory.” The “two-church theory” was the idea that there are two sets of rules—one for Jews and one for Gentiles. The theory was that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter and John and the others were the apostles to the Jews. And, yes, the Jews continued to keep the law and continued to observe the Sabbath. That was alright for them to do at that time, but those things never pertained to anybody except the Jews. The Gentiles said, ‘We are Gentiles and not under the law and Paul said they didn’t have to obey any of those things.’

This was the line of reasoning that began to be used. They said, ‘The law doesn’t apply to us. We are Gentiles; they are Jews. Sure the Jerusalem Church keeps the Sabbath. That’s fine. Let them do it. But they are Jews and we are not. We don’t need to do that. So, if John writes something, we don’t have to receive it. John is not the apostle to the Gentiles. Sure, he was one of the twelve, but what he says really doesn’t apply to us because we are Gentiles. He’s kind of old and everything.’

The theory gained great vogue among the followers of Simon in the latter first century and second century. Then, once they got control, they did away with the “two-church theory” and said everybody had to conform to what they were doing. They said, ‘I don’t care, even if you are a Jew, you have to quit keeping the law.’

I want to read to you some interesting quotes from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon who was a famous historian of the Roman Empire. He has some interesting things to say about the early Church. He deals with some of that. I will read a little bit of Gibbons. Notice the progression.

Chapter 13, “The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition which was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labor and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection.”

Now, that sounds like a summary from some of our literature. We have had articles that said something similar. He was writing back in the 1700s. He was writing a history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. [Another particular book was called *The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*.] Gibbon is writing about the early Church. He says this is what the early Church taught. It is a matter of history.

The idea of the doctrine of the Millennium, or six thousand years, is not something Mr. Herbert Armstrong invented. That was something the early Church was teaching. That was a matter of secular history. Here was a secular historian who was not a part of the true Church. He was a part of the Church of England, writing over 200 years ago. He was writing that this is what they taught. Notice what he says.

“The assurance of such a Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostles, down to Lactantius, who was preceptor to the son of Constantine. Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers; and

it seems so well adapted to the desires and apprehensions of mankind, that it must have contributed in a very considerable degree to the progress of the Christian faith. But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism."

There was a progression of changing it and getting away from it. It changed from acceptance to toleration, to branding it as anathema and ready to persecute them.

Gibbon has a number of interesting things. He says, "...when we discover that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is omitted in the law of Moses..." So, he makes this statement, "From these specious and noble principles, the philosophers who trod in the footsteps of Plato deduced a very unjustifiable conclusion, since they asserted not only the future immortality, but the past eternity of the human soul...."

He talks about the Gnostics. We will discuss the Gnostics a little bit. The term "Gnostic" is the Greek word for "knowledge" or "we know." The concept of the Gnostics really stemmed from Simon Magus. The Gnostics had a very great impact in the first century. In fact, a lot of the issues we read of in the New Testament in terms of Paul and John's epistles have to do with refuting the Gnostics.

Now, Gibbon has some comments to make about the Gnostics: "The Gnostics blended with the faith of Christ many sublime but obscure tenets, which they derived from oriental philosophy, and even from the religion of Zoroaster, concerning the eternity of matter, the existence of two principles, and the mysterious hierarchy of the invisible world."

We find that the Gnostics sort of blended in, as he says, "the faith of Christ with many sublime but obscure tenets." In effect, the Gnostics utilized a technique of interpretation called "allegory." Now allegory is important to understand because this was the way that the truth of God or the law of God was explained away. The word "allegory" comes from a word in the Greek language which means "to speak in riddles." The concept of allegory was that something doesn't really mean what it says—it is an allegory, simply a riddle to teach a spiritual truth. The reason allegories came in and came to be used so prevalently was because the religion

of the ancient Greeks was contained in the mythology written by Homer.

If you have ever read any of the old Greek mythology, you realize that it is sort of like one big soap opera in the sky. It's some pretty raunchy stuff. As the Greeks progressed and various philosophers rose, they were a little bit embarrassed that their religious works were nothing more than just tales of rape, pillage, adultery and fornication, and this goddess and that god, and all of these crazy things going back and forth. It was a little embarrassing that this was all they had by way of religious works. So, the philosophers figured out that when Homer wrote these things, he didn't really mean that this happened and that happened; it was an allegory. It was simply to teach us about spiritual truths. It was to teach about truth, fear, anger, evil desire and knowledge. They came up with the idea that these stories were allegories. They were to teach us certain things about spiritual truths, and this became the popular way of the Greek philosophers explaining their own books. They sort of explain away everything that was embarrassing as an allegory. This spread and became a very popular method of interpretation.

It had its effect even on certain Jews. Philo, who was a Jew in Alexandria, Egypt, became a famous author. He really went in for allegories and applied a lot of it to the Old Testament. This was tailor-made for Simon and the Samaritans. The Samaritans paid lip service to accepting the first five books of the Bible and the Law of Moses, but they didn't really keep the Law. This was tailor-made.

The Gnostics adopted allegory. This is why it became the mystery religion. They said they had the key and you couldn't understand without their key. 'When you read it, all you're reading is a story about Abraham; you don't realize that it's not what it is talking about. It is teaching various "spiritual" things.' The Gnostics really went in for this sort of thing. They blended these things together.

(This may not be word-for-word from the book:)
"One example: The Gnostics had objections against the authority of Moses and the prophets. The objections were eagerly embraced and urged by the vain science of the Gnostics. As those heretics were, for the most part, adverse to the pleasures of senses, they morosely arraigned the polygamy of the patriarchs, the gallantries of David, these things, the conquest of the land of Canaan and the extermination of the unsuspecting natives. They were loss as to how to do this, so what they did was the Mosaic

account of the creation. The fall of man was treated with profane derision by the Gnostics. They would not listen with patience to the repose of the deity after six days of labor, to the rib of Adam, the Garden of Eden and the tree of life and knowledge. They treated these things as an allegory. And they said that the literal sense is repugnant to every principle of faith as well as reason, and they deem themselves secure and vulnerable behind the ample veil of allegory, which they carefully spread over every tender part of the Mosaic dispensation.”

What it amounts to is that if you treat the law as an allegory, then when it says, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,” that doesn’t really mean you can’t work on the Sabbath. That’s just sort of allegory. They began to undermine the authority of Scripture by simply treating things as allegorical. You combine this with the so-called “two-church theory” and they had the basis of undermining the authority of the Bible.

The term “Gnostic” is a general term that is applied to heresy. It’s used primarily to designate the dualism between God and matter. Gnosticism tore away at the authority of the Scriptures by saying that the real meaning was allegorical. They taught that their initiates were no longer subject to the moral commandments. This was simply a continuation of the old mystery religion.

The primary goal of the Gnostic movement was to introduce a no-law doctrine and to attempt to wrest their own meaning from the Scripture, primarily from Paul’s writings. This laid the groundwork for much of what later became the Catholic Church. They laid groundwork. They would not literally accept any of the statements of scripture. They would not accept the fact that Jesus Christ literally was God and that He was born as a human being to live as a human being. They denied many of these things.

There arose a number of heresies. It wasn’t just simply one heresy; there were a lot of heresies. There were all kinds of false doctrines and false ideas going on. What ultimately became the Catholic Church did not accept and absorb every one of them. It is simply an outgrowth of one set of heresies that was influenced in certain areas by other heresies. Certain elements of truth were clung to and certain elements of heresy were accepted. As the years went by, there were more changes and modifications. There were more acceptances of all sorts of paganism that came to be a part of it. Even many of the early Catholic fathers would be amazed and flabbergasted at

some of the things that are done today because they hadn’t gone that far.

Take Christmas for example. Even the church at Rome didn’t popularly accept that until up into the fourth century. It was up into the fourth century before that even began to get acceptance in the church at Rome. Even some of the heretics of the second and third century would have been surprised at that one.

The widespread use of idols was something that only gradually gained prominence. It didn’t really begin to come in until the second century. In the third century it became more and more utilized.

The Gnostics took a blend of oriental mysticism. In other words, the Babylonian Mystery Religion took a blend of Oriental mysticism, a blend of Judaism and the Old Testament, which they treated in an allegorical fashion. They blended those things together with the doctrine of Christ and came up with a hodge-podge. There were a variety of different things. But there was one thing that set the stage for a lot of problems. Just as the Jews had been dispersed to cities throughout the known world, so also, after the time of Alexander the Great, the Samaritans had been dispersed. There were large settlements of Samaritans in Rome and in Alexandria, Egypt.

Simon the sorcerer was the great religious leader of the Samaritans ‘to whom they all gave heed from the greatest to the least.’ He was acknowledged as the power of God (Acts 8:9-10). When Simon and his followers (claiming to be “Christians”) came into these areas, they quickly gained influence, particularly in Rome and Alexandria where there was a sizable Samaritan population. Simon was acknowledged as the religious leader to the Samaritans.

These concepts of Gnosticism influenced many different ones, particularly certain Jews and certain ones even as a part of the Church. There were those who had accepted more truth and some who had accepted less truth. But there was a fatal flaw because there wasn’t an acceptance or a spirit of yielding to the authority of God’s Word in the literal sense. There was an absence of commitment to the integrity of the law of God. The real issue ultimately got back to the authority of the law of God.

There were various ones and various other things that came in to add to all of this “stir and mix.” There were Greek philosophies and the stoics who had their ideas. They had a great deal of public influence in the first century. They taught that man alone in his present state of existence

could achieve perfection. It was a concept of penance. The stoics really went in for that. They taught that there were things you could do. By some system of rigorous penance, you could bring yourself to perfection. When you take in that this is a general and popular concept of much of the Greek world and you add in the increasing influence of the Gnostics, you have a real mix. That sets the stage to completely misunderstand the role of the law of God in the plan of salvation because if you can save yourself, if you can do enough good things to outweigh the bad things, then why did Christ have to die? It strikes at the very root and core of Christianity. If you can atone for your own sins, why did Christ have to die? Why did He go through that? Paul admonished and warned Timothy of these concepts of falsely called knowledge.

1 Timothy 6:20-21, "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith." There were all these ideas floating around that were becoming more and more prevalent. It ultimately gave rise to the visible professing "Christian" church. Yet there was also a different group.

In his history, Gibbons talks about some interesting things concerning the early Church: "The Jewish converts, who acknowledged Jesus in the character of the Messiah foretold by their ancient oracles, respected Him as a prophetic teacher of virtue and religion; but they obstinately adhered to the ceremonies of their ancestors.... They affirmed, that, if the Being who is the same through all eternity had designed to abolish those sacred rites which had served to distinguish His chosen people, the repeal of them would have been no less clear and solemn than their first promulgation...that the Messiah Himself, and His disciples who conversed with Him on earth, instead of authorizing by their example the most minute observances of the Mosaic law, would have published to the world the abolition of those useless and obsolete ceremonies, without suffering Christianity to remain during so many years obscurely confounded among the sects of the Jewish church. Arguments like these appear to have been used in the defense of the expiring cause of the Mosaic law.... The history of the church of Jerusalem affords a lively proof of the necessity of those precautions, and of the deep impression which the Jewish religion had made

on the minds of its sectaries. The first 15 bishops of Jerusalem were afterwards called the Nazarenes, who had laid the foundation which they presided united the Law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ...."

Now here's an admission of secular history. The first 15 bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews, and they united the Law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ. Here is a clear admission by a secular historian that the early New Testament Church, the Church that Jesus founded, the Church at Jerusalem, kept the Law.

"But when numerous and opulent societies were established in the great cities of the empire, in Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, the reverence which Jerusalem had inspired to all the Christian colonies insensibly diminished. The Jewish converts, or, as they were afterwards called, the Nazarenes, who had laid the foundations of the church, soon found themselves overwhelmed by the increasing multitudes that from all the various religions of polytheism enlisted under the banner of Christ: and the Gentiles, who, with the approbation of their peculiar apostle, had rejected the intolerable weight of Mosaic ceremonies, at length refused to their more scrupulous brethren the same toleration which at first they had humbly solicited for their own practice. The ruin of the temple, of the city, and of the public religion of the Jews, was severely felt by the Nazarenes; The Nazarenes retired from the ruins of Jerusalem to the little town of Pella beyond the Jordan, where that ancient church languished above sixty years in solitude and obscurity...."

"But at length, under the reign of Hadrian, the desperate fanaticism of the Jews filled up the measure of their calamities; and the Romans, exasperated by their repeated rebellions, exercised the right of victory with unusual rigour. The emperor founded, under the name of Aelia Capitolina, a new city on Mount Sion, to which he gave the privileges of a colony; and denouncing the severest penalties against any of the Jewish people who should dare to approach its precincts, he fixed a vigilant garrison of a Roman cohort to enforce the execution of his orders. The Nazarenes had only one way left to escape the common proscription, and the force of truth was on this occasion assisted by the influence of temporal advantages. They elected Marcus for their bishop, a prelate of the race of the Gentiles, and most probably a native either of Italy or of some of the Latin provinces. At

his persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, and more firmly cemented their union with the Catholic Church.

When the name and honors of the Church of Jerusalem had been restored to Mount Sion, the crimes of heresy and schism were imputed to the obscure remnant of the Nazarenes, which refused to accompany their Latin bishop. They still preserved their former habitation of Pella, spread themselves into the villages adjacent to Damascus, and formed an inconsiderable church in the city of Berea...they soon received, from the supposed poverty of their understanding, as well as of their condition, the contemptuous epithet of Ebionites...he ventured to determine in favor of such an imperfect Christian, if he were content to practice the Mosaic ceremonies....”

He continues and talks a little bit about them. It’s interesting that even secular historians can see that the early Church was not at all the church that emerges from the shadows. The church that emerged from the shadows, the church that was identified as the “Christian” church or as the Catholic Church, is a far different group than the people among whom Peter and Paul labored.

Groundwork was laid and the true Church was established. In Revelation 2 and 3, we have the outline of the history of the true Church of God. It is a great contrast with the outline that we find in Revelation 17 and 13 of a false church, a great powerful church. A great fallen woman is described in Revelation 17, called a great whore [harlot] that sits upon many waters (vv. 1, 15), the one who rides the beast (v. 7). A great false church is descriptive of something totally different than that which Paul describes as the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9; Revelation 19:7-8).

What we have in the first century was a battle—a battle for the Bible or the truth of God. It was a battle for the law of God because the issues involved were ultimately not peripheral issues. They were not little things here or there. They involved a fundamental acceptance and adherence to the law of God, to observing the Sabbath, the holy days, to the basic law of God and the plan of God. As these things began to give way to all of the pagan ideas around, it was subtle. It didn’t occur at the “snap of a finger.” Within a period of time, the things that Paul warned about, the “mystery of iniquity” that he

said was already at work (2 Thessalonians 2:7), continued to work.

We find ourselves today as the successors of the Jerusalem Church, not the church at Rome, not the church at Alexandria. We find ourselves as the spiritual descendants of the Jerusalem Church. It is important that we understand some of these things and how it set the stage. Even by the admissions of secular history, the church that emerged was far different than the Church that Jesus built. Various ideas and philosophies came in and served to subvert and undermine the authority of the Scriptures. When you undermine the authority of the Scriptures to determine our life, the way we should live, the things we should do and not do, then you subvert the very basis of God’s authority in our lives.

With these things, we focused a little bit on some wrap-ups of Church history and some major influences in the first-century Church history.

Next Bible study we are going to start a brand new series. We are going to start into the Minor Prophets. We are going to go into some things about prophecy and the Minor Prophets in particular. The 12 Minor Prophets are short books, but an awful lot is packed in there. The next Bible study will be the first Bible study of the new series on the Minor Prophets.