

The Unity Series

One Lord



One Lord

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One Lord

VI. God approved of Jesus

Jesus tried to please God his entire life long. He did what God wanted up until his dying breath. And leading that kind of lifestyle, how do you suppose the Father felt about his Son Jesus? It's patent that he was happy with Jesus. We know that because, as we've seen, God established Jesus as Lord.

I seek not to please myself but him who sent me (John 5:30).

The One who sent me... I always do what pleases him (John 8:29).

God's approval meant everything to Jesus, and we hope that it means everything to you too—if God's approval of Jesus is the reason why you believe in Jesus, then you have a solid faith, grounded in God. What value is there believing in someone unless God approves of him? That applies to Jesus and it applies to yourself. Is the approval of God on your own life? What is your life worth unless God approves of you?

• God's approval meant everything to Jesus.

A. Psalm 110

1. An important message ignored
2. Peter's interpretation
3. The basis of a sound interpretation
 - a. God establishes authority
 - b. God is happy to give
 - i. Jesus the Worthy One
 - c. God's reason: Jesus' conscience
 - i. A time to die
 - ii. A time to live
 - iii. What Christianity is about

There are many Bible passages that demonstrate God's approval of Jesus but one stands out among the rest—it's Psalm 110. We're going to examine it closely in this section, and you'll see why in just a moment. Here are its first two verses:

The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’
The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, ‘Rule in the midst of your enemies!’ (vv. 1-2)

- the most frequently quoted OT passage in the NT

Did you know that this passage stands out among all others? It really is special because it is the most frequently quoted OT passage in the NT.¹⁶⁶ We have to ask ourselves why the apostles quoted it so much. Did they quote it often because what it means for our faith? Yes they did—and reading it, you’ll see that it is about divine approval. What divine approval? This one: That God approves of Jesus.

- God’s approval of Jesus was very important for the apostles.

The fact that Psalm 110 is quoted by the apostles more than any other OT passage means that God’s approval of Jesus was very important for the apostles. When they read their Scriptures, that was the theme that they felt was most important to highlight for the Christian churches. But who understands it today? Practically nobody.

1. An important message ignored

- Jesus was Lord because God made him Lord.

The men who wrote the NT, along with the churches they pastored, put great importance on this truth: Jesus was Lord because God made him Lord. This truth should be just as critical for today’s Church as it was for the Early Church, but since today’s pastors don’t preach that God made Jesus Lord, none of today’s Christians learn the doctrine of the Early Church. Does that sound shocking? It is. It’s a grave problem. It’s means that Christians today are far from the original teachings of the Church. It means that we are in apostasy. If truth be told, we are in the Apostasy.

- ...none of today’s Christians learn the doctrine of the Early Church.

Psalm 110 teaches us that God wanted the Jews to know some 1000 years before Jesus’ coming¹⁶⁷ that God was going to give authority to one who would be our Lord. Now the Jews should have been preparing themselves for the

¹⁶⁶ “Our Lord’s frequent use of Psalm 110 should... serve as a signal to us of the significance of this psalm. It is unique in that it is quoted more often than any other Old Testament passage.” Deffenbaugh, B. (2014). Bible.Org, *Psalm 110: David’s Lord*. Retrieved on 31 October 2014 from https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-110-david%E2%80%99s-lord#P1688_507482.

¹⁶⁷ David wrote his psalms, including this one, about 1050 years before Jesus was born.

coming of the Lord—he was, after all, going to be their King! However, when their King finally came to them, they killed him. So the Jews had 1000 years to get ready for their King, but didn't recognize him when he came. Instead, they violently rejected him.

You think that the Jews are bad for not getting the point of Psalm 110 even after God gave them a 1000-year grace period to study it? Well, think again. They are not as bad as today's Christians. We live 2000 years after this same prophecy [remember: it's the most common OT prophecy in the NT] has been fulfilled—yes, fulfilled! That's double the amount of time the Jews had, and we also have double the revelation (the OT and the NT)—but still most Christian groups outright deny what Psalm 110 says!¹⁶⁸ Can you believe it?

The meaning of Psalm 110 is no mystery any more. It has been fully explained by the apostles. You would think that people who call the NT their most treasured book would have put great importance on understanding a psalm that was so important for the Early Church, but most Christians don't have a clue about what it means. How is it that a Christian does not understand its message: God approves of Jesus, and made Jesus Lord?

2. Peter's interpretation

We are certain that the interpretation of Psalm 110 is that God designated Jesus as Lord, but how is it that we are so sure? Well, Peter delivered the divinely-inspired interpretation of the psalm to us on a silver platter. He preached on it in his famous Pentecost message:

... he [David] said, "The Lord¹⁶⁹ said to my Lord: 'Sit at

¹⁶⁸ One way Christian groups deny it is by holding to the Trinity: They think that God and Jesus are mysteriously part of a being they call "the Godhead" (their version of the One God). For them, for Jesus to be part of "the Godhead" means that Jesus is *not* subordinate to the Father. Their Trinitarian doctrine teaches them that God and Jesus have always been "co-equal." Psalm 110 flies in the face of their false doctrine because it reveals that God made Jesus Lord. It says that God gave Jesus the authority that Jesus enjoys today.

¹⁶⁹ Don't forget that this first *the Lord* was understood by Peter to be Yahweh God, while the second *Lord* was someone properly called *my Lord*. Why the ambiguity? It's because Peter was quoting the Hebrew version of Psalm 110, a version which didn't really have the word *Lord* for the first *the Lord* of his mes-

• ...double the amount of time the Jews had, and we also have double the revelation (the OT and the NT).

• God approves of Jesus, and made Jesus Lord.

my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:32-36).

Pay close attention to the way Peter uses the word *therefore* in his preaching. The *therefore* means that: (a) because God promised to give King David’s Lord a seat at God’s right hand, and (b) because Jesus had ascended to Heaven, Jesus had to have been *the Lord*. Since Peter actually witnessed Jesus’ ascension with his own eyes, he was all the more zealous to share the God-inspired interpretation of Psalm 110.

3. The basis of a sound interpretation

Peter spoke from personal experience, but he also used solid Biblical principles to interpret Psalm 110. There are three principles which any of us should have as our basis for a sound interpretation of Psalm 110. The members of the Early Church heard Peter’s preaching but already had these principles firmly established in their thinking. Modern-day Christians normally don’t have these principles established in their minds, but we should:

1. All authority is **established by** God.
2. God was **happy to give his power** to Jesus.
3. God **had a good reason** to exalt Jesus.

Let’s look at these principles one-by-one:

a. God establishes authority

All authority is established by God.

... there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God (Romans 13:1).

This principle speaks for itself. Most Christians accept it readily. The only problem they seem to have with it is that they think that Jesus is an exception to the rule. Should we include Jesus among those whose authority is established

• ...they think that Jesus is an exception to the rule.

sage. What it had was the name *Yahweh* (Jehovah). Put differently, what Peter was quoting from looked the way the ASV looks like in English:

Jehovah saith unto my Lord, ‘Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool’ (Psalm 110:1).

by God? We are sure that we should. To lead other Christians towards this truth, one of the best things to ask Christians today is “Who gave Jesus the authority he spoke of when he said that all authority had been given to him?”

Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me...’ (Matthew 28:18)

There has to be someone who gave authority to Jesus if he was using the passive voice in the construction “all authority... has been given to me.” The One who gave authority to Jesus is none other than the One God, his Father.

b. God is happy to give

You probably already know that it was God who gave all authority in Heaven and on Earth to Jesus—congratulations if you did. However, you probably didn’t know how God *felt* when he gave it. Did you know that God was really happy? It pleased God to do it! Yes, the Bible informs us that God enjoyed giving *all his fullness* to Jesus.

... [Jesus] is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Colossians 1:18-19).

At this point, a natural next question would be “Why was God so happy to give all of his fullness to Jesus?” Well, the heart-warming answer is simple but profound: God is Love. That means that he is not selfish or self-serving. He’s always thinking of how to make others stronger. God has nothing to lose by sharing his power with us—or do you think that he does? The Muslims seem to think that way, but they’re wrong. God is no tyrant desperate to keep all the glory. He’s no egomaniac. Contrary to the teaching of Islam, God shares his authority, glory, and power with any one of his children who is worthy. God is much more loving than the best human father, and wouldn’t a father share all that he has with a son who has proven himself worthy of his trust? Of course he would.

•God is Love.

•God has nothing to lose by sharing his power with us.

i. Jesus the Worthy One

Jesus has proven himself to be worthy of God’s blessing. Our Lord’s victory over temptation brought great joy to God, why? It’s because God diligently seeks to find any-

one¹⁷⁰ who he can strengthen to serve him.

... the eyes of the Lord range throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now and take note, and seek in her open squares, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth... (Jeremiah 5:1; NASB).

• God was pleased to find someone worthy in Jesus.

So God was pleased to find someone worthy in Jesus. He was so pleased that he called Jesus his *Servant*. Jesus was the one God had so earnestly sought for. What a relief for God to watch Jesus succeed against sin!

Here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight (Isaiah 42:1).

Jesus' worthiness was a blessing to the heart of God and a relief to the apostle John as well. In fact, John shed tears because God found nobody on Earth who was worthy to do his will. In particular, God was looking for someone to allow his Kingdom to come and the end-times events usher in that Kingdom. When John heard Jesus declared to be worthy to break the seals of God's end-times scroll, John could stop crying.

I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' But no one in Heaven or on Earth or Under the Earth could open the scroll or even look inside it...

Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed...' (Revelation 5:2-5)

c. God's reason: Jesus' conscience

You say "Of course God exalted Jesus," but you may not know that God exalted him for a reason. He didn't do it out of favoritism, but God set Jesus above other prophets and angels because of Jesus' excellent conscience. That's exact-

¹⁷⁰ If God can't find a man to lead, he'll give the honor to a woman.

Barak said to her [Deborah the prophetess], 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.'

'Certainly I will go with you,' said Deborah. 'But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.'

ly what the following verse tells us:

[God says to Jesus]: ‘You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy’ (Hebrews 1:9).

Observe that according to this verse, Jesus’ greatest triumph in life was not doing miracles. It was not preaching. It was not his brilliant arguments or creative illustrations. It was not healing the sick or delivering people from demons. Jesus’ greatest victory was not even his willingness to die!¹⁷¹

Jesus’ greatest victory was in his inner-man. It was won on the battlefield of his conscience. He trained himself to discern good from evil and evil from good in every situation, even in the most difficult of all situations: death. When a person faces death, it’s difficult to make a spiritual decision because our flesh has a strong natural instinct for self-preservation. But even when he knew that death was near, Jesus was still able to make spiritual decisions. Jesus’ conscience was so sensitive that he knew when dying was a temptation, and when dying was the will of God. His decision to go to Calvary proves that Jesus had an excellent and highly-trained conscience. That decision showed that Jesus knew when dying, life’s greatest evil, could actually be a good thing.

i. A time to die

So Jesus’ greatest victory was not simply overcoming fear, or facing death, or being willing to die. His victory was knowing when to die! He could tell when it was time because he had a trained conscience, able to discern the will of God. Jesus didn’t love his life more than he loved God.

- He trained himself to discern good from evil and evil from good in every situation.

- ...he knew when dying was a temptation, and when dying was the will of God.

- Jesus’ greatest victory was...knowing when to die!

¹⁷¹ That’s not to say that being willing to die is not a great victory. It is, but it’s not only Jesus who’s famous for that kind of victory—lots of people are willing to die. Remember the millions of soldiers who have willingly faced death by walking straight into battles. They triumphed over the fear of death just like Jesus, and that is very admirable. Look closely at Jesus and you’ll see that life’s greatest battle is against something greater than fear: life’s greatest battle is against temptation. Only someone with a highly-trained conscience will be able to win the battle against temptation.

... [Jesus, speaking to the Father said] your love is better than life (Psalm 63:3).

[Jesus taught] Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25).

ii. A time to live

We know that Jesus did not avoid death when it was time for him to die. That's powerful. But it's equally powerful to know that Jesus *did* avoid death when it *wasn't* time to die. Jesus knew when it was time to live, and he knew when it was time to die. He was not a man with a death wish. He didn't treasure life or death more than he treasured God's will.

• Jesus knew when it was time to live, and he knew when it was time to die.

When Jesus preached in Nazareth, his old neighbors didn't like his message—not at all. In fact, they got on their feet in the middle of the message, forced him out of the village, and physically escorted him to a cliff from which they wanted to throw him off. Since it was obvious that his old neighbors didn't appreciate his message very much, Jesus decided that it was time for him to go. It was not time for him to die, so he walked away, by faith. And God even gave Jesus a hand walking away. He made sure that nobody injured him.

... They [the residents of Nazareth] got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way (Luke 4:29-30).

Exhorting his disciples on a separate occasion, Jesus told them that they should be willing to do what the same thing he did in Nazareth. He told them that they also should flee if they found themselves in a place where they were being persecuted.

When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another (Matthew 10:23).

iii. What Christianity is about

With that advice, Jesus proved that Christianity is not about being a martyr. It's about doing the will of God. And how can you know the will of God in difficult situations? How will you be able to make the especially tough decisions like

• Christianity is not about being a martyr.

when to stand your ground with courage versus when to flee... with courage? If you have a good conscience, you will know.

Being a Christian is not about being a martyr, but about doing what God wants you to do when he wants you to do it. Jesus' great accomplishment is that he did what God wanted him to do, and he knew when to do it. Do you? You may think that the greatest thing for you to do is to die for God, but God wants something higher from you: He wants your attention, and he wants it every day. He wants you to live daily according to his great commandment, love. That's why the Bible says:

To obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

... if I hand over my body in order that I will be burned, but do not have love, it benefits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3; NASB)].

If God thinks that you are worthy of being a sacrifice to him, and he has some purpose in your death, then he'll let you know that it's time for you to be a martyr. You should die then. But if it's not God's timing for you to die, and you are being persecuted, then you should *flee to another place*. The important thing is for you to stay or go, but for you to do exactly what God wants. And the only way to know what he wants is to have an excellent conscience, just like Jesus did.

B. The bottom line

1. The big question
2. Jesus doesn't need our vote
3. It doesn't stop with Jesus

What does the One Lord issue all boil down to? What is the bottom line? In the final verdict, what matters is what God says. Our study of this doctrine is not about what people say. In the end, it is God's Word that will stand. In fact, although every person on the face of the Earth say the opposite of the Bible, they will all still be wrong, while God will still be true.

Let God be true, and every human being a liar (Romans 3:4).

• Being a Christian is not about being a martyr, but about doing what God wants you to do when he wants you to do it.

• ...the only way to know what he wants is to have an excellent conscience.

• ...what matters is what God says.

What is human theology next to the God-breathed Truth? What is a man-led seminary next to the Spirit-led Church? May God help us to put the *traditions of men* aside and to have a simple focus on the Bible's greatest commandment, love.

He [Jesus] said to them [the Pharisees], "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors me [God] with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines [as if they were doctrines of God] the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men" (Mark 7:6-8; NASB).

1. The big question

What we're getting at is that the big question is not "What does your pastor think about Jesus?" but "What does God think about Jesus?" Well, we know what he thinks of Jesus because the Bible says that

God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9).

The same God who exalted Jesus to the highest place expects every human being (be they dead or alive), and every angel (be they holy or fallen) to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. And God will make sure that the living, the dead, the angels, and the demons all bow before Jesus. Here's the conclusion of the matter: Since God thinks very highly of Jesus, so should everyone else!

2. Jesus doesn't need our vote

Lots of people don't agree with God—that's their choice. They have a free will, and God will not infringe upon it. Even so, they have no reason to be proud about their free will. Their thinking doesn't change reality. Jesus is Lord even without their consent.

What these poor souls need is to understand is that Jesus doesn't need them to make him Lord: He already is! He doesn't need our vote, our acceptance, or even our faith to make him Lord. God has made Jesus Lord, and that's that!

• What does God think about Jesus?

• Since God thinks very highly of Jesus, so should everyone else!

• Jesus doesn't need them to make him Lord: He already is!

• God has made Jesus Lord, and that's that!

The invitation to “make Jesus the Lord of your life” popularly used by Evangelical preachers is not the Gospel the way the Bible presents it. Instead of using these words as an evangelistic technique, Evangelicals would do much better if they explained to unbelievers that God has already made Jesus Lord of all. After explaining that, they could invite unbelievers to recognize Jesus as Lord, at the same time, demanding that these new converts surrender their lives to Jesus in baptism.

Our job is to guide people to think like God does, and God says that Jesus is Lord. God has made Jesus Lord. What God has done, no human being can undo. We either agree or disagree with God, and what God thinks is evident because

God has made Jesus... Lord (Acts 2:36).

3. It doesn't stop with Jesus

Now the supreme beauty of God glorifying Jesus is that God will do the same thing for us. Hasn't God promised us (who have repented and been baptized into Christ's death) that we will also live with Christ?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:4-5, 8).

Our God and Father has promised eternal life to all who have been baptized in Christ. Baptism is the condition, but what a simple condition. Do you understand what baptism permits us? God will resurrect us and give us the Kingdom, just like he did with Jesus! We will get the same authority Jesus has, authority to reign on the Earth. Because of what we're explaining here, the Gospel can be summed up in these words: What God has done in Jesus, he will also do in us!¹⁷²

¹⁷² What has God done in Jesus? He gave him flesh, he gave him training, allowed for him to have weaknesses, he disciplined him, gave him his Word, his Spirit, his promises, made him suffer for righteousness, even unto death, and then resurrected him. Count on God doing all that in *you*.

- ...invite unbelievers to recognize Jesus as Lord, at the same time, demanding that these new converts surrender their lives to Jesus in baptism.

- What God has done, no human being can undo.

- God will do the same thing for us.

- What God has done in Jesus, he will also do in us!

C. What Cornelius heard

1. Lord of All
2. Peter's approach
3. Peter's main points
4. Faith in God

Speaking of evangelism, you may recall how Peter presented the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. If you can, did you realize that their meeting was a historical first? Yes, it was the first time in history Jews became brothers with Gentiles! It was the first time that Jews welcomed Gentiles into fellowship with them without insisting that Gentiles change their customs. Cornelius and his household were history's first Gentile converts to Christianity.

- ...the first time in history Jews became brothers with Gentiles!

- history's first Gentile converts to Christianity

Now, consider this: Cornelius' family and friends were the *first fruits* of Gentile conversion. That means that the way they were evangelized is a model (and it's the best model) for how to reach Gentiles for Christ. Needless to say, the words Peter used to evangelize Cornelius' group should be very important for us—didn't God charge us with the evangelization of the Gentiles? Peter presented the pure Gospel to them, and we want to do likewise.

1. Lord of All

Knowing that the Gospel Peter shared with Cornelius is the pure Gospel, you won't be surprised to find out that the message was basically about how God established Jesus as Lord. Read the his preaching here and you'll see that the point Peter drove at was how God made Jesus *Lord of all*.

- ...the message was basically about how God established Jesus as Lord.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news [Gospel] of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, because God was with him.

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already

chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as Judge of the Living and the Dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:36-43).

2. Peter's approach

It's shouldn't be hard for you to notice that the essence of Peter's message is the doctrine of Jesus as Lord—but can you notice something else? Observe that Peter didn't approach this doctrine the way modern preachers do. Today's preachers treat "Jesus is Lord" like a given. It's not. It has to be explained. Peter's Gospel was about explaining how Jesus became Lord.

Listen to them and you'll see that a lot of modern-day preachers say "Jesus is Lord" just to get an easy-enthusiastic "Amen" from their congregation. Peter didn't speak of Jesus to get an emotional reaction from anybody. Contrary to modern preachers, Peter went into great detail explaining why Jesus is Lord. He wanted the Gentiles to really think about it. He wanted them to understand it. Peter gave them good reasons so that they could really have a basis for believing that Jesus is Lord. He wanted them to have a strong faith.

3. Peter's main points

Isn't it just as essential today as it was in Peter's time for us to teach that Jesus became Lord through what God did in him? The main points of Peter's great message are of little interest to pastors today, but God willing they will be for you. Here are those points, we have listed them for you below. As you read them, see if you can find a pattern.

- **God** announced the Gospel through Jesus.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

- **God** anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power.

You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that

• Peter's Gospel was about explaining how Jesus became Lord.

• Jesus became Lord through what God did in him.

John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power

- **God** was with Jesus to empower him to do good and to heal.
... and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, because God was with him.
- **God** raised Jesus from the dead.
They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day...
- **God** caused Jesus to be seen.
... and [God] caused him to be seen...
- **God** chose the apostles who would testify about Jesus.
... We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. ...He [Jesus] was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen...
- **God** appointed Jesus as Judge.
He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the One whom God appointed as Judge of the Living and the Dead.

4. Faith in God

Have you notice the pattern already? Peter's message was centered on God! According to Peter, God worked through Jesus and made Jesus what he is.¹⁷³ Each point carefully demonstrates that Jesus was backed by God. And this is not just a message for the first Gentile converts—all Christians are supposed to believe in a Jesus who is in charge because God put him in charge. Do you believe it?

Do you preach it? All true evangelism is grounded on the premise that Jesus has authority because God gave it to him. Is that the way you present Christ to others?

If anybody had asked the Peter, “Why do you call Jesus ‘Lord’?” Peter would have been eager to explain that it was

¹⁷³ Taken together, the main points of Peter's message prove that the faith of the Early Christians was “faith in God.” You should recall that “faith in God” is the second of the seven Fundamentals (Hebrews 6:1). As you already know, the Fundamentals offer us a summary of the “doctrine of the apostles” (Acts 2:42) and the essential doctrine of the Church.

- Peter's message was centered on God!
- ...a Jesus who is in charge because God put him in charge.
- All true evangelism is grounded on the premise that Jesus has authority because God gave it to him.

because God had resurrected Jesus. Peter and the apostles wanted others to believe in God, just like the apostles did. They wanted people's faith to be grounded in God. That's the firm foundation of the Christian faith: We believe in God through his Word.

Now hopefully you understand why only after the resurrection the apostles would freely refer to Jesus as *the Lord*. It's because the resurrection was God's great affirmation of Jesus. God seated Jesus on the Throne, bestowing all authority on him, after the resurrection.¹⁷⁴ The apostles based their preaching on what God said about Jesus.

• ...why only after the resurrection the apostles would freely refer to Jesus as *the Lord*.

D. The faith of John the Baptist

Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, was another NT character who, like the apostles, interpreted the OT in the light of Jesus as Lord. When Zechariah got an inspired interpretation of a prophecy from Isaiah,¹⁷⁵ he used the prophecy like a blessing upon his baby son John. That's nice, but the point is the way he interpreted the *Lord* of the Isaiah prophecy. Read below and you'll see that Zachariah was inspired just the same way Peter was with Psalm 110.

[Zechariah said of John, his son] 'And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him' (Luke 1:76).

¹⁷⁴ Here's a study challenge: Find a Bible passage that indicates that before the ascension Jesus was seated at God's right hand. We have never found one. If there isn't one (as we suspect), that means that Jesus' Throne was a prize—Jesus' great reward—for serving God. The Bible seems to emphasize that Jesus got it only after he completed God's will unto death. For example, notice how the word after is used here:

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into Heaven and he sat at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

¹⁷⁵ They had read a passage where God designated Jesus to be *Lord*, yes; but even more than *Lord*. In Isaiah 40:3 (as in a number of other OT passages) God actually shares his name (*Yahweh*) with Jesus! We look more fully at God's name-sharing in the book *One God*. Please read it. Our principal text in that section is "my name is in him" (Exodus 23:21).

For the Bible text at hand, it suffices to say that Zechariah and Elizabeth's interpretation of *Yahweh* as *Lord* was something they did under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were not simply using a method of interpretation acquired in their local synagogue. They were being led by the Spirit to prophesy God's Word.

Zechariah knew that his son would someday serve the Messiah. He didn't know that the Messiah was soon to be conceived in the womb of his relative Mary, but God was getting him and his wife Elizabeth ready for that surprise.

It's interesting to observe that the naming of John wasn't the only time John the Baptist's parents demonstrated their remarkably lucid understanding of Jesus as Lord. John's mother Elizabeth recognized Jesus' lordship while Jesus was still an embryo. It takes quite a bit of faith to believe that a baby in someone else's womb is your Lord—doesn't it? But that's exactly what Elizabeth believed.

[Elizabeth said to Mary] 'But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' (Luke 1:43).

John the Baptist, strongly influenced by the revelation God gave his parents, chose to define his public ministry using the same passage his parents blessed him with as a child.

[He said that he was] ... a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him' (Mark 1:2-3; cf. Luke 3:4).

Furthermore, while preaching to the crowds, John would freely use the term *the Lord* to refer to the Messiah. That means that his followers, among whom were many of the apostles, understood *Lord* to mean not just God, but the Messiah. That One Lord faith of John the Baptist was transferred to the apostles, and the faith of the apostles has been passed down to us.

E. Established by God

Again, the fundamental truth about our *One Lord* is that God glorified Jesus because Jesus glorified God. Only when Jesus' work was over did God resurrected him. Then, as a reward for a job well done, God submitted all things under Christ's feet:

... [God] seated him [Jesus] at his right hand in the Heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be Head over everything for the Church (Ephesians 1:20-22).

• God glorified Jesus because Jesus glorified God.

The point of the previous passage is hard to miss: It was God who established Jesus as the Head over everything. Jesus wouldn't be what he is today unless God had established Jesus as such. In fact, there are no authorities anywhere which God did not establish.

• It was God who established Jesus as the Head over everything.

There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God... what God has instituted... (Romans 13:1-2).

Excuse the redundancy of this summary, but we're moving towards a very important topic. We should not begin the new topic if we have any doubts about who gets authority. The point we will explain next is what God's government will be like.

F. A theocratic monarchy

1. All things subject to God
 - a. The global order
 - b. We will rule
2. What God always wanted

The most popular form of government in the world today is the democratic republic.¹⁷⁶ It is the form of government which the US and many other nations have adopted. What does *democratic republic* mean? It means that the people rule¹⁷⁷ through elected officials who represent the people.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ We define the term here, but you will have to know that many countries that call themselves "democratic republics" are not truly democratic, neither are they republics. In fact, the least democratic country in the world as of January 2015, North Korea, has the official name *Democratic People's Republic* of Korea. It is actually a dictatorship without elections.

Another country, one rated as having the least freedom for its citizens is the *Democratic Republic* of the Congo. It is said of this country that "... in 2011 [it] was rated by Freedom House as a 'not free' country, having a rating of 6.0 (1.0 being completely free and 7.0 being completely unfree)" (Retrieved on January 22, 2015 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_republic).

What we deduce from these two examples is that it is very popular today for nations to designate themselves as "democratic republics." This is a style of government that people around the world are proud to follow. The term is so popular that the leaders of many countries are eager to use it, even if it is just to give their citizens and the international community the impression that they follow this form of governance when they really don't.

¹⁷⁷ That's the *democracy* part, the word *democracy* having come from the Greek words *demo* (people) + *kratia* (rule).

¹⁷⁸ That's the *republic* part, the word *republic* having come from the Latin words

Most of us like the idea of a democratic republic, but the problem is that the Kingdom of God is not a democracy and it is not a republic. The people are not the source of authority-rule and they do not have elected officials who represent them. Rather, the Kingdom of God is a theocratic monarchy. What does that mean? It means (in the simplest terms) that a king rules, and that king is chosen by God. Let's look at the terms *monarchy* and *theocracy* a little more closely here:

• ...a king rules, and that king is chosen by God.

- **monarchy:** a government in which a monarch (a king, prince, emperor, duke, sultan, or a female counterpart such as a queen) rules with those they choose
- **theocracy:** a government in which the ruler is chosen by God, not by the people, or by representatives of the people

1. All things subject to God

Even though the topic is already very exciting, we've only just touched the tip of the iceberg—we have only defined the type of government Jesus will have. There's so much more to understand about the Kingdom of God. For example, did you know that Jesus' government has a goal? Its goal is to subject all things to God.

• ...to subject all things to God.

Indeed, the Bible promises us that during Jesus' reign, he will make a great effort to subject *all things* to the One God.

When all things are subjected to him [Jesus], then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28-29).

a. The global order

Jesus will rule for 1000 years with the objective of establishing a God-fearing global order. Now, when we say that Jesus will establish a “global order” we are talking about him organizing *all things*. After he has organized *all things*, he will then subject those things to God. That is, Jesus will hand them over to God.

Sometime Christians have the idea that Jesus is only coming to organize true religion in the world. That's true. He will, and the religious aspect of global order will indeed be the essence of his reform, yes—but Jesus will also organize all nations in their:

• to organize true religion in the world

✓ governments	✓ cultural heritage
✓ legal systems	✓ educational systems
✓ domestic politics	✓ social structure
✓ foreign affairs	✓ medicine
✓ economic systems	✓ science
✓ business	✓ agriculture
✓ labor	✓ transportation
✓ commerce	✓ recreation
✓ travel	✓ architecture
✓ language and communications, but without the use of today's technologies	✓ and all civil engineering projects like roads, aqueducts, and infrastructure!

b. We will rule

Yeah—Jesus will do all that and more! Sounds exciting, but how will Jesus be able to do so much? He will do it with our help. He will do it through us. We will rule with Jesus and, as you can see with the list of areas that need to be covered, we're going to be quite busy.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge... They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years... those who share in the first resurrection... will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4, 6).

We will not guide the nations with economic philosophies like capitalism, socialism, or communism. In fact, money will not even inform our political decision-making like it does for political leaders now. Heavy industry will not even exist. No electronic technologies will develop again.

- Our one guiding principle as we rule the nations will be the Word of God.

There will be no more talk of democracy, liberalism, or Sharia (Islamic) law. Things like dictatorships and kleptocracy will disappear.¹⁷⁹ Our one guiding principle as we rule the nations will be the Word of God. We will be the kind of leadership God always wanted to have over his people. We will be prophets, priests, and kings.

... though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention (Jeremiah 25:4).

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9).

... [Jesus] has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5-6).

2. What God always wanted

Understand that theocracy is not a new concept. It's not like God came up with the idea just recently. He wanted Israel to be a nation guided by prophets long before they chose their first king. In fact, they chose a king against God's will. He wanted them to be a theocracy from the beginning. God wanted Israel to be led directly by his prophets.

- God wanted Israel to be led directly by his prophets.

Samuel was God's chosen prophet for a time and, before the Saul was declared King of Israel, Samuel led the country. Samuel would go from place to place governing the people, judging their cases, and showing them how to worship.

¹⁷⁹ Just as a note for those who are interested in governance: You may have noticed that we did not mention federalism or feudalism among the political systems that will not exist in the Kingdom.

Federalism is a system based on a covenant made between different states or regions. God's Kingdom does in fact have a strong covenant element to it. The "glue" of the Kingdom is the covenant with Yahweh. So federalism will continue to exist. Egypt will still be Egypt. The United States will still be the United States. The only thing is that those nations will all have Jerusalem as their capital city.

Secondly, *feudalism* is a system by which land is given as a reward for services (such as military service) and faithfulness to a king. The Kingdom of God has a strong feudalistic element. Jesus rewards those who are faithful to him with lands. Since we will "inherit the Earth" through Jesus, feudalism will be revived during his rule.

- a federal, feudal, theocratic monarchy

In conclusion, and to be precise, let's call the Kingdom a federal, feudal, theocratic monarchy.

Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD (1 Samuel 7:15-17).

Even though Samuel erred by not raising his sons properly, and the Israelites rightly complained against that defect, it was wrong for them to ask for a king. When they rebelled against Samuel, they were really turning away from God.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'

But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their King' (1 Samuel 8:4-7).

The point is this: A theocratic monarchy is what God has always wanted for humanity! It is the best form of governance ever imagined—God said so long before Israel even started insisting on having their kings. God warned his people that choosing our own kings would become a snare for us.

• It is the best form of governance ever imagined--God said so.

Do you think that democracy is going to solve the problems of the world? Think again. Do you think that Socialism will solve the world's problems? You're wrong. Do we need the United Nations? We don't. What we need is a theocracy. What we need is for Jesus to be our King.

G. Why God chose Jesus

1. God was pleased with Jesus
 - a. Honor and glory from God
 - b. Obey God's Son
 - c. Always pleasing God
2. God is just
 - a. No sin, no death
3. Follow Jesus' example
 - a. Jesus was no show off
 - i. Like Joseph

- ii. Not a spoiled son
- b. You can walk on water too
 - i. Nothing is impossible for us
 - ii. To the other side
 - iii. Don't be astonished
 - iv. They thought they couldn't
 - v. A man just like us
- c. You can forgive sins too
 - i. A great ministry
 - ii. Thinking like the Pharisees
 - iii. Your duty
- d. You can overcome negativism
 - i. Renouncing sin
 - ii. Taking up your cross
 - 1) Destiny death
 - 2) Being worthy
- e. You can do what Jesus did
 - i. Walking on the way
- f. You can be holy
 - i. Capable Cain
 - ii. Examples for Cain
 - iii. Jesus has equipped us
- g. Your calling is Jesus' calling
 - i. God's power for us
 - ii. What God did in him, Jesus does in us

• Christian-
ity is about
believing
in the One
whom God
has anoint-
ed

Christianity is about believing in the One whom God has anointed, so it is fundamental for us to ask ourselves: "How did God select his Messiah?" What were the criteria God used to pick him?" Far be it from God to exalt a man out of favoritism. God would never make someone Lord on a whim. There were definite reasons for God's choice of Jesus—what were those reasons?

1. God was pleased with Jesus

• God was
pleased with
the way
Jesus led
his life.

In the first place, God was pleased with the way Jesus led his life. How do we know that? Well, it's not only something we have passed down to us in written form. It's not only something we read in the pages of the Bible—God actually said it. God literally made his voice heard on the matter, and he did it twice.

God's first audible approval of Jesus was during Jesus' baptism. Everybody present that day at the Jordan River heard something, and it sounded like thunder. It was God's deep voice. Those who could understand the voice¹⁸⁰ heard God Himself declare his approval of Jesus.

And a voice from Heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17).

The second time God spoke from Heaven about Jesus was at a place Peter calls the *sacred mountain* during an event most Christians call the *Transfiguration*.

a. Honor and glory from God

Now there are a lot of bad interpretations of the Transfiguration floating around, but the right interpretation has been made apparent. Peter, who was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he wrote his Second Epistle, tells us that at the Transfiguration Jesus "received honor and glory from God the Father" (2 Peter 1:17-18). Notice, if you would, that Peter worded this statement in the passive voice: Jesus *received* honor. What does the passive voice mean for us? It means that Jesus did not glorify himself!¹⁸¹

• Jesus "received honor and glory from God the Father."

If you have thought that Jesus was glorifying himself at the Transfiguration, you have misunderstood it. In fact, you have faltered on a very basic Gospel principle: Jesus never glorifies himself. You may ask: "Who says that Jesus doesn't glorify himself?" The answer is "Jesus says so." He

• Jesus never glorifies himself.

¹⁸⁰ Three observations about what it's like when God speaks from Heaven can be gleaned from another passage:

... a voice came from Heaven, 'I have glorified it [God's name], and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine' (John 12:28-30).

Those three points are:

- God has a thundering voice.
- Not everybody understands what he's saying when he speaks.
- He speaks audibly it for our benefit, to strengthen our faith.

¹⁸¹ Grammatically speaking, the wrong interpretation comes from people who want to treat this like the *reflexive* voice. It is not the reflexive voice. If it were, it would say "Jesus gave himself glory." It is the passive, and it even tells us who exactly Jesus received glory from: the Father.

told us in another Bible passage:

I am not seeking glory for myself... (John 8:50)

Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me' (John 8:54; NASB).

b. Obey God's Son

You will be interested to know that God was making the same point on *the sacred mountain* which he made at Jesus' baptism. In other words, of the three times God made his voice heard from Heaven in the NT, twice¹⁸² (that's 66% of the time) he told us the same thing: That Jesus was his beloved Son. That means that the fact that God loves Jesus is a very important thing for God to communicate to us, doesn't it?

Moreover, at the Transfiguration God punctuated his approval of Jesus with a forceful command: "Listen to him [Jesus]!" God said that because he wanted to drive home a strong message to the apostles and to all believers: Obey my Son!

... a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5)

God's two audible declarations that he was pleased with Jesus were very significant moments in history, weren't they? It was no small thing for God to make his voice be heard from Heaven itself. God was even a little angry the second time he said it, which means that he's zealous about this. He's zealous about his love for Jesus, and he wants us to know how much he loves him. Anyone who fears God should honor the one he loves.

c. Always pleasing God

Something else the Heavenly declarations tell us is that although Jesus hadn't finished his mission, he was already well on the road to glory. In other words, God's voice was like a "pre-approval" on Jesus. How did Jesus obtain "pre-approval" from God? Well, in his remarkable life of faithfulness to God, Jesus always pleased the Father. His habits were well-established, and his character was prov-

• ...he was already well on the road to glory.

¹⁸² We looked at the third occasion in footnote #182. It's John 12:28. In that passage, for the sake of the crowds, God affirms that he will glorify his own name.

en.¹⁸³

... I always do what pleases him (John 8:29).

Because Jesus was always pleasing God, God trusted Jesus. God's noticed the pattern of Jesus' life and he felt confident that Jesus could resist sins. Jesus' consistency and character was God's main reason to honor Jesus.

We have to make a strong effort to gain character also. If we do, our entrance into the Kingdom will just as firm as Jesus'.

... make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things [maturing spiritually step-by-step], you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:10-11).

2. God is just

The first reason why God chose Jesus to be the Messiah is because God was pleased with Jesus. We just looked at that. The second reason why God chose Jesus is because God is just! God always does what is fair. Follow the logic:

- Jesus did not sin¹⁸⁴ but **died anyways** (God

• God chose Jesus is because God is just!

¹⁸³ Jesus sowed the Word of God in his heart. That Word was received in good soil and produced the fruit of good works. Jesus was consistent in those good actions and had great habits. Those habits formed character, and his proven character is what prepared him to for eternity. It qualified him as the Messiah. Following that thought, it's useful for us to remember the famous saying (Adapted from what was retrieved on April 4, 2015 from <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/01/10/watch-your-thoughts/>):

Plant a thought and reap a word;
 plant a word and reap an action;
 plant an action and reap a habit;
 plant a habit and reap a character;
 plant character and reap a destiny.

¹⁸⁴ As an aside, consider this important question: Are you sure that Jesus never sinned? Maybe you just being biased since you're from a Christian background. Maybe you are being partial about something and you are imagining it because you're emotional about Jesus. But no, no one is being emotional or depending on human judgment when they affirm that Jesus never sinned. God was the one who affirmed Jesus' innocence by resurrecting him! Anyone who is sure of Jesus' innocence is just believing in God's testimony about Jesus.

If the resurrection is not enough evidence for you, God's assessment of Jesus is written plainly in the Scriptures. A passage in Hebrews puts it like this:

• Are you sure that Jesus never sinned?

• God was the one who affirmed Jesus' innocence by resurrecting him!

said that the soul that sins should die, not the innocent).

- Jesus **descended to the Place of the Dead**¹⁸⁵ and

... he [Jesus] did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

¹⁸⁵ Jesus is called “the firstborn from among the dead” (Colossians 1:18). Do you know what the place of the dead is? It has been famous throughout history in the different cultures of the world. It was known as:

- *Hades* to the Greeks
- *Sheol* to the Hebrews
- and the *Underworld/Netherworld* to the Anglo-Saxons (among others).

Hades was where God’s angels placed Jesus from the time immediately following his death at Calvary to the moment just before his resurrection. The Gates of Hades (Matthew 16:18) are real gates. You can find them at the entrance to Hades itself.

•The Gates of Hades are real gates.

An important truth for understanding God’s justice in judgment is that Jesus was immediately assigned to the pleasant *Paradise* side of the Underworld, not to the fiery *Hell* side. This Paradise is one of the two general sections of Hades. It is completely separate from Hell. A great abyss separates these two areas. On the Hell side, sinners receive the torment their sinful deeds deserve (Luke 16:22-26), the righteous are consoled on the Paradise side.

Jesus knew where he was going even as he was dying. He expressed his faith in his destiny through the words he spoke on the Cross to the penitent rebel: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Those words are one reason why we know that Jesus went to Paradise after he died. That blessed place is where Abraham and the righteous-dead abide even up to this very moment. Others such as Noah, David, Samuel, and Daniel also comfort believers who die. They will receive us upon our arrival in Hades.

* Please note that although Abraham is there, the name of the place is not “Abraham’s bosom,” as many pastors currently claim. The patriarch Abraham is waiting there, yes. He is waiting for the resurrection along with many others such as all the Christians who have already died in the faith [we call them the “dead in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)]. Do you see why it’s incorrect to call Paradise “Abraham’s bosom”? Abraham’s bosom is actually Abraham’s chest—a part of his body. His bosom is Abraham’s anatomy, not Sheol’s geography.

Anyways, Abraham doesn’t comfort every single person who arrives in Paradise. For example, he didn’t comfort Jesus when Jesus arrived. On the contrary, it was Jesus who comforted Abraham when on that day, he arrived. And that’s the point: If Jesus didn’t go to “Abraham’s bosom” when Jesus died, why call the place “Abraham’s bosom”? A lot of people (like John the Baptist for sure) probably got a nice hug from Jesus when Jesus appeared there—so they got to experience Jesus’ bosom, didn’t they? If that’s what you can look forward to, why don’t we call Paradise “Jesus’ bosom”? Paul certainly had that concept of Paradise:

I desire to depart [die] and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:23-24).

was with all of the other dead souls (God said that people who go there belong there).

- Now, since God is always fair, he **could not allow Jesus to remain in Hades**—Jesus did nothing to deserve death.

The rest of the people in Hades would rightly have been left there forever, but Jesus didn't deserve to be there. Jesus knew that he didn't belong in Hades, so he affirmed his faith. He set his eyes on God. Jesus happily put his hope in God. Our Lord Jesus expressed that hope through a powerful prayer (you can read it here):

'I [Jesus] saw the Lord [God] always before me. Because he [God] is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you [God] will not abandon me to the Realm of the Dead, you [God] will not let your holy one see decay.

You [God] have made known to me [Jesus] the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence' (Acts 2:25-28).

Upon hearing such a prayer, what was God to do? God heard Jesus' cry and responded to it by getting Jesus out of there.¹⁸⁶ His own justice demanded it. It was impossible for

¹⁸⁶At some point, God granted Jesus the keys to the gates of Hades. It may have been at the time of Jesus' resurrection or it may have been after the ascension, upon Jesus' arrival in Heaven. We think that it was in Heaven. Jesus shared many precious moments with his apostles after the resurrection, in none of those did he lead them to think that he was carrying anything special. The apostles never mention anything jingling in his pockets.

Anyways, the Bible emphasizes something different: that God resurrected Jesus. That tells us that God got Jesus out of Hades, meaning that Jesus didn't open the gates of Hades by himself. He didn't sneak out of Hades, did he? Rather, it seems that God sent an angel to unlock the gates for Jesus.

I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18).

Now, Jesus mentions the keys, and he does so as a consolation to us. How might that console us? Well we might someday find ourselves in Hades. If that happens, knowing that Jesus has the keys assures us that we won't get stuck there, wondering how we'll get out. Now we know for sure that Jesus is going to open the gates. If Samson could rip the gates of Gaza (Judges 16:3) out of the ground, Jesus has just as much power to open the gates of Hades. Jesus is greater than Samson.

• Jesus didn't deserve to be there.

God to allow an innocent man in Hades. That's why it says:

God raised him [Jesus] from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24).

- God cannot go back on his promises.

Jesus' prayer was a particularly good prayer because it was based on God's own promises. God cannot go back on his promises, so when we use them in prayer, he's obligated to respond to them. Jesus used the Scripture that says

You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence

to draw God's attention to the injustice done to him.

Here's an amazing fact you should know: Jesus didn't claim his own righteousness as the basis for God delivering him from Hades. Rather, the basis of Jesus' claim on a resurrection was his hope in God. Wow. Jesus prayed by faith—faith in God's Word—so God (being just) responded to those prayers. In other words, Jesus was resurrected because God is faithful to respond to his own Word. He does what he says. He is just.

- Jesus prayed by faith—faith in God's Word—so God (being just) responded to those prayers.

Do you get it? God made Jesus *Lord* based on the rock-solid foundation of God's own justice. When God resurrected Jesus, a great prophecy was fulfilled:

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

- God made Jesus Lord based on the rock-solid foundation of God's own justice.

Instead of keeping him in a place where he didn't belong, God freed Jesus by means of a powerful resurrection. And then God rewarded Jesus. Didn't Jesus deserve it? Sure he did. So God was simply being fair when he made Jesus Lord. As Peter taught, "It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

- God was simply being fair when he made Jesus Lord.

a. No sin, no death

So we've seen that God was simply keeping his own Word when he resurrected Jesus. God's law was: Death will only retain the guilty, but that law of death was invalidated. Death was not allowed to maintain its grip on Jesus. To illustrate Jesus' victory over death more clearly, one Bible commentator wrote:

- Death will only retain the guilty.

... the Abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.¹⁸⁷

We totally agree with that explanation. Labor pains indicate that the time has come when a baby absolutely must leave his mother's womb. The baby simply doesn't belong in his mother's womb when labor begins. It's necessary that he be there for 9 months, but when the natural process of gestation ends, the baby is either forced out through the mother's contractions (that's natural birth), or he must be taken out surgically (a C-section). Either way, the baby must come out. Likewise, the law of God determined that Jesus' time in the tomb was up.

God's Word says "The soul who sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4; NASB). That's a law. Expressing that same law, God also said

... when you eat from it [the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] you will certainly die (Genesis 2:16-17).

God's law says that a person who sins must die. Jesus was free from sin. Because of that precious¹⁸⁸ truth, Jesus was

• Jesus was free from sin.

¹⁸⁷ G. Bertram as quoted in *The NIV Application Commentary, Acts* by Ajith Fernando, expounding Acts 2:24, 1998. Found at <http://books.google.com/books> on September 21, 2012.

¹⁸⁸ It really is precious! There's nothing special about someone with a divine nature being free from sin—so those who do not teach that Jesus came in the flesh actually bore their hearers to death. They preach a boring Gospel—one which says nothing special. They even contradict the Scriptures—which is worse than boring people—by erasing Jesus' human effort from his victory. They make Jesus sound special—which is why they sound so spiritual—but that's not the true Gospel. The true Gospel is one of a Jesus who was just like one of us. Beware of their subtle deception! It won't cause you to love Jesus. It will cause you to hate him.

Do you know the story of Lance Armstrong, the supposedly great seven-time Tour de France champion? He was a cyclist who was caught in 2012 after years using performance-enhancing drugs like steroids. He was also caught doing blood transfusions during races.

What did cycling enthusiasts think of Mr. Armstrong after they found out that he did not win fairly? When they discovered that he was not using normal human strength, they all turned away from him. Many hated him for it. In fact, all of his sponsors renounced him and he was stripped of his seven Tour de France victories.

- God simply *had* to raise Jesus from the dead.

also free from the consequence of sin: death. Jesus was free from the law of death. That legal reason is also the reason why God simply had to raise Jesus from the dead. God's own righteousness actually obligated him to resurrect Jesus!

- God invites you to research Jesus' holiness thoroughly.

It is of the utmost importance to investigate for yourself whether Jesus was really free from sin or not. You are welcome to do it, in fact that kind of research is the key to a living faith. God invites you to research Jesus' holiness thoroughly. Feel free to question Christ.¹⁸⁹ Go ahead and try

In the same way, if someone teaches that Jesus had a divine nature, his victory over sin seems like a "fixed" victory—something rigged. It's as if he cheated. Worse off, Jesus gets no credit for being the hard-working Savior he really is. People see Jesus as if God had "arranged" the victory for him, not that he got it because he suffered. But that's exactly why he got it:

Jesus, because of the suffering of death [was] crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9).

- We can't say that Jesus was victorious if we leave out his suffering.

Take note that the Scriptures say that it was because of his suffering death that Jesus was triumphant! He had to suffer to have the victory. We can't say that Jesus was victorious if we leave out his suffering. Cutting out the human-suffering part of Jesus' victory disqualifies his victory. It makes it illegitimate. Now reflect on this verse:

... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the Antichrist (2 John 1:7).

Since the doctrine of Jesus coming in the flesh is the Bible teaching that the Antichrist will most blatantly oppose (according to the verse given above), the Antichrist's last-times strategy should be no secret to you: He will try to discredit Jesus.

Do you get it? The Antichrist will try to make Jesus look like a cheater. Worse off, he wants Jesus to seem like a spoiled son. Why? It's because the Antichrist fervently desires that we renounce Jesus and settle for himself as our savior. The Antichrist desperately tries to present himself to be more human than Jesus ever was. The technique he uses to do that is to make Jesus seem less like us.

Furthermore, the Antichrist will present himself as the one who has the technology and political leadership to save us from the chaos that the Tribulation will bring upon the planet. He will offer his own "cheap fix" for the deep spiritual problems of the world. Be warned: The Antichrist will be able to offer all people on Earth the opportunity to buy and sell (at a time when markets are in a state of absolute chaos). He will be able to help humanity with our bank accounts, but there is only One man who can pay our debt with God. That man is Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of mankind.

¹⁸⁹ This is the sign of true religion. A true religion is one in which questioning the holiness and dignity of the founder is highly encouraged. False religions actually

to find evidence about whether Jesus ever committed a sin. He's welcomes you to do so. A great starting point would be to read the Gospels. As you read them, see if there's anything there in Jesus' life that looks like sin to you.

3. Follow Jesus' example

A third reason why God chose Jesus to be Lord is because Jesus set an impeccable example for us to follow. We challenge you to name one person in history who has given an example that matches Jesus'. Try as you may, you won't find anybody who can inspire people better than Jesus.

We have outlined some points (a–g) in the paragraphs that follow to help you to reflect on what a great inspiration Jesus is for us. Before we look at them in detail, here's an overview:

- a. Jesus was **no show off**.
- b. You can **walk on water** too.
- c. You can **forgive sins** too.
- d. You can **carry your cross**.
- e. You can **do what Jesus did**.
- f. You can **be holy**.
- g. Your calling is **Jesus' calling**.

Because these points are true, we can follow Jesus.

a. Jesus was no show off

Now, mark this: Our Lord Jesus did not live the way he did to show off. He did not do what he did to draw attention to himself. He never said "Look at how great I am!" On the contrary, Jesus resisted that temptation. He was indeed great. The sheer number of miracles, deliverances, and healings Jesus performed are unmatched in history, but he never boasted about them. If humility is a sign of greatness—and it is—how great is Jesus? He was humble when there was no need to be humble. He performed more supernatural wonders than anyone before him, and never boasted about them!

• Jesus did not live the way he did to show off.

prohibit it. A false religion will not allow anyone to question their founder. They would rather deem it to be "blasphemy," in order to guarantee that the truth of the founder's sinful lifestyle remains concealed, and for themselves—their pride and financial income—as well.

Note that the final and strongest temptation after Jesus' 40-day fast was precisely for him to show off. Jesus refused the Devil's suggestion that he should cast himself from the pinnacle of the Temple, remember? Now, we know that Jesus could have cast himself down. Most certainly God would have sent angels to hold Jesus up—right? What Satan said was true: Angels were at Jesus' disposal. The Devil was even right in pointing out that it would have been a fantastic miracle; but it would have been wrong. Why? Because Jesus would have been showing off.

• What Satan said was true: Angels were at Jesus' disposal.

i. Like Joseph

The patriarch Joseph's humility is similar to Jesus' humility. Convinced that their father Jacob preferred their younger brother Joseph over them, Joseph's ten older brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt. Joseph had to suffer greatly in Egypt, even to the point of imprisonment, but eventually Pharaoh took Joseph out of the prison and made him second in command over all Egypt.

Joseph's brothers eventually asked him for forgiveness because they came to realize that Joseph was not the spoiled kid they thought he was. He was someone worthy of honor and respect. He was a fighter. He had tenacity. He had faith in God.

ii. Not a spoiled son

Jesus is not the spoiled Son of God many of us thought he was either. Can you see how he was rejected by his own people, just like Joseph was? Can you see how Jesus suffered, and how he kept his faith in God even from the depths of Hades, just like Joseph hoped in God from the dungeon? Throughout his difficult life, Jesus showed himself to be someone worthy of our respect. He was a fighter. He had tenacity. He had faith in God.

• Jesus is not the spoiled Son of God many of us thought he was...

Now, just as Pharaoh put Joseph on the throne to distribute grain to all who came to Egypt for relief, God also placed Jesus on a throne for the survival of all who come to God. We come to Jesus seeking relief, and he gives us spiritual bread—his body. Jesus was authorized by God to give his body as the bread of salvation.

Seeing Jesus at God's right hand, we have to realize that he got there without any favoritism. Jesus got there legitimately. He had no advantages over us in life. If we thought that way about him for a time, we should stop now. We should repent just like Joseph's brothers repented and began to forgive themselves for being so judgmental of Joseph. Just as Joseph was merciful with his brothers, Jesus is willing to forgive us—but he is wise. He will wait until he brings us to repentance first, before he offers us forgiveness.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you' (Genesis 45:3-5).

b. You can walk on water too

To demonstrate how different Jesus was from other people, pastors often point out that Jesus could walk on water. Those pastors are making a huge mistake. Jesus didn't walk on water to prove anything about himself. He did it to get to the other side of the lake.¹⁹⁰ Excuse us for being so simple, but here's the truth of Jesus' walking on water: Since he didn't have a boat, and many people needed him on the other side of the lake, Jesus walked across it. He was going from point A to point B by line F, faith.

i. Nothing is impossible for us

The lesson we're supposed to learn from Jesus walking on water is that nothing is impossible for us. The lesson for us is the same lesson for Peter—is it not? Jesus invited Peter to walk on the water with him, and he invites us to do the same thing. Jesus was trying to get Peter to believe in what Peter could do, right? Jesus wanted Peter to literally "step

• ...he got there without any favoritism. Jesus got there legitimately.

• The lesson we're supposed to learn from Jesus walking on water is that nothing is impossible for us.

¹⁹⁰ We're not into jokes much, but here's one: Do you remember the classic joke "Why did the chicken cross the road?" The answer is "To get to the other side." Now here's a new version of the same joke: "Why did Jesus cross the Sea of Galilee?" The answer is the same as the chicken joke: "To get to the other side." That's all Jesus was up to. We base this teaching on Mark 6:48 which says "... he [Jesus] intended to pass by them [the apostles in the boat]."

out” in faith.

‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus (Matthew 14:29).

• ...he wanted Peter to live the same supernatural life he did.

Jesus said “Come” to Peter for a simple reason: He did it because he wanted Peter to live the same supernatural life he did. Will you answer Jesus’ call like Peter did? Will you step out in faith today? The other alternative is to rationalize, to worry, to doubt, and to sin. Do you want to live the natural life everyone else lives? Do you want to simply follow the laws of nature? Or will you accept the challenge of Christ?

ii. To the other side

Consider this about the walk-on-water miracle: Jesus wanted to pray alone, so he sent his apostles across the Sea of Galilee ahead of him. The words “ahead of him” is exactly how the Bible describes the position of the apostles, meaning that Jesus would travel to the other side of the lake behind them, right? What that means is that Jesus was planning on catching up to the apostles later.

... Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side (Matthew 14:22).

When he finally finished praying, Jesus’ goal was to catch up with the disciples—but why? Many sick people needed him and his disciples on the other shore in Gennesaret. The Bible tells us that the disciples were halfway there (Matthew 14:34-36), so since Jesus didn’t have any time to waste, he literally walked by faith. His faith in God allowed him to walk straight across the lake (Mark 6:45-48).

• ...Jesus “intended to pass by them.”

The Bible says very distinctly that Jesus “intended to pass by them” (Mark 6:48), and that tells us something very important: Jesus did not walk on the water to get anyone to see him. He wasn’t looking for attention. Our Lord simply walked on the Sea of Galilee so that he could fulfill God’s will—which was getting to the people on the other side of the lake. It was there where our Lord could preach the Gospel. The way Jesus saw it, a little water wasn’t about to stop him from doing what his God wanted.

iii. Don't be astonished

Read the passage closely and you'll see that Jesus got into the boat with the apostles only because they were so afraid of what they saw—they thought he might have been a ghost! Jesus was not the kind of person who would ever try to scare others, so he walked towards them peacefully and he comforted them with these words: "Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). Even though he said that, they remained astonished.

A story is not over until we learn its moral, right? Well, here's the moral of Jesus' walk-on-water episode: We shouldn't be amazed at Jesus. The astonishment of the apostles was wrong. They sinned by being so amazed.

Hadn't they already seen enough of Jesus' power? Shouldn't they have already moved on to a new level of faith? Jesus didn't want the apostles to be amazed anymore! That's for new converts. Jesus didn't want their amazement for this very important reason: God didn't do miracles through Jesus to amaze people. God gave Jesus miracle power to show us our potential in Christ. God gave us Jesus to activate our faith.¹⁹¹ Jesus' faith was his faith in God. He wants us to have our own faith in God. He wants to inspire us to believe in God the way he did.

Take the Bible at face value when it explains the apostles' closed-mindedness and unbelief this way:

... and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the loaves, but their mind was closed (Mark 6:51-52; NASB).

Their astonishment proved that the apostles' minds were closed to what Jesus wanted to teach them. The *for* of the passage makes that absolutely plain—notice it above. We underlined it.

¹⁹¹ Studies done on the mind demonstrate that people use a very small percentage of their brain matter. Most of the synapses that are not being used would be activated if we believed more. When we act by faith, we do things that we never imagined before. We use our God-given potential. We stop being astonished by things and instead, do astonishing things.

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9; NASB).

- Jesus got into the boat with the apostles only because they were so afraid.

- The astonishment of the apostles was wrong.

- God didn't do miracles through Jesus to amaze people.

- We stop being astonished by things and instead, do astonishing things.

- ...they didn't learn the lesson of the loaves.

So, what did Jesus want to teach the apostles? If you want to know what Jesus wanted to teach them, the key is finding out what they missed from the loaves. The Bible says that they didn't learn the lesson of the loaves. Their inattentiveness to Jesus' teaching with the loaves closed their minds to the possibilities God had for them. It set them up for more closed-mindedness on the Sea of Galilee.

iv. They thought they couldn't

Before Jesus multiplied the loaves, he invited the apostles to do it. He said to them "You give them something to eat!" (Mark 6:37). Did they obey him? No. Why not? They did not believe that what he said was possible. They were unbelieving. They didn't think that they would be able to give food to so many people.

- ...what did the apostles do? Again, nothing.

They manifested that same unbelief in Mark 4:38-41, the "stilling of the sea" passage. Again, what did the apostles do? Again, nothing. The only thing they did was marvel at Jesus when he stilled the sea. They declared "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?", but that was not what God wanted from them. He wanted them to act.

Jesus knew that God wasn't happy with the apostles so he rebuked them for depending on him so much. He didn't just tell them they were *timid*, he told them they were *so timid*. Jesus would say the same thing today to any Christian who has walked with him for a time, but who still stubbornly refuses to exercise faith in God.

Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith? (Mark 4:40).

The apostles did not believe in the Word of God—you say "What Word of God?" The Word of God was given to them through Jesus when he said to them "Let's go over to the other side," but they didn't believe that it would happen. Jesus commanded it—so why did they not believe it? Would their loving pastor Jesus lead them to die in the midst of ministry? They were praising him, but not truly believing in him. That's how many Christians are today: Praising Jesus but having no faith because they do not do what he commands them. As Jesus said to the apostles, so does he say to those who do nothing (like them at the Sea of Galilee):

How is it that you have no faith?

v. A man just like us

By the way, the Biblical answer to the Biblical question “Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?” is the following: A man just like us. Jesus was...

... fully human in every way (Hebrews 2:17).

Do you believe that? It took time for the apostles to draw that conclusion, so don't worry if it has taken you time to draw the same one. Just try to have a solid apostolic faith. If you study the Bible, it will eventually hammer the following points in your head like well-driven nails:

- Jesus came in the flesh, to show us **our potential in the Spirit**.
- Jesus did not come to show us his power, but **God's power**.
- The Son of God became a son of man, so that the sons of men might become **sons of God**.

c. You can forgive sins too

Another way we can act like Jesus did is to forgive others for their sins. Jesus has authority to forgive sins and he put that authority to work when he actually declared the people who were brought to him “forgiven.”

‘I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home’ (Matthew 9:6).

Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you, either.’ Go. From now on sin no more’ (John 8:10-11; NASB).

i. A great ministry

We'll have you know that this is one of Jesus' great ministries, the ministry of forgiveness. Jesus made no mystery of its importance for him: He came to call sinners to repentance and to offer them God's forgiveness.

• one of Jesus' great ministries

I have not come to call the righteous but sinner to repentance (Luke 5:32; NASB).

God did not send the Son into the world to judge the

world, but that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17; NASB).

I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world (John 12:47; NASB).

- Sinners were attracted to him.

Jesus was very generous in divvying out forgiveness. Sinners were attracted to him precisely because they perceived that he was merciful. They felt that Jesus did not come to judge them.

[Jesus speaking of a sinful woman said] ‘... her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ Then he said to her, ‘Your sins have been forgiven.’ Those who were reclining at the table with him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this man who even forgives sins?’ (Luke 7:47-49; NASB)

- ...it is everybody’s duty to forgive others.

Unfortunately, people throughout the centuries have misinterpreted Jesus’ forgiveness. They take his mercy to mean that he was someone quite different from the rest of us. The problem with that idea is that Jesus did not declare people forgiven so that we would marvel at him. He never said that it was only for him to forgive. He never affirmed the words of the Pharisees who said that forgiveness was exclusively for God to give. On the contrary, Jesus said that it is everybody’s duty to forgive others. In other words, Jesus forgave to show us how to forgive. He was modelling a behavior which God demands of every person on earth: mercy.

- Jesus forgave to show us how to forgive.

ii. Thinking like the Pharisees

- Jesus gave his followers the same authority to forgive that he had.

If you fail to see that Jesus gave his followers the same authority to forgive that he had, then you will be tempted to think like the Pharisees who said “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). It’s amazing how many Christians today quote that passage of Scriptures as if they were proclaiming one of God’s great revelations. It’s not a revelation at all. It’s a lie. To quote Mark 2:7 in support of the false Pharisaical doctrine that “only God can forgive sins” is like quoting a passage from the Book of Job where one of Job’s friends blurts out some bad advice—it’s just wrong.

- ...let’s think like Jesus does.

Instead of thinking like the Pharisees did, let’s think like Jesus does. Let’s look for opportunities to forgive, show mercy, and bless our enemies.

I [Jesus] will give you [Peter] the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven (Matthew 16:19).

[To believers, Jesus says] ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven’ (Matthew 18:18).

[Speaking to 10 of the apostles] If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven (John 20:23).

iii. Your duty

If you do not forgive, you are refusing to represent Jesus. You are renouncing your privileged place in his ministry of forgiveness. God wants to extend his pardon to people around the world, and he has chosen Christians to bring that forgiveness to the people. We are his instruments just like Jesus was God’s instrument. Forgiveness of sins will not be granted to others unless we bring it to them. It’s the Great Commission!

Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations (Luke 24:46-47; NASB).

This is the Gospel ministry: proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Do you do that? Are you part of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation?

... we try to persuade others... Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died... [God] reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:11, 14, 18-20).

d. You can overcome negativism

Let’s rewind. As you can see, not many Christians understand what our ministry of reconciliation is about. But even

• Forgive-
ness of
sins will not
be granted
to others
unless we
bring it to
them.

more Christians are missing out on the Christ-centered lifestyle because of negative thinking. They don't think that it's really possible to follow Jesus. It doesn't seem possible or even realistic to them. What's behind their negativism? Here we'll look at two things which contribute to negativism in the Christian life: an unwillingness to renounce sin and an unwillingness to take up our cross.

- ...an unwillingness to renounce sin and an unwillingness to take up our cross.

i. Renouncing sin

A backsliding Christian who is walking according to the flesh will make excuses in order to avoid God's challenges. They will to cling to comforts more than the Cross. They will allow the world to deceive them into taking the easiest paths in life; but by taking those paths, they actually cease to follow Jesus. Only the straight gate and the narrow path lead to life. An easy life will lead to destruction.

- Only the straight gate and the narrow path lead to life.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

So here's what backsliding Christians need to understand: Jesus is the Lord. He is the Boss. It is not an option to follow him—it's a command. The only way for us to be his disciples is to obey him. We are either for him or against him.

- It is not an option to follow him—it's a command.

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters (Luke 11:23).¹⁹²

¹⁹² Did Jesus teach the contrary on another occasion when he said "whoever is not against us is for us"?

'Teacher,' said John, 'we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.' 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us' (Mark 9:38-40).

No, Jesus did not contradict himself. Rather, he was showing us in this second passage (Mark 9) not to be hard with seekers. Jesus was showing the apostles that they shouldn't shun people who were not yet disciples. The first teaching about how we are either for him or against him (Luke 11) is in the context of a Christian's self-examination.

The two passages actually combine quite nicely. Put them together and you

If it were only as easy as attending church meetings on Sunday mornings—but it's not! To be worthy of the Kingdom we have to do that which is most difficult in life: follow Jesus. That is to say, he has to be our Lord.

And he [Jesus] said to them [the first disciples], 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Matthew 4:19; NASB).

• ...we have to do that which is most difficult in life.

ii. Taking up your cross

Jesus calls the commitment to follow him “taking up our cross.” It's a sobering and serious challenge to carry a cross. In Jesus' time, nobody took those words to mean that they should wearing a gold necklace with a cross-shaped pendant hanging from it.

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38).

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34).

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).

Again, Jesus was not selling jewelry—little silver and gold crosses to wear around our necks. He was calling people to suffer with him, even to die with him.

Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (John 15:20).

They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them (John 16:2-4).

1) Destiny death

Carrying your cross is about renouncing the love of money, fame, power, and pleasure—the glory of the world—and committing yourself to dying with Jesus. Just as Jesus' des-

get this rule: Judge yourself strictly and others mercifully—that's the balanced approach Jesus taught.

• Judge yourself strictly and others mercifully.

tiny was to die, so is it ours. Do you agree? Isn't death the destiny of Christians? Are we not "sheep for the slaughter"?

Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter... (Zacharias 11:4, 7).

Won't the "Beast," the Antichrist, ultimately defeat us? Yes, he will.

It [the "Beast"] was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them (Revelation 13:7).

Are you ready for death? It's hard to know whether you are or not, but it's certainly presumptuous to say that we're ready. John, James, and Peter all affirmed their readiness to go with Jesus to death. But they all ran away the night he was captured by the Temple guards.

• ...it's certainly presumptuous to say that we're ready.

'Can you drink the cup [of death] I drink or be baptized with the baptism [of blood] I am baptized with?' 'We can,' they [John and James] answered (Mark 10:38-39).

Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'

'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.'

But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same (Matthew 26:33-35).

It's obvious that many Christians are not well-informed about what "bearing our cross" means. How can they expect to overcome the trials and tribulations they will face if they avoid and even hate hearing the warnings faithful preachers give them now? Forewarned is forearmed. Not-warned is unprepared.

... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the Earth? (Luke 18:8).

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

2) Being worthy

Someone truly worthy of eternal life not only accepts their calling to carry their cross, they rejoice in that challenge. They are firm in Christ and are not ashamed of him. They

can feel good about their suffering, praising God for the honor of suffering for the name of Jesus.

They [the Sanhedrin] called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name [of Jesus] (Acts 5:40-41).

... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Peter 4:16).

Someone worthy of eternal life does not love their life more than they love Jesus. They are willing to follow him even if they are faced with death.

... they overcame him [the Antichrist] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death (Revelation 12:11; NASB).

True Christians are willing to go with Jesus wherever he may lead.

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Revelation 14:4).

They are like Thomas, who was willing to go anywhere Jesus went. Thomas would follow Jesus even if it meant going to a place where Jesus' enemies were waiting to kill him. Like Thomas, we all have to be willing to die with Jesus.

Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go [to Jerusalem], so that we may die with him [Jesus]' (John 11:16).

e. You can do what Jesus did

Because we actually can follow Jesus, and holiness is within our reach, we are mistaken if we excuse our sins saying "But I'm just a human being." Jesus will roundly reject the silly excuse "But we're all sinners" on the Day of Judgment. Since the human being Jesus will be our Judge (John 5:22), we have to examine ourselves carefully now, and we must make sure that we don't have any sins we are justifying with the "We're all sinners" lie. We're not all sinners, we're saints!

- Jesus will roundly reject the silly excuse "But we're all sinners" on the Day of Judgment.

Has it crossed your mind that you'll be able to excuse yourself by telling Jesus "All humans are sinners"? Forget about it. Jesus' simple reply will be: "All humans are sinners? I'm not. I wasn't." Would anyone dare say to Jesus: "But with human flesh, how could we resist sin? We didn't ask for these weak human bodies you gave us"? To that complaint, Jesus could rightly give an answer like this:

- God gave you your flesh, yes; but he also gave you **my flesh**—on the Cross. Do you want to complain about my flesh? Is it not a great enough gift from God? Doesn't it pay for your sins? Is it not sufficient as a sacrifice?
- I came to you in the flesh, and God told you believe in me. **You didn't believe in me.** You didn't follow me. If you had followed me, you would have found the way of holiness. My way is to walk in the Spirit.
- You say that it's "impossible" to be holy—by your own words you stand condemned. With them you call God a liar. You call "impossible" **what God has called possible.** He commanded "Be holy for I am holy," and he doesn't command what is impossible.

Although he was *a friend to sinners*, Jesus was friendly with them for to convert them. He wasn't their friend so that he might do what they do or encourage them in their sins. Jesus is going to gather the saints, his *holy ones*, not sinners into the Kingdom. Nobody who practices sin will be allowed to enter the Kingdom. We who get in will do so because we have actually triumphed over temptation.

i. Walking on the way

Jesus' life proves that people who have the sinful human nature can walk in holiness. Jesus has proven that any man, woman, or child can get to God! He is *the Way* to the Father (John 14:6).

To walk on a *way* you have to take steps—one after another. Let's not think that the way of Jesus is some abstract concept. Rather, it's very practical. The way of Jesus is the

• Jesus is going to gather the saints, his *holy ones*, not sinners into the Kingdom.

pattern of his life. Do you follow Jesus' pattern? Do you live the way he lived or not? If you follow his pattern, you are on *the way*. You are a follower of Jesus.

- He overcame temptation. → His followers **overcome temptation**.
- He lived by faith. → His followers **live by faith**.
- He loved others. → His followers **love others**.
- He forgave his enemies. → His followers **forgive their enemies**.

Jesus' pattern of life is distinct from all other people in history, even the best people in history. Jesus' pattern of life is far superior to the lifestyles of other religious leaders. Who can compare to Jesus? It says in the Bible that he couldn't escape notice. Everyone had their eyes on him—not just because of Jesus' miracles, but because he was so different, so holy!

And when he had entered a house, he wanted no one to know of it; yet he could not escape notice (Mark 7:24; NASB).

Jesus' way is holiness. Let's walk in it with him. The early Church was not called *the Way* for nothing. The members of the Church had a very particular lifestyle that was known to all those around them—it was the lifestyle of their Lord Jesus.

f. You can be holy

Holiness is not some new demand exclusively placed on Christians—it is the path God has always directed human beings to take, all of them. It is not just for us, but for all humanity. From Creation to this very day, God has expected all people everywhere to free themselves from sin.

Never does the Bible say that it is beyond humans to do right. God has never pegged us as weaklings who cannot overcome temptation. On the contrary, God created us in his likeness, and demands that we keep that likeness. He commands us to be like him. The very reason why we should be holy and perfect is because God is holy and perfect.

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them

• The way of Jesus is the pattern of his life.

• God created us in his likeness, and demands that we keep that likeness. He commands us to be like him.

(Genesis 1:27).

... be holy, for I am holy (Leviticus 11:44; NASB).

... you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

- ...those people who use God's reason for their holiness (that he is holy) as their excuse for sin!

The big lie is this: "You can't be holy. Only God is holy." Don't be one of those people who use God's reason for their holiness (that he is holy) as their excuse for sin! If you think that way, your mind is in reverse. We should be holy because he is holy, not sinners because he is holy!

i. Capable Cain

For the Lord¹⁹³ it wasn't a waste of time to encourage Cain to do the right thing. He believed in Cain's potential to do good. As Cain got more and more discouraged, Jesus exhorted Cain about how Cain might overcome temptation. He said that Cain (a murderer at heart) needed to *rule over* Cain's sin. It had to be done! It was not optional.

- Jesus knew that Cain was capable of doing what was right.

Jesus wasn't teasing Cain. He motivated Cain to do right because Jesus knew that Cain was capable of doing what was right. He even warned Cain about the temptation trap set before Cain, "crouching at his door." The Lord did this in love. He wanted Cain to be free from the snare of sin. He wanted him to "rule over it."

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:6-7).

ii. Examples for Cain

You might read this and say in your heart, "But Cain had no example back in his day." Are you sure? We beg to differ, Cain didn't just have one example, he was surrounded by examples.

- the best example a person can possibly have

First of all, Cain had the best example a person can possibly have: his Mom and Dad. Jesus clothed them with a skin,

¹⁹³ God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) and the Bible is not a book of ambiguity, but a clear revelation; so let it be known that we're talking about Jesus here. We have already explained why the One called *Yahweh* in Genesis 4 (the Cain and Abel story) was Jesus in our section entitled "Cain and the Lord" (Part III, chapter E, section 2) This footnote is just a reminder.

the skin of an animal he had sacrificed. Jesus did that to cover their shame, their sin, and they understood it as such. But even with his parents' powerful sin-covering experience, Cain decided to ignore God's mercy. Cain ignored the lesson that we need a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. He didn't want to believe like his parents did.

Cain also had his younger brother Abel. Shouldn't Cain have felt some degree of tenderness towards his little brother? Surely Cain must have had some degree of natural affection. Everybody does. Abel was an example of righteousness, pure worship, and pastoral love, but Cain was turned off by it. Abel's shepherding was a lesson about how God cares for us. His habit of sacrificing sheep showed that an innocent life must be sacrificed for sin. What Cain saw in his younger brother should have been enough to prompt him to give his best to God too. But he didn't—he turned negative. He refused to worship God with his little brother.

- ...an innocent life must be sacrificed for sin.

In spite of all that, God still wasn't done with Cain. God is patient even with the most unbelieving hearts. Even after Cain murdered his brother, God still plead with Cain, even speaking the way the blood of Jesus speaks to people today, 6000 years later. God spoke to Cain with more than words. He spoke to him through Abel's blood.

- Abel's blood

[Jesus referred to Abel as] 'righteous Abel' [because his blood was among] 'all the righteous blood that has been shed on Earth' (Matthew 23:35).

[Jesus has]... the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:24).

God kept speaking to Cain, who ignored his parents' and his brother's example. He communicated with Cain in as many creative ways possible, just like he does with people today. But just like Cain, the multitudes of people who reject Jesus today continue to harden their hearts.

iii. Jesus has equipped us

Consider this: If Jesus was so sure that Cain could be righteousness, how much more so must Jesus now believe in us—that we can do what is right? Far be it from Jesus to demand that we do things we can't. That would be sadistic and cruel. On the contrary, Jesus has equipped us to live in holiness. He has done that by giving us his Spirit.

- Jesus was so sure that Cain could be righteousness.

• ...we are much better equipped to live in righteousness than any of the OT saints.

Forget about comparing yourself to Cain. Now that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, we are much better equipped to live in righteousness than any of the OT saints—more than Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Solomon, Esther, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and Deborah, all the way down to John the Baptist! We have more potential than they did.

- Question: Guess **what kind of spirit** the **Holy Spirit** produces in you?
 - Answer: a spirit of **holiness**

• Holiness is what the *Holy Spirit* is about!

Holiness is what the *Holy Spirit* is about! He's called the "Holy Spirit" because he is a spirit who produces holiness! Holiness is freedom from sin, so with the Holy Spirit, we can live free from sin. With the Spirit's help, we can live according to *the law of the Spirit*, which is love. We are able to love our brother. We won't be like Cain, envying and hating our brother.

g. Your calling is Jesus' calling

Our Lord Jesus will give us all the power we need to do miracles, even the power to resurrect the dead. We have lots of anointings among us, but did you know that Christians even have the anointing to bring the dead back to life. Didn't Peter resurrect Tabitha?

... [Peter] got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up (Acts 9:40).

But remember: It wasn't just the apostle Peter who resurrected the dead. Paul resurrected a young man named Eutychus.

Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.

Paul went down, threw himself on the young man, and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. 'He's alive!' Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted (Acts 20:9-12).

Nice—but Peter and Paul are just two stories of Jesus’ disciples resurrecting the dead. What about the time that Jesus commanded all of the 12 apostles to resurrect the dead? Are we to suppose that they heard Jesus’ command, disobeyed their Lord, and didn’t resurrect anybody? Of course not. The Twelve most certainly did exactly what Jesus told them. They resurrected the dead.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘... Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons’ (Matthew 10:5-8).

We also invite you to consider this: Since Jesus commanded the 12 apostles to resurrect the dead, he must have already given them the anointing they would need. Otherwise, he would have been cruelly commanding them to do something they were unable to do. That means that Jesus even gave a sinner like Judas Iscariot the power to resurrect!

Try to resist the temptation to say “That was just for the 12 apostles.” Paul was not one of the Twelve, but he still resurrected people. The anointing to resurrect the dead is not limited to the 12 apostles. It wasn’t just limited to the 12 apostles plus Paul either. The resurrection anointing was available long before the apostles were ever born. The prophets Elijah and Elisha resurrected people more than 800 years before the apostles.

... [Elijah] cried out to the LORD, ‘LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?’ Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, ‘LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!’

The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, ‘Look, your son is alive!’ (1 Kings 17:20-23).

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands.

- Jesus commanded all of the 12 apostles to resurrect the dead.

- Jesus even gave a sinner like Judas Iscariot the power to resurrect!

- ...resurrection anointing was available long before the apostles were ever born.

As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes (2 Kings 4:32-35).

You think that's impressive? How about the fact that after Elisha died, his bones still had resurrection power in them? Even after his spirit had long departed from his body, Elisha's dry bones had enough anointing to give life to the dead!

Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21).

i. God's power for us

Peter walked on water, Joshua stopped the sun in the sky, Moses parted the Red Sea, and Elijah called down fire from Heaven. It's all amazing, but none of this should be a surprise to us, for God has always shared his power with those who believe in him—just like he did with Jesus.¹⁹⁴

• God has always shared his power with those who believe in him—just like he did with Jesus.

Under Paul's ministry, people were healed just by touching a handkerchief or an apron that had made contact with his body.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12).

Others were healed or delivered from demons by simply positioning themselves in a spot where Peter's shadow would fall as he passed by. Every single person upon whom his shadow fell was healed!

... people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might

¹⁹⁴ These words "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38) prove that all Jesus did was done through the power of *God*, and not by his own power.

fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed (Acts 5:15-16).

iii. What God did in him, Jesus does in us

We know that all this feats are true—but how was it possible for people to do them? Is it possible for us to do the same things today? Yes it is, and it's because of Jesus' promise. He promised great anointing to anyone who believes in him; so great that we would do even greater works than he had done!

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

What was the purpose of Jesus' promise here? It's not to teach us that we are greater than he is—He is the only begotten Son of God. Jesus is and will continue to be greater than us; however, because his greatness is best demonstrated through his love, he offers us the same power he has. Does that sound like what the God of Love did with him? Yes, it's exactly what God did in Jesus too: He offered Jesus the same power he has. God demonstrated his greatness through his love first!

Since God is not egotistical, Jesus is not egotistical. God is not interested in showing off, and neither is Jesus. Our Lord did not come to show off his power. God wanted to show us how his power works in Jesus. Jesus wants to show us how his power works in us.

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods?'" (John 10:34)

Jesus showed the world God's power, now let's show the world Jesus' power. Jesus' potential was in God, and our potential is in Jesus. Jesus came to strengthen us spiritually. He came to give us power. He came so that we might someday get a divine nature. If you can accept it, Jesus came to show us that we are *gods*.

- ...his greatness is best demonstrated through his love

- Since God is not egotistical, Jesus is not egotistical.

- Jesus showed the world God's power, now let's show the world Jesus' power.

H. Being gods

1. God's image in us
2. How God uses his promises
 - a. Grab a promise
 - b. How to get the divine nature

That last statement about being *gods* might sound shocking—Jesus knows that it is, which is why he immediately reminded his hearers (and it's the only time he ever gave this kind of reminder) that what is written in the Bible is unbreakable. God's Word cannot be undone. No one will ever be able to deny that God calls us *gods*.

- No one will ever be able to deny that God calls us *gods*.

- ...we will bear his likeness—we will have his nature.

- Jesus, who is God in man's likeness, gives man God's likeness.

What God means by calling us *gods* is something greater than we will bear his likeness—we will have his nature. Having the divine nature is what will make us gods. The way to get it is following in Jesus' footsteps. Isn't the divine nature what Jesus got when he finished fulfilling the will of God? He gives us the example of what it takes to be gods. This is totally related to the fact that Jesus himself is now God.

... the one and only Son... is himself God (John 1:18).

The fact that we can be gods is totally related to the fact that we can call Jesus "my God" (John 20:28), or "our God" (2 Peter 1:1), or "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13), or even "God over all" (Romans 9:5)! We follow in the footsteps of our God Jesus to become gods. Doesn't that make sense?

So the good news—the Gospel—is that Jesus, who is God in man's likeness, gives man God's likeness. Here's the verse that proves that Jesus is "God in man's likeness."

God was manifested in the flesh... [and] believed on in the world... (1 Timothy 3:16; NKJV)

Now, it's your turn to prove that you can have God's likeness. Will you believe that it's possible? Will you follow Jesus' example? Jesus' ministry to mankind is about this: God came in man's likeness to restore man to God's likeness.

- God came in man's likeness to restore man to God's likeness.

1. God's image in us

Adam and Eve had God's likeness in the beginning: They were holy just like he is. But they lost their holiness—they

sinned. How can we get that *likeness* back? Jesus is not going to turn back time and put us in the Garden of Eden again. A time machine might sound like a good idea to a quantum-physicist, but Jesus has a better idea. He let Adam and Eve reign over one garden, but he'll let us reign over all the Earth.

Jesus won't send us back in time, but push us towards the future. He has given us the promise of the Kingdom to make us holy. Now that we know that our authority over all angels, animals, birds, fish, and plants is a sure thing—the blessed hope—we turn from sin and towards God. That's how we get our holiness back.

And check this out: In the Kingdom we'll be able to keep our knowledge of good and evil. Yes, even though humans got our conscience through Adam's disobedience, God is going to allow us to keep it forever. Having it in the Kingdom will make us more like God than even Adam was the day he was created.¹⁹⁵ So, imagine this: Humans will bear more of God's image in the Kingdom than we ever would have if we had remained in the Garden! And since Adam and Eve are numbered among believers, they will have more than they did ever did in Eden. How good God is to all of us!

2. How God uses his promises

God has always commanded man to come back to him. From long ages past, he has insisted that we return to him through his Son. He has tried everything to get us to honor his Son, even threats!

Kiss his Son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment (Psalm 2:11).

Threats have been of little use however. They tend to scare people away from God, so the Only Wise God uses love more frequently. Mark this: Throughout history, kindness has been God's most effective way of drawing us to him.

God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance (Romans 2:4).

- He let Adam and Eve reign over one garden, but he'll let us reign over all the Earth.

- Jesus won't send us back in time, but push us towards the future.

- Humans will bear more of God's image in the Kingdom than we ever would have if we had remained in the Garden!

- ...kindness has been God's most effective way of drawing us to him.

¹⁹⁵ That makes for a good trivia question: "What is the only thing will we be able to keep in the Kingdom which we obtained through sin?" Answer: Our conscience.

... he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

One great kindness of God is his promises. One of his greatest promises, which we just looked at, is the promise that we will be *gods*. We can get great victories against temptation from this promise because when we see the glory that we can get in eternity, the temptations of this life seem petty. Human beings only get strongly inclined towards doing what is right when a great reward is associated with doing it. That's why the Gospel of the Kingdom is so effective in making us righteous and why the Ten Commandments are not.

- Human beings only get strongly inclined towards doing what is right when a great reward is associated with doing it.

- Jesus used God's promises to overcome trials.

a. Grab a promise

If (by faith) we grab hold of a promise, we will be able to overcome trials just like Jesus did. And indeed Jesus used God's promises to overcome trials. One of the biggest trials he faced was the Cross. The promise of reigning with God was "the joy set before" Jesus. He clung to it by faith while he hung on the Cross.

For the joy set before him he endured the Cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Since the Scriptures promise that we will reign also, we have a joy set before us! Since we will share in God's divine nature, we have the encouragement to overcome all trials, temptations, and tribulations!

... the holy people of the Most High will receive the Kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever... the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom... (Daniel 7:18, 27)

... he [God] has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

b. How to get the divine nature

So here's what Jesus came to show us: how to get the divine nature. He became what we are—a human being with the same human nature we have—but still overcame every temptation. Having been victorious against temptation, God made him our Lord. If you believe in Jesus, he gives

- how to get the divine nature.

you a special right: the right to become a child of God.

... to all who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

God resurrected Jesus, gave him a divine nature, and sat him down at his right hand. Do you want to have a resurrection body like Jesus? You'll have to be faithful to him until he comes back. If you have been born of the Spirit, you are already like him in one very special way—you are a child of God. That's just a start though. It's when we actually see Jesus, that we will be completely transformed.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him [Jesus] as he is (1 John 3:2).

Jesus became what we are for a reason: Jesus became what we are so that we might become what he is. Do you accept the challenge to become what Jesus is? God has given that challenge to us. He wants us to be like Jesus in glory, but first we must be like Jesus in humility. The Gospels tell us that God approved of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus was in the flesh, but gained God's approval by living by faith. The only questions now are:

- Will God approve of **us**?
- Will **we** obtain the same glory Jesus obtained?
- Will **we** get resurrected like Jesus did?

§

• Jesus became what we are so that we might become what he is.

• He wants us to be like Jesus in glory, but first we must be like Jesus in humility.

VII. Life service, not lip service

Words are cheap. Many people publically proclaim Jesus as Lord, and seem like Christians because of it—but their hearts are far from God. Many even have great anointings from the Holy Spirit. They can prophesy, cast out demons, and do miracles. That's what they can do—but what can they *not* do? They can't stop sinning.

- ...what can they *not* do? They can't stop sinning.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

These are the Church's hypocrites. They infiltrate congregations, but they have never really met Jesus. They enter church buildings, but Jesus will deny them entrance into the Kingdom. Be warned: If you think that because you go to church you are okay with God, think again. Jesus expects much more than Sunday morning attendance. We have to *do* what the Father wants in and out of church. It's not a matter of being churchgoers or non-churchgoers. You are either a *doer* of God's will, or an *evildoer*.

- They enter church buildings, but Jesus will deny them entrance into the Kingdom.

- You are either a *doer* of God's will, or an *evildoer*.

A. Obeying Jesus' commands

1. Twenty commands
 - a. Cut it out
 - b. Say the simple truth
 - c. Be extra kind to the unkind
 - d. Love your enemies
 - e. Be perfect
 - f. Secretly give to the poor
 - g. Pray in secret
 - h. Pray ad lib
 - i. Pray to the Father
 - j. Hide your fasting
 - k. Invest in Heaven, not on Earth
 - l. Don't worry about necessities

- m. Put the Kingdom first
 - n. Don't worry about tomorrow
 - o. Don't judge
 - p. Repent of hypocrisy
 - q. Don't preach to the unrepentant
 - r. Try to get things from God
 - s. Keep the Golden Rule
 - t. Struggle to get to God
2. We should listen to Jesus
3. Keeping Christ's commands
- a. Surpassing Moses
 - b. A pastor's job
 - c. An excellent teacher
 - d. The 10 Commandments
 - i. The Law is good
 - ii. The sin in us
 - iii. We are not carnal
 - iv. We can do it
 - v. Not following but fulfilling
 - 1) No other gods
 - a) Jewish roots
 - b) Original Christians
 - c) Jesus' God
 - 2) No images
 - a) Jesus' confrontation
 - b) The apostles' warnings
 - c) The world's final idolatry
 - 3) Do not use God's name in vain
 - a) Yes or no
 - b) Teaching God's name
 - c) God's reputation in Jesus
 - d) The power of God's name
 - e) God our Savior
 - 4) Rest on the Sabbath
 - a) Jesus the Sabbath-keeper
 - b) Sabbath joy
 - c) Working for God
 - d) A Sabbath rest for us
 - 5) Honor your parents
 - 6) Do not kill

- a) Jesus' random comment
- b) Apostles against murder
- 7) No adultery
 - a) Original design: $1+1=1$
 - b) Moses the nice guy
 - c) Scaring people away
 - d) *Single*-mindedness
 - e) Death to adulterers
 - f) Real zeal
 - g) Unfaithfulness: Another adultery
- 8) No stealing
 - a) Pay up
 - b) Eyes, teeth, and hearts
- 9) No lying
 - a) Personal example
 - b) Keeping quiet
- 10) No coveting
 - a) Positive reinforcement
 - b) More than taxes
- e. A new commandment
 - i. Following Jesus, not Moses
 - ii. The perfect law
 - iii. Take it seriously
 - iv. What love was like
 - v. How difficult it is to love
- f. The Lord's Supper
 - i. True fellowship
 - ii. Real food and real drink
 - iii. Necessary food and drink
 - iv. Remaining in Christ
 - v. Too hard
 - vi. Jesus gets jealous
 - vii. Breaking bread often
 - viii. Don't you dare
 - ix. Discerning his body
 - x. Jesus' extreme measures

• We can't pick and choose our favorite commands.

Let me tell you something about obeying Jesus that we tend to forget: It's not optional. We can't pick and choose our favorite commands. We can't select which of Jesus' com-

mands we're going to obey and which ones we won't obey. A Christian must observe all that he commanded us—that's the commitment we make in baptism. That's your part of the covenant, friend.

[Jesus said to the apostles]... make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).

There's this perception of Jesus that he only taught love. It's an idea floating around churches, the idea of a Jesus who only commanded us to love one another, nothing else. Although loving each other is his essential commandment, and it's far from easy to do, the other commandments of Jesus are, well... commands! Christians are under obligation to obey all of them, with love.

1. Twenty commands

There are countless commands of Jesus to consider; so many that it would take many millions of books to copy them down. That's why in this chapter we will limit ourselves to looking at just twenty of Jesus' commands. Imagine what a small number that is—just twenty! The commands you'll read about here were given on just one occasion during Jesus' extensive ministry: the Sermon on the Mount. They may have taken him 20 minutes to explain. They might take you 10 minutes to read. It's just a sampling of what Jesus demands of us. Reflect upon them:

• There are countless commands of Jesus to consider.

a. Cut it out

You have to cut sin right out of your life. Quit sin “cold turkey.” Jesus' command to “cut it out” particularly applies to sexual sin. We know that it's about sexual sin because Jesus was teaching about not committing adultery when he mentioned it. That's the context.

• Quit sin “cold turkey.”

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell.¹⁹⁶

And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

¹⁹⁶ Since *Hell* is a place and the rules of English grammar are to capitalize proper nouns (i.e., places with names), we capitalize this word in our book.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into Hell (Matthew 5:29-30).

b. Say the simple truth

- Mean what you say and say what you mean.

Do not make oaths swear by anything. Mean what you say and say what you mean.

I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by Heaven, for it is God's Throne; nor by the Earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the Evil One (Matthew 5:34-37; NKJ).

c. Be extra kind to the unkind

Don't battle with bad people. As long as it's not sinful, do whatever they ask of you, and more. Go beyond what bad people ask of you!

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:39-42).

d. Love your enemies

- You must love those who mistreat you.

You must love those who mistreat you. You've got to pray for them, asking God to bless them.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

e. Be perfect

Be like God, perfect in love; in other words, loving everybody. This can be done particularly by greeting evil people warmly (that's the context surrounding Jesus' command).

Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

- Help the poor, not your reputation.

f. Give secretly

You have to keep your giving a secret. Help the poor, not

your reputation.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... (Matthew 6:3).

g. Pray in secret

If you really want God to respond to your prayers, pray in private, not in public.

- ...pray in private, not in public.

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:6).

h. Pray ad lib

Do not pray in a repetitive way. Speak to God from your heart. Be spontaneous, as if you were having a natural conversation with someone.

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words (Matthew 6:7; NKJ).

i. Pray to the Father

You must direct your prayers to the One God and Father in Heaven. It's his name that you are giving a special place in your heart when you pray.

- ...direct your prayers to the One God.

This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name...' (Matthew 6:9).

j. Hide your fasting

Don't let other people know that you are fasting. When you do, take the appropriate measures to hide it from others.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face... (Matthew 6:17).

k. Invest in Heaven, not on Earth

Do not save up riches in this world, but in the next. Do not hoard down here, invest up there. Store up rewards for eternity. Open a Kingdom savings account.

- Open a Kingdom savings account.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal... (Matthew 6:19-20).

l. Don't worry about necessities

- Don't worry about material things.

Do not be concerned about food, drink, or clothes. Don't worry about material things.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? (Matthew 6:25).

m. Put the Kingdom first

Make the Kingdom of God and doing things right your two top priorities in life. Put things in an eternal perspective.

But seek first his [God's] Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).

n. Don't worry about tomorrow

- Limit your concerns to today.

Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Limit your concerns to today.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34).

o. Don't judge

Do not condemn people—particularly if you commit the very sin you condemn in them.

Do not judge, or you too will be judged (Matthew 7:1).

p. Repent of hypocrisy

- Be much more concerned about freeing yourself from your own sins than about freeing others from theirs.

Recognize your hypocrisy. Be much more concerned about freeing yourself from your own sins than about freeing others from theirs.

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Matthew 7:5).

q. Don't preach to the unrepentant

- Your effort to save them, is their opportunity to destroy you.

Do not share God's message with people who will not value it. Beware of those who would turn your evangelism against you. Your effort to save them, is their opportunity to destroy you.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under

their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (Matthew 7:6).

r. Try to get things from God

Ask God for what you want. Make a concerted effort to get real answers to your prayers. Persist until you get what you need.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

s. Keep the Golden Rule

Do to others the same good things you would like them to do for you. Always treat others the way you want them to treat you. When you are dealing with them, put yourself in their shoes.

- Always treat others the way you want them to treat you.

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you... (Matthew 7:12)

t. Struggle to get to God

Approach religion the hard way, not the easy way. Don't be like everybody else.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it (Matthew 7:13).

This list is quite short, only consisting of 20 commands, because our point here is not to give you a teaching, but a sampling. We want you to realize that Jesus gave a lot more commands than people imagine. The 20 listed here are from just one 20-minute message during Jesus' 3-year ministry. How many other things must he have commanded outside of these? John, in the very last verse of his Gospel, says that Jesus taught so many things that, you'd need gigabytes to write them all down.

- Jesus gave a lot more commands than people imagine.

... there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the World itself would not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25; NASB).

2. We should listen to Jesus

We have to pay very close attention to what Jesus commands. That's what people are supposed to do with a lord—

- Are Jesus' words important to you?

pay attention to him. A *lord* is someone whose words are important. Are Jesus' words important to you? Peter realized that we can't afford to ignore what Jesus taught. Jesus has the words of eternal life.

'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (John 6:67-68).

How can we listen more closely to Jesus' sayings? One way is to read the Bible every day. Another way would be to listen to solid preaching often. If you want, you could also seek the advice of people who walk with Jesus, or you could listen to prophecies. The point is that there are many ways to pay closer attention to what Jesus has said. We are duty-bound to use the means that are available to us. Our Lord made sure that his Word was proclaimed openly, and not in secret.

- ...there are many ways to pay closer attention to what Jesus has said.

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs (Matthew 10:27).

'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret' (John 18:20).

3. Keeping Christ's commands

Like Moses, who worked to establish the Tabernacle worship, a priesthood, and a nation which God would be pleased to accompany in battle, Jesus aims at establishing something too—but what? We can see it in the content of his teaching. His primary focus was the Kingdom of God, right? Well, that's exactly what he aims at establishing. Consider what establishing the Kingdom entails:

- ...Jesus aims at establishing something... establishing the Kingdom

- building **a Temple** dedicated to the One God
- lifting up **a royal priesthood**
- forming **a nation of priests**
- preparing **global worship** in spirit and in truth
- gaining **God's support** to defeat the forces of evil

a. Surpassing Moses

A big difference between Moses and Jesus you should be aware of is that Jesus is organizing something much greater than Moses. Jesus is administrating the one eternal covenant—the one designed for those who will rule forever in the Universal Kingdom. Moses was organizing a temporary covenant for those who would inherit Canaan, the Promised Land. Because of the greatness of what Jesus is doing, it makes sense for Jesus’ commandments to be much more demanding than Moses’, doesn’t it?

Jesus not only commands us not to kill, he orders us to never call anyone a “dummy.” Jesus didn’t only say that we should not commit adultery; he said that we shouldn’t have an impure thought. Moses taught not to swear by God’s name; but Jesus said that we shouldn’t swear by anything, not even the hairs of our head.

... I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:20).

If we follow Jesus, our righteousness will far surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. They only followed Moses—and they didn’t do it very well anyways. Jesus is much more demanding than Moses ever was, and he does more than Moses because Jesus actually empowers us to love. He gives us a new heart. He sends us God’s Spirit.

b. A pastor’s job

God has called all Christian pastors to teach Christians to obey all of Jesus’ commands. To teach the Ten Commandments of Moses would be a very light task compared to teaching just one commandments of Jesus because Jesus goes so much deeper than Moses. Jesus demands that we give all of what we are to God.

... he [a teacher of the Law] asked him [Jesus], ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

• Jesus is organizing something much greater than Moses.

• ...it makes sense for Jesus’ commandments to be much more demanding than Moses’.

• Jesus is much more demanding than Moses ever was.

There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Jesus summed up the commandments of Moses with two: love God and love your neighbor. But just because Jesus summed up Moses’ commands in two doesn’t mean that Jesus doesn’t have many other specific commands about how we should love God and exactly how we must love our neighbor. There are many others, and they get much more specific than the two great commandments!

There will be a great reward in the Kingdom of Heaven for pastors who do and teach everything Jesus has commanded. Those who do not set any of Jesus’ teachings aside will be called *great* in God’s Kingdom.

[Speaking of the commandments given by Moses, Jesus said]: ... anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19).

c. An excellent teacher

• An excellent Gospel teacher will teach obedience to everything Jesus has commanded.

An excellent Gospel teacher will teach obedience to everything Jesus has commanded. He’ll do it because Jesus told him to. He will do it for his own salvation and for the salvation of those who hear him.

... go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you... (Matthew 28:18-20).

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).

d. The 10 Commandments

• Jesus indeed taught each of the 10 Commandments.

So, let’s hear about some more of the commands of Christ. A point for us to continue from would be to look at Jesus’ take on the 10 Commandments. Our reason is because people say he didn’t teach them, but Jesus indeed taught each of the 10 Commandments. To prove that he taught them is easy. The point is: Not only did he teach them, he expects us to obey them.

In some places in the Bible, you can find Jesus speaking directly about the 10 Commandments. In other passages, you'll find his apostles' teachings on them. Whether you learn about them through Jesus or his apostles, you'll discover the same thing: A Christian's commitment to the Ten Commandments should be deeper than the commitment a Jew has to them.

The Ten Commandments were not only written for the Jews. They were written for us. The Ten Commandments do not contradict Jesus' teachings, but support them. They were even meant to guide people to Jesus! If someone understands the Law the right way, it will lead them to Jesus.

... the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

i. The Law is good

The Law of Moses is good. His commandments are good. In fact, if there was any law that could have produced righteousness, the Law of Moses would have been that law!

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:12).

Is the Law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the Law (Galatians 3:21).

From the previous passage, we can draw the same conclusion that Paul does: “

The Law is good (Romans 7:12,16).

ii. The sin in us

The Law would have worked if only human beings were spiritual. The problem is that we humans are not spiritual, but carnal. Our flesh causes us to resist God's holy Law. We don't do what our mind tells us, but what our deceitful heart leads us to do. We are in grave spiritual condition—desperately wretched.

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9; NASB)

... I find the principle with me, the one who wants to do good, that evil is present with me. For I joyfully

- A Christian's commitment to the Ten Commandments should be deeper than the commitment a Jew has to them.

- The Ten Commandments do not contradict Jesus' teachings, but support them.

- The Law would have worked if only human beings were spiritual.

agree with the Law of God in my inner person, but I observe another law in my members, at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that exists in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:21-24; LEB).

iii. We are not carnal

But a person who has received Christ as Lord is no longer carnal. We have power over the flesh because Jesus has revived our spirit with his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Now the Law is written on our hearts. If you can understand what Jesus has done for us, you can understand why Jesus expects so much from us. He expects us to obey the Law of God because his Spirit frees us from the power of our flesh.

• He expects us to obey the Law of God because his Spirit frees us from the power of our flesh.

... that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you (Romans 8:4, 9; LEB).

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts... I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

... the anointing [the Holy Spirit] you received from him [Jesus] remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things... (1 John 2:27)

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God (1 John 3:6, 9).

iv. We can do it

Did you know that we can fulfill the Ten Commandments easily? Let's look at three passages that teach that. The first one says that the Law is not even designed for Christians, but for sinners. That is to say, God gave the Ten Commandments with horrible sinners in mind. He was not thinking of the righteous when he wrote them. That's why Paul says here that you are not even supposed to use the OT Law with a Christian. It's not written for the righteous.

• ...the Law is not even designed for Christians, but for sinners.

We know that the Law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the Law is made not for the righ-

teous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:8-10).

The second says to love God is to obey him; and it's no great burden to do so.

... this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:2-3).

The third calls Christians the keepers of God's commandments. That's just what a Christian is: a keeper of God's commands. That's what defines us.

... patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

v. Not following but fulfilling

There are many Christian teachers today who never mention the Ten Commandments. There are even those who teach that Christ does not demand holiness from us. Granted we won't become righteous by following the Law, but that doesn't mean that we don't have to fulfill it. We must fulfill the Ten Commandments and much more—just like Jesus did!

[Jesus said]: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until Heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).

One thing that really shocks the antinomians¹⁹⁷ is when you

- ...to love God is to obey him.

- ...what a Christian is: a keeper of God's commands.

- ...we won't become righteous by following the Law, but that doesn't mean that we don't have to fulfill it.

¹⁹⁷ Excuse the archaic term. The Puritans used it a lot to debate with those who were against the law. Our English language derives the word from *anti-* (against) and *nomos* (Greek for law). *Antinomian* is a legitimate English word—it's just out of use due to the fact that people don't talk much about the commandments anymore. But the fact that people don't give much importance to the commandments anymore is precisely the problem! It's better for people to be passionately against them than for people to ignore them altogether. At least, with someone who opposes them, you can have a discussion with him about how important they are. With someone who doesn't care, there's no conversation.

- Jesus made the New Covenant even more demanding than the Old.

show them that Jesus made the New Covenant even more demanding than the Old. They want to think that things are easier now. Poor souls, they fail to see that Jesus expanded on the Ten Commandments, he didn't abbreviate them. They want the commandments to go from ten to only two. We say that the two commandments turn the ten to ten million.

- ...the two commandments turn the ten into ten million.

If you can at least demonstrate to them that Jesus taught each of the Ten Commandments, they might begin to change the error of their ways. Use the following ten points as a tool, if you like. Our aim with them is to prove that Jesus and his apostles taught the Ten Commandments. Under each of the Ten Commandments listed below, we share some passages that show how they should be applied to Christians.

1) No other gods: We must have no other gods before Yahweh.

- ...the Early Christians...were strict monotheists.

First of all, there is no doubt that they the Early Christians believed in One God and that their One God was the Father. They were strict monotheists and had thoughts very distant from the Trinitarianism confusion so prevalent today.

a) Jewish roots

Since the first Christians were just Jews who believed in the Messiah, it should be no surprise to you that the famous Jewish expression of faith, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4) is repeated eight times in the NT:

... the Lord is One (Mark 12:29).

... God is One and there is no other but him (Mark 12:32).

... there is only One God (Romans 3:30).

There is no God but One (1 Corinthians 8:4).

... there is but One God (1 Corinthians 8:6).

... God is One (Galatians 3:20).

For there is One God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

... there is One God (James 2:19).

- Christians have only One God, they didn't believe that any other gods even existed.

Not only did Christians have only One God, they didn't believe that any other gods even existed. They rightly called

the gods of the Gentiles “so-called gods.”

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in Heaven or on Earth... yet for us there is but One God, the Father, from whom all things came, and for whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).

b) Original Christians

The original Christians believed in only One True God, the Father.

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ... to the Only [yes, the *Only*] Wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (Romans 16:25, 27). [There is]... One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6).

They tell 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—Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is True. And we are in him who is True by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the True God and eternal life (1 John 5:20).

c) Jesus' God

Jesus was a Jew, so he was just as monotheistic as the apostles, who were all Jews. He never tried to change Jewish belief. His new religion, Christianity, only built upon Jewish faith. In fact, Jesus was so fervent for monotheism than he used his monotheistic faith to rebuke the Pharisees! He chastised them because they didn't pursue the glory of the Only God.

... you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the Only God (John 5:44)?

Jesus would pray to God, calling him “the Only True God,” clearly distinguishing God from himself.

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).

Jesus also would insist that only God, not anybody else—not even himself—was good.

• Jesus was so fervent for monotheism than he used his monotheistic faith to rebuke the Pharisees!

‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone’ (Mark 10:18).

But most importantly, Jesus obeyed God’s commandment: “Serve him [God] only” (Deuteronomy 6:13; 1 Samuel 7:3). Jesus was tempted to serve another, but he refused. Jesus would not serve anyone other than the One God. By making that choice under great temptation and duress, Jesus demonstrated his deep commitment to the first of the 10 Commandments, and to God Himself.

- Jesus would not serve any-one other than the One God.

Jesus answered [Satan], “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’” (Luke 4:8).

2) No images: It is prohibited for us to make idols or graven images because true worship is spiritual. An idol always impedes true worship. It will never enhance it.

- An idol always impedes true worship.

a) Jesus’ confrontation

Jesus spoke directly to an idolater one day and made it plain to her that what she and her people worshipped was not God at all. He directed her towards true worship in order to free her from her idolatry.

[Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:] You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for indeed the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the ones who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:22-24; LEB).

b) The apostles’ warnings

We just saw how Jesus warned the Samaritans to repent of their idolatry, but the apostles had a more subtle task than Jesus: They had to warn Christians about the sin of idolatry.

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14).

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21).

- ...the apostles would warn Christians against idolatry.

Does it sound strange that the apostles would warn Christians against idolatry? It’s not strange at all. In fact, in the very first Council in the history of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem, the apostles wrote a letter warning the churches about four sins. Idolatry was so common during their day that out of just four sins the Church was asked to avoid, not

eating meat sacrificed to idols was one of them—and it was only a matter of conscience, not even that the Christians were actually in the gatherings in which the sacrifice was made.

You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols... You will do well to avoid these things (Acts 15:29).

e) The world's final idolatry

If you visit a Hindu temple or an older Catholic church you'll see images and statues all around. Those are obvious manifestations of idolatry, but electronic devices¹⁹⁸ are the most popular idols today, and you don't need to go to a special place like a temple to find them: They are everywhere. The ever-so-common addiction to them proves that many millions of so-called "Christians" are not free from modern-day idolatry.

• ...electronic devices are the most popular idols today.

Technology will be one of the most powerful tools the Antichrist will have in his hands. He will take advantage of modern man's dependence on electronic devices in order to be seen by all and worshipped by all. Through technology, the Antichrist will get maximum worldwide publicity. His image, the "image of the beast" is said in the Bible to have breath. That means that it appears to be alive. It is also able to speak and to kill! Whom will it kill? The people who refuse to worship it—the few of us who are free from technology-idolatry.

• Technology will be one of the most powerful tools the Antichrist will have in his hands.

The second beast [the False Prophet] was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast [the image of the Antichrist], so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (Revelation 13:15).

Those who worship the image of the Antichrist will be able to buy and sell. All others will be refused that basic right. The idea of the Antichrist's government is to pressure us to participate in history's strongest and final form of idolatry.

• ...history's strongest and final form of idolatry.

... no one was able to buy or to sell except the one who had the mark—the name of the beast or the number of his name (Revelation 13:7).

¹⁹⁸We are referring to smart phones, mobiles, televisions, MP3 players, computers, gaming devices, and tablets.

Economic pressures are very effective tools of persuasion, aren't they? That's why Christians are warned in the NT to avoid the most common idolatry of all: greed.

- ...the most common idolatry of all: greed.

... greed... is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10; AKJV).

3) Do not use God's name in vain: It is prohibited to use God's name in an empty way. We shouldn't pronounce it without reverence.

a) Yes or no

Jesus sternly warned people against using God's name lightly. He prohibited oaths, swearing by Heaven, by Earth, by Jerusalem, or even by the hairs of our head. According to Jesus, we shouldn't say any more than we mean.

- ...we shouldn't say any more than we mean.

... I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by Heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the Earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the Evil One (Matthew 5:34-37).

James reaffirmed Christ's yes/no approach to commitments.

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by Heaven or by Earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple 'Yes' or 'No.' Otherwise you will be condemned (James 5:12).

b) Teaching God's name

Anyone who thinks that Jesus didn't teach the name of God probably doesn't understand what it means to teach God's name. There is a lot of confusion on the matter. Jehovah's Witnesses say that it means teaching that the name of God is pronounced *Jehovah*. Messianic Jews say think it means teaching that the name of God is pronounced *Yahweh*. The funny thing about these teachings is that Jesus never mentioned Jehovah or Yahweh in the entire NT; but at the same time, Jesus was sure that he had taught the name of God to his apostles.

- ...what it means to teach God's name.
- Jesus was sure that he had taught the name of God to his apostles.

... I have made thy name known to them [the apostles],
and will make it known... (John 17:26; NASB)

How curious. What did Jesus mean by “I have made your name known to the apostles”? He was not talking about teaching a particular combination of letters (like J-e-h-o-v-a-h). He was talking about something much deeper than pronunciation. Jesus meant that he taught the apostles what God’s essential character is. That essential character was what Jesus meant by *thy name*. In other words, God’s *name* is God’s reputation.

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name,
the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we
are one (John 17:11).

c) God’s reputation in Jesus

Now, you’ll notice that according to what Jesus said, that *name* of God to which Jesus referred was not only God’s name, it was also the name which God gave to Jesus. How can that be so? Is the name *Jesus* the same as the name *Yahweh*? No, that’s clearly not what Jesus meant. Remember, Jesus didn’t use the term *name* to refer to the pronunciation of a series of letters. He used it to mean *reputation*.

Now you can see how Jesus could say that God’s name was the name God gave Jesus: God put his very *reputation* in the hands of Jesus. It was not such a stretch for God to do that, being that Jesus is God’s Son. Being God’s Son, Jesus very naturally bore the reputation of his Father! And since Jesus always did what was right, he never brought disgrace to the name God gave him—so God made a great choice when he gave his name to Jesus. God’s reputation was kept intact by Jesus.

d) The power of God’s name

Understanding that *name* means reputation is a really important accomplishment for people who want to understand the Bible well. If you understand that principle, you will also be able to understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of “the power” of God’s name. Remember, Jesus said:

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name...
(John 17:11)

- ...he taught the apostles what God’s essential character is.

- God’s *name* is God’s reputation.

- ...the name which God gave to Jesus.

- Jesus very naturally bore the reputation of his Father!

- God’s reputation was kept intact by Jesus.

•...the strength of God's own reputation.

If name means *reputation*, then we can interpret this passage to mean that a good reputation allows a person to wield power. A good reputation commands respect. So when Jesus asked God to protect us by the power of God's name, he was asking God to protect us by the strength of God's own reputation. This is not such an easy concept to grasp, but we'll try to explain it.

Can you imagine someone who has a better reputation than God Himself? We assure you that there is no one. Have you realized that many times, even when we are bad, God still does good things for us? Why does he do that? It's not because we deserve it, but because he is concerned about his own reputation in the world. Lots of people observe our lives, we represent God, and it's in his best interest to make us examples of his grace.

•...his reputation is at stake.

It's in that sense that God will protect us by the power of his name: He'll do good things for us not because we deserve them, but because his reputation is at stake. For example, read the following passage and figure out the reason why God did not destroy the Israelites after they had worshipped the golden calf. Do you know why he didn't? It was because God's reputation was at stake. Moses reminded him:

Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the Earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people" (Exodus 32:11-12).

God heard Moses' prayer and forgave the Israelites. He forgave them in the times of Ezekiel for the same reason: not for anything good in them, but for his own reputation. He couldn't put it at risk. If you can see how his mercy worked towards Israel, you'll understand the power of his name!

Therefore say to the Israelites, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes' (Ezekiel 36:22-23).

e) God our Savior

We don't know God directly, but we *do* know God through what he did in Jesus. That's why Jesus said that it is "by that name" (God's reputation in Jesus) that Jesus keeps us safe.

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me (John 17:12).

Do you get the point here? We believe in the God of Salvation who worked through Jesus. We believe in the Father and his Son. They have the same reputation because the Son does exactly what the Father asks of him. The Father gave the Son his own name—his own reputation. Their reputation, especially their reputation as Saviors (and you can see how both are called *Savior* in 1 Timothy and Titus in particular), keeps us safe. God won't allow his reputation to suffer. He wants everyone in the world to know him as Savior.

God has revealed himself through Jesus to be the Savior. How so? Well, God saved Jesus. If God saved Jesus, he'll save us. Through faith in Jesus—and that means that living in the New Covenant—we are promised salvation. We believe in the God who saved Jesus from death. God earned his reputation as Savior through the resurrection of Jesus, and now God wants everybody to know that reputation, that name.

God allowed death to happen to Jesus, but then he saved him from it. God let Jesus become a victim of death—and then he rescued him. Why did God rescue Jesus from death? Why doesn't he just rescue everybody from death? Why doesn't he just take everybody out of Hades? The reason is because God wants to save us from a problem that's deeper than death—he wants to save us from sin! A person who is free from sin (like Jesus was), does not deserve death, and cannot be condemned.

• ...we *do* know God through what he did in Jesus.

• God wants to save us from a problem that's deeper than death.

Now you understand what God’s fatherly love is all about. If you are a child of God, expect him to save you the same way he saved his Son Jesus—he’ll save you from sin. He wants to solve the sin problem first. He’ll do it for the honor of his own name because you bear his reputation. Then, when he solves your death problem, he’ll get even more glory. When we are resurrected, people will praise his name as God our Savior.

4) Rest on the Sabbath: You shall work six days, but the seventh day is a day on which you shall do no work.

Regardless of the debate about whether the Christian Sabbath should be Saturday or Sunday, let’s just deal with the fact that Jesus taught on the Sabbath. When he did, he encouraged the Jews to fulfill their Saturday rest. One example of that is when he warned them to prepare for the last times through a prayer: That they wouldn’t need to flee Jerusalem on a Sabbath (caught off guard).

Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20).

a) Jesus the Sabbath-keeper

Not only did Jesus affirm the Saturday-rest commandment, he kept Saturdays holy in his own life. Don’t pay any heed to the way the Pharisees criticized him. Although the Pharisees considered Jesus to be a Sabbath-breaker, they were dead wrong. He actually kept it much better than they did. They didn’t understand his ways for this reason: Jesus kept the Sabbath according to its original design. The Pharisees kept the Sabbath according to their own rules—and they literally made up thousands of them.¹⁹⁹

• ... the Pharisees considered Jesus to be a Sabbath-breaker, they were dead wrong.

¹⁹⁹ The *Mishnah*, the written codification of the oral tradition, lists “forty less one” (Shabbat VII.2) categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath. Some of them came directly from the work of the tabernacle itself, e.g., spinning, warping, sewing, and dyeing. Other areas included the agricultural activities implied in the use of a finished product, such as linen cloth. These would include sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, and winnowing. These prohibitions would cover activities in growing the plants from which they obtained fibers for the linen cloth... From these thirty-nine categories, well established by the time of Jesus, came the thousands of specific *halachah*, or specific rules governing each situation and contingency (Retrieved on April 7, 2015 from <http://www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0699.htm>).

The Pharisees hijacked the day of rest and made it a day of tyranny, turning it into their great weekly opportunity to oppress God's people. Their control was based on their ability to condemn others for the smallest infraction of the Sabbath law. As the religious leaders of their time, they took it upon themselves to walk around watchfully on Saturdays to see who would dare carry a pot, light a fire, or saddle a mule. Of course, they reprimanded those who did so.

- The Pharisees hijacked the day of rest.

Jesus consecrated the Sabbath as it was intended to be consecrated—as a day of rest from secular activities. And Jesus outdid the commandment, just like he did all of them, but not like the Pharisees. He didn't outdo it by concentrating his ministry into a 24-hour period, but by spreading that ministry out. Jesus didn't dedicate just one day a week to God, he dedicated seven days a week to God! He consecrated his entire life to ministry. Jesus outdid the commandment by keeping a 24/7 Sabbath. From the moment he left his carpentry business, his entire life became one big Sabbath. Would you dare to do something similar? Would you dare to quit your job and devote all of your labors to God?

- Jesus didn't dedicate just one day a week to God, he dedicated seven days a week to God!

b) Sabbath joy

Jesus understood that God's original purpose for the Sabbath rest was to give God's people a reprieve from the worries and pressures of everyday life. God especially wanted the slaves and the poor (many of whom were oppressed by their bosses and owners) to have an opportunity to be with God and to worship him. This was clearly the intent of the original command.²⁰⁰

- Jesus strove so diligently to help his Jewish compatriots to experience the Sabbath-day freedom.

²⁰⁰ The original command speaks of the Sabbath being a reminder of what it means to be freed from slavery. In fact, the command was *so that* the Jews' servants might rest. Here it is:

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to ob-

Now you know why Jesus strove so diligently for his Jewish compatriots to experience the Sabbath-day freedom God originally intended for them.

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable... then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land... (Isaiah 58:13-14)

Then he [Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27).

• Jesus' approach towards the Sabbath was not inactivity—it was joy!

Jesus' approach towards the Sabbath was not inactivity—it was joy! The inactive approach (that people should not even pick up a mat when they moved from one place to another, or that they not help a disabled person to stand up, or take a sheep out of a ditch) was the oppressive and dreary Sabbath the Pharisees imposed upon the people. Their hearts were so hard that Jesus could heal a man who had been disabled for 38 years, and the Pharisees would not congratulate him or rejoice with him. Instead, they would be angry at him for walking with his mat on the Sabbath!

... so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' " So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" (John 5:10-12).

c) Working for God

Jesus' approach to the Sabbath was not sedentary inactivity but active work. The Sabbath was a day for Jesus to work for God. In fact, he said that his reason for healing was because God Himself was still working—even on the Sabbath. Jesus' approach to the Sabbath was quite offensive to the Pharisees. They ended up hating him for it.

• God Himself was still working.

... because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day [the Sabbath], and I too am working' (John 5:16-17).

For those Pharisees who were looking for a reason to condemn Jesus, his supposed Sabbath-breaking tipped the scales for them. His healings of the sick, blind, and deaf were the straw that broke the camel's back. It became the primary point of criticism they had against him. It became the reason why they wanted to kill him.

Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2).

... because Jesus was doing these things [healing] on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him... For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath... (John 5:16, 18).

d) A Sabbath rest for us

Understand this: Although Jesus taught that the seventh day of the week should be kept holy by Jews, that was only because the Jews were still under the Old Covenant. Jesus has revealed a different *seventh day* to those of us who are now under the New Covenant. Believers are not subject to the command to abstain from secular work on the seventh day of the week. We will fulfill the command a different way—through the Millennium.

The Saturday Sabbath was just a *shadow* of the Millennium. The Millennium is the time to come, and only believers will enter into it.

... do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

So believers actually will fulfill the Sabbath rest. Our Sabbath just happens to be a different seventh day from Saturday. Our Sabbath is the seventh millennium. We're aiming for the Sabbath God was mysteriously referring to the day the command was given. To set your sights on the seventh thousand years, you have to understand that for God, seven days and seven thousand years is the same thing.

With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day (2 Peter 3:8).

- We will fulfill the command a different way.

- ...believers actually will fulfill the Sabbath rest.

- ...for God, seven days and seven thousand years is the same thing.

When history's seventh thousand begins,²⁰¹ we will enter into the true Sabbath. We call it the Millennium! That's when God's Kingdom will be established on Earth. Jesus will reign and will give both Creation and us a well-deserved rest. Now that's a Sabbath you can't afford to break!

- ...a Sabbath you can't afford to break!

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his (Hebrews 4:9-10).

'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them' (Revelation 14:13; NASB).

5) Honor your parents: You shall honor your father and your mother.

Jesus reaffirmed the fifth commandment: to honor father and mother. The angle Jesus took on it was that we should take care of our parents financially in their old age.

- ...take care of our parents financially in their old age.

... he [Jesus] continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.'

But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down..." (Mark 7:9-13)

Paul also repeated the fifth commandment in his letters. It has not been annulled. God still demands that children honor their parents, even Christian children. This is good news because it's true that the children of Christians can be just

- ...God still demands that children honor their parents, even Christian children.

²⁰¹ That should be sometime around 2029 AD. To do the math, you just take into consideration that Jesus was born in about 4 BC, then add 33 years (his approximate age at his death) to get 29 AD (which is about 4000 years after Creation). Then add another 2000 years to get 2029 and you have the beginning of the Seventh Millennium.

Don't forget to subtract 7 years to figure out when the Tribulation will begin. If you do, you get an early date of 2022 years for the Antichrist's covenant with Israel. The Kingdom is closer than we think it is! (Feel free to analyze the subject through an Internet source like Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology_of_Jesus).

as disobedient and rebellious as the children of unbelieving parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the Earth' (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1).

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things (Colossians 3:20).

6) Do not kill

For Jesus, merely getting angry with your brother or sister is equivalent to murder. To call them names is worse than murder. Don't do it. If you do, our Lord (and Judge) said that it makes you worthy of Hell.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Hell (Matthew 5:21-22).

• ...merely getting angry with your brother or sister is equivalent to murder.

a) Jesus' random comments

Jesus made numerous random comments against the sin of murder. First of all, let's look at this one—the one where he said that people who kill by violence will die by violence:

... all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword (Matthew 26:52; NASB).

Secondly, he pointed out that the precursors to the Pharisees were murderers, having killed the prophets.

Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them (Luke 11:47; NASB).

• ...the precursors to the Pharisees were murderers.

He noted that the teachers of the Jews were trying to kill him, making them lawbreakers and murderers.

Has not Moses given you the Law? Yet not one of you keeps the Law. Why are you trying to kill me? (John 7:19)

That wasn't the only occasion Jesus boldly confronted the Pharisees about their murderous intents. He said that that desire to murder made them children of the Devil himself. Strong words.

You are of your father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning... (John 8:44; NASB)

b) Apostles against murder

• ...the Pharisees were murderers.

Stephen echoed the teachings of Jesus, also pointing out (to their faces) that the Pharisees were murderers. He said this based on the fact that they had killed Jesus and their ancestors killed the prophets who came before Jesus. What did they do when they heard this speech against them? They killed Stephen. That confirms that what he said was true, doesn't it?

Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become (Acts 7:52; NASB).

And John taught against murder too. He even did us the favor of pointing out its source: It comes from hating people who are more righteous than us.

... we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:11-12; NASB).

7) No adultery: You shall not commit adultery.

• ...a very rational argument against these very passionate sins.

We already looked at this passage briefly, but now we want to analyze it in the light of the evils of divorce and remarriage. Jesus laid out a very rational argument against these very passionate sins.

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart... And it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for a matter of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32; LEB).

a) Original design: 1+1=1

Jesus reinforced these same teachings on another occasion, invoking Adam and Eve as the standard for what husband-wife unity should look like. According to that first couple in history, Jesus taught that one man and one woman become one flesh. On the basis of his 1+1=1 teaching, Jesus warned those who would separate what God has joined.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate (Matthew 19:3-6).

• ...one man and one woman become one flesh.

b) Moses the nice guy

Immediately after the previous teaching, Jesus taught that Moses only gave permission for divorce because the Israelites had such hard hearts. In other words, God didn’t actually want them to have divorce in their society. It was a concession.

‘Why then,’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’

Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning’ (Matthew 19:7-8).

c) Scaring people away

Jesus’ teachings caused his apostles to declare that it might be better not to get married in the first place. Our Lord made marriage sound like such a huge commitment that he actually scared people away from it.

‘I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.’ The disciples said to him, ‘If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry’ (Matthew 19:9-10).

d) *Single-mindedness*

Then Jesus challenged those who were able to take the path of celibacy. He very wisely did not impose it on anybody, but he challenge people to it nonetheless. What a balanced approach!

- a balanced approach

Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it' (Matthew 19:11-12).

The teaching on celibacy was not only given by Jesus—Paul taught it too. Paul gave more importance to serving God single than any other apostles. His reason was undivided service to the Lord. That is, his devotion to his Lord Jesus was the fundamental reason why Paul didn't marry.

- undivided service to the Lord

I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion...

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided.

An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.

I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:7-9,32-35).

e) *Death to adulterers*

Consider the occasion when an adulterous woman was brought before Jesus: What was Jesus' judgment? It was quite simple: She should die, just as Moses had said. Jesus didn't make the Law any more lenient. He recognized that its demands had to be met.

- She should die, just as Moses had said.

‘... in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do you say?’ They were saying this, testing him, so that they might have grounds for accusing him. But Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground.

But when they persisted in asking him, he straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and he was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court (John 8:5-9; NASB).

Notice that more than expressing his judgment, Jesus handled the crowd. He knew that he had to be patient and wait for the Pharisees’ rush to condemn the woman to abate. He let the thrill for capital punishment subside. He didn’t let the Pharisees control the situation. If he did, the crowd would have rushed into rash behavior.

Jesus stooped over and drew in the sand to detach himself from the situation—he knew that his enemies wanted to trap him in it. That worked to cool their anger. Then Jesus spoke giving his approval of the death penalty taught by Moses.

- cool their anger

Wisely, he invited the accusers to begin carrying out the punishment they said was fair—but at that point they couldn’t anymore. Their consciences wouldn’t allow them. Jesus’ manner of dealing with the situation revealed that his opponents weren’t really indignant about the woman’s sin—they were just trying to trap Jesus. They wanted to discredit him. They wanted him to appear either too hard-hearted or worse, disobedient to the command God gave through Moses.

- ...they were just trying to trap Jesus.

f) Real zeal

The Pharisees did not have the spirit of the law in their hearts. First of all, they had no love. The spirit of the Law is to love our neighbor. Those men were not interested in bringing the adulteress to repentance. But secondly, the spirit of the law would have led them to actually stone the adulteress. Zeal for holiness in Israel is what characterized

- ...the spirit of the law would have led them to actually stone the adulteress.

great priests like Phinehas:

Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand, and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach (Numbers 25:6-8).²⁰²

In his day, Phinehas purged Jewish society from the evil of sexual sin. The Pharisees didn't have anything similar to what he had. Their zeal was revealed for what it truly was: cheap theatrics, self-righteousness, and a hatred of Jesus.

8) No stealing: You shall not steal.

a) Pay up

If you owe something to someone, Jesus taught that you must pay it all. Jesus affirmed that he will be so strict with this commandment that he will keep you in jail until you pay the very last cent.

- ...he will keep you in jail until you pay the very last cent.

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:25-26).

b) Eyes, teeth, and hearts

Our Lord never denied the famous *eye for eye / tooth for tooth* law of retribution on a judicial level. He upheld it. He did, however teach that God wants us to show mercy on a personal level. That is, Jesus did not attempt to change courtroom justice, he tried to change our hearts. He taught us to forgive from the heart and to let public prosecution take care of itself. Jesus was not directing his teaching to lawyers and judges, but to common people when he said:

- He taught us to forgive from the heart.

²⁰² God praised Phinehas for his zeal and honored him greatly with an eternal covenant of peace. To see that, read the verses that follow (vv. 10-13).

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:38-42).

Jesus encouraged the offended party not to seek revenge. Christians should allow themselves to be treated unjustly. If we do, it will advance the Gospel in this world, and we might even win souls. We should cheerfully give our resources and time to those who demand things from us. If we do, they will taste what the Kingdom hope is about.

- We should cheerfully give our resources and time to those who demand things from us.

9) No lying

Jesus always spoke the truth. That in itself should be enough of a teaching for us about not giving false witness. Jesus was honest and true; but he taught us so much more than how to speak the truth: He taught us the right way to react to false accusations.

a) Personal example

Now, the ninth commandment says that we should not give false witness. Did Jesus reinforce that precise commandment? He did, and he made it even more strict, using himself as an example. What was his example? It was the greatest example given by any human being: Jesus would not give a testimony about himself.

- Jesus would not give a testimony about himself.

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true (John 5:31-32).

Do you know what Jesus' lofty example means for us? It means that we shouldn't give a witness about ourselves either. Like our Lord, we should wait for God to give a witness about who we are. He can confirm who you are through prophecy, anointing, signs, or best of all, in the resurrection. Wait for those divine testimonies if you would follow Jesus' example.

- ...we shouldn't give a witness about ourselves...

b) Keeping quiet

Jesus also taught us something more about lies: He taught us how to respond to false accusations. Again, he taught by example. Jesus responded to false accusations by keeping quiet.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent (Matthew 26:59-63).

- the silent approach

Why is the silent approach such a good way to deal with false accusations? Because it shows that we don’t feel threatened. If someone accuses us of evil and we do not respond, it proves that we have no guilty feelings. It proves that we have a clear conscience. It proves that they are wrong!

A silent response to false accusation might prick the consciences of those who are lying about us, but even if it doesn’t, at least it shows that we trust in God. If I do not rush to defend myself, it’s because I am trusting in God to defend me. Jesus demonstrated supreme trust in God on the day of his crucifixion. What’s more, by keeping quiet, he fulfilled this prophecy:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

10) No coveting: You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

a) Positive reinforcement

Did Jesus ever teach about the dangers of coveting what belongs to others? It might be hard for you to remember when, but he did. When Jesus taught that we should be generous in our giving, he was reinforcing the tenth command in a

- ...re-enforcing the tenth command in a positive way.

positive way. In his typical style, our Lord took his teaching way beyond what Moses commanded:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

... the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35).

b) More than taxes

Our Lord also taught that we should pay taxes to the government. But that was a simple matter for him—a light commandment. Jesus wanted us to go way beyond taxes, so what did he teach? He taught that we must give all things back to whom they are due—and that includes giving God what we owe him. This is a major teaching of our Lord Jesus: Our biggest debt is with the One in whose image we have been created.

• ...we must give all things back to whom they are due.

'Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?' But Jesus knew their hypocrisy.

'Why are you trying to trap me?' he asked. 'Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied.

Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' (Mark 12:14-17).

e. A new commandment

Jesus made no effort to be original. On the contrary, he only said and did what the Father commanded him. That's it. Although he was not dry, he was un-original. All that he taught was in order to fulfill the OT Law, not to change it. So when Jesus gave a new commandment to his disciples, it was a memorable moment. His new commandment was unique. It was especially for Christians. Only we can fulfill it.

• ...when Jesus gave a new commandment to his disciples, it was a memorable moment.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34; NASB).

He gave that Christian commandment again, a little later in the same place, the Upper Room. He gave it again to his apostles. On that second mention of the command, Jesus

clarified: It was *his* command.

This is my command: Love each other (John 15:17).

i. Following Jesus and not Moses

Jesus' commandment to love one another became the apostles' new rule of life. Keeping the Old Covenant wasn't their guiding principle anymore. Rather, love became their rule. Paul put it this way:

... in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6).

The apostles had to adapt to Jesus' new commandment. It wasn't what they were used to, but they were sure that Jesus was greater than Moses, so they were eager to give it a try. They didn't follow the Ten Commandments anymore. They would follow Jesus instead, and by doing so, Jesus would make them more holy than the Law ever could. Their new challenge in life was to love as Jesus loved! They would to love *even as* he had *loved them* (John 13:34).

ii. The perfect law

James was very zealous for Jesus' new commandment, calling it *the perfect law*. That meant for James that there was no other law that summed up so much. There was no other law that was able to accomplish so much. James also called "love one another" *the law of liberty*. He gave it that name because it frees Christians from two great evils: judging and being judged.

Let's recall that as a younger brother to Jesus, James was raised in the same house as our Lord. They grew up together as brothers—and that means that James had a unique experience which taught him in a very personal way what it meant to love "as Jesus loved." Because James experienced so much love from Jesus, James said:

... one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does... So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12).

• ...love became their rule.

• Their new challenge in life was to love as Jesus loved!

James was so serious about Jesus' new commandment that he warned Christians to be ready to be judged by it. Those are strong words! James warned us that we will have to give an account to God about whether or not we fulfilled the law of love. He considered Jesus' commandment to be the new gold standard of godly behavior.

iii. Take it seriously

So if we are going to be judged by it, we have to take Jesus' command to love one another very seriously. Jesus gave this *new commandment* exclusively to Christians. He did not give it to the Jews under the Old Covenant and he didn't give it to the World in general. This command is especially for us—the people that will be most hated as history rolls on.

... you will be hated by all nations because of me (Matthew 24:9).

The hate we are destined to receive is the key to understanding how hard it will be to fulfill this commandment. Jesus knows that it's not at all easy to love someone that everybody else hates. Can you recognize that that's precisely why the commandment is so challenging? It is. Are we going to stick together and love one another when the rest of the world hates us? A time will come when Christians will betray Christians, but loving each other is what will always make a true Christian stand out from a false one.

... many will turn away from the [Christian] faith and will betray and hate each other (Matthew 24:10).

This love for other Christians is what identifies you or me to be a Christian. Other people are watching us. They will notice if there is something different about our behavior. They will notice if we have a strong love for each other or not—if we are bound by a strong commitment or not. They will notice whether we are kind to each other or not. Don't worry more about preaching God's Word than about loving other Christians. People will see right through your hypocritical preaching if you don't love the Christians. The foundation of your preaching is love. The world knows what the disciples of Jesus look like!

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34).

• ...we will have to give an account to God about whether or not we fulfilled the law of love.

• ...loving each other is what will always make a true Christian stand out from a false one.

iv. What love was like

What would the Church²⁰³ be like if all Christians were to follow Jesus' command to love? We already know what it would be like because when the Church first started, the believers really followed Jesus' commandment to love one another. They shared everything they had. There was no selfishness—just hospitality and generosity. Their love was so effective, it actually wiped out poverty among them.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... there were no needy persons among them.

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:32,34-35).

No discrimination or class division existed among that first Christian congregation. The rich shared their food and money freely with the poor. Every home was open through hospitality, and everyone had their needs met. They were one big family. The Early Church gives us a picture of what it is like when Jesus' commandment is kept.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:44-46).

²⁰³ By *Church* we're referring to people from every nation around the World who have been born again in the Holy Spirit through baptism, and who persevere in the New Covenant. We're not talking about people who simply call themselves "Christians," but people who believe in the doctrine of the apostles [as defined in Hebrews 6:1-2 and Ephesians 4:3-6]. If they don't know the fundamental doctrine of the apostles, at least they shouldn't reject us or leave us when we explain it to them.

... if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:19).

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us (1 John 4:6).

• ...when the Church first started, the believers really followed Jesus' commandment to love one another.

Seeing what the Church is capable of when it is obedient to the new commandment, we wonder, “Why doesn’t the Church look like that today?” Well, maybe what we’re calling the Church is not really the Church. There are people in congregations all around to help their Christian brothers and sisters in a loving way. But will they be so loving when the World is in crisis? Will they continue to do it when the seals are broken and the trumpets sound? Will they act in love during the Tribulation?

... There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:7-12).

From this passage we can see that times are going to get much worse—for the Church. Yes, if you read it carefully, you’ll see that love will grow cold particularly in the Church. That’s the only way to interpret “the love of most.” The *most* refers to the people who are in the Church. Anyone who *stands firm to the end* (that can only be someone in the Church) *will be saved*. Another translation puts it this way:

... because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12; LEB).

v. How difficult it is to love

Times going to get ugly for the Church, but even if they weren’t, it’s still always difficult to love! It’s not as easy as just being nice to people. Since it’s a fruit of the Spirit, it doesn’t appear from one day to the next. Like fruit, love needs to be cultivated.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love... (Galatians 5:22).

Here’s a question to see if you have real Christian love: Would you be willing to sell your house for the poor Christian people you knew? If you are willing, then you not only love them, you are accumulating treasures in Heaven. Con-

• ...times are going to get much worse.

• ...it’s still always difficult to love!

gratulations.

And if you did sell your house, would you give the proceeds to your local church leadership? Most people wouldn't today. Most Christians couldn't trust their pastors. They know that their pastors wouldn't use the money to support the Church's poor. Many pastors today work for God for a salary. They are *hired hands*.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep (John 10:11-13).

- ...pastors no longer care for the flock of God.

A sign of apostasy is that pastors no longer care for the flock of God. They care about money. They care about it so much that they even brag about their prosperity in front of the Church. That is one factor that has added to the distrust and coldness so common in the Church nowadays.

... [speaking of] the flock doomed to slaughter. The ones buying them kill them and go unpunished, and the ones selling them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I have become rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them (Zachariah 11:4-5; LEB).

- ...loving is much more difficult than practicing the gifts.

Here's a final reflection on how difficult it is to love, and how difficult it will be in the times when the love of most will grow cold: The Bible says that loving is much more difficult than practicing the gifts. Since in most congregations—even the Pentecostal ones—Christians are not practicing the gifts, do we dare say that we're capable of loving? It's easier to speak in the tongues of men, to speak in the tongues of angels, to prophesy, to fathom mysteries and knowledge, and to have faith that moves mountains than it is to love! But we must love because Jesus has commanded it.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing... (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

f. The Lord's Supper

Another command of Christ is to eat and drink of him. If Jesus said “Take and eat” and “Drink from the cup,” then he gave us two very concise commands, didn't he? Taking the Lord's Supper is not optional for Christians. It's a matter of whether we will obey Jesus' command or not.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:26-28).

Jesus doesn't just want us to put bread and wine in our mouths, he wants us to proactively examine our hearts in the Lord's Supper—*proactive* meaning that you must make a concerted personal effort. There's a saying in Spanish: “A sleeping shrimp gets swept away by the tide.”²⁰⁴ The same thing is true for Christians: If we stop struggling, the sinful tendencies of this world will sweep us away. We have to be proactive.

In his wisdom, Jesus knew that the most effective way for us to defeat sin is to look into our hearts on a regular basis—and that's the spirit of the Lord's Supper. It is the filter of the Church. All the sins that otherwise would have gone unnoticed get trapped there through confession. They proceed no further.

i. True fellowship

Besides its usefulness to cleanse us, the Lord's Supper is a powerful tool Jesus uses to exercise his authority over the Church—and it's very powerful. It is one of Jesus' instruments of punishment. If we take the bread or cup in an unworthy manner, he will punish us with sickness or death. Don't feign fellowship in Jesus' Church, he will catch you.

True fellowship (also known as *communion*) is not just a matter of eating and drinking with your congregation, it's about striving together for inner holiness. If you are not willing to do strive against sin, then don't take the Lord's

- Taking the Lord's Supper is not optional.

- ...you must make a concerted personal effort.

- Don't feign fellowship in Jesus' Church...

- ...striving together for inner holiness.

²⁰⁴ The Spanish version says: *Camarón que se duerme, se le lleva la corriente.*

Supper. To do so would be to act hypocritically. Don't act like you're following Jesus when you really aren't. Don't act like your struggling against temptation when you are toying with it.

ii. Real food and real drink

You'll notice that the doctrine that Jesus came in the flesh takes on deeper meaning when you eat and drink the Lord's Supper. "Jesus came in the flesh" is much more than a doctrine to think about. It is a doctrine to eat and drink!

- ...a doctrine to eat and drink!

Jesus put a huge amount of importance on his flesh and blood when he called them our *real food* and *real drink*. What did he mean by *real*? It means that other foods and drinks won't fill you the way his flesh and blood do. Other foods and drinks won't take away your soul's hunger and your soul's thirst the way the Lord's Supper will. Is Jesus' body and his blood more important to you than anything else you could ever eat or drink? They should be.

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink (John 6:55).

iii. Necessary food and drink

Anyone who wants eternal life²⁰⁵ has to eat Jesus' flesh and they have to drink his blood. Otherwise, they have no life. Jesus said that *unless* you eat and drink, you do not have life in you. That means that the Lord's Supper is indispensable.

- ...the Lord's Supper is indispensable.

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day' (John 6:53-55).

iv. Remaining in Christ

Notice how in the following verses Jesus teaches what our participation in the Lord's Supper is all about: It's about *remaining* in Jesus.

- It's about *remaining* in Jesus.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

²⁰⁵ That means the life that you get now through the Spirit, the life which has its fulfillment in the Resurrection.

This is the bread that came down from Heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever (John 6:56-58).

What an important word *remaining* is. Some Bible versions translate it *abiding* in Jesus. It means “not falling away.” It means not getting sucked into sin. If you *remain* with your wife, you don’t get separated or get divorced. If you remain in Jesus, you stick with him through thick and thin. You don’t let your love for him grow cold.

v. Too hard

So how did people react to Jesus’ teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood? You probably already know—they thought that the teaching was too difficult. They complained that Jesus was asking for too much. Not surprisingly, Christians today react to the demands of the Lord’s Supper in a similar fashion. They say: “He can’t be serious, can he?”

... many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’ (John 6:60-61).

As you can see, when Jesus challenged his disciples to make a complete commitment to him, the reaction was dismal. Practically nobody liked the idea. In fact, many of his disciples responded by turning away. That means that they stopped following Jesus altogether. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood was the breaking point for many of his disciples. When they abandoned Jesus, it proved that he really wasn’t their Lord.

As a result of this many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with him anymore. So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you?’ (John 6:66-67; NASB).

The Lord’s Supper was only embraced by Christ’s followers after Pentecost. After that day, Christians began to break bread together on a daily basis. The Lord’s Supper would crystallize into a Church tradition—one that looked much different than the tradition we see practiced in churches today. The Early Christians saw Lord’s Supper as the greatest sign of their commitment to Christ (after baptism). They

- ...Christians today react to the demands of the Lord’s Supper in a similar fashion.

- ...when Jesus challenged his disciples to make a complete commitment to him, the reaction was dismal.

- Eating his flesh and drinking his blood was the breaking point for many of his disciples.

- ...the greatest sign of their commitment to Christ (after baptism).

treasured it as the sign that they were in the New Covenant. They shared the Lord's Supper daily, and with solemn simplicity.

vi. Jesus gets jealous

The apostles warned Christians to be careful about how they participated in the Lord's Supper. It was actually a dangerous thing to participate in, believe it or not. Why? The reason the Bible gives is because Jesus gets jealous.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf...

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 21-22)

Jesus sees the Church as his bride. We belong to him. What if Jesus suspects that some Christians are participating in ceremonies of worship to other gods? He would consider that to be spiritual adultery—Jesus would get jealous. The Church is his bride and she shouldn't have any other Lord but him. Jesus is just as jealous with the Church under the NT, as God was jealous of Israel in the OT.

• Jesus is just as jealous with the Church under the NT, as God was jealous of Israel in the OT.

I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God (Exodus 20:5; NASB).

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deuteronomy 4:24; NASB).

• They had to make sure that they didn't eat meat sacrificed to any idols.

How could the Corinthians make sure that Jesus wouldn't get jealous of any contact they had with idols? What was the solution Paul offered? They had to make sure that they didn't eat meat sacrificed to any idols. Demons inspired devotion to idols, so eating the meat sacrificed to an idol was the equivalent of eating at *the table of demons*. How could they come to the Lord's Table right after eating at a demon's table? The Lord's Supper is supposed to be our expression of faithfulness to just One Lord.

vii. Breaking bread often

The believers' devotion to the *breaking of bread* in the first church in history, the Jerusalem congregation, was much stronger than what we see in churches today. Since Jesus commanded that Christians do it, and they wanted to be very obedient, they did it a lot—like every day! Read the following passage, and pay special attention to the terms *devoted themselves* and *every day*.

They [the members of the first Church] devoted themselves to... the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together... They broke bread in their homes and ate together ... (Acts 2:42, 46).

viii. Don't you dare divide

Now comes the hard part. In the next passage, you will see how the Lord Jesus judges Christians. Are you ready for a shock? How does Jesus act towards Christians who divide the Church along socio-economic lines? What does he do with Christians who look down their noses at their poor brothers and sisters in the faith? Be sure that Jesus does something about it. Paul said:

I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you... when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.

Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! (1 Corinthians 11:18-22)

People who had plenty of food in Corinth *despised* [expressed a low view of] the Church by eating in little kinship groups and drinking too much. They weren't sharing their food with their poor brothers and sisters. By not sharing with the poor, they actually were *humiliating* the poor because the poor in the church had no food to eat. As Paul said, they had *nothing*.

So how did Jesus get involved with all of this? You might be surprised to know that Jesus was very offended by this

• ...how the Lord Jesus judges Christians.

- ...he sent sickness and even death to the rich-ego-centric believers.

- Don't you dare divide Jesus' Church during the very tradition he left to unite us.

- ...the reality of his presence when we meet together.

behavior. He was so unhappy with it that he sent sickness and even death to the rich-egocentric believers. Sound drastic? Well, it's all a matter of whether they deserved it or not.

What does someone who divides God's Church deserve? Isn't division a serious sin?²⁰⁶ Apparently for Jesus it is. For Jesus it's a sin that deserves death. It's particularly serious sin to use the very Lord's Supper (God's primary sign of Christian unity) to divide the Church. Don't you dare divide Jesus' Church during the very tradition he left to unite us.

ix. Discerning his body

Jesus commands us to discern his body during the Lord's Supper. What does that mean? It means that we have to believe in the reality of his presence when we meet together—even if there are just two or three of us! Believe that Jesus is there.

... where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst (Matthew 18:20; NASB).

If we are going to eat the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, we have to be certain that Jesus' presence in the Lord's Supper is real. His presence among us is as real as his promise, isn't it? Surely it is. And he promised that he would be with us to the end.

I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20; NASB).

²⁰⁶ See Proverbs 6:16-19 (NASB) which is a list of six things God hates. The last of the six is understood to be the worst.

There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Also consider these two NT passages:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions (Romans 16:7).

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned (Titus 3:10-11).

Are these just poetic words of symbolic value, or are we supposed to believe that the bread that we eat is really Jesus' body? Obviously these weren't literal words. If they were literal, then we would have to be cannibals. But because they weren't literal doesn't mean that they are allegorical and it doesn't mean that they are metaphorical. In fact, Jesus' words were neither of those. Instead, they were spiritual. They were and still are "full of the spirit and life." That means that they go *beyond* reality. They are not simply natural, they are super-natural.

[Jesus asked] '... what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!²⁰⁷ The spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the spirit and life' (John 6:62-63).

Are you going to believe these words of Christ or not? Do you want to see the bread of the Lord's Supper through a microscope? Go ahead. But if you want to see it with the eyes of faith—you'll see the reality of what is there. Do you want to study the bread scientifically or see it spiritually? Do you choose to disbelieve Christ's body, or discern his body? Here are the words of Jesus himself: "This is my body." It's your choice whether you believe him or not.

Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26; NASB).

Every time we come to the Lord's Table, Jesus challenges us to really check to see whether we are remaining in the New Covenant, or whether we are allowing our conscience to become hardened by unconfessed sins. He challenges us to ask ourselves whether we are participating in the covenant sign in a worthy or unworthy way.

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

• Jesus' words... were spiritual... they go *beyond* reality.

• Do you want to study the bread scientifically or see it spiritually?

²⁰⁷ In other words, Jesus' physical body would not be with the disciples after the Ascension, so the disciples were supposed to understand that Jesus was not talking about his literal physical body when he said "Eat of my flesh."

Considering the passage above, every time you take the Lord's Supper, it would be good to ask yourself these questions:

- Is this **really** (**spiritually**) Jesus' body?
- Is his body **still the effective sacrifice** for sin?
- Does Jesus' body **really work to save** us from sin?
- Doesn't this sharing of Jesus' body and blood, **get God's forgiveness for us?**

If you can't give a hearty "yes" to each of those questions, you'd better not eat of the bread or drink of the cup just yet. Wait. Reflect more. You wouldn't want to be guilty of eating and drinking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

x. Jesus' extreme measures

If we have sin in our hearts and do not confess it, the Lord of the Church will send judgments—and he does that out of love. He does it in our best interest, so that we will be saved. Do you get it? He doesn't want us to be judged in Hell, so he sends lighter judgments like sickness and death now. He dies it as a preventative measure. He will do anything to make sure that sin doesn't destroy our souls—even destroying our bodies.

• ...he sends lighter judgments like sickness and death now.

Jesus will give Christians punishment through physical death for two reasons: First, he does it so that other Christians will not be affected. Sinful people in a congregation are the *leaven* Paul warned us about twice:

A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9; NASB).

Secondly, Jesus judges us with physical death in order to save us from being condemned with unbelievers. In other words, he sends sickness and death to avoid something worse for us: the fire of Hell.

• ...he sends sickness and death to avoid something worse for us: the fire of Hell.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment (1 Corinthians 11:30-34).

It all comes down to this: Jesus uses his power to save us from eternal condemnation. Doesn't that make you feel safe? It's supposed to be a comfort for you to know that Jesus uses his authority and judges his Church. Jesus' judgments are our guarantee that "we will not be finally condemned with the world."

• Jesus uses his power to save us from eternal condemnation.

B. Hypocrites are out there

1. Lord of our hearts
 - a. An undivided heart
 - b. A new goal in life
2. Half-hearted disciples
 - a. Jesus tests would-be followers
 - b. The cover up
 - c. Multiplying words
 - d. The apostles denied Jesus
 - e. Don't presume you're strong

If being a Christian were only so easy as saying the words "Jesus is Lord"—but it's not. Go ahead and say it, but know that Jesus will have you prove your faith. If you do not pass the tests that he gives you, then he has proven you to be a hypocrite. The destiny of hypocrites is not a pretty one:

• Jesus will have you prove your faith.

... He [Jesus] will cut him²⁰⁸ to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:51).

1. Lord of our hearts

The way of a hypocrite is to forget about Jesus in daily life and to talk a lot about him among friends, family, and acquaintances. If you find yourself locked in that bad habit, the habit of "talking the talk but not walking the walk," remedy it through repentance. Repent from your hypocrisy. Then, renew a heartfelt love for Jesus. A true Christian is someone who expresses their feelings with sincerity, but

²⁰⁸ The hypocrite in the context of this passage is a pastor who has sinful habits (like drinking and eating with evil friends). Furthermore, he acts harshly towards those God has given him to lead.

- a heart-felt love towards Christ.

who first has a heart-felt love towards Christ. Check to see how your heart is before you try to change your words.

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord (2 Peter 3:15).

a. An undivided heart

To actually get to the point of having a sincere reverence for Christ, you'll have to renounce other things you love. A person cannot love God²⁰⁹ and the World at the same time. A hypocritical heart is a divided heart. A divided heart is no good.

The main obstacles to our love for God are:

- **servicing wealth**

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Luke 16:3; NASB).

- **friendship with the World**

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the World is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the World makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4; NASB).

- **strong bonds with unbelievers**

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.²¹⁰ For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the Temple of God and idols? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

²⁰⁹ We're not confusing God and Jesus here. Loving God is loving Christ, and here's the reason: God has commanded us to listen to and obey his Son. Obedience to Jesus is obedience to God. And obedience is *love*, according to God's way of seeing things.

²¹⁰ This is better known by the famous translation "unequally yoked." The NASB translated it as being "bound together with unbelievers." Some examples of this kind of behavior include: willfully marrying an unbeliever, choosing an unbeliever as your best friend, or entering into a business venture-contract with an unbeliever. Anything that legally binds you to an unbeliever is an unequal yoke. Avoid it at all costs.

b. A new goal in life

Do you want to be free from hypocrisy? Make *knowing* Christ your new goal in life! As you can see from the length of this book, there is a lot to learn about Jesus. Make it your goal to *gain Christ* by counting your previous *gains* as *loss*. Your social, academic, professional, and religious prestige add up to nothing. It's all worthless in the light of the resurrection, right? Throw away those worldly trophies and strive to gain the crowns that Jesus promises to those who serve him.

- ...there is a lot to learn about Jesus.

... whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:7-11).

2. Half-hearted disciples

One of the most obvious signs that a Christian is a hypocrite is their overuse of Jesus' name. They think that they will impress others by calling Jesus *Lord*, *Lord* all the time, but it doesn't impress God because they use Jesus' name in vain.

- their overuse of Jesus' name

- ...they use Jesus' name in vain.

a. Jesus tests would-be followers

Observe how the men in the next passage volunteer their service to Jesus, call him *Lord*, but in the meanwhile had bigger commitments. Watch what Jesus did with these supposed-disciples. He tested them—and he has every right to do so. If they say that they're going to be his disciples, he has to know what they're made of. Being a disciple of Jesus demands all that we have. It's not just a matter of putting on a jersey.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Fox-

es have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’

He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.’

Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:57-62).

b. The cover up

Lots of people call Jesus *Lord* to cover up their sin. There are even those who reject the Christians God has sent to them, then they dare to turn around and call Jesus *Lord*. Of course Jesus sees right through these two-faced liars. The words he will speak to them in judgment are already written for us in the Bible. He will confront them with this powerful truth: “If you reject those whom Jesus has sent, you reject Jesus himself.”

‘I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

They also [just like the righteous in v. 37] will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’ (Matthew 25:44-46).

Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me [God] (John 13:20).

c. Multiplying words

An exaggerated use of the title *Lord* is more common than you might think. Millions of Christians today have found themselves caught in the habit of *multiplying words* to either feel or appear more spiritual. Listen to some Christians’ prayers—they might repeat *Lord* twenty times in one prayer. Do they stop to think about whether theirs is a vain or meaningful use of Jesus’ title *Lord*? No, they do not.

• An exaggerated use of the title *Lord* is more common than you might think.

Others repeat “Praise the *Lord*, praise the *Lord*, praise the *Lord*” as a greeting. Should they think a little more deeply about what they are saying? Let the name *Lord* be used in our greetings with moderation. Let there be plenty of actions in our lives to back the name of the Lord up. Our actions will show that he is the Lord of our lives, not our words.

Maybe the way people are using *Lord* is okay too. Maybe a Christian who is saying *Lord* abundantly is actually quite submissive to Jesus in their life. That’s possible, but not probable. Hypocrisy is a deadly and deceitful sin. Anyways, the point is that repeating *Lord* is no proof that you are a Christian. The true test of Christian faith comes when you are pressured to deny Jesus under the threat of losing your job, your comforts, your family, your money, or even your life. Will the person who is always saying *Lord*, *Lord* cower back in fear when the threats come? Will their faithfulness to their Lord bear up under tribulation? Time will tell.

• ...repeating *Lord* is no proof that you are a Christian.

d. The apostles denied Jesus

Peter was confident that he would never deny Christ. He even assured Jesus face-to-face, insisting that he was willing to die with Jesus. The other apostles said the same thing.

Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not’ (Mark 14:29).

Peter kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!’ (Mark 14:31; NASB).

But the reality is that Peter began to deny Jesus just a few hours after he spoke these words of devotion—and note that to show his devotion, he actually called Jesus *Lord*.

But he [Peter] replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death’ (Luke 22:33).

Peter asked, ‘Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you’ (John 13:37).

Not only Peter, but all of the 12 apostles professed their loyalty to Jesus as *Lord* the night of his betrayal, yet they all subsequently abandoned him. Their last brave words as they went out with him that night were “See, *Lord*, here are two swords” (Luke 22:38), but they left their courage behind. In spite of their verbal commitments, each of them fled as they came to understand that their lives were in danger.

• ...all of the 12 apostles professed their loyalty to Jesus as *Lord* the night of his betrayal, yet they all subsequently abandoned him.

Peter kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!’ And they all were saying the same thing also (Mark 14:31; NASB).

Remember that these were strong, mature, and even anointed men. This was no group of wimpy academics, most of them were burly fishermen, yet fear gripped them that night, and they did what they insisted they would never do: They abandoned their Lord.

- They abandoned their Lord.

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?’ (Matthew 26:20-21).

e. Don’t presume you’re strong

If the very apostles of our Lord cracked under pressure, let’s not presume that we won’t. Let’s not presume that we are immune to the temptation of fear. Rather, let’s examine our hearts, praying that we will not deny him when the time of testing comes. The reality is any of us could deny Christ. In light of this reality, Jesus has given us a warning:

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in Heaven (Matthew 10:32-33).

And Jesus has also asked us a penetrating question. We can use it as a basis for our own self-examination:

Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46).

Could it be that we take Jesus’ name in vain? Could it be that we call him *Lord* but do not do what he says? Do we use *Lord* in our vocabulary just to make others think more of us?

- ...there is hope that any lip service we’re giving Jesus will be transformed into the life service he so highly deserves.

Hypocrisy is such a common sin that even the apostles had it; but it can be overcome. If we examine our hearts, develop sincerity, and guard our lips from vanity—then there is hope that any lip service we’re giving Jesus will be transformed into the life service he so highly deserves.

VIII. Why Lord?

Jesus is *Lord of all* (Acts 10:36) but not absolutely all. There is one exception to his authority, God. Jesus is subordinate to God. Now that's something you already know if you have read the book *One God*. You know that the Father has authority over Jesus. You know that God is greater than Jesus. We don't need to explain their relationship here.

What we do need to explain is the purpose of Jesus' authority. That is, we need to explain why Jesus is Lord now. What is he supposed to accomplish with the authority God gave him? Okay, well here it is—Jesus' mission—in just seven words: Jesus must get everything ready for God.

Jesus' current authority is unlimited. He can do whatever he wants—He's not even subject to God! Did you know that? His authority is so complete that Jesus is not subject to God now—wow! How do we know that? It's because the Bible says that a time will come when “the Son himself will be made subject to [God]” (1 Corinthians 15:28)—and that time hasn't come yet.

The time that has come is the time when God

... the Father had put all things under his [Jesus'] power (John 13:3)

... has put everything under his [Jesus'] feet (1 Corinthians 15:27).

When did God do that? When did he put everything under Jesus? Jesus spoke of having that authority even before his resurrection. In the Upper Room, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus was already confident that he had all authority over people.

Jesus... looked toward Heaven and prayed: 'Father... you granted him [your Son] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him' (John 17:1-2).

He repeated this claim to power after the resurrection as well. Jesus let the apostles know that his authority—and it was *all authority*—had come from God.

- Jesus must get everything ready for God.
- His authority is so complete that Jesus is not subject to God now.

Jesus came to the [the apostles] and said, ‘All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me...’ (Matthew 28:18)

If God has given Jesus all authority, then that’s how it will be. God trusts in Jesus so much that he made Jesus sovereign—isn’t that amazing?

So what will Jesus do with his *carte blanche* then? Not what most people would do if they were given complete liberty to act as they please: Jesus is going to lead the world to serve and worship the One God! He’s going to get the world ready for the return of God. John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord Jesus, but Jesus will prepare the way of the Lord God!

A. Made subject to God again

1. Seeing Jesus, seeing God

Now, again we’ll consider a verse which should help us to understand more clearly what history is headed towards. The goal in history is that God come to Earth and dwell with us. When God does come, Jesus “will be made subject” to God again, just like he was before the resurrection.

... the Son himself will be made subject to [God]... (1 Corinthians 15:28).

How will we ever be able to understand that Jesus will be *made subject* to God unless we first understand this: as of his resurrection, Jesus has not been subject to God? It’s true. Jesus acts freely as Lord now—did you know that? Jesus is Lord because he has God’s authorization—and that means that Jesus is still subordinate to God, okay—but it doesn’t mean that Jesus is not free to do what he wants. God has given Jesus the liberty to do whatever he wants. So Jesus is not just Lord, he’s got complete freedom to act—even without God’s permission!

It might be hard for you to comprehend how being subordinate to God does not make Jesus *subject to* God, so let’s dwell on that situation a little more deeply. Let’s consider what will happen during the Millennium, a 1000-year period when Jesus will not be subject to God. He will be Lord over everybody. Anything Jesus says will go. He will be in charge of all of us and he won’t have to give an account

- Jesus is going to lead the world to serve and worship the One God!

- John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord Jesus, but Jesus will prepare the way of the Lord God!

- ...as of his resurrection, Jesus has not been subject to God.

- Jesus is still subordinate to God.

- ...he’s got complete freedom to act—even without God’s permission!

- ...being subordinate to God does not make Jesus *subject* to God.

to God. Then, at the end of the Millennium will Jesus “be made subject” to God again.

Then the end will come, when he [Jesus] hands over the Kingdom to God the Father... then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him... (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28).

How does Jesus get to act with so much authority? God gives it to him—which is what makes Jesus still subordinate. This authorization God gives to Jesus makes Jesus God’s deputy. The Biblical term *Lord* connotes a sense of *deputy*. Jesus, an authority, was sent by a Higher Authority not only to represent that authority, but also to be a substitute for that authority—isn’t that precisely what makes someone a deputy? A deputy both represents and substitutes for a higher authority. For example, it’s what a *charge d’affaires* does in an embassy—he replaces the ambassador and is given full authority to make decisions while the ambassador is out. All the authority of God (the person Jesus is temporarily substituting for), is invested in our Jesus! That’s what we mean when we call Jesus *Lord*. Wow.

• God’s deputy

1. Seeing Jesus, seeing God

Be careful not to be confused by Trinitarian theology here. One of the Trinitarians’ favorite verses to quote as they try to prove that the One God is not the Father; but a mysterious union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is this one, spoken by Jesus:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9).

The problem with the Trinitarians’ use of this verse is that Jesus wasn’t implying that we would never actually see the One True God. Jesus certainly wasn’t teaching that the Father is somehow mysteriously absorbed into the person of Christ. He wasn’t saying that the Father was hidden in him. Our Lord Jesus never would have said that together he and God were the One God—that’s heresy. Instead, Jesus told us that his unity with God could be seen in Jesus doing everything God commanded him. In other words, Jesus wants us to know that because he did God’s will, he reflected the very will and ways of God.

If you have a good foundation in the doctrine of monotheism, then you'll know how to interpret John 14:9, above: What Jesus meant to say is that he is the exact representation of the Father.

• ...he is the exact representation of the Father.

... [the Son is] the radiance of his [God's] glory and the exact representation of his nature (Hebrews 1:3; NASB).

We hope that you're clear on this: We will see the True God face-to-face. It is one of the Bible's greatest promises! Be clear about it. The One God will dwell with us on Earth. That promise has not been fulfilled in Christ, but Christ will be the one to make sure that it is fulfilled!

• We will see the True God face-to-face.

• The One God will dwell with us on Earth.

B. The supreme goal

1. A big promise
2. Not fulfilled in Jesus
3. When God gets here
4. Mission complete
5. What we can't handle

All of human history is moving towards a climactic event: The day when God becomes *all in all*.

... that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

• God must be all in all.

The fact that God must be *all in all* is the very reason why Jesus has to be Lord now. Remember: All of history is marching towards the fulfillment of that goal. So let's get a better idea about what this supreme goal of history is about. If we can understand it, we'll understand the reason behind Jesus' ministry as Lord.

The Church shouldn't just hope for:

- the forgiveness of our sins
- salvation from Hell
- the return of Christ
- the resurrection
- the Kingdom

All of those things are great things to hope for, and in fact we do hope for them—just not only them. Together, these goals culminate in a superior hope: The hope that God be with us. If you're not forgiven of your sins, you won't see him. If you're not saved from Hell, you won't see him. If

Jesus doesn't come back, if we're not resurrected, and if the Kingdom is not established on the Earth—God will not come.

God will be with us, up close and personal. The greatest hope of history is God's coming. He will be with us at the end of the Millennium, when the Eternal Kingdom begins. In the Eternal (not Millennial) Kingdom, the One God will physically dwell among us.

- The greatest hope of history is God's coming.

Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them (Exodus 29:45-46).

1. A big promise

We trust that this doesn't sound new to you. It has never been a periphery matter in the Holy Scriptures. In fact, what you have just read is one of the most oft-repeated promises in the Bible! In this chapter of our book, we'll share some 22 passages that promise that God the Father will someday come to Earth and reign over us personally. We showed one above, here are seven more:

- ...one of the most oft-repeated promises in the Bible!

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7).

I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God (Exodus 6:7).

I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God (Exodus 29:45).

I am the LORD, who made you holy and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God (Leviticus 22:32-33).

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God (Leviticus 25:38).

I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Leviticus 26:11-12).

... I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God (Leviticus 26:45).

2. Not fulfilled in Jesus

At this point you may be saying in your heart: “These are all OT prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus when he came.” But you’re wrong. They were not fulfilled in Jesus. Again, don’t let Trinitarianism blind you here. Although it is true that these prophecies have been fulfilled in part through the Holy Spirit²¹¹ who lives in us today, we are supposed to understand them as essentially promises to be fulfilled through God’s descent in the New Jerusalem, an event that will take place after the Millennium.

• ...promises to be fulfilled through God’s descent in the New Jerusalem, an event that will take place after the Millennium.

I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God... (Revelation 21:2)

You can see here that the “God will be among us” Bible promise is given in this context—a passage in which the post-Millennial Eternal Kingdom is described:

... I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:3).

3. When God gets here

God’s arrival will indicate the absolute end, the obliteration of all evil in the world. While Jesus reigns during the Millennium, it will be the closing stages of the world system as we know it. The Antichrist will have been defeated, Satan will be bound, and almost all external evils will be removed. However, mortal man’s heart will still be evil, so Jesus will still have to wrestle against rebellious people. Rebelliousness will increase as the 1000 years draw on, culminating in a final attack on Jerusalem, an attempted *coup d’état*, led by men by the names of Gog and Magog.

²¹¹ When Paul teaches that we are the Temple of the Living God, he affirms that truth with an interpretation of the “God will be among us” promise which is unique among all the “God will be among us” Bible verses. Paul repackages the idea of “God among us” for Christians, and makes it say that God will “dwell in” us. With that, Paul offers us a deeper understanding of the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. Check out his creative hermeneutics here:

I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Corinthians 6:16; NASB).

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the Earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people (Revelation 20:7-9).

The followers of Gog and Magog will not be any of us (we will be resurrected and will be perfect). Gog and Magog’s followers will only be mortals who have no fear of God. Those mortals will foolishly resist Jesus’ rule, having been deceived by Satan. In opposing Christ, they will ruin lots of the work we will have done to build up the Kingdom, but even though they destroy our work, the Kingdom will go on. It is an eternal Kingdom, not just a 1000-year Kingdom.

His [the Son of Man’s] dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed... the holy people of the Most High will receive the Kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever (Daniel 7:14, 18).

Can you see that the world will still not be ready for God at the end of the Millennium? Jesus will make fire descend from Heaven and will destroy Gog, Magog, and their armies before God ever arrives on the scene. It is only when that fire falls that all sin will be completely purged from the Earth. Because Jesus will have finished his work as Lord, then the great prophecy will finally be fulfilled: God will dwell among us on Earth.

- ...the world will still not be ready for God at the end of the Millennium.

You already know that as Lord of the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus will lead us in worship to God. He will minister to God as High Priest on our behalf. His ministry will be based at the Temple in Jerusalem. That Millennial Temple will be built so that we can serve God in proper worship, but we will still need faith. Why? Because we will be worshipping One we do not see. Jesus will help us with our faith. He’ll help us by leading us in worship and interceding before God as our High Priest.

- ...as Lord of the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus will lead us in worship to God.

- ...we will still need faith. Why? Because we will be worshipping One we do not see.

4. Mission complete

When the Millennium is over and we see the Father, the saying will be fulfilled: “We will see God face-to-face.” We

• We will finally know God fully!

will finally know God fully! Jesus' job will have been finished and his mission complete.

... then we shall see face-to-face... I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

They will see his face (Revelation 22:4).

Jesus has always pushed us towards this same goal. He has always motivated us to seek the reward of seeing God face-to-face.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8).

• Jesus' job as Lord is to get the world to the point which he won't need to be in charge anymore.

Jesus' job as Lord is to get the world to the point which he won't need to be in charge anymore. He aims at completing his mission. He wants to reach his objective. He's Lord now, and he will be Lord during the Millennium, but after he has straightened things out, and God Himself comes to dwell among us, God will be *all in all*.²¹² That means that

²¹² Does God's becoming *all in all* mean that Jesus won't be Lord anymore? That's a challenging question. Here are some clues to help you answer it:

- The Lord God has promised that Jesus will be a priest forever, but we don't see any promise in the Bible that he will be the Lord forever:

The Lord [that's God] has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You [Jesus] are a priest forever (Hebrews 7:21; NASB).

- The Lord God will be the source of our light during the Eternal Kingdom, in which we will reign:

... the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:5; NASB).

- God the Father is called *the Lord* during the Eternal Kingdom:

... the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets (Revelation 22:6; NASB).

- God is called *the Lord* in the Kingdom. It is both the angels' and our own joy that he begin to reign over us. When our Lord God takes his great power along with *his Christ*, we will rejoice!

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord (and of his Christ), and he [the One God] will reign for ever and ever.'

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying: 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your

God the Father will be the one we know as Lord!

To say that God will be the Lord is an understatement. God will be all in you. God will be all in me. God will be all in Jesus too! God will be the light that shines through Jesus. Because he is Love—and that means that he shares his glory—God will make Jesus the focus of worship with him. God and Jesus will together constitute the Temple of the Holy City.

I did not see a temple in the city [the New Jerusalem], because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21:22-23).

5. What we can't handle

You might ask: “Couldn't God just rule us directly?” That's exactly what we're getting at: No. God could not rule us directly now—we couldn't bear it. If it were possible, he would do that, but God has to lead us through an intermediary for a time. That intermediary-mediator-priest is Jesus.

We need time to get things to the level that God wants them to be at—we need 1000 years of time! That's why the Millennium is called “the period of restoration of all things.” During those years, Jesus will restore right worship, good order, and peace on the Earth. Why will he restore all these things? To get them ready for God.

... [Jesus will be in Heaven] until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient time (Acts 3:20-21; NASB).

great power and have begun to reign' (Revelation 11:15-17).

Conclusion: Jesus will still be the center of our attention and worship even after the Millennium, but with God. Jesus, the Word, will be with God just like he was before the Creation. His being *with* God is what makes Jesus God. It's what makes him great.

God will be pleased to share all of his glory with Jesus, just like he did before the incarnation. God will continue to share his Throne with Jesus, and that means, for all practical purposes, that there will be nothing wrong with calling Jesus *Lord* in the Eternal Kingdom.

• God the Father will be the one we know as Lord!

• God will be all in Jesus too!

• God could not rule us directly now—we couldn't bear it.

• ...the Millennium is called “the period of restoration of all things.”

• Jesus will be in Heaven until the Millennium starts. God will be in Heaven until the Millennium finishes.

Jesus will be in Heaven until the Millennium starts. God will be in Heaven until the Millennium finishes. God won't come to Earth before then because we wouldn't be able to bear his presence. We would be consumed like shreds of newspaper in a roaring fire. His holiness would be too much for our fragile frames—We would die! Do you remember how the Bible describes the day that God descended on Mount Sinai? Here's a reminder of how dangerous it is for a mortal human being to get close to God:

... there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the LORD said to him, 'Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them' (Exodus 19:16-22).

• No man has ever seen God and lived—except Jesus.

No man has ever seen God and lived—except Jesus. And that's precisely why Jesus is the perfect man to be our Lord. Since he is the only person who has seen God, he is uniquely qualified to make peace between God and us.

... there is One God and one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

C. God will be *all in all*

1. Handing everything over
2. Jesus: The final subject

During the Millennium, God has assigned to Christ the impossible task of submitting everything on Earth to God. Since a large proportion of Millennial mortals will refuse to submit to God, and the situation will get worse and worse, Jesus will not succeed. He will only be able to do his best, but that will be good enough for his God.

God is realistic. He knows that most people hate him and that very few of us obey him. So in his great wisdom God has sent Jesus Lord to do something special: to prepare a specific people for God's coming. That specific people is known as *the Church*. Are you part of it? When God finally comes in his full glory, Jesus will hand the Church over to God. It is then that the famous Bible promise "I will be your God" will have its complete fulfillment:

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Leviticus 26:12).

I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people (Jeremiah 7:23).

... Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God (Jeremiah 11:4).

... you will be my people, and I will be your God (Jeremiah 30:22).

I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people (Jeremiah 31:1).

They will be my people, and I will be their God (Jeremiah 32:38).

Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:28).

My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people (Ezekiel 37:27).

1. Handing everything over

So Jesus is the one in charge until the end of the Millennium. Then God will come to us and will become *all in all* for everybody and everything. It will be the culmination of Christ's ministry as Lord. It will be the glorious fulfillment of our hope!

Then the end will come, when he [Jesus] hands over the Kingdom to God the Father after he [Jesus] has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he [Jesus] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he [God] 'has put everything under his [Jesus]' feet.'

Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him [Jesus], it is clear that this does not include God

• ...God has sent Jesus Lord to do something special: to prepare a specific people for God's coming.

• ...God... will become *all in all* for everybody and everything.

Himself, who put everything under Christ.

When he has done this [Jesus handing over the Kingdom to God], then the Son himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

2. Jesus: The final subject

Now please note that the 1 Corinthians 15 passage unmistakably teaches that unless Jesus is made subject to God again, God will not be *all in all*. In other words, Jesus will be the final person to subject himself to God. This is not because Jesus doesn't want to subject himself to God now, or because he won't want to do it during the Millennium. It's because God trusts Jesus so much that he has given Jesus complete liberty to do what he wants both now and in the Millennium.

Since Jesus is Lord during the Millennium and since Jesus is exempted from having to subject himself to God, there will still be one person who is not subject to God by the time the end of the Millennium rolls around: Jesus. That's why the Bible tells us that God will make Jesus subject to him at the end of the Millennium. God will do that "*so that God may be*" everything to everybody.

That final subjection of Jesus to God will be like a seal on eternity—it will be done to give us a guarantee that nothing like the rebellion of Lucifer ever happens again. Think of it this way: As long as there is some degree of free will, there is always the possibility that someone (even Jesus) could rebel against God.²¹³ When God makes himself "all in all," the distant possibility that Jesus might rebel against God will be eliminated forever.

God doesn't obligate anyone to be subject to him now. We're all free. Although we will be made subject to God after the resurrection, only we will be subjected to God. God won't make the mortals (who we will rule over) subject to

- Jesus will be the final person to subject himself to God.

- ...to give us a guarantee that nothing like the rebellion of Lucifer ever happens again.

- ...neither sin nor love can exist where there is no free will.

²¹³ We write that with the caveat "Far be it from us to imagine that it might happen!" But still further be it from us to imagine that Jesus doesn't have a free will! He most certainly does and always did. Jesus makes his own decisions, which is what makes his choice to serve God an authentic act of love. Neither sin nor love can exist where there is no free will. In Jesus' case, the amazing thing is that even with a free will, no sin has ever been sprung up in him—only pure love has!

him during the Millennium. It is only in the end that God will make everyone, even Jesus, subject to him. It is then that God will be the absolute Sovereign of the Universe—the *all in all*.

• God will be the absolute Sovereign of the Universe.

D. Biblical parallels to the Lord

1. Lifted up like Joseph
 - a. I am Pharaoh
 - b. Priestly wife
2. Xerxes exalts Mordecai
 - a. Self-destruction
 - b. Spoils of the enemy
 - c. Mutual honor
 - d. Famous, followed, and feared
3. Solomon becomes king
 - a. The joyful crowd
 - b. Respect the Son
 - c. The national interest

At this point, the topic at hand may seem a little heavy for you. So you might ask: “Are there any metaphors in the Bible that illustrate how God has made Jesus Lord?” Yes there are. The stories of Joseph, Mordecai, and Solomon each demonstrate very nicely how God lifted Jesus up to the position of Lord over God’s people.

• how God has made Jesus Lord

1. Lifted up like Joseph

Let’s first consider how the Pharaoh of the story of Joseph, took Joseph out of the depths of the royal dungeon to become the second in command of all Egypt. Pharaoh’s taking Joseph out of the dungeon is a picture of God’s taking Jesus out of Hades. It’s an allegory.

• God’s taking Jesus out of Hades

Pharaoh asked them, ‘Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain

around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.’ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:38-45).

a. I am Pharaoh

Pharaoh was still the one Pharaoh just like God is still the One God. That’s what Pharaoh meant when he said “I am Pharaoh.” Joseph was not Pharaoh, and Jesus is not the One God; but just as Joseph had great authority given to him by Pharaoh, so Jesus has great authority given to him by God.

Also, just as nobody in Egypt could do anything without Joseph’s permission, now no one on Earth can do anything without Jesus’ permission. He is the Lord established by God.

- ...now no one on Earth can do anything without Jesus’ permission.

b. Priestly wife

Notice that along with his new role as Lord of Egypt, Joseph was even given a special priestly wife. Does that parallel anything that happened with Jesus? Yes, along with Jesus’ role as Lord, God has given Jesus a bride: the Church.

- Joseph was even given a special priestly wife.

God placed all things under his [Jesus’] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, which is his body (Ephesians 1:22-23).

And just like in the story of Joseph, the bride of Christ is of priestly descent.

... [we are] a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... (1 Peter 2:9)

2. Xerxes²¹⁴ exalts Mordecai

The exaltation of Mordecai in in the story of Esther is another powerful analogy to the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. The four key players in the story of Esther are:

²¹⁴ This famed king of the Persian Empire reigned from the city of Susa from 486–465 BC. He is also known by the name *Ahasuerus* (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahasuerus> for more information).

- Queen **Esther**
- the powerful King **Xerxes**, Esther's husband,
- **Haman**, the evil counsellor who plotted to destroy the Jews
- **Mordecai**, Esther's wise cousin (2:7)

a. Self-destruction

You will probably remember that King Xerxes made sure that Haman got what he deserved. Having plotted Mordecai's death by preparing tall gallows, Haman was certain that he would have the opportunity to hang Mordecai on them; but the tide of events turned against him and Haman got hung on his own gallows. In similar fashion, the Devil plotted Jesus' death on the Cross, but instead of destroying Jesus, the Devil destroyed himself.

'... A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.'

The king said, 'Impale him on it!' So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai (Esther 7:9-10).

God has nailed our sins to the Cross and now the Devil has lost his ability to accuse us. He has become powerless to condemn. The Devil plotted the death of Christ through the Cross, but the plot backfired, leaving our sins on the Cross, and Jesus crowned Lord of All through the resurrection. What a humiliating defeat for the Devil!

b. Spoils of the enemy

Another parallel from the story of Esther is that after Mordecai was saved from death, Esther was given the land and house of Haman.

... King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate (Esther 8:1-2).

We are like Esther in the sense this passage depicts. We will inherit the world, the Devil's domain, after the Devil is de-

• King Xerxes made sure that Haman got what he deserved.

• ...instead of destroying Jesus, the Devil destroyed himself.

• Esther was given the land and house of Haman.

stroyed. He is the Prince of this World, but he will lose his hold on this World when God gives it to us.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth (Matthew 5:5).

The Devil led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world ‘... all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to’ (Luke 4:5-6).

c. Mutual honor

Through us Jesus will be greatly honored. The story of Esther shows how Mordecai was honored through Esther’s faith. Just like how King Xerxes gave his signet ring to Mordecai, God gives his authority to Jesus. We know that God gives his authority to Jesus, but this passage gives us a powerful insight as to why God gives his authority to Jesus—it’s because of what Jesus did to elevate us to royal status! We are Jesus’ honor, his crown, just like a good wife is the crown of her husband.

A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown (Proverbs 12:4).

• ...our honor depends on his honor and his depends on ours.

Furthermore, we are so closely related to Jesus, that our honor depends on his honor and his depends on ours. We are inextricably linked, just as the lives of Esther and Mordecai were linked.

d. Famous, followed, and feared

The commands of Jesus are to be obeyed by all people on Earth (for he speaks in God’s name and with God’s authority). That’s why his message is now proclaimed in all nations and in every language through evangelists and missionaries who move quickly throughout the world with God’s blessing.

• ...his message is now proclaimed in all nations and in every language.

With that in mind, now read how the commands of Mordecai were dispatched throughout the kingdom of Xerxes. As you do, consider how it foreshadowed the fame Jesus has now:

... They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors, and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the lan-

guage of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king (Esther 8:9-12).

God has robed Jesus in glory. He has made him Lord, a King. God has crowned him with many crowns and has put his name in Christ. That's very similar to what Xerxes did for Mordecai: He gave Mordecai glory, and that glory gave Mordecai a following!

... When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen (Esther 8:15).

Now *the fear of Christ* has been implanted in many hearts. Jesus has a reputation, a big one, and his power has increased. All around the world there are people who obey the words of our Lord Jesus.

• ...*the fear of Christ* has been implanted in many hearts.

... all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful ... So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun [Purim], doing what Mordecai had written to them (Esther 9:3-4, 23).

... be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

The rise of Mordecai foreshadows the rise of Christ. Just as King Xerxes exalted Mordecai, so has God exalted Jesus. And in the same way that the Jews followed Mordecai's orders by taking up arms, so must Christians now follow the orders of Jesus and put on the full armor of God so that we might defend ourselves from our spiritual enemies. What gives us so much confidence to do so? It's because God has made Jesus Lord!

• ...Christians now follow the orders of Jesus.

3. Solomon becomes king

God is still working today.

Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working' (John 5:17).

God did not give Jesus authority because God was looking

for a break. God doesn't intend to stop working. It was simply the right time. It was time for God to establish a Lord not because God needed it, but because we needed it.

God is not about to retire. He never will. David didn't retire either. While he was still king, he anointed his son Solomon to be king. David did it because it was time—the people needed it.

a. The joyful crowd

David's anointing of Solomon is like God's anointing of Jesus, and we are like the joyful crowd who watched the coronation. They delighted in the authority of the new king Solomon, and we rejoice to see God crown his beloved Son.

• ...we rejoice to see God crown his beloved Son.

King David said, "Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada." When they came before the king, he said to them: "Take your lord's servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!'

Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah."

... Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound (1 Samuel 1:32-35, 39-40).

b. Respect the Son

We learn from David's coronation of Solomon that those who honor a son, honor the father of that son. Our joy in Jesus' authority is our joy in God—the God who has made Jesus Lord. Those who opposed Solomon's coronation, like his brother Adonijah, paid for their dissidence with their lives. Those who oppose God's Son will pay with their lives as well.

• ... those who honor a son, honor the father of that son.

A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others (Mark 12:1-9).

c. The national interest

Solomon was patient at first, but then he made a tough decision: He would kill his opponents. Try to understand that this was not something he did out of personal vengeance. Solomon was not acting out of personal interests. Rather, he killed his enemies in the interest of national unity. He was safeguarding the kingdom—and Jesus will show his anger to his enemies for the same reason. He will do what he must in order to safeguard God’s Kingdom.

• He was safeguarding the kingdom.

Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the Earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his Son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:10-12).

God wants us to honor the Son as we would honor God Himself. God wants his Kingdom to work. It will only work if we honor the One he sent. That’s why God made Jesus the Judge of All.

... the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him (John 5:22-23).

IX. Our message: Jesus is Lord

The Gospel can be summed up in the phrase “Jesus is Lord.” You might not like that because “Jesus is Lord” may sound almost too simple—even trite. However, at this point in the book, you know that *Lord* means a lot. Even though they normally don’t do so, people are supposed to think deeply about “Jesus is Lord” when they hear it.

So is superficial thinking the root problem of the Church today? Will the lack of deep thinking explain why so many Christians react to the phrase “Jesus is Lord” with a yawn? Why are Christians bored by what should be the most powerful phrase in our vocabulary—*Lord*? Lamentably, the problem goes beyond a lack of deep thinking. The real problem is actually quite frightening: Christians have been deceived. They have believed in another Jesus.

- Christians have been deceived. They have believed in another Jesus.

... if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached... you bear this beautifully [Paul said sarcastically] (2 Corinthians 11:4; NASB).

Yes, they have been taught a different Jesus—one who came to us in a divine nature, and that’s not the Jesus of the Bible! Because they think that he came in the divine nature, their thoughts are: “What’s the big deal about calling him Lord”? They think in their hearts: “Of course Jesus is Lord—he’s God isn’t he?” That’s why for us to say “Jesus is Lord” means nothing to them. To us it means everything: salvation, life, and hope. It’s the very Gospel we preach. To them, it’s a foregone conclusion.

- ...they are totally unaware that God made Jesus Lord.

The fundamental problem these beloved friends have is that they are totally unaware that God made Jesus Lord. But their problem doesn’t stop there. That’s just where it starts. Because they don’t know that God made Jesus Lord, they are also unaware of how much it cost Jesus to become Lord. Due to their wrong ideas of who Jesus was, they fail to realize that Jesus paid a very high price, the highest of all, to become Lord. Beyond that, they don’t realize that we’ll have to pay a high price too—if we’re going to get the glory Jesus got.

- ...Jesus paid a very high price, the highest of all, to become Lord.

A. Unpack the meaning

So here's our strategy: We have to unpack the meaning of God's message "Jesus is Lord" if people are actually going to be affected by it. If you preach it—and you must preach it—don't be naïve. Don't think that by simply pronouncing the words "Jesus is Lord" there will be some magic effect on people. They won't understand the way in which Jesus is Lord unless you teach them. Learning does not come by osmosis, it comes through work. It doesn't happen by luck, but by strong communication. People need you to explain what it means for Jesus to have become Lord.

The Levites... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read... all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Nehemiah said, '... Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.' ... Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them (Nehemiah 7:7-8,9,10,12).

A great starting point for our proclamation of Jesus as Lord is this: Ask people, 'Do you understand what the Bible says about Jesus?' Listen to what they have to say. You can correct any errors in their doctrine by gently pointing out Bible verses that we have highlighted in this book. If they ask for an explanation, give it to them.

... Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked.

'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him... The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:30-31, 34-35).

B. The only way to be saved

Now, the only way for someone to be saved is for them to publically profess Jesus as Lord. Don't think that someone

• We have to unpack the meaning of God's message "Jesus is Lord"

• what the Bible says about Jesus

you are evangelizing can be saved from sin and condemnation without declaring “Jesus is the Lord” in front of others. They can’t. They cannot keep their faith a secret.

• They cannot keep their faith a secret.

If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

A saving faith is a brave faith. The belief that Jesus is Lord, even when it’s a new belief, is stronger than any fear a believer might feel. How scary was it for a public official, a soldier of Rome, like the Philippian jailer to profess faith in Jesus? It was against the law for him to have any Lord but Caesar. The punishment for having a god other than Caesar was death. In spite of that, Paul and Silas called the jailer to task, evangelizing him with an invitation to “believe in the Lord Jesus.”

He [the Philippian jailer] then brought them [Paul and Silas] out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household’ (Acts 16:30-31).

So we have to challenge people with this very message: Jesus is Lord. People who believe it with all their heart will repent and will seek to be baptized—but that’s just the beginning. They will need to follow up on their profession of faith by fulfilling Jesus’ commands until he comes back. They’ll have to obey Jesus to the end. Make sure that you let them know that. Simply calling Jesus *Lord* won’t be enough to save. We’ve already studied that. You know that it’s treating Jesus like their Lord that will save them.

C. The silence of the apostles

1. Don’t tell anyone
2. Lord means *Christ*
3. Loaded language

• ...why didn’t the apostles proclaim Jesus as Lord until after the resurrection?

But if it’s our fundamental task to preach Jesus as Lord, and people need to believe it to be saved, then why didn’t the apostles proclaim Jesus as Lord until after the resurrection? Were they afraid? Were they confused? Was their understanding of Jesus incomplete? Did they even know that he was Lord?

Actually, even though the apostles were a little afraid and a little confused, they did know that Jesus was the Lord and Christ. The reason why they didn't proclaim it was because *Lord* meant *Christ* in their day. That's the way their hearers would have understood the word *Lord*, and the people they were ministering to simply weren't ready to hear that Jesus was the Christ.

1. Don't tell anyone

With the widespread confusion about what a Messiah was actually going to do, people would have misunderstood Jesus had his disciples proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ. Most of the people who heard "Jesus is the Lord" would have supposed that Jesus was going to assume a political role. They would have imagined that Jesus' was going to free them from the Romans.

Jesus knew how confused people were, so he did something you might not know about: He commanded his apostles not to let anyone know that he was the Christ!

[Jesus] asked, 'Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in Heaven...' Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah (Matthew 16:15-17, 20).

The Jews interpreted the prophecies of a coming Christ so wrongly and so incorrectly that Jesus had to keep his identity a secret. Although Jesus knew exactly who he was, and his apostles did too, Jesus wanted God to be the only one to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. Do you get that?

2. Lord means *Christ*

Now, in case you haven't yet seen it proven from the Scriptures, we'll show you that Lord means *Christ*. When we call Jesus *the Lord* we are actually saying that he is the Christ, the Messiah; that is, the Son of God, the Savior of the World. Here is one verse that proves it:

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (Luke 2:11).

- ...the people they were ministering to simply weren't ready to hear that Jesus was the Christ.

- ...people would have misunderstood Jesus had his disciples proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ.

- ...Jesus wanted God to be the only one to demonstrate that he was the Messiah.

The words the angel pronounced on the first Christmas night to the shepherds confirm that *Lord* means *Christ*. Notice how the angel used the words together, indicating that they meant the same thing.

3. Loaded language

Now we'll prove how charged with meaning the word *Messiah* was at the time of Jesus. First we want you to recognize that this is a vital, fiery, and passionate issue. After all, Jesus was killed precisely because he admitted to being the Messiah. Read the passage below and you'll understand how passionate the Jewish leaders were about the subject of their Messiah. Look at how angry they became when Jesus finally conceded that he was the Messiah.

- Jesus was killed precisely because he admitted to being the Messiah.

... Jesus remained silent. The High Priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'

'You have said so,' Jesus replied... Then the High Priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?'

'He is worthy of death,' they answered. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?' (Matthew 26:63-68)

Can you imagine the scenario? Talk about loaded language! The word *Christ* was absolutely charged with meaning in Jesus' day. Our Christian doctrine that Jesus is Lord was much too dangerous to divulge in public at the time of Christ. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders would kill him as soon as they heard him proclaim himself to be the Christ. Now you understand why he waited until he had no other option but to answer the question the High Priest gave him.

- The word *Christ* was absolutely charged with meaning in Jesus' day.

The environment was electric when Jesus finally said it. The Jewish leaders were passionately waiting for their Messiah, but they expected someone different. The promise of a Lord was at the center of their vision of a Jewish nation, and Jesus didn't fulfill their vision of what that nation should look like. It was the Messiah who would hold the future of their country in his hands. They were sure that they didn't want Jesus to be that person.

- The promise of a Lord was at the center of their vision of a Jewish nation

D. Lives on the line

1. *Lord* meant much more
 - a. The strategy of explaining *Lord*
 - b. Put the thrill back into it
 - c. Shaking things up again
2. The hope of mankind
 - a. The Prophet
 - b. Lord means *Messiah*
 - c. Simple faith
 - d. The decisive confirmation

Now let's move to a study of the years that followed Jesus' resurrection. It was not easy for a Christian to make a profession of faith in those times. In the Roman Empire, the predominant empire in the world, for a citizen to profess loyalty to anyone other than Caesar was treason—and it was punishable by death. Probably tens of thousands²¹⁵ of Christians who lived under the shadow of Rome died for their profession of faith in Jesus.

Christians of the first three centuries AD laid their lives on the line by professing Christ. Do you consider that when you read Paul's Letter to the Romans? Remember that Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire—the epicenter of Emperor worship, when you read the Book of Romans. And when you read it, try to comprehend the pressure upon Roman Christians as Paul insisted that they declare Jesus as Lord.²¹⁶

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

Those who made their faith in Jesus public had to be ex-

• If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'... you will be saved.

²¹⁵ "Estimates of Christians killed for religious reasons before the year 313 vary greatly, depending on the scholar quoted, from a high of almost 100,000 to a low of 10,000." Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians on September 18, 2014.

²¹⁶ Those who under the threat of persecution would profess Jesus as Lord were called *confessors*. That's because they would *confess* the name of Jesus before others. They ran the danger of losing their jobs, being separated from their families, being jailed, suffering torture, being made into slaves, or—worse yet—getting the death penalty! If any of those Christians actually got killed for their faith, they would not be remembered as *confessors*, but as *martyrs* (literally, *witnesses* or "those who give testimony").

tremely brave, just as they have to be today in many countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, or Iran.²¹⁷ Early Christians put their lives on an altar the moment they made their faith public. Christians still do it to this day.

1. *Lord* meant much more

The Christians of the Early Church were stating something never heard before. This is a really important fact for you to understand. Instead of announcing a 2000-year old historical event like we do now, they proclaimed something that had just happened. It was exciting news for their hearers, wrapped in a 4000-year old mystery which most Jews and God-fearing Gentiles were eager to solve. The first Christians had a revelation people were dying for. We have information people are tired of.

a. The strategy of explaining *Lord*

Our family, friends, and co-workers have become jaded by the hypocrisy of the Church. They have heard too many “Christians” using Jesus’ name in vain—calling him *Lord* but without a lifestyle to back it up. Many of our acquaintances know something about the power of Jesus, and they might even call him *Jesus Christ*, but until we actually explain what *Christ* means, Jesus’ role as the Christ will con-

²¹⁷ What if a Saudi Arabian, a North Korean, or an Iranian converts to Christ today? That person’s “crime” is punishable by death. In fact, some 100,000 professing Christians are believed to be killed each year for their faith (see <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2013/12/the-worst-countries-to-be-a-christian/>). The worldwide persecution against declaring Jesus as Lord is particularly strong among Communist and Muslim-dominated countries. The worst 50 countries for Christians according to World Watch as of August 2013 can be found at this link: <http://www.worldwatchlist.us>.

But we don’t have to even leave the US to see how strongly the world opposes faith in Christ. What if you are a school teacher and you profess Jesus as Lord in a New York public school with your colleagues at lunchtime? You just might lose your job. You’ll certainly be ostracized. Let’s say that you’re an executive for a multinational. Will the corporate system allow you to express your commitment to Christ? It’s doubtful.

No matter whether you are packing trailers for FedEx or serving the federal government as a senator, without even putting up a sign in your workplace that reads “My boss is a Jewish carpenter,” if you obey Jesus and maintain a clear conscience, you’ll soon see how your boss and coworkers reject you. It’s not just Communists and Muslims, liberal democracies are also hostile to Christ and his followers. Even in what others perceive to be predominantly “Christian” countries like the USA, it’s hard to be a Christian.

• The Christians of the Early Church were stating something never heard before.

• Jesus’ role as the Christ will continue to be an enigma for them.

tinue to be an enigma for them.²¹⁸

If we explain what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, our acquaintances might start to get excited about him. Our first step is to let them know that the word *Christ* is a synonym for *Messiah*. Anointed Biblical teachings on what it means for Jesus to be the Christ would be a great help in evangelization, but since the Church deals very little on the topic, we won't find those sort of messages in local congregations. In our evangelization, we have to face the fact that we won't transmit the meaning of "Jesus is Lord" by just saying it. Actually teaching what *Lord* means would be a much better investment of our time.

b. Put the thrill back into it

Before Jesus was born, there were wise people from many different nations around the world who were waiting expectantly for the revelation of God's Messiah. They wondered: "Who would he be?" The Messiah²¹⁹ is the man God promised to send to the human race to save us from our sins. He is the One chosen by God to bring us the truth, to free us from sin, to break the power of death, and to reign as King over the entire world!

Now, does that definition of who the Messiah is sound like a message that might strike your friends and family as being important? Well, that's what Christians were affirming when they said "Jesus is Lord!" in the times of the apostles. They were saying, in effect, "Jesus is the one person God has chosen to rule over all of us."²²⁰ Anyone who dares to

- He is the One chosen by God... to reign as King over the entire world!

- Jesus is the one person God has chosen to rule over all of us.

²¹⁸ That's one of the major problems with Islam also: The Qur'an uses the term *Messiah* for Jesus but does not explain what Messiah means. In fact, I have never met a Muslim who understands the meaning of Messiah even though the term is used 11 times in the Qur'an. Most think that it just means *prophet*. The Muslims consider the Bible, a book practically none of them have ever read, to be a book that focuses on monotheism, and little else. The truth is that the Bible focuses on monotheism, and also upon the hope of a Messiah.

²¹⁹ This is the Anglicized word we get from the Hebrew *Meshiac*, meaning *Anointed One*. It was translated into Greek as *Cristos*, from which we get *Christ* and the word *Christian*.

²²⁰ By the way, even Muslims believe that Jesus is coming back to rule over the Earth. How much more boldly should a Christian affirm it? Even Muslims will call no other man but Jesus the Messiah—so shouldn't we? Muslims believe that Jesus is in Heaven with God and will return to establish justice and peace on the

express the Christian faith that way today states the equivalent of what “Jesus is Lord” meant during the times of the apostles. Do you dare to express the true Christian faith? Do you dare to say that Jesus is the One God has chosen to:

- bring us the **truth**
- free us from **sin**
- break the power of **death**
- reign as **King** over the World forever?

c. Shaking things up again

After around 17 centuries of lukewarm Christianity, proclaiming that Jesus is Lord has practically no effect on anybody. It’s proclaiming that Jesus will rule over the Earth that sounds radical—that’s what shakes things up. What’s the difference between the two ways of professing Christ? In the first case, we use a word; in the second case, we give God’s definition of that word. When you define a word biblically, you can help people to see things the way God sees them. If you don’t define a word, people interpret it however they like.

- ...Jesus will rule over the Earth.

So, to overcome apathy and ignorance, here’s some advice: Fearlessly proclaim that Jesus is Lord, but explain to people what *Lord* means! Only by using this two-pronged approach will you be preaching on the level that the Early Church preached in Jerusalem. They basically only had to mention *Lord* and the Jews who heard them understood what they meant. The neighbors of the first Christians, the Jews of Jerusalem, had a concise concept of the spiritual, social, religious, and political ramifications of the coming of the Lord.

- ...explain to people what *Lord* means!

But since people in the centuries-long Christianized countries of the West have become numb to the original meaning of *Lord*, Westerners who hear us don’t normally give it a second thought when we tell them that Jesus is the Lord. When secular Westerners hear us call Jesus *Lord*, they think that we’re just expressing subjective religious sentiment. They let us say it not because of any belief that it’s true, but just because we live in societies that have freedom of religion and freedom of expression. That’s why—if we want to

- subjective religious sentiment

Earth—are we afraid to say that? They aren’t.

evangelize people with the truth of Jesus as Lord—we need to do more. If we explain what *Lord* actually means, we'll shake things up again.

2. The hope of mankind

If Jesus is the Lord, then he is also the Messiah. The promise of a Messiah is ancient. In fact, the oldest of all of God's promises was given in the Garden of Eden. It was there that God said that a child would be born to Eve, and that the Son of Eve would crush Satan's skull.

[God said to the Devil] And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He [the offspring of Eve] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).

The instant God promised this Savior, his birth became the hope of mankind. All believers would long for the time when this Son of Eve (that means a human being) would finally break the Devil's sway over humanity. The person to be born of Eve would be called *the Promised One*. He would be the Savior, the man God would anoint to save the human race.

a. The Prophet

As the prophets progressively revealed more of who the Promised One would be, they also revealed that he would reign as Lord. For example, the prophet Moses said that God would lift up someone like him, a fellow Israelite, and that he would be their Lord. That man would get the honorable distinction of being called *the Prophet*.

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.²²¹ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not hear the voice of the LORD

²²¹ This first part of the passage is quoted twice in the NT (Acts 3:22; 7:37), but we are quoting it here in its original and complete OT format so that you can see that the person the People of Israel were asking for was *the Prophet*. The Jews wanted someone who would be God's spokesman to them. They knew that they couldn't deal directly with God, and they were right! (God Himself acknowledged that what they wanted was good).

This passage very concisely describes what Jesus' job is as Lord. He is the one who deals directly with God for us. He is the one we deal with because direct dealing with Yahweh God is impossible for any human in the flesh.

- the oldest of all of God's promises

- The instant God promised this Savior, his birth became the hope of mankind.

- he would reign as Lord

- Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die

- ...direct dealing with Yahweh God is impossible for any human in the flesh.

our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’

The LORD said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites,²²² and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the Prophet speaks in my name’ (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The person that God would lift up would tell the Jews *everything* God commanded him. Yahweh God would *call to account* anyone who would not listen to this person. Such a person had to have been the *Lord*, for he had the complete authorization of God himself. Now you know how the Jews understood that God’s Messiah would also be a prophet—it was through the Deuteronomy 18 prophecy. The coming Lord would be the same person they called the *Prophet*, with a capital *P*.

By the time John the Baptist began ministering, the Jews suspected that he might be the Prophet. That’s why they asked him:

Are you the Prophet? (John 1:21)

He was not, and he let them know it. But he also let them know that the Prophet was on his way.

b. Lord means *Messiah*

And now come to a big point: As you can see from the following verse, the term *the Lord* eventually became synonymous with *the Messiah*. Pay close attention to the angel’s words to the shepherds on that first Noel, the very night Jesus was born:

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (Luke 2:11).

If the former verse is not convincing enough (it was given by angels, so it should be), the following passages should help you to see that *Lord* and *Christ* are synonymous. They also use the terms *Lord* and *Christ* together. Observe them closely, and you’ll see that *Christ* means the same things as

- ...the term *the Lord* eventually became synonymous with *the Messiah*.

- ...*Christ* means the same things as *Messiah*.

²²² The Prophet had to be a Jew. How then could he have been Mohammed, an Arab? Muslims say that this prophecy was meant to prepare us for the coming of their prophet Mohammed, but that’s impossible.

Messiah.

... just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him (Colossians 2:6).

It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:24).

I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ (Philemon 20).

... in your hearts revere Christ as Lord (1 Peter 3:15).

c. Simple faith

Is it so terribly difficult to get the idea? No, it's not. The Messiah was the same person Moses promised, the Prophet. The Messiah-Prophet connection wasn't difficult for the common folk who lived during the times of Jesus to understand. Maybe we need faith as simple as theirs.

Martha (the sister of Mary) for example, was a Jewish woman from a small village. She was no theologian—just a simple young lady from the country. However, she had enough sense to understand that Jesus (to whom she referred as *Lord*) had to be the long awaited Messiah:

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world' (John 11:25-27).

We see in this passage that Jesus encourages even the simplest people to believe in him as the Lord and Messiah. He knew that the revelation that he was the Lord and Messiah is what believers needed, so he helped them to believe it. Jesus knew that the profound desire of every lover of truth is to find the man that God has chosen—the Promised One—so he was glad to help believers discover that person in him.

d. The decisive confirmation

The resurrection of Jesus was a remarkable moment in history. Through it, God gave his final confirmation of the identity of his Messiah. God's set his seal of approval on Jesus, confirming for all eternity his choice of Jesus as Lord. Granted that Jesus' Holy Spirit baptism, his miracles, and

- The Messiah was the same person Moses promised, the Prophet.

- Jesus encourages even the simplest people to believe in him as the Lord and Messiah.

- ...find the man that God has chosen—the Promised One.

- ...God gave his final confirmation of the identity of his Messiah.

the two times God spoke from Heaven about him all confirmed Jesus as Lord—still, the resurrection was God’s decisive act of approval.

- The apostles began to use the word combination *Christ the Lord* only after his resurrection.

The apostles began to use the word combination *Christ the Lord* only after his resurrection. Not once did they use it before the resurrection took place. That’s a fact few Christians know. We present the four most common Biblical combinations of the words *Messiah* and *Lord* here. You’ll notice from the Biblical references that they are only used from Acts onward. In other words, they were only used after Jesus’ resurrection (there are no references from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).

- **The Lord Jesus Christ**

Acts 11:17; 28:31; Romans 1:7; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 6:11; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 13:14; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; 6:23; Philippians 1:2; 3:20; 4:23; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 12; 3:6, 12; Philemon 3,25; James 1:1

- **Our Lord Jesus Christ**

Acts 15:26; Romans 5:1, 11; 15:6, 30; 1 Corinthians 1:7, 8, 10; 15:57; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 8:9; Galatians 6:14, 18; Ephesians 1:3, 17; 5:20; 6:24; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:9, 23; 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 14; 3:18; 1 Timothy 6:3, 14; 1 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:8, 14, 16; Jude 17, 21

- **Christ Jesus our Lord**

Romans 6:23; 8:39; Ephesians 3:11; 1 Timothy 1:2, 12

- **Jesus Christ our Lord**

Romans 1:4; 5:21; 7:25; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Jude 25

- ...the four Gospels contain absolutely no varieties of the... Christ-Lord title.

Again, the four Gospels contain absolutely no varieties of the above-mentioned Christ-Lord title. Why not? As we said, they were written during a time—Jesus’ earthly ministry—when something was still lacking. What was lacking

was the decisive confirmation from God that Jesus was the Lord. Jesus was not yet ordained the One Lord while he still walked among the apostles. God had to resurrect Jesus from the dead, and that was Jesus' ordination.

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it... let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:32, 36).

So Jesus wasn't automatically the Lord, but rather he became the Lord through the power of the God who "made this Jesus... Lord and Messiah."

E. Basic doctrine

1. Famous verses
 - a. Declare it for salvation
 - i. The demand on converts
 - ii. The demand on evangelists
 - b. Real unity
 - i. One Lord, not three
 - c. No other name
 - i. Jesus means salvation
 - ii. Not about sounds
 - iii. What he stands for
 - iv. More than Savior, Lord
2. Summary statements
 - a. What they preached
 - i. Complicating what's simple
 - b. Repentance and faith
 - c. But one Lord
 - d. Why he died and rose
 - i. The reason
 - ii. What you must believe
 - e. Teaching about the Lord
 - f. Whatever you do
3. Unity in Love

We can only press forward to the Kingdom when we get back to basics. If we understand things the way the apostles understood them, and think the way the Early Church thought, we will be successful Christians. There had to have been a core set of doctrines the apostles taught as they pas-

• We can only press forward to the Kingdom when we get back to basics.

tored the Early Church. What was that core set of doctrine, the *apostles' teaching*?

They [the first Christian congregation in history] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching... (Acts 2:42)

1. Famous verses

Certain verses of the Scripture have had a special resonance among Christians for centuries. You can find them repeated in autobiographies, in creeds, statements of faith, books, and sermons from different Christian communities all around the world. After just a few years of study, most new Christians will have begun to appreciate these precious verses because they are famous in the churches.

We're going to look at some of those jewels here, especially the verses that highlight Jesus' place as Lord.

a. Declare it for salvation

Although evangelistic outreach has increased since around 1962,²²³ the quality of evangelism has suffered a serious downward trend since around 1900.²²⁴ Today's evangelism

²²³ That's the year when *Evangelism Explosion* was launched by Dr. D. James Kennedy (<http://evangelismexplosion.org/about-us/history/>).

²²⁴ That's approximately the year that Billy Sunday (1862-1935) was at his peak of popularity, having large evangelistic meetings around the United States in which he used the "altar call" to invite people to receive salvation. Although both Charles Finney (1792-1875) and Dwight Moody (1837-1899) used the altar call before Billy Sunday did, they didn't *replace* baptism with it like he did. Sunday promised "on the spot" salvation.

Finney and Moody used the altar call more as a tool to bring people to repentance. Finney called people forward so that they might sit in what he called the "worry seat" and William Booth (1829-1912, the founder of the Salvation Army) called sinners to what he deemed the "mercy seat." Their style of altar call was designed to give a space in which pastors could counsel people, urging them towards repentance.

... it's fair to say that no preacher prior to Billy Sunday explicitly equated the altar call with salvation, but it's possible that the "immediate decision" that Dwight Moody asked of his listeners could have been understood that way (Retrieved on February 14, 2015 from <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/10208/was-billy-sunday-the-first-evangelist-to-equate-the-altar-call-with-salvation>).

By the time Billy Graham had become popular (around 1949), and with his consistent use of the altar call, baptism had become completely emasculated as an evangelistic tool. Doctrinally,

has much more positive-thinking and group psychology than Bible truth in it;²²⁵ but still, some Bible verses have managed to still be used by evangelists. One of those is Romans 10:9. In spite of the trend to water down the Gospel, it's still popular.

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

i. The demand on converts

It's hard to weaken the strong language of Romans 10:9. Whoever preaches this passage must by necessity placing a strong demand on those who are seeking salvation. And what is that demand? The demand of going public with their faith.

This verse commits us to publically declare Jesus as Lord. Do you see that? If you can't, it might be helpful for you to read the verse in its converse. Here it is (the same truth presented in a different way):

Anyone who cannot publically declare
"Jesus is Lord" **cannot** be saved.

ii. The demand on evangelists

People who want salvation will always have God's Romans 10:9 demand looming over them, but the verse places a bigger demand on the evangelists who preach it. Implicit in this invitation to salvation is that evangelists will teach others what *Lord* means. If people don't understand what it means, they cannot be saved. Evangelists want people to be saved, so they must teach the meaning of *Lord*.

• ...the verse places a bigger demand on the evangelists who preach it.

Graham does not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. He wrote: "If baptism were a requirement for salvation, we would certainly say that" (Retrieved on February 16, 2015 from <http://billygraham.org/answer/is-baptism-necessary-for-salvation/>).

Baptism is a key issue for people who love the doctrine of the apostles. We believe that denying that baptism is necessary for salvation has contributed to the current Apostasy. What does the Apostasy consist of? It's all about when Christians deny any of the seven "fundamental teachings" (as listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 or Ephesians 4:3-6).

²²⁵This is clearly seen in the ministries of apostate preachers like Joel Osteen, Marcos Whitt, and Benny Hinn.

It's only logical that people who hear the Gospel will need to know the One through whom salvation comes. For someone to say "Jesus is Lord" from the heart, with all sincerity, they will need to know what *Lord* means. How could someone be expected to profess faith in Jesus if they don't first understand who he is? Or would we dare say that Jesus' position as Lord is not an essential aspect of who he is? No, we couldn't ever say that.

b. Real unity

In Ephesians 4, Paul laid out the seven essential realities (or essential truths) that bind Christians together. These truths, if we share them, will allow us to experience the unity of the spirit; that is, they allow us to experience *spiritual unity*.²²⁶ This list, the only one in the Bible specifically written in order to define Christian unity, establishes seven points. Something very powerful happens if we agree upon each point: Real spiritual unity.

- Real spiritual unity

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **One Lord**, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

If we do not agree on each of these seven points, any imagined "Christian" unity is just a mirage. So let's review them. In the order they are presented, we have: 1.) the one body, 2.) the One Spirit, 3.) the one hope, and then 4.) the One *Lord*, Jesus, who happens to be right in the middle of the list—something we take to mean that Jesus is at the center of our religion.

After the One Lord, come 5.) the one faith, 6.) the one baptism, and 7.) the one God, perfect! In a doctrinal sense, this

²²⁶ We insist that *spirit* should be written with a lower-case *s* for a very simple reason: Another *Spirit* (and to honor him we write his name with a capital *S*) figures on the list. If the same word (*spirit*) is used two times, that demands that a distinction be made between the first use and the second use, right? Well, here's the distinction: The *spirit* used in the title of the list refers to the *human* spirit. The *One Spirit* who figures on the list is the *Holy* Spirit.

If you say that the *spirit* used to describe the list is the Holy Spirit, that would mean that the Holy Spirit is on the list of the unity of the Holy Spirit! That would make no sense at all! Rather, the Holy Spirit is a vital part of the spiritual unity of the Church. He is on the spiritual unity list (and he appears there with Jesus and Father God).

list defines the seven great pillars of the Christian religion and God expects us to contend earnestly for each one.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3; NASB).

These are truths that can never be compromised. There is no true unity among Christians unless we agree upon these truths. They were *handed down* to the saints *once for all*—by the apostles. They constitute the doctrine of the apostles. A big mistake is to think that we’re united by the name “Christian.” We’re not. Christian unity is not based on imagining that you are one with anyone who names the name of Christ. Rather, seven truths passed down to the apostles and then to us—if we believe in them—make us one. The fourth of those truths is the One Lord, Jesus.

i. One Lord, not three

But can we be absolutely sure that the One Lord of the list is Jesus and not someone else like the Holy Spirit or God? Yes, we can be. Common sense tells us that the identity of the One Lord is distinct from the One Spirit. Otherwise, why would they have two different places on the same list? Would we put oranges and apples on the same list if they were the same thing? No—we would put them on a list of fruits, and they would be two different kinds of fruits.

Along this same line of thinking, the One Lord could not possibly be the same person as the One God. It would be illogical to list them separately if they were the same person.

Since the One Spirit is the Holy Spirit and Paul (in Ephesians) 4 clearly states that the One God is the Heavenly Father; then through the process of elimination, we deduce that Jesus is the One Lord. If not through the analogy of Scriptures,²²⁷ then through common sense, any student of

²²⁷ The method of interpretation by which you compare one Scripture to another, called *the analogy of Scripture*, is the same method that Jesus and the apostles used. It is based on the belief that Scriptures do not contradict themselves, since the God who inspired them never lies. This method is also known as *Scriptures interpret Scripture*.

We would encourage everybody to use the analogy of Scripture as their herme-

- ...the seven great pillars of the Christian religion

- There is no true unity among Christians unless we agree upon these truths.

- It would be illogical to list them separately if they were the same person.

- Jesus is the One Lord.

the Bible should be able to conclude that Jesus is the One Lord.

c. No other name

• Now Jesus has earned a better reputation than anybody else who has ever lived.

A man's name is his reputation—agreed? If you do agree, then here's a further matter: Consider the reputation of Jesus. Now Jesus has earned a better reputation than anybody else who has ever lived.²²⁸ Isn't that true? No evil was found in him—not even by Pontius Pilate, the Roman official who sentenced him to death! Pilate was only giving in to the pressure of the Jewish leaders when he conceded that Christ should die. He made it clear to them that he never found Jesus to be guilty of any wrongdoing.

Pilate... went out again to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in him'... Pilate came out again and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in him... Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in him...' When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves...' (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; Matthew 27:24; NASB)

neutic tool. A way to persuade people to use this method is to convince them that the best commentary on the OT is the NT, and the best commentary on the NT is the OT. If you teach them enough, they'll be convinced that that's true.

²²⁸ Not only Christians, but at least three other major world religions honor Jesus: Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. **Hindus** include him among their 33 million gods. **Muslims** recognize that he was a prophet and call him the Messiah. **Buddhists** don't believe in God per se. They believe in an energy (Nirvana); but if you speak to one about Jesus, they'll probably say that he was an example of someone who had good energy.

Most **atheists** will at least recognize that Jesus was a wise man. They'll give some recognition to Jesus—if not for any other reason than for his impeccable personal testimony. They are atheists, notwithstanding they have never been able to find so much as a blemish in Christ's reputation.

Practically everybody in **the academic world** gives credence to the religious importance of his teachings. For example, there are practically no historians who accuse him of doing anything wrong—and how could they if there is no historical evidence against him? Not even the authorities of his day could ever build a case against him. Think of it: Jesus has a testimony unlike any other person who has ever lived!

To this day, the Jews are the only people on Earth who accuse Jesus of being evil. In particular, they accuse Jesus of being a blasphemer; an accusation based on their opinion that he was the Son of God. But if he was in fact the Son of God, then he was not a blasphemer, and was innocent. Can the Jews actually prove that Jesus blasphemed by calling himself the Son of God? No, they cannot. So he has never been proven guilty of any wrongdoing. His reputation is untarnished.

• ...the Jews are the only people on Earth who accuse Jesus of being evil.

i. Jesus means salvation

Every person's name has meaning. The name *Jesus* means *salvation*. When our Lord was given the name, a clarification was given by the angel:

• The name *Jesus* means *salvation*.

You shall call his name Jesus [meaning *Yahweh saves*] for it is he who will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21; NASB).

Jesus is the only name under Heaven which God has given to the human race by which human beings must be saved. That means that Jesus is all about salvation!

Salvation is found in no one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under Heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

ii. Not about sounds

When the Scriptures speak of a man's name, they're not talking about the letters that he uses to sign a document, like J-o-h-n B-a-k-e-r. Those letters change from language to language. In Spanish the same name John Baker would be *Juan Panadero*, which has the same meaning, but a completely different pronunciation. Consider what John Baker sounds like in Arabic: *Younis Al-Khobaz*—but it also has the same meaning!

A person's name is not about sounds. We just gave the example of the pronunciation of an English name in Spanish and Arabic, but consider this: The pronunciation of John Baker is different even among different English-speakers like the Irish, Americans, and Australians.

Furthermore, pronunciation is different from region to region within a country. Think about it: If you were John Baker from Brooklyn (New York), would you force a Mis-

Mississippi (a fellow American) to pronounce John Baker with a Brooklyn accent? What would be the point? To make sure that he understood your name? Of course not—that’s because your name is not about pronunciation. Your Mississippi friend understands who you are perfectly well without having to pronounce your name like you do.

- ...your name is not about pronunciation.

iii. What he stands for

- A person’s name is all that he represents to others.

A person’s name is all that he represents to others. For example, if a U.S. ambassador were to arrive in France and he declares “I come to France in the name of the President of the United States,” The ambassador (let’s say it was Benjamin Franklin) would not be referring to the letters of the name of his president: G-e-o-r-g-e W-a-s-h-i-n-g-t-o-n, as if the way that Mr. Washington’s name was spelt was what mattered. Rather, Ambassador Franklin would be referring to the ideals President Washington stands for: liberty, democracy, human rights, and freedom from oppression.

Again, if a messenger says “I come to you in the name of the King,” all that his king represents [be it prosperity, righteousness, a certain religion, or justice] is behind the messenger. The king’s name is what that king represents. So if we go to people in the name of Jesus, what does his name represent? We already said, it means salvation.

- ...if we go to people in the name of Jesus, what does his name represent?

iv. More than Savior, the Lord

Surely you won’t deny that Jesus represents much more than salvation! Who else in history has fulfilled all the prophecies written about:

- Who else in history has fulfilled all the prophecies?

- a Savior
- the Son of Eve
- the Son of Man
- the Prophet
- the Messenger (Angel) of Yahweh
- the Lamb of God
- the Redeemer
- the Messiah
- and the Son of God?

Of all the men who have walked on the face of the Earth, only Jesus has fulfilled God’s Word to the tee. It is an unde-

niable fact: Today, only Jesus is known by those titles.

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Is Moses, the Pope, Buddha, the Dali Lama, Alexander the Great, Confucius, Mohammed, Cesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, or anybody else in history known as *the Messiah*? No. Some men have dared to lay claim to one of Jesus' titles,²²⁹ but nobody has dared to lay claim to two, three, or more. No other man but Jesus has ever so boldly laid claim to all of the titles together. These titles (by which God honors Jesus) have simply been too lofty for any other man in history to use for himself. Jesus far-far surpasses all of the would-be saviors, lords, or messiahs history has every produced.

The bottom line is that no man in history has ever confidently affirmed that he is Lord except Jesus. Of none of them it is said that they have the "name that is above every

²²⁹ Mohammed the prophet of Islam dared to call himself "the Prophet," a title reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ. That's a mistake which Mohammed will regret forever, but his sin is not as bad as the Pope's. Since *Pope* is from the Greek word *pappas*, meaning *Father*, whoever takes the title of *Pope* dares to call himself *the Father*, a title Jesus said we can only use for God the Father, and no one else on Earth.

... do not call anyone on Earth 'father,' for you have One Father, and he is in Heaven (Matthew 23:9).

There is one exception to Jesus' teaching about using the title *father*, and God Himself will make that exception. Wanting to honor Jesus in a special way, God will give the title of *Father* to Jesus when Jesus rules in the Kingdom. In other words, although God won't call Jesus by that name, God will insist that we call Jesus *Father* during the Millennium.

... he [Jesus] will be called [that's the passive voice, meaning that other people will say it, not that Jesus will use it for himself] Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Now, the fact that Jesus "will be called" (that's the future tense) *Everlasting Father* shouldn't be surprising to us since God has already (in the past) shared his personal name *Yahweh* with Jesus. God has shared his glory, his power, and his name with Jesus as far back as before the Creation of the World. What stops God from doing it again in the future?

- No other man but Jesus has ever so boldly laid claim to all of the titles together.

- ...no man in history has ever confidently affirmed that he is Lord except Jesus.

- God will insist that we call Jesus *Father* during the Millennium.

name.” Only Jesus. And who said that of Jesus? God Himself said it of him.

We can sum up the meaning of Savior, Lamb of God, Redeemer, Messiah, Son of Man, Prophet, Messenger of Yahweh, and Son of God in one title: Lord. Now do you understand how comprehensive the title *Lord* is? When we say that Jesus is the Lord, we’re saying that his name is above every name.

• ...his name is above every name.

2. Summary statements

The apostles wrote some very inspirational statements which sum up the content of their preaching—let’s call them “summary statements.” It’s relatively easy for those who read the NT to deduce that “Jesus is Lord” is an essential doctrine of the apostles when we come across these statements in our Bible study. We’ll look at just six of the apostles’ summary statements here.

a. What they preached

To start, let’s look at one of Paul’s summary statements. It’s short and to the point. In just four words, he lays out the message that he and his companions²³⁰ preached: Jesus Christ is Lord.

... what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord... (2 Corinthians 4:5)

So the writer of the greatest number of books of the NT (13), a man who was among the three most prolific NT writers,²³¹ had this mantra: “Jesus Christ as Lord.” In fact, from

²³⁰ Paul’s partners in ministry included Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy, Apollos, Titus, Mark, Priscilla, and Aquila. They all preached the same message as Paul. Even Peter was a partner of Paul, and he had the following to say about him:

... our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Our point here is that Peter considered Paul’s writing to be Scriptures. Do you?

²³¹ John and Luke are the other two. John has a gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation; while Luke wrote the longest gospel and the masterful Book of Acts.

this verse Christians have inherited the shortest doctrinal statement found in the NT: Jesus is Lord. Isn't it a wonderful statement? It really is! The only problem with using such a short phrase is that its brevity leaves room for misinterpretation.

• ...the shortest doctrinal statement found in the NT: Jesus is Lord.

i. Complicating what's simple

The problem in these times of Apostasy, is that simple statements are often manipulated by unscrupulous preachers. "Jesus is Lord" is not an opportunity for false prophets to summarize a teaching of the apostles. They're not interested in summarizing anything. They're not teachers of the Word, trying to help their sheep to understand doctrine more clearly. They don't care about the teachings of the apostles and they care less about their flock. "Jesus is Lord" is a Bible teaching they can manipulate, just as they do with many others. And since it's so short, they can make it say what they want it to say. Preachers from the United Pentecostal Church, for example, use it to try to prove that Jesus is the One God, saying that *Lord* was a term which was only used for God in NT times. Baptists will say the same thing to prove that Jesus is part of the Trinity.

How can we deal with misguided teachers and those who follow them? Is there a way for us to deal with them effectively? Yes, there is. The key is unpacking the meaning of *Lord*. We must boldly proclaim what *Lord* means. If anybody will listen to your explanation, then go one step further: Show them that God gave Jesus the title of *Lord*. If they believe that, go even one more step further and teach them why God gave the title to Jesus. In summary, try to hit these three points:

• The key is unpacking the meaning of *Lord*.

- what *Lord* means
- **who made** Jesus Lord
- **why** he made Jesus Lord

b. Repentance and faith

In still another passage, Paul said that his message had two main features: "turning to God in repentance" and "faith in the "Lord Jesus." *Just* those two points sum up the message of the greatest apostle in history!²³² Wrapping up his more-

²³² Of course, God only knows who the greatest apostle is, and he knows per-

than 3-year ministry in Ephesus, Paul said this:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21).

Fearing God's judgment, yet aware of his kindness, we turn to the Father in repentance. Repentance means "renouncing our sins." Repentance is born of fear,²³³ but it is also inspired by the kindness of the Father. That's why Romans 2:4 says

God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.

So the two dimensions of salvation are:

- **repentance** on one side of the coin
- and **faith** on the other side of the coin

• Why is faith in Jesus the other dimension of salvation?

Why is faith in Jesus the other dimension of salvation? It's because only when our lives are emptied of sin is there be enough room for faith. Faith can't flourish where sin abides. There's no use planting a good seed in a garden full of weeds. Faith in Jesus is the good seed. The weeds of sin must be cleared away if the seed of faith is going to produce fruit. Clearing sin out of your life is repentance.

• Faith in our Lord is all about the truths contained in this book.

We have defined what repentance is about, but have we yet defined what "faith in our Lord Jesus" is about? Yes, we have—quite extensively! Faith in our Lord is all about the truths contained in this book. Do you believe them? If you do, then you are well-prepared to live by faith in the Lord Jesus.

c. But One Lord

Another foundational passage of Scripture is 1 Corinthians 8:6. In it, Paul is making it plain that there is but One God, the Father. While Paul is busy establishing this truth, he states (additionally) that there is but One Lord, Jesus.

factly well who has served him best in the two millennia since Paul walked the Earth; but Paul has much to his credit. Try reading 2 Corinthians 11 to see what a great apostle looks like. Paul mentions this:

I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles'... I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again (vv. 5, 23).

²³³ Proverbs 1:7 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."

Here's the first part of the passage:

We know that 'An idol is nothing at all in the world' and that 'There is no God but One.' For even if there are so-called gods, whether in Heaven or on Earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but One God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live...

After reading that, then we get to the One Lord summary statement. Here it is:

... and there is but One Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Again you'll notice that Paul points out very concisely the difference between Jesus and God: The *One God* is the Father and the *One Lord* is Jesus. Jesus is defined in relation to the One God and Father. It would be terribly illogical to read such a passage and then to say something Trinitarian like "God is Three-in-One." It would be a violation of basic logic to say that the One Lord, Jesus, is the same person as the One God—but so-called "Christians" do that all the time. They fail to understand that the One Lord, Jesus Christ, is not the One God. May God enlighten them.

d. Why he died and rose

Undeniably, the two historical events upon which our salvation sinks or floats are the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Billions of Christians around the world remember these events every year on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. But there is a big problem: Every year during what some people call "Passion Week," you can feel that it is unclear what the death and resurrection of Jesus are really about.

Do a little survey and you'll quickly discover that most Christians don't understand why these two events had to happen. Nonetheless, the explanation for why they happened is not far from any Christian's discovery. It's printed out for them right in Romans 14:9, a passage you probably have never heard preached during Passion Week, but which definitely should be preached during Passion Week:

- ...Jesus is defined in relation to the One God and Father.

- ...the One Lord, Jesus Christ, is not the One God.

- ...it is unclear what the death and resurrection of Jesus are really about.

For this very reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

i. The reason

Let's think about what God is saying here. There was a specific reason why Jesus died and came back from the dead—that reason is that he might be the Lord of those who live, and the Lord of those who have died. That is to say, Christ was crucified and was resurrected so that he might become everybody's Lord. And everybody means everybody: those who are on the Earth and those who are under the Earth.

- Christ was crucified and was resurrected so that he might become everybody's Lord.

- Jesus went to Calvary and God resurrected him so that Jesus would become Lord.

What a compact statement! Jesus went to Calvary and God resurrected him so that Jesus would become Lord. Only through his death and resurrection could Jesus become the Lord of all. If he hadn't died, he would not have qualified. Without a resurrection, he wouldn't have qualified either. As it is, Jesus did die, making him Lord of the Dead; and he was resurrected, making him Lord of the Living. Today Jesus is Lord of all—halleluiah!

ii. What you must believe

God resurrected Jesus, and he did it to give us a sign. God gave us the sign of the resurrection as his most powerful proof that he has made Jesus Lord. If you believe in the resurrection of Christ, you have faith in God. That's the only kind of faith that can save you from sin. That's why it says in Romans 10:9

- ...the only kind of faith that can save you from sin.

... if you... believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So Jesus accepted the suffering of Calvary in order to gain the honor of being the Lord. He was no fool. He knew what he was going to gain from the crucifixion. He believed in the God who rewards those who seek him, and Jesus was seeking God's blessing and favor when he surrendered his life to his enemies. Believe it or not, at Calvary Jesus was acting by faith in the God who gives glory.

- He believed in the God who rewards those who seek him.

... without faith it is impossible to please him [God], for he who comes to God must believe that he is [he exists] and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6; NASB).

[Jesus encouraged others to] ... seek the glory that is from the One and Only God (John 5:44; NASB).

Every Christian knows that Jesus died on the Cross and that he was resurrected, but practically nobody knows that Jesus died seeking a great reward from God. Practically no one will tell you that he died seeking the glory that comes from God. Yet it's only by knowing that truth that Calvary will ever make any sense. Are we supposed to believe that Jesus gave his life but with no recompense in view? There was nothing in it for him? He had no personal motivation? Or should we understand Calvary as the great demonstration of Jesus acting by faith in the God who gives rewards, eternal life, and glory? Yes, indeed that's exactly what Calvary is about.

e. Teaching about the Lord

You can't understate the importance of teaching people about the Lord Jesus. It was a priority for the apostles and it should be even more so for us now. We have already seen how important the teaching ministry was to Paul in Ephesus. (That was when we looked at Acts 20:21, the summary of Paul's ministry there). Ephesus was a very important city, the capital of Asia Minor; but Rome was more important, it was the capital of the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, *the Lord Jesus Christ* was the subject of Paul's teaching to the Romans just like it was with the Ephesians.

For two whole years Paul stayed there [in Rome] in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:30-31)

Rome was the hub of Western civilization at the time of the apostles. The apostles' doctrine about the Lord Jesus Christ would touch the lives of the Christians of Rome; then, through the travel of businessmen, soldiers, sailors, government officials, missionaries, slaves, and family interaction, the teaching would spread outward. Within decades it would reach the inhabitants of Spain, Ireland, England, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Northern Africa.

- Jesus died seeking a great reward from God.

- ...Jesus acting by faith in the God who gives rewards, eternal life, and glory.

- ...*the Lord Jesus Christ* was the subject of Paul's teaching to the Romans.

Because Rome was such an important place, it helps greatly if we can know what the apostle's teaching to the Romans was focused on. It must have been important, correct? From the summary of Paul's work in Rome we find in Acts 28, it's clear that the apostolic message to the Romans revolved around two points:

- proclaiming **the Kingdom of God**²³⁴ and
- teaching about **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Notice that the apostles' declaration of Jesus as Lord was more than an announcement—it was a complete teaching. The Kingdom of God was a proclamation, but for people to really believe that Jesus is Lord, they needed a teaching. To convince people today that Jesus is Lord, we'll also have to teach. That's why this book was written. It's a teaching tool we have put together to help you to understand why Jesus is Lord.

• To convince people today that Jesus is Lord, we'll also have to teach.

f. Whatever you do

If you believe in Jesus as Lord, let him influence every area of your life. Let him have an impact on everything you do. That's what this next passage commands us:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus... (Colossians 3:17).

Serving our Lord Jesus is supposed to become all-encompassing. It is supposed to affect everything we do. Whatever we do in our lives, we should do it for the Lord Jesus. The reason for why we should do everything for Jesus is simple: We belong to him. Notice how "we belong to the Lord" is the conclusion to the following passage, a passage which mentions doing things *for the Lord* five times!

• We belong to him.

Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord;

²³⁴ You should understand the expression "the Kingdom of God" to mean the same thing as "the Gospel." The Gospel is, after all, the good news of and about the Kingdom. So the first part of the original apostolic ministry could just as rightly be described as "Proclaiming the Gospel." The second part was "teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ."

and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord (Romans 14:6-8).

3. Unity in love

Now, to conclude the book, let's zoom in on a passage which sums up everything.

- a passage which sums up everything

If the reason for writing this book were simply to define Jesus as the One Lord, it would have been an easy task. Actually, we are trying to do much more than that. *One Lord* is one of seven books in a series on unity. So this book was written mainly to help you to know true Christian unity when you see it.

Authentic Christian unity is grounded upon the seven realities of Ephesians 4, and One Lord is one of those realities. However, Christians need something more than agreement on the seven realities if we're going to really experience the unity we long for. We need the right attitude to go with our knowledge. Defining unity is a relatively simple accomplishment compared to feeling it. To define unity, we have to read Ephesians 4. To feel unity, we have to love one another.

- We need the right attitude...

Look at what Paul says just one verse before he presents the seven truths of the unity of the spirit:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).

So don't measure your spiritual maturity by the number of truths you know. Instead, prepare yourself to be judged by the law of love. Do you tend to judge others in the Church? Who are you to judge someone for whom Jesus died? Pray for them instead. Speak the truth to them in a kind way. Whoever loves most, knows best.

- Whoever loves most, knows best.

... Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand... You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? (Romans 14:4, 10).

If anyone is strong in the Lord Jesus, it's not just because they have understood the doctrine of One Lord, it's because they obey Jesus—and what is his command? “Love one another.” Let's do that. By so doing, we'll accomplish

- ...what it means to actually have Jesus as Lord.

something much greater than transmitting a doctrine, we'll become living examples of what it means to actually have Jesus as Lord.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

§

Appendices

1. Just One Lord

Where there is fanatical devotion to a certain pastor, preacher, teacher, priest, or healer, be assured that the devotees are deceived. The true Church will always have a singular devotion to Jesus as her Lord. Just as a godly wife will have no special affection for any other man but her husband, the true Church of Christ is devoted to him alone.

Let's understand that God has given Jesus to the Church like a father gives a groom to his daughter. The Church belongs to Jesus, and God wants it that way.

Precisely, one great error of Roman Catholic Christians is their devotion to the Pope. Although Jesus named Peter *the Rock*, and Jesus has indeed built his Church upon Peter—he never intended for Peter or anyone who became a church leader after him to have a corner on the market of Church leadership. Jesus never set up a dynasty for Peter.

The essence of the Catholic error is not that they believe that Jesus established Peter as a leader of the Church. Jesus did establish Peter as the leader of his day. We shouldn't argue with them about that. What we need to argue is that they are violating the doctrine of One Lord by making devotion to Peter and his supposed successors (the Roman Catholic Popes) a matter of pride.

• ...they are violating the doctrine of One Lord...

History repeats itself. This is not the first time a group of Christians has made their devotion to Peter a matter of pride. Roman Catholics have repeated an ancient error which a group of Corinthian Christians, famous for saying "I follow Peter," committed 2000 years ago.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul;' another, 'I follow Apollos;' another, 'I follow Cephas [Peter]²³⁵;' still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

The passage above shows us that Paul didn't want the believers at Corinth to be more devoted to Peter, himself, Apollos, or any Church leaders more than they were devoted to Jesus. That's why he reminds them that Jesus was crucified for them and they were baptized in the name of Jesus.

But you may also have a concern about the situation in Corinth that sounds something like this:

Why were the people at Corinth who said 'I follow Christ' still **just as wrong** as the ones who said 'I follow Peter?'

• ...having devotion to Jesus Christ is not about just saying it.

The answer to the question is that having devotion to Jesus Christ is not about just saying it. We deceive ourselves if we say we are devoted to Jesus while we fight with other Christians about how great that makes us. That's exactly what was happening in Corinth: Believers were fighting with each other—even ones who were proudly proclaiming that they followed Christ! The fighting was wrong. The fighting was a denial of Christ. If you fight with Christian brothers and sisters about how you follow Jesus better than they do,

²³⁵ Cephas is *Peter*, so this is the same argument the Roman Catholics make. They claim that they are under the leadership of Peter, who they call "the first Bishop of Rome." They consider that the current "Bishop of Rome," the Pope, got his authority through *apostolic succession* (which means that men laid hands on other men to transmit authority from one to another in an unbroken tradition dating back to the Twelve Apostles). Catholics believe that the current Pope has received his authority through succession all the way back from Peter.

A bigger problem with their misplaced devotion to Peter is that most Catholics have never even read the Epistles of Peter (as if they were long)! Speak to most Catholics and you'll soon discover that they know nothing of what Peter taught. Forget about the two short epistles of Peter, can a Catholic explain Peter's Pentecost sermon (which consists of some 22 verses from Acts 2)? It's likely that they have never even read that either. So much supposed devotion to a man they don't even know? Strange. Could it be that the Catholic confidence in Peter is just a matter of pride, like a person who says he knows the president, but who has never really had a conversation with him?

then you really aren't following Jesus at all!

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness (1 John 2:9).

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him (1 John 3:15).

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister (1 John 4:20-21).

The Corinthians should have sought unity. We know that real unity is all about loving our Church family. It's not about trying to prove to others that Jesus is our Lord and not theirs. The Corinthians should have paid more attention to how Paul began his exhortation. He began it by asking them to reconcile with each other "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul believed that through Jesus the Corinthians could be perfectly united—and he was sure that the bond of unity would only come through brotherly love.

• ...real unity is about loving our Church family.

Now let's get back to the Catholic crisis. How might we be able to deal lovingly with Catholics and correct their sinful devotion to the Pope? We would repeat the Corinthian error if we were to tell them "We follow Jesus, but you follow the Pope," right? Indeed, that would be a mistake. Rather, we could try saying something like this:

We should all just follow Jesus. He's the **One Lord** of the Church. Was the Pope crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of the Pope?

The best things you can do with a Catholic or any Christian is to seek unity in Jesus. There is no one else who can unite Christians the way he can—don't you agree? And why is there nobody who can unite Christians the way Jesus did? Because only Jesus has really taught us and equipped us to love.

• ...seek unity in Jesus.

The error of giving a human being too much honor in the Church is a common error. Because of that, we will also have to deal wisely with Christians who have commitments with:

- Jesus and **another pope**,²³⁶ like Orthodox Christians
- Jesus and **their pastor**, like many Evangelicals
- Jesus and **Luther**, like many Reformed Christians
- Jesus and **Calvin**, like most Calvinists

• other religions outside of Christianity

While we're on the topic of false lords, we should also mention other religions outside of Christianity. The basic error of every false religion is that Jesus is not their Lord. They will honor God, and they may even honor Jesus—but as long as they refuse to recognize how special Jesus is for God, they are in error. Here are some of the common divided loyalties of false religions:

- **God** as understood by the teachings of his final messenger **Mohammed** and the prophets such as Moses and Jesus (Islam)²³⁷
- **Buddha**, the **Dali Lama**, and perhaps Jesus as an enlightened man (Buddhism)
- **Confucius** and other wise men such as Jesus (Confucianists)
- **Brahma**, **Shiva**, **Vishnu**, with millions of other **gods**, including the god Jesus (Hinduism)
- all inspired **religious leaders**, including Jesus (politically-correct secular humanism)
- the many **forces of good** and perhaps Jesus

²³⁶ It's not only Roman Catholics who devote themselves to following a man they call a *pope*; the Egyptian Copts have their own pope too. Eastern (Greek) Orthodox and Syriac (Iraqi Assyrian) Orthodox Christians have still another patriarch—and each of them considers their pope to be the true leader of the Church, the heir of the authority of the apostles. What to do? The only way out for them is seeking unity in Jesus.

²³⁷ Muslims like to say that they believe in “all of the prophets” because they *think* that the Qur'an includes stories of most of them. The truth is that it does not. Actually, the Qur'an just has just a few short sections taken from a handful of OT stories. Even though it's a long book, it's very repetitive, and only gets around to telling about 1% of the story of the Bible.

harmonizes with them (Taoism)

The list goes on and on. What do we find outside of religion? Not the One Lord Jesus, but many lords. Many people put Jesus together with political leaders:

- Jesus and **the President** (a political fanatic in a democratic country might make this their faith)
- Jesus and **His or Her Majesty** / the King / Queen / Emperor / Prince / Princess / Sultan (a fan of monarchs might say this in their heart)

This kind of religious-political fervor will become more and more popular among the people of the world. How do we know that? Well, the final lord of the world will be the Antichrist, a political leader who will steer the world through the chaos of the Tribulation. He will rise to power as a secularist, but after three and a half years he will solidify his power as a distinctly religious leader. Knowing that the Antichrist will rise to power that way, be leery of any feeling of devotion you might have towards any political leader. That person could be the next Antichrist.

In fact, be careful of mixing your commitment with Christ to any human beings. Some other less-than pure devotion to Christ you'll want to watch out for are:

- Jesus and **your Dad/Mom**, husband/wife, son/daughter
- Jesus and **your friend**, boyfriend/girlfriend, teacher, coach, boss, favorite actor/actress, favorite athlete, favorite musician, etc.

According to God, there's One Lord and his name is Jesus. A true Christian will not put any other person on a level anywhere near Jesus. If we are going to protect the unity that God intended for us to keep, then we must fight for the truth that Jesus is the One Lord. All others who claim our loyalty need to take a very distant second place to the Lord Jesus.

You might feel a legitimate concern thinking: "But our primary commitment is to God, right?" Well, no. God has commanded us to give Jesus our primary commitment.

• What do we find outside of religion?

• ...a true Christian will not put any other person on a level anywhere near Jesus.

That's exactly what the Bible means when it says that "God has made Jesus Lord." God has put Jesus in charge, and he's not going back on his word.

Don't let it cross through your mind that Jesus might at some point tell us to do something different from what God would tell us—he wouldn't and he won't. Jesus has proven to the world that he does everything that the Father tells him to do. Nothing that Jesus would command us would ever go against the will of God.

- ...he does everything that the Father tells him to do.

[Jesus said] I have come down from Heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me (John 8:28).

For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken... So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say (John 12:49-50).

Although we should respect our parents, bosses, rulers, and pastors, our highest degree of devotion is reserved for Jesus—because that's what God wants!

- ...we should respect our parents, bosses, rulers, and pastors.

... a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5)

[Jesus is] the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

... suppose that servant [a pastor] is wicked... The master of that servant [Jesus] will come on a day when he does not expect him... He [Jesus] will cut him [the evil pastor] to pieces... (Matthew 24:48-51)

2. The Passion of our Lord Jesus²³⁸

- a. How to study the Passion narratives
- b. The betrayal
- c. At Anna's house
- d. At Caiphas' house
- e. Sentencing before the Sanhedrin
- f. First appearance before Pilate
- g. Before King Herod
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 - i. The first attempt
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- i. One last flogging
 - i. Reduced to shame with a staff?
- j. Crucifixion
 - i. Unable to carry the Cross
 - ii. The details of his crucifixion
 - iii. Mocked by Jewish leaders
 - iv. Relatively speedy death
- k. The worst of all of Jesus' suffering
- l. Death but not darkness

a. How to study the Passion narratives

The best way to really understand Jesus' death is harmonizing the four gospel accounts of the Passion. Only then do you get a complete picture. We can't give every detail of the Passion here—it would take a whole book—so we have selected certain verses. Which ones have we selected? The ones which highlight Jesus' humiliation.

Why emphasize Jesus' humiliation? We want to demonstrate how greatly Jesus humbled himself because if you behold Jesus' humility, you'll believe in his greatness. God exalted Jesus precisely because Jesus humbled himself. The Cross brought Jesus low, but Heaven lifted him high. We should follow that same pattern.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God,

²³⁸ Here we give a detailed history of the Passion. However, there are two details of the Passion that are more appropriate for other books: the piercing of Jesus' side and Jesus' burial. We'll try to cover the former in our book *One Body*, and the latter in our book *One Hope*.

• ...if you behold Jesus' humility, you'll believe in his greatness.

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself... (Philippians 2:5-8).

Don't go to movies if you want the real story about the Passion. They do not do it justice. The only way to really grasp how much Jesus' humbled himself is through the Scriptures. Movies tend to either make the crucifixion too neat and tidy, or too sensationalistic.

Artists (such as writers, actors, and cinematographers) tend to use a lot of creative license. Normally a very weak study of the Scriptures is evident in their movies. What they call "creativity" is actually subjectivism. For example, have you noticed how differently Pontius Pilate is portrayed in movies? Some productions make him out to be cold with Christ and weak-willed with the Jews. Others make him out to be sympathetic with Chris and firm with the Jews. What was Pilate really?

The wide variety of interpretations of Pilate's character is proof enough that movies are not a reliable means of finding the truth. And if you think about it, the Passion of our Lord is a story we can't afford to misinterpret. To understand what moved our Lord on that fateful day, we have to visualize the Passion as it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, not as it was interpreted by artists.

• ...the Passion of our Lord is a story we can't afford to misinterpret.

b. The betrayal

It began when Judas Iscariot delivered Jesus into the hands of his enemies. The kiss of Judas is history's classic example of betrayal. We are hurt when people let us down, but we are particularly hurt when a friend betrays us. Only a friend can betray our trust. Acquaintances don't have enough of our trust to lose it, but a friend holds our heart in his hands. There are many ways people hurt their friends, but handing a friend over to death while secretly concealing a deep-felt hatred is the epitome of enmity. When someone uses friendship to destroy us, we feel great pain in our very spirit. And that was precisely where Jesus felt the pain. He expressed that pain at the Last Supper as Judas sat there with him.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and

testified, ‘Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.’ His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant (John 13:21-22).

After Judas left the feast, the eleven apostles finished eating and went to the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. That Garden was a place just outside of Jerusalem where they went to rest. Jesus invited them to pray with him, but they were too tired.

It took Jesus three attempts to get to the point at which he would be prepared to face his greatest suffering—the Cross. By the time Judas came to him, accompanied by a Jewish leader and Jewish Temple guards, Jesus was ready.

• ...his greatest suffering—the Cross.

Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him... (Mark 14:43-46)

... a crowd²³⁹ came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ (Luke 22:47-38)

Jesus was tied up by his enemies (which was uncomfortable and rough on his wrists) and abandoned by his friends. The apostles abandoned him, leaving him without support or consolation. Only his faith in God comforted Jesus at that point. There were no friends or family to be found.

Then the disciples all abandoned him and fled (Matthew 26:56; LEB).

Then everyone deserted him and fled (Mark 14:50).

²³⁹ John includes in this crowd a *detachment of soldiers* (John 18:2 is better translated *cohort*) which, among the Romans, normally consisted of some 600 soldiers. Since the only soldiers involved at that point were Jewish Temple guards, we can presume that the cohort wasn’t quite as large as a Roman one would have been. Maybe there were 150 of them, we don’t know. What we do know is that it was a “large crowd armed with swords and clubs” (Matthew 26:47). Large probably means more than 100, right?

Anyways, since these men “were carrying torches, lanterns, and weapons” (John 18:3), it must have been a scary sight to see them approaching. Still Jesus did not flee. What courage!

c. At Annas' house

Jesus was taken from the Mount of Olives to the home of Annas. Now, Annas was part of the High Priest's family, Caiaphas' father-in-law, and was eagerly awaiting Jesus. He had organized an assembly of the chief priests prepared to drill Jesus with questions.

... [the group] brought him [Jesus] first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest that year... the High Priest [a title for Annas] questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching... (John 18:13, 19).

• ...Annas' friends focused their questions on Jesus' disciples and Jesus' doctrine.

From the Bible we know that Annas' friends focused their questions on Jesus' disciples and Jesus' doctrine. That means that some of the questions sounded like this:

- Where are your disciples from?
- What do they do when they visit different towns?
- Why do they not keep the Sabbath?
- Does your doctrine come from any particular teacher?
- Do you teach that the Temple should be torn down?
- Do you teach against the Sabbath?

'Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.' When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the High Priest?'²⁴⁰ he demanded (John 18:13, 19, 21-22).

With the questioning being handled as a court of law, it wasn't likely that Jesus would get a slap in the face, but he did anyways. It was a bad start, but that slap was just the beginning of much physical abuse. It would all culminate in a gruesome crucifixion.

²⁴⁰ There's a little problem here: Annas wasn't the High Priest! The High Priest was Caiaphas. Still, since the Jewish leaders had converted the High Priesthood into a family affair, and had hijacked its original purpose by making into a dynasty of power, they made a scandal of the way Jesus addressed Annas. Perhaps a little bit of insecurity on Annas' part was shown here? Definitely. Anyways, the real High Priest was standing before him. Think about it: Annas was nowhere close to fulfilling the requirements of High Priest while Jesus was almost ready to fulfill them!

d. At Caiaphas' house

After being mistreated at the home of Annas, Jesus was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest and supreme leader of the Jewish religion. It was a very large house with a courtyard and halls used for assemblies. There were more people at Caiaphas' house than at Annas' house. Three groups of people assembled there: all the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the Law—all of them.

Then Annas sent him [Jesus] bound to Caiaphas the High Priest (John 18:24).

... all the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the Law came together (Mark 14:53).

It was in the courtyard of Caiaphas' house that Peter would deny Jesus three times. It had been a long night, and as the rooster crowed for the second time, Peter had just finished uttering his third denial. How miserable Peter must have felt. Picture it with your mind's eye: Peter was close enough to Jesus that Jesus was able to look at Peter straight in the eyes! What a piercing look it was—straight into Peter's conscience.

• What a piercing look it was.

... Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly (Luke 22:60-62).

There was pain and sorrow in that gaze, but there was also the same mercy, love, and hope that Peter experienced in Jesus for three long years. Love "hopes all things" and it "endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7), so Jesus, the Son of Love was still willing to forgive Peter. He still believed in Peter.

Caiaphas' house was where Jesus was maligned by numerous false witnesses. The great difficulty of the false witnesses was that their testimonies didn't agree—it was hard for them to figure out how to accuse Jesus of the same false accusations, so hard that they gave up.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him

to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree (Mark 14:55-56).

Since the false-witnesses failed to present any convincing evidence against Jesus, the Sanhedrin resorted to involving the High Priest himself. Caiaphas got the head-to-head battle he had been waiting for. He had an aggressive interrogation ready for our Lord and planned to bring the meeting to a dramatic conclusion through it.

- Caiaphas ...had to get Jesus to confess that he was the Son of God.

Caiaphas knew exactly what he had to drive at: He had to get Jesus to confess that he was the Son of God. If he did, the Sanhedrin could easily condemn Jesus as a blasphemer.

Jesus knew that this was the trap his enemies had laid out for him, so he was prudent. He had to be sincere in his answers, but very careful. The interrogation was vicious, and Jesus was “as shrewd as a snake and as innocent as a dove” (Matthew 10:16). Nevertheless, Caiaphas finally cornered Jesus, insisting that Jesus answer this question “Are you the Son of the Blessed One?” And to make sure that Jesus had no way out of the trap, Caiaphas put him under oath. Jesus had to answer the question with a *yes* or a *no*. Jesus had no other recourse, so he answered affirmatively.

The High Priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the Living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’

‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied (Matthew 26:63-64).

When Jesus gave his answer, Caiaphas ripped his garments.²⁴¹ Do you know why he did that? Jesus didn’t say anything terribly brazen, just “You have said so [that I am the Messiah]”—but that’s exactly why Caiaphas had to be so dramatic. He had to stir things up as much as possible because he couldn’t get any drama out of Jesus. Caiaphas tore his clothes to get the assembly as emotionally charged as possible. That was his only way of getting the Sanhedrin

²⁴¹ Now, you may not have known this, but for a High Priest to rip his garments was a violation of an OT injunction.

Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Do not let your hair become unkempt and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community (Leviticus 10:6; cf. 21:10).

to condemn Jesus with him.

The High Priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death (Mark 14: 63-64).

In scandalous outrage, feigning righteous indignation, the High Priest encouraged all of the members of the assembly to condemn Jesus. They were more than happy to oblige him; after all, that was the very reason why most of them had met together that night.

They declared that Jesus was worthy of death—but it was not a unanimous vote. According to Luke 23:50-51, Joseph of Arimathea,

... a member of the Council, a good and upright man...
had not consented to their decision and action.

Joseph was like a rose growing in a garden of weeds. It must have taken very strong character for him to disagree with his colleagues. What was the secret to Joseph’s faith? The Bible tells us that Joseph of Arimathea

... himself was waiting for the Kingdom of God (Luke 23:51).

• the secret
to Joseph’s
faith

Yet Joseph was not able to change anybody’s mind.²⁴² The men of the Sanhedrin spat on our Lord, blindfolded him, punched him, and slapped him—taunting him. They also accused him of being a false prophet. Then the Temple guards took him away. As if Jesus hadn’t been through enough already, they all beat him up, bound him with ropes,

²⁴² It seems that Joseph was able to persuade one person that Jesus was innocent: Nicodemus. This man, a Pharisee and also a member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1), courageously accompanied Joseph in burying Jesus’ body after the crucifixion was through.

Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen (John 19:38-40).

and led him away to yet a third meeting.

... they [the men of the Council] spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him... (Matthew 26: 67)

Then some [men of the Council] began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, 'Prophecy!' And the guards took him and beat him (Mark 14:64-65).

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, 'Prophecy! Who hit you?' And they said many other insulting things to him (Luke 22:63-65).

e. Sentencing before the Sanhedrin

The leaders of the Jews planned their last illegal assembly for the early morning. Imagine how Jesus must have felt by the time the third trial started. He was so tired. He had not rested all night long.

- He had not rested all night long.

The purpose of the final meeting of the Council was already decided: They would find a way to prove that Jesus was worthy of death. Again, just like the two previous meetings, their goal was to get Jesus to say that he was the Messiah. Jesus was still at Caiaphas' house (John 18:28) so the meeting was held in a hall there—perhaps the same one as the night before.

- ... their goal was to get Jesus to say that he was the Messiah.

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the Law, and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans... (Mark 15:1a).

Jesus wisely avoided answering their questions as long as he could, but they pressed the issue so hard that they obligated him to speak. They knew that if he would just state that he was the Messiah, they could then cause the people to riot against Jesus.

'If you are the Messiah,' they said, 'tell us.'

Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer...'

They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?'

He replied, 'You say that I am.'

Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips' (Luke 22:67-68, 70-71).

Jesus finally conceded to what they were driving at—he didn't go right out and say "I am the Messiah," but he said enough. He gave in. He let them win. When Jesus said "You say that I am" it's as if he was saying "Congratulations, you guys are as shrewd as it get. Take what you want. I give up."

Jesus was putting into practice his own teaching:

... do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles (Matthew 5:39-42).

Jesus turned the other cheek. He went the distance with the Sanhedrin. But before he surrendered, he stated the truth in plain terms: the group of men sitting before him, the leaders of the Jews, were unbelievers. That's why he said:

If I tell you [that I'm the Christ], you will not believe me.

As soon as Jesus said "You say that I am," the Sanhedrin had what they wanted. They would blow his words out of proportion. They would turn his acquiescence²⁴³ into a mob-scene. They were ready to bring their murderous plot to the next stage: They would bring Jesus to the Roman Governor, the one person who had the authority to kill him. The Sanhedrin could not carry out the death penalty without the Governor's permission.

... So they bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate (Mark 15:1b).

f. First appearance before Pilate

By the time Jesus was brought to Pilate, he was already pretty beaten up. He had bruises all over his body. Remember the physical abuse of the guards and the beating he got at Caiaphas' house. His body was sore and weary. Jesus desperately needed medical attention. He needed a good rest, but what he got was more false accusations hurled at him.

- They would turn his acquiescence into a mob-scene.

- Jesus desperately needed medical attention. He needed a good rest.

²⁴³ This word is defined by Google as "the reluctant acceptance of something without protest." Merriam-Webster defines it as "to accept, agree, or allow something to happen by staying silent or by not arguing." I can't think of a better word to describe how Jesus finally responded to the High Priest's last verbal attack.

... they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king’... they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here’ (Luke 23:2, 5).

The Jews presented Jesus to Pilate as a *criminal* (John 18:30). They expressed their desire to have him executed (John 18:31) and gave their reason: Jesus had committed four crimes. The following list of his crimes is based on Luke 23:2, 5 above:

- subverting the Jewish nation
- opposing Roman taxes
- claiming to be a king
- stirring up people (in two regions of Palestine)

Pilate questioned Jesus but found no reason to condemn him. Interestingly, Pilate focused his questions on whether Jesus was really claiming to be a king or not. We know that this was Pilate’s focus because Pilate began his questioning by asking Jesus “Are you the king of the Jews?” and he ended it with a sarcastic “You are a king, then!” (John 18:33, 37).

- Pilate focused his questions on whether Jesus was really claiming to be a king or not.

Pilate’s keen interest in whether Jesus was proclaiming himself to be a king shows us three things about Pilate:

- Pilate **didn’t care** about whether Jesus was paying taxes, subverting the Jewish nation, or stirring people up or not.
- Pilate was only interested in the impact Jesus might have on **the political power structure** of Palestine.
- Pilate didn’t consider Jesus to be **a threat to Roman rule**.

After his first hearing with Jesus, Pilate could easily deduce that the Jewish leaders were jealous of Jesus. He saw right through them. He knew that they were trying to use him to get rid of their enemy, Jesus. Pilate was sharp. He realized that the only reason for the Jews’ accusations against Jesus was envy.

... he [Pilate] knew that they had handed him over because of envy (Matthew 27:18; LEB).

Pilate was a cynical man. He didn't believe that it was worth his time to seek religious or philosophical truth. We know this because when Jesus spoke of the truth, Pilate sarcastically asked Jesus "What is truth?" How do we know the tone of voice he used when he asked this infamous question? It's simple. Because the Bible tells us that after he asked it, he immediately walked away. What does it mean if you ask a question but don't wait for an answer? It means that you really don't want to discuss the matter at all, and Pilate didn't want to discuss truth with Jesus. Pilate figured that he was speaking to a dreamer.

- Pilate sarcastically asked Jesus "What is truth?"

- ...after he asked it, he immediately walked away.

[Jesus said to Pilate] '... the reason I was born and came into the World is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'

'What is truth?' retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there... (John 18:38)

Although Pilate wasn't interested in hearing Jesus' teachings, at least we know that he was impressed with Jesus' character. What particularly amazed Pilate was how Jesus kept silent in the face of the false accusations of the Jews. Jesus showed calm, dignity, and hope. Pilate noticed that Jesus was willing to die, and he recognized courage in that. That courage made Pilate begin to feel some degree of respect for Jesus.

When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor (Matthew 27:12-14).

The pressure was mounting on Pilate, so he tried to try to free himself from it. Knowing that the Jews were trying to use him to kill Jesus, but not finding any guilt in Jesus, Pilate tried to free himself from the whole case. It occurred to Pilate that there was someone else in Jerusalem who might be able to free him from that burden—King Herod.

g. Before King Herod

Herod Antipas²⁴⁴ happened to be in Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' trial, so Pilate sent Jesus to him. Herod had jurisdiction over the Roman Palestine region of Galilee, and Jesus was from Galilee, making Herod competent to sentence Jesus. Pilate and Herod were not friends, so Herod wasn't about to do Pilate any favors by assuming responsibility for Jesus.

... [Herod] plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him (Luke 23:9-10).

Herod also knew how difficult the Jewish religious leaders could be, so there was little reason for him to get involved in Jesus' case. The one thing he did want was to satisfy his curiosity about this famous prophet. He had long desired to meet Jesus face-to-face, but was greatly disappointed with Jesus. Jesus didn't do any miracles or even speak to Herod.

Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23: 11).

With contempt for our Lord, Herod sent him away. Scorning Jesus, Herod had a costly robe placed on him, mocking Jesus' claim to be a king. Then Herod returned Jesus to Pilate.

h. Pilate seeks to release Jesus

i. The first attempt

To his credit, Pilate tried his best to release Jesus. The first time Pilate presented his judgment to the crowd, he confidently stated that Jesus was not worthy of death. He told them that there was no basis for their charges against Jesus, and said that he would release Jesus. Pilate reported to "the chief priests, the rulers, and the people" (v. 13) that Herod's judgment was the same as his: Jesus was innocent. Trying to cool the anger of the people towards Jesus, he said that he would give Jesus a scourging.

• Pilate...
said that
he would
release
Jesus.

²⁴⁴ Herod Antipas was the son of the infamous King Herod who killed the babies of Nazareth on the first Christmas. Antipas is the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded.

I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him (Luke 23:14-16).

It was in that same speech that Pilate presented another solution: He could release Jesus for the sake of a Jewish custom. It was a custom of the Jews to have mercy on a prisoner on their Passover holiday. Pilate hoped that mercy would prevail on that day. It was worth a shot.

“But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”

They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising (John 18:39-40).

It was the people, not Pilate, who wanted Barabbas released. With this, Pilate realized that the religious leaders were more intent on Jesus’ death than he first thought. They were outwitting him. Pilate was running out of options, so God gave him some extra encouragement. He did it to help Pilate to escape temptation.

God sent a special revelation about Jesus to Pilate’s wife. She had a dream and was so touched by it that she told him how she felt by sending him a message:

While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him’ (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate was caught in a real dilemma. He feared being responsible for the death of Christ at that point. A little later, when Pilate heard from the Jews that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, it says that Pilate felt “even more afraid.” The comparative adjective *more afraid* indicates that Pilate was already afraid. Fear was growing within Pilate’s heart as the unjust legal process dragged on. He couldn’t find a way out. He felt trapped.

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid (John 19:8).

• Fear was growing within Pilate’s heart as the unjust legal process dragged on.

Even though Pilate told the Jews that he would let Jesus go, they insisted that Pilate should free a notorious rebel instead. Barabbas had committed murder and participated in an uprising against the Romans in Jerusalem. Clearly, he was not the kind of person Pilate wanted to be roaming the streets again.

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered (Matthew 27:20-21).

But the whole crowd shouted, ‘Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!’ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder) (Luke 23:18-19).

In response to the will of the Jews, Pilate went ahead with the *punishment* he said he would give to Jesus, hoping that giving Jesus a beating would calm the rage of the Jewish people. He hoped that humiliating Jesus would prove to the Jews that Jesus was no threat to their nation. How could a man as disgraced as Jesus ever be a king?

- a crown of thorns

That was the first time that the Roman soldiers placed a crown of thorns on our Lord’s head and dressed him in a purple robe. We don’t know whether that robe was the same one that Herod put on Jesus earlier, but the nature of the taunting and mocking was the same: Everyone wanted to show Jesus that he would never be king over them.

- Everyone wanted to show Jesus that he would never be king over them.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they slapped him in the face... (John 19:1-3, 4).

ii. The second attempt

With Jesus standing there in disgrace, Pilate hoped that the Jews would feel that justice had been served. Unfortunately, he underestimated them. The envy the Jewish leaders had towards Jesus was stronger than Pilate had imagined. They would not desist.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ (Luke 23:20-21).

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him’ (John 19:4).

This dynamic of what was happening on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion doesn’t always come out in the movies, but let’s state it clearly here: Pilate had Jesus beaten and humiliated to save Jesus’ life! His goal was not to make Jesus suffer as much as possible, but to free him from the plot of the Jews.

• Pilate had Jesus beaten and humiliated to save Jesus’ life!

iii. The third attempt

For the third time, Pilate addressed the Jews and made it abundantly clear that Jesus was innocent. Pilate wanted to do what was right. He tried to persuade the Jews, but was unsuccessful.

For the third time he spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.’

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed (Luke 23:22-23; comparing it with Luke 23:14-16, proves that it was Pilate’s third attempt to free Jesus).

The leaders of the Jews had finally found the way to corner the Governor. They had complete control of the crowd and “an uproar was starting” (Matthew 27:24). Pilate wanted to get away from all of them, so he had a private conference with Jesus, entering into his chambers. That conversation revealed both his character and Jesus’ character better than any other dialogue between them.

You would think that a Roman Governor who boasted of his own power would be strong enough to act freely. You would think that, if he spoke about what he could do, that he would be able to do something—but Pilate was weak. His words were empty. He didn’t really have the power to free Jesus, and he knew it in the deepest part of his heart. Pilate knew that he didn’t have the strength of character to free the innocent man who stood before him.

... he [Pilate] went back inside the palace. ‘Where do you come from?’ he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ‘Do you refuse to speak to me?’ Pilate said. ‘Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’ (John 19:9-10).

The power Pilate needed was inner strength—and he was unable to muster it up on that day. He couldn’t follow his personal convictions or obey his conscience. In contrast, Jesus did exactly what his conscience said was right and he did it in the most difficult circumstance of all—under the threat of death. Jesus proved that he was willing to face death for what he believed.

How courageous was Jesus? Observe his final conversation with Pilate and you’ll know. Jesus had the courage to confront the man who was sentencing him to death, speaking to Pilate about Pilate’s sin—now that’s brave! Understand that Jesus didn’t speak out of anger. Jesus wasn’t trying to hurt Pilate’s heart, but to heal it! Most innocent prisoners would try to make Pilate feel just guilty enough so that Pilate might set them free, but Jesus spoke to Pilate about Pilate’s sin out of love. He ministered to Pilate the way he and you and I should minister to all people: by stirring their conscience to repentance.

... by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

“Don’t you realize I have power...?” are the words of a weakling, not of a true leader. And Jesus knew how much power Pilate really had. Jesus’ words to Pilate demonstrated that he knew more about the extent of Pilate’s power than Pilate did.

Jesus knew Pilate better than Pilate knew himself. Jesus realized that what Pilate said wasn’t true at all: Pilate did not have power to free Jesus. Pilate didn’t have that power because he served the world, not God. Jesus was well aware that it’s God who makes people free.

- Pilate did not have power to free Jesus.

Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from Above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you²⁴⁵ is guilty of a greater sin’ (John 19:11).

Pilate’s words expressed the conflict he had deep within: He knew that even though he was the Governor, he had no real power to free Jesus. He wasn’t really free himself—so how could he free Jesus? It was Jesus who could free him! Still, these were Pilate’s words:

Don’t you realize I have power either to free you... ?
(John 19:10).

Jesus frees people who are slaves to the world’s system by revealing to them what the Kingdom of God is, and he tried to give Pilate some insight into the Kingdom.

Jesus said, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place’ (John 18:36).

But Pilate loved his job more than he loved justice. Pilate lived for the world, and not for the Kingdom. So the only thing Jesus could do with him was call him to repentance. Jesus gently made Pilate aware of Pilate’s sin. Jesus pointed out the nature and the degree of the Governor’s sin by pointing out that authority had been given to Pilate from God, but that he was using it irresponsibly. Jesus did that by comparing Pilate to the High Priest.

• ...Pilate loved his job more than he loved justice.

Since Pilate was very upset about the behavior of the High Priest, he felt uncomfortable being compared to him. Not wanting to share the same guilt as the High Priest, Pilate’s conscience was pricked. Pilate began to try in earnest to set Jesus free.

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free (John 19:12).

However, it was too late. There was no way of convincing the Jews that Jesus should be freed. They had been stirred

²⁴⁵ The one who handed Jesus over to Pilate was Caiaphas. As High Priest, God had given Caiaphas a higher position of authority than God had given Pilate. Jesus’ lesson was that if God gives you great authority, you are responsible to use it according to his will. Jesus was saying with his “therefore” that the High Priest had greater authority than the Roman Governor. Why? Because spiritual authority is a greater responsibility in the eyes of God.

up by their religious leaders and, in a frenzy, cried out “Crucify him!”

... with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified (Luke 23:23).

As a last resort, Pilate presented Jesus to the Jews as their *king*.

‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews (John 19:14b).

• He was trying to get the people to see how ridiculous their accusations were.

Can you see what was going on in Pilate’s mind when he called Jesus the *king* of the Jews? He was trying to get the people to see how ridiculous their accusations were. How could they accuse such a meek man of something that deserved death? Pilate wanted the Jews to reflect on what they were asking for. He was trying to show them that Jesus was harmless. He thought that through his sarcasm, they might come to their senses.

‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, ‘Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!’ ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ Pilate asked. ‘We have no king but Caesar,’ the chief priests answered (John 19:14b-15).

Pilate eventually gave in to the will of the people. An uproar was starting. The Bible says “their shouts prevailed” (Luke 23:23). In other words, they gave him no more voice on the matter.

Pilate gave the people what they requested. He let anarchy rule. He let them have their way. Washing his hands of the matter, he renounced any responsibility for the death of Jesus.

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ (Matthew 27:24).

It’s worth noting that Pilate’s hand washing did not absolve him of sin before God, it simply made it clear to the Jews that he would not assume any legal responsibility for Jesus’ death. He is responsible under the law of God, however. God will hold him accountable for putting an innocent man to death, and making a decision on a false charge.

Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty (Exodus 23:7).

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both (Proverbs 17:15).

Pilate is also guilty of people pleasing—that is, political negligence and irresponsibility. What he did was an abdication of the authority God had given him. He did not lead the people, he let them lead him.

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them (Mark 15:15).

Whatever happened to Barabbas after that we do not know. What we do know is that Jesus took his place that day. We also know that we are all as guilty as Barabbas. We deserve death just like he did. The mercy God gave to Barabbas on that day is the same mercy God offers us today. God's mercy comes through the death of Christ.

• The mercy God gave to Barabbas on that day is the same mercy God offers us today.

i. One last flogging

Up to that point, the beatings Pilate ordered were intended to calm the hatred the Jewish leaders felt towards Jesus. The beatings were designed to please them just enough so that they would drop the case altogether. Unfortunately, Pilate's plan didn't work. The Jewish leaders would settle for nothing less than for Jesus to die. They got what they wanted. Pilate gave the order to crucify Jesus, but that meant that there had to be one last flogging.

... he [Pontius Pilate] had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified (Matthew 27:26).

There was no turning back. It was “about noon” (John 19:14), and our good Jesus was whipped brutally—as if he hadn't suffered enough already. Jesus' final beating was different from the previous ones because it was the one Roman soldiers gave to prepare condemned prisoners for death. Here's a description of what it was like:

...The instrument of torture is a short cluster of whips, perhaps three feet in length. Similar to a whip that is referred to as a cat-o-nine-tails, each strand of leather has a sharp piece of bone or metal attached to the end of it. When struck

across the body it would tear off the upper layer of skin in a strip several inches wide, causing pain and profuse bleeding...

How many times was the Messiah struck with the whip? Historically, the punishment specified thirty lashings... His back and chest was entirely covered with deep, bleeding bruises and lacerations that resulted from the scourging process. His torso would be a mass of blood... His body bore far more bloody scars than... we... assume.²⁴⁶

• to prepare
Jesus for
death

It was Roman custom to give this final flogging to a prisoner before his crucifixion. The soldiers' job was to prepare Jesus for death—he had to be made as weak as possible. It was in the Romans' best interest to weaken their condemned prisoners as much as possible so that they would give in to death more readily.

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, King of the Jews!' they said (Matthew 27:27-29).

As you can see from the text above, an entire company (i.e., *cohort*) of soldiers, meaning a group of at least 480 men, stripped him, ridiculed him, and gashed his head by placing another crown of thorns upon it. It was a different robe from the purple one he wore before and it was a different crown too.

Thorns are a symbol for sin.²⁴⁷ By placing a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, those callous soldiers unwittingly demon-

²⁴⁶ Retrieved from *Images of the Cross* (Matthew 27:26) on February 28, 2015 from http://www.biblicaltheology.com/mat/42_27_24.html

²⁴⁷ Genesis 3:17-18 says

To Adam he [Jesus] said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you... It will produce thorns and thistles for you."

strated what God’s plan of salvation is about—God making Jesus a curse for us. As Jesus wore that crown, he bore the curse of sin for all humanity. He wore it with utter dignity and love. Picture him with it on in your mind’s eye. If you can, you’ll can see the price Jesus had to pay to become the Savior of the world!

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Galatians 3:13).

i. Reduced to shame with a staff?

During the harsh treatment inflicted by the soldiers, there is a detail of Jesus’ suffering that we don’t want to overlook: the staff that was used. The staff was supposed to be a mock scepter. It was part of the humiliation the soldiers subjected Jesus to.

• a mock scepter

They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again (Matthew 27:30).

Being beaten on the head with a staff was not only physically painful, it was insulting. The soldiers were using the staff as to ridicule Jesus’ claim to be a King—but Jesus tolerated all of this by faith in the God who had promised him a scepter to rule.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Below are some Bible passages that prove that Jesus will, in fact, use a scepter in his Kingdom. Look closely and you’ll also see what the scepter represents: authority over the ethnic groups (nations) of the world.

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Genesis 49:10).

... about the Son he [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your Kingdom’ (Hebrews 1:8).

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father (Revelation 2:26-27).

She [Israel] gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron scepter’ (Revelation 12:5).

- Jesus was a man who hoped in God's Kingdom.

Jesus knew that he would be honored by God after he had endured the scorn of men. Jesus knew that his reward would be much greater than his suffering. Jesus lived by hope in God's promises. That's how he endured persecution, and that's how you can endure it too. Jesus was a man who hoped in God's Kingdom. Hope was his secret strength and it's our secret strength as well. We have to imitate that kind of perseverance:

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the Cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).

j. Crucifixion

For the death penalty, Romans didn't use lethal injection or electric chairs. Those are modern methods we have designed to be as painless as possible. The Romans had no concern for the comfort of those they had sentenced to death. On the contrary, the Romans sought to inflict the worst possible pain on their victims. Capital punishment was supposed to produce a slow, painful death, and it was supposed to be a public spectacle at the same time. That's why crosses were used. The Romans wanted everyone who witnessed a crucifixion to know that those who would follow in the footsteps of the condemned would have the same fate.

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (John 19:17).

Jesus didn't argue against the death penalty. He did not cry out in his defense, willingly succumbing to injustice. He knew that it was the will of God, so Jesus took the Cross and started off to the place where he would be nailed to it—the Place of the Skull, Golgotha.

... a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns... his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him... Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter (Revelation 19:11-15).

i. Unable to carry the cross

Jesus got a decent start, but was too weak to carry the Cross beyond the city gate. It was too difficult for him, being weakened by a sleepless night, having not eaten breakfast or lunch, and having nothing to drink all morning long.

• Jesus... was too weak to carry the Cross beyond the city gate.

Of course, the terrible beatings that he suffered at the hands of both the Temple guards and the Roman soldiers left Jesus severely bruised, lacerated, bleeding, and sore. That's why the soldiers had to force a passer-by named Simon to carry the Cross for Jesus. The encounter between Simon and Jesus happened just as they were leading Jesus out of a Jerusalem gate.²⁴⁹

As they [the soldiers with Jesus] were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the Cross (Matthew 27:32).

Simon the Cyrene was coming in to the city from the country (Mark 15:21). He was just arriving to Jerusalem when he got chosen for the task. Notice that he had to be *forced* to carry it. The Bible says that the soldiers *made him* carry the Cross after they *seized* him. This clearly was a disgrace for Simon, but that disgrace would become Simon's badge of honor for all eternity—he will always be remembered as the man who carried the Savior's greatest burden at the moment of his greatest need.

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the Cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).

Jesus went first, and Simon carried the Cross behind him. Simon, not Jesus carried it from the Jerusalem gate up to Golgotha. What would be the point of giving it back to Je-

²⁴⁹ As you can see, the Catholic tradition of the "stations of the cross" which involves three falls, must be inaccurate. There may have been one fall—the one that convinced the Roman soldiers that someone else should carry the Cross. However, stations 4 (Jesus meets his mother), 6 (Veronica wipes the face of Jesus), 7 (Jesus falls the second time), and 9 (Jesus falls the third time) have no Biblical warrant.

Now, it's not just the Catholics who have an inaccurate conception of the road to Calvary. The pervasive teaching among most Evangelicals and Protestants is that Jesus carried his Cross up the hill, but it simply could not be true. It was Simon who carried the Cross for Jesus up that hill.

sus if Jesus was clearly already too weak to carry it. The Bible narrations give no reason to suspect that the soldiers had Simon give the Cross back to our Lord on the way up.

If Jesus did in fact take the Cross back and started to carry it up to Calvary again, then how could he have *turned around* to address the multitudes that were following him? The fact is that Jesus couldn't have done that if he was carrying the Cross. It just wasn't physically possible.

... following him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting him. But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children...' (Luke 23:27-28; NASB).

Since Simon followed Jesus up the hill, we are reminded of Jesus' challenge:

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; NASB).

On the hilltop they called Calvary the Roman soldiers crucified our Lord. The Bible says that the crucifixion took place at 9am (Mark 15:25).²⁵⁰

ii. The details of his crucifixion

Surprisingly, the Bible writers give very few details about what the crucifixion actually looked like. Unlike many movies and a good deal of artwork, the Bible doesn't highlight the blood and gore of the crucifixion. Undoubtedly there was a lot of blood, but the apostles highlight the peace, love, hope, and forgiveness our Lord Jesus transmitted from the Cross. If you can believe it, his demeanor was a far more astounding sight than the blood that ran down his body.

No details of how the Romans performed the crucifixion are given to us in the Scriptures. All we get is "They crucified him."

²⁵⁰ Jesus' sentencing by Pilate took place at about 6am (John in 19:14 says that it was at *approximately* the Roman civil *sixth hour*), the crucifixion took place at 9am (Mark says in 15:25 that it was at the Hebrew *third hour*), and Jesus died at about 3pm (the Hebrew *ninth hour*), there having been darkness over the land for *three hours*, from noon to 3pm (Matthew 27:45). John used Roman timing in his account, while Mark and Matthew used Hebrew timing (<http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=6&article=4759>).

• ...the apostles highlight the peace, love, hope, and forgiveness our Lord Jesus transmitted from the Cross.

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots (Matthew 27:35).

There they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle (John 19:18).

The Bible tells us what we need to know: Jesus obeyed the Father up to his dying breath. The Bible is not sensationalistic, so it doesn't address the issue of how much blood was covering Jesus' body, whether the soldiers used ropes, or whether Jesus groaned in pain or not.

- Jesus obeyed the Father up to his dying breath.

Blood and gore is not what God wants us to dwell upon. What we should dwell upon is that prophecy was fulfilled. The nails were driven through his hands and his feet in order to fulfill God's Word! The prophecy of Psalm 22:16 had to be fulfilled, which says "they pierce my hands and my feet." That's not the only passage that was fulfilled of course. Here's another famous one:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished (Isaiah 53:4-8).

The most important thing to understand about the crucifixion is that God's Word was fulfilled there. Can you see that? God didn't let it happen so that people could make movies of it, but to show people that he does what he says he'll do. He said through many prophets that he would save us, and he did.

- The most important thing to understand about the crucifixion is that God's Word was fulfilled there.

You may wonder about whether the nails were placed in Jesus' wrists or in his palms. It's a good question. Although the accounts of the crucifixion don't inform us about the

specific location of the nails, we can surmise their location through what Jesus said after the resurrection. It was then that he showed his apostles his scars saying:

‘Look at my hands and my feet... Touch me and see...’
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet... (Luke 24:39-40)

Because of what Jesus said later, not because of any detailed description of the crucifixion, we know that the Romans nailed Jesus’ hands and feet to the Cross. Jesus’ scars tell the story of his love, so he’s not ashamed to tell us that story.

• Jesus’ scars tell the story of his love.

... [Thomas said] ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were... I will not believe...’ [Then Jesus came and invited him to] ‘Put your finger here; see my hands...’ (John 20:25, 27)

iii. Mocked by Jewish leaders

While Jesus was hanging on the Cross, his executioners offered him wine mixed with bile (some versions of the Bible call it *gall*). That was a liquid with a very bitter taste so it wasn’t at all refreshing, even for a man parched with thirst. This scornful action shows us that Jesus got zero sympathy from his enemies at his crucifixion. The people who were there had no mercy on him but added insult to injury.

There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it (Matthew 27:34).

Someone might say that there was mercy in what they did, but we know that the wine was a malicious act because an OT prophecy predicted it. That prophecy described the hatred others had towards Jesus. If the prophecy isn’t enough to convince you, Luke tells us that soldiers offered him *sour wine* in an attempt to mock him. There was no compassion for Jesus in his death. They did not do it out of compassion for a dying man.

I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst (Psalm 69:20-21).

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up to him, offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ (Luke 23:36-37).

Jesus was surrounded by enemies even at his moment of greatest grief. No one offered him the compassion a dying man so deserves. There were six groups of people there at the Cross, and they were all casting insults at Jesus:

- the soldiers
- the people passing by
- the chief priests
- the teachers of the Law
- the elders
- the rebels who were crucified with him

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the Cross, if you are the Son of God!’

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders mocked him. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the Cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’

In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (Matthew 27:39-44).

But Jesus did not respond in kind. Jesus responded by being kind, doing something that has touched the hearts of believers for centuries: He asked the Father to forgive them.

Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

• Jesus did not respond in kind. Jesus responded by being kind

iv. Relatively speedy death

Jesus hung on the Cross for somewhere around three hours. During that time, his body weight pressed hard against his rib cage, making it very difficult to breath. Jesus’ difficulty breathing explains why his seven famous sayings on the Cross were so short. It was an excruciating job for him to get out every syllable. He was hardly able to move his diaphragm, much less speak.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (Mark 15:33-34).

• ...why his seven famous sayings on the Cross were so short.

Jesus' death was over relatively quickly, in six hours. That may sound like a long time to you, but it was quicker than the two other men who were crucified with him. It was not necessary for the soldiers to break his legs like they did to the *rebels* (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:27) hanging on each side of him.²⁵¹

The Romans had the custom of breaking the legs of their victims to kill them. Broken legs made it impossible for a crucified man to support his body weight with his feet. There was no way for him to relieve the pressure on his diaphragm. A crucified man who couldn't push his body up with his legs any more would simply suffocate and die.

... as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea... went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead (Mark 15:42-44).

- Jesus was a strong man.

Jesus' rapid death indicates how hard the beating he got from the soldiers was. Don't forget that Jesus was a strong man. If you didn't know that, consider all the walking he had done for three years from Galilee to Jerusalem,²⁵² as well as the fact that he was a carpenter by trade. The men crucified alongside him expired after our Lord, right when the soldiers broke their legs. They were able to resist death longer probably because they had rested the night before and had some breakfast.

k. The worst of all of Jesus' suffering

To put things in perspective, although Jesus' physical suffering was intense, the worst of his suffering was spiritual

²⁵¹ Nowhere does the Word of God make reference to a supposed "thief on the cross"—so it is a human tradition, not a God-inspired truth. Rather, the Bible refers to the two men as "rebels." They most likely had been involved with the same insurrection as Barabbas, since they were in jail at the same time as him.

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve (Luke 23:41).

They knew each other, since the penitent rebel pointed out to the other that their deeds were being fairly punished. The penitent rebel knew what the crimes of the other were according to the way he spoke. In fact, it even sounds like they did the same thing because he calls them "our deeds."

²⁵² A one-way trip from Galilee to Jerusalem was approximately 75 miles. Consider how far that is by estimating that if you drove 75 miles per hour (which is very fast) for one hour, the distance you would cover.

and not physical. You will not read in the Scriptures of Jesus making any complaints against the scourging, the crown of thorns, the beatings, the nails, against the insults hurled at him, or any of the people who killed him. He did not yell at them. He didn't open his mouth. Jesus didn't ever expect help from them. He never said, "Help me, please! I need somebody to do justice here and to save me from this unfair treatment!" What he did do was cry out to God.

• ...the worst of his suffering was spiritual and not physical.

Jesus did expect God to help him, and that's why the Passion hurt so much—it was the day of Jesus' life when God did not help him. What bitter grief it caused our Lord Jesus to feel—and to know—that God had turned his back on him. Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 as he hung from the Cross, expressing how hurt he felt by God's abandonment.²⁵³

• ...the day of Jesus' life when God did not help him.

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') (Matthew 27:46)

I. Death but not darkness

Jesus clung to life up until his dying breath. It was only when he surrendered to death that he gave up his spirit. The darkness never overcame the spiritual light which was in Jesus—but it did kill him physically.

'Every day I was with you in the Temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns' (Luke 22:53).

²⁵³ If only the Jews who were there to hear Jesus quote these words had paid closer attention, they might have read the entire psalm, and if they did they would have seen how the situation they were experiencing was so perfectly prophesied there. And what if they had seen how this Psalm ends?

... future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it! (Psalm 22:30-31)

Jesus, in fact, *did it*. He made salvation possible for all of us by dying on the Cross at the hands of unjust men. But he was only able to do it because of God. Jesus' hope was in God. Jesus was just like Job, who declared with similar confidence:

Though he [God] slay me, yet will I hope in him (Job 13:15).

In him [the Word] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5).

• Jesus loved to the very end.

The forces of darkness prevailed at the Cross, but Jesus' spirit was never subjected to the powers of darkness. His spirit was conserved because Jesus loved to the very end. It was also conserved because when Jesus delivered his spirit over to God, he was finally free from his "flesh of sin" (Romans 8:3; Darby). His death seems awful to us because it was such an injustice, but it was actually a relief for him. When he died, Jesus' battle against temptation was over. He was really free.

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit (Matthew 27:50).

When he had received the drink [this was a different drink from the previous one that had gall in it], Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit... The soldiers... came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs (John 19:30-33).

§

3. Jesus and his family

- a. Relatives in the ministry
 - i. John the Baptist
 - ii. James and John
- b. A mother and a step-father
- c. The brothers and sisters of Jesus
- d. The unbelief of Jesus' family
 - i. A family that doesn't believe
 - ii. A family that thinks you're crazy
 - iii. A mother who won't let go

Christians tend to forget that Jesus was a member of a family. It's not just Christians' fault, Bible teachers have been quite negligent in reminding us. But why is Jesus' family a subject preachers mostly avoid? Why does the Catholic Church even deny that Jesus even had a family?²⁵⁴

Every human being has a family somewhere. It's impossible to come into the world without family because we are born into them. Even orphans have some aunt, uncle, or distant relative somewhere in the world. We enjoy family members but sometimes we are troubled by them because all of us have some degree of conflict with our family. Par-

²⁵⁴ There is an entire theology built around the Catholic lie of a "Holy Family" (an imaginary family of three people: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus). The lie is not just that these three constituted an ideal family that lived in perfect harmony, but that Jesus had no brothers or sisters. That's a lie.

How do Catholic priests go about denying the plain Bible truth that Jesus had siblings? Their strategy is to twist the meaning of Bible words like *brother* and *sister*. They tell naive Catholics (who don't read the Bible) that in the Bible *brother* doesn't really mean brother, and *sister* doesn't really mean sister. They say that the original Greek words mean Jesus' *spiritual* brothers and sisters.

It's ludicrous, we know. But more important than uncovering the Catholic lie is to ask "What's behind it?" That's where we get to the root of the issue. Here's the answer: The priests want to rob Jesus of his humanity. That's their fundamental reason for lying, if you can believe it. But why do they want to do such a thing? Well, since it's Jesus' humanity that makes his life useful for instruction, these priests deny his humanity so that no instruction will be necessary. They deactivate what otherwise would be the challenge of Jesus' exemplary life.

Priests know that the members of their parishes don't want to be challenged to holiness. If the priest taught the truth about Jesus' humanity, Catholics would be challenged to repentance. They would feel what they are supposed to feel—that they should live like Jesus lived. It would shake everything up. Catholics would feel uncomfortable, so they wouldn't come to mass. Without people in mass, there would be no offerings and the priests would be out of work.

• What's behind it?

ents, brothers, sisters, and mother-in-laws can even be our worst enemies—Jesus himself said so.

They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:53).

- Jesus was speaking from experience when he spoke of having enemies in the family.

Little did people know and little do Christians suspect that Jesus was speaking from experience when he spoke of having enemies in the family. He had enemies within his own family, and they opposed his ministry. Did you know that many Bible passages about Jesus and his immediate family testify to the struggle he had with his family? We'll look at those passages shortly.

But first, a word of caution: When we observe the problems in Jesus' family, we're not supposed to think "What a dysfunctional family." Jesus' family was relatively functional and quite spiritual. Indeed, his parents, brothers, and sisters were nurtured under the best traditions on Earth: the Jewish traditions inspired by God's Holy Scriptures.

The Jewish family structure of Jesus' day was strong. At least outwardly, Jewish families were religious. They would go to Jerusalem and worship God during festivals at least once a year. They would go to the synagogue every Saturday. They would pray in their homes daily.

Jewish society encouraged strong homes. Everyone expected the men to lead their families and to be the primary breadwinners. The expectation was that mothers would be home-keepers. Young women were expected and encouraged to dress discreetly and to stay virgins until marriage. Most fathers and brothers took special care of the young ladies in their families. Divorce was uncommon. Grandparents and other extended family members lived close by. Alcoholism was uncommon and drug abuse was practically unheard of. Prostitution was frowned upon. Homosexuality was a disgrace and not even named.

Jesus was raised in a religious society which held completely different values from the secular values so prominent around the world today.²⁵⁵ The people around Jesus would

²⁵⁵ Many of us who are Westerners are raised in *secular* societies. A secular

seek God's blessing in politics and in business. Prayers were heard at the plaza, at the city gate, at the well, and any place Jews travelled. For a man to pray in public brought honor to his reputation. In fact, it brought a man so much honor that Jesus actually had to rebuke public prayer—the hypocritical ones.

They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers (Mark 12:40).

Esteem for spiritual leaders was very common in the Jewish society of Jesus' day. It was strange for someone like Jesus

society is one in which speaking about God in public is considered to be inappropriate, even wrong. For example, France has a law called *laïcité* which was established in 1905. That law prohibits involving religion in the public sphere. The law got a lot of press in 1989 because three Muslim girls were expelled from a public schools for wearing headscarves (*hijabs*).

French society is secular by law. If you are a Christian in the US, you will be relieved to know that the US is not guided by the same principle (secularism). The US government abides by another principle which is similar but more open (thank God): it's the principle of "separation of church and state."

The principle of "separation of church and state" was enshrined in the first amendment to the US Constitution. In that amendment, the "free exercise clause" and "establishment clause" are supposed to balance each other out so that:

- the government protects people's ability to express their religion in public, and
- the government is never allowed to impose any one religion on the people.

It should be noted that the expression "separation of church and state" is not in the US Constitution. It is an expression coined by Thomas Jefferson in a letter he wrote to a Connecticut Christian congregation in 1802. He used it to assure that Baptist congregation that the US government would allow them to practice their religion freely. It is not a phrase you are going to find in the Constitution or any of its amendments, but it is a principle which accurately reflects the rights protected by the first amendment.

As a final note, the French government enacted a law in 2010 which bans the wearing of a full-face covering (that includes burqas) in public. Some people have called it the "burqa ban," but that's not accurate because the new law does not target burqas, nor is it aimed only at Muslims. For example, it does not apply to head scarves, the head covering of choice of the great majority of Muslim women. The ban only pertains to full-face coverings (such as masks) and it applies to both men and women. Furthermore, it only applies to how people dress in public spaces.

Still, this law is clearly based on the principle of secularism and the French tradition of *laïcité*. It's very unlikely that this kind of law would ever be enacted in the US because religious-minded people would feel targeted and there would certainly be a public backlash.

• Jesus actually had to rebuke public prayer.

• ...the US is not guided by... secularism.

to come along and question spiritual leaders because everybody feared and revered religious leaders. Some of his criticism of the Pharisees were very shocking for Jewish ears:

‘... I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich [the religious leaders were rich] to enter the Kingdom of God.’

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ (Matthew 19:23-25)

Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces (Luke 11:23).

• God... wanted Jesus to grow up with a healthy awareness of the truth.

God put the boy Jesus in Israel for a reason: He wanted Jesus to grow up with a healthy awareness of the truth. Our good God guaranteed that Jesus would have the healthiest development possible. Jesus’ upbringing in the Galilean village of Nazareth allowed him to grow up psychologically strong, spiritually pure, and mentally sound.

• an environment of trust

The boy Jesus lived among his relatives and neighbors in an environment of trust. His parents had confidence that their children would be safe. In fact, the Bible shows us that Jesus’ parents trusted their relatives and neighbors so much that Mary and Joseph could go without seeing their adolescent son Jesus for a complete day and feel no worries.

... his parents went every year to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. And when he [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the feast. And after the days were completed, while they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. And his parents did not know it, but believing him to be in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey.

And they began searching for him among their relatives and their acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him (Luke 2:41-45; NASB).

There has been a problem with interpreting this passage in churches, but you’ll understand it much better if you start with this important fact: Jesus had a few younger brothers and sisters by the time he was 12 years old. Jesus was the oldest child of many siblings. Since his brothers and sisters all had to be 11-years old and under when the Temple epi-

sode took place, a basic piece of information for interpreting the passage is that Joseph and Mary had small children on that pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Can you imagine how the little ones must have distracted Mary and Joseph? Their presence explains why the last thing Mary and Joseph were thinking about on their 75-mile trip to Jerusalem was their extremely well-behaved 12-year-old son, Jesus. They were feeding the babies, changing clothes, changing diapers, keeping the kids in order, and playing with them. There is no other rational explanation for why Mary and Joseph lost track of Jesus for a complete day. If he were there only son, how could it be possible for them not to know where he was for 24 hours?

• ...rational explanation for why Mary and Joseph lost track of Jesus for a complete day.

a. Relatives in the ministry

Let's look at Jesus' extended family a little. It surprises most Christians to find out that Jesus even had cousins, aunts, and uncles—after all, most people haven't even been taught about his brothers and sisters. But since the information about his extended family is right there in the pages of our Bibles, should it be a surprise? Of course not.

Church teachers have been negligent. Because they do not teach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27; NKJV), they will have to give an account on the Day of Judgment. Not only will they be judged, but by cutting Jesus' family relationships out of their teachings, they have produced a dangerous effect: Christians think of Jesus as being transcendent. That is, their concept of Jesus is that he never experienced the life common to all of us. For these deceived souls, Jesus was someone who lived a life beyond the everyday experiences of family life. So the current negligence of pastors to teach about Jesus' family has produced a deadly effect: Christians think that Jesus was not like us.

• Christians think of Jesus as being transcendent.

This negligence in teaching the truth morphed into fanciful tales. Stories about how the baby Jesus performed miracles (like speaking from the cradle or creating birds as he played in the sand) began to circulate soon after the Gospels were written.²⁵⁶ Their effect has been devastating. Greeks,

²⁵⁶ These exist particularly among the 1st to 4th-century Greek Gnostics (who tried to pass for Christians) and the 7th to 8th centuries Arab Muslims (who tried

Egyptians, Arabs, and others who heard these stories were blinded to the real Jesus. It's as if Jesus wasn't really a man. These poor souls were robbed of the truth. A little later they began to deny the truth with actual doctrines that brazenly contradicted the Bible, saying outright that Jesus didn't have the same nature as us.

If pastors had made the effort to teach about Jesus' family relationships, the doctrine of Jesus' humanity would have been well-established and Christians would have understood how human he was. Christian doctrine all began with the apostles, and they certainly believed that Jesus was a normal human being—they saw his humanity with their own eyes. They knew his mother and brothers and sisters personally. They witnessed Jesus' struggle against temptation.

• ...the apostles... certainly believed that Jesus was a normal human being

False teachers have concealed basic Bible truths from us, but Christians aren't innocent in the matter. What's the main reason why pastors don't preach about Jesus' family? It's because Christians don't want to hear about it. When a Christian hears about Jesus' family life, they get challenged by his example. Because carnal-minded Christians prefer to imagine that holiness is only for Jesus and not for "sinners like us," they will always try to put Jesus in a different category from the rest of us. It's the job of a faithful preacher to fight against that tendency.

i. John the Baptist

By the grace of God, spirituality ran in Jesus' family. With a dad²⁵⁷ as just as Joseph, a mother as modest as Mary, and a

• By the grace of God, spirituality ran in Jesus' family.

to pass for... well, Muslims). A church leader of the time said that if the Gnostics said that Jesus only *appeared* to die on the Cross, then the Gnostics themselves "only appear" to be Christians.

²⁵⁷ Technically, Joseph was a *surrogate* father, not Jesus' real father. But for all practical purposes Jesus was expected to treat Joseph with the same respect that he would have for a biological dad, as we can see from the words of Mary when she rebuked Jesus with these words:

Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you (Luke 2:48).

Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, seconded Mary's words by referring to Joseph as one of Jesus' parents:

When his parents saw him, they were astonished (Luke 2:48).

relative²⁵⁸ as zealous for God as John the Baptist, Jesus had no lack of encouragement. John was a particularly spiritual person—Jesus said that John was “more than a prophet” (Matthew 11:9).

John was probably Mary’s cousin. How do we draw that conclusion? Well, John was the son of Elizabeth, and Elizabeth is called the *relative* of Mary. Since Mary and Elizabeth were very affectionate with each other, they certainly were not distant but close relatives.

But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John...’

[And to Mary, the angel said]: Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month...

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby [John the Baptist] leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:13, 36, 39-41).

Elizabeth was somewhere between 44–62 years older than Mary, so it is safe to presume that Elizabeth was Mary’s aunt.²⁵⁹ If Elizabeth indeed was Mary’s aunt, that would

The conclusion of the matter is that since Jesus was very aware of who his real Father was, and because Joseph was the man God chose to care for young Jesus, it was right for Jesus to treat Joseph like his own father.

²⁵⁸ Now if the Bible, when it speaks of Elizabeth as being Mary’s *relative*, means that she was Mary’s aunt, then John would have been a cousin to Mary and a second-uncle (e.g., cousin-uncle) to Jesus. That means that Jesus was a *cousin-in-nephew* (i.e., second-nephew) to John. In other words, it seems that they were *first cousins once removed* (using official genealogical terminology). However, the Bible doesn’t specify the relationship for us exactly, so here we call John a *relative*.

It is, however, logical to say that Elizabeth was Mary’s aunt. Elizabeth was “in old age” (more than 60 years old; cf. Luke 1:36 w/ 1 Timothy 5:9) by the time she gave birth to John. Mary gave birth a little later, but she was no older than 16. That would have made the minimum age difference between Mary and Elizabeth 44 years. If Elizabeth was 75 and Mary was 13, another possibility, the difference between them could have been as high as 62 years.

²⁵⁹ Since the difference between generations was only around 13-30 years, Elizabeth might have been the oldest daughter of her mother, and Mary might

• It was right for Jesus to treat Joseph like his own father.

- John the Baptist was probably Jesus' second uncle.

- John was both a contemporary of Jesus and part of the same family.

make John Mary's cousin. So John the Baptist was probably Jesus' second uncle.

Whether John was Jesus' second uncle or not is not the point. The point is that John was both a contemporary of Jesus and part of the same family. Beyond their shared experiences, they both had a sincere devotion to God. John and Jesus learned to love God through their parents.

Jesus and John's mothers loved each other dearly. We can see that not only in the way the two women greeted each other, but by the fact that out of all of the family relations she had, Mary chose to visit Elizabeth in particular. Mary must have chosen to visit Elizabeth for a reason, right? Was it that they shared the joy of being the mothers of two great men: one of whom it was said "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater" (Matthew 11:11) and the other whose greatness will never be excelled by any man, the *Great Shepherd* (Hebrews 13:2)?

Jesus and John had parallel lives and parallel ministries. They met for the first time when they were still *in utero*. John did a flip in his mother's womb when he felt Jesus nearby. That excitement John had for Jesus never abated. John would be just as thrilled when, as a full-grown man, he had an encounter Jesus again at the Jordan River.

The Bible says nothing of it, but Jesus and John must have known each other as boys. How could Mary have visited Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus, and not after? Didn't Mary have so much to share as she saw the baby grow bigger? With mothers as close as Mary and Elizabeth were, and the grace of God to unite them, Jesus and John must have seen each other as they grew up.

Actually, John and Jesus were bound together for life. Jesus had a deep respect for John's ministry and John had nothing but admiration for Jesus'. As the curtain closed on John's ministry, Jesus was deeply troubled. He heard about John's death and needed to be alone to weep the loss of a great companion.

John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard what

have been the youngest child in her own family.

had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place (Matthew 12:12-13).

ii. James and John

Let's move on to two other men: You might have thought that the apostles James and John, fishermen from Galilee, became Jesus' followers just because John the Baptist told them to. Well, there was more to it—Jesus was their *cousin!* This kinship is difficult to detect from a casual reading of the Scriptures, but God has given us all the clues we need. Anybody who is willing to study the Bible will be able to figure out that James and John were cousins to Christ. You just have to be willing to do a little bit of research. Let's start with this verse:

... James and John, the sons of Zebedee... (Mark 10:35; Luke 5:10).

Zebedee was James and John's father (Mark 10:35; Luke 5:10), and Zebedee had a wife. She was one of the women who travelled along with Jesus during his ministry (see Matthew 20:20-23 below). She was also among the many ladies who watched the Crucifixion from afar.

Many women were there [at Golgotha], watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons (Matthew 27:55-56).

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome (Mark 15:40).

So, you'll notice that the Scriptures list four women present at the Crucifixion. Three of them were named *Mary*, and the fourth was named Salome, she was Zebedee's wife.

1. **Mary** the mother of Jesus
2. **Mary** Magdalene
3. **Mary** the wife of Clopas (the mother of James and Joseph)
4. **Salome** (Mark 15:40; 16:1), Zebedee's wife

Now, there is one passage, written by the apostle John himself (John 19:25), in which he reveals to us that Salome [his mother] was the sister of Jesus' mother. That is a key

• Jesus was their *cousin!*

• ...one passage, written by the apostle John... in which he reveals to us that Salome [his mother] was the sister of Jesus' mother.

verse because with it we discover that Salome was Jesus' aunt. But at this point we're only defining who Salome was. There is much more to be said about her.

For example, the morning of the resurrection, there were three women who went to the tomb. Most Christians know that Mary Magdalene was one of them because she's famous, but did you know that Jesus' aunt Salome was there too? Her presence at the tomb early that first Easter morning tells us that she was a very devoted follower of her nephew, our Lord Jesus.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1).

So what are we getting at? Is the point just to say that Jesus had an aunt? No, we're not only saying that Jesus had an aunt. We're understanding the dynamics of Jesus' group of followers. The fact that Salome was John's mother, and the fact that Jesus' mother was John the apostle's aunt, helps us to understand the nature of Jesus' ministry. It also helps us to interpret other passages better.

- the nature of Jesus' ministry

For example, knowing that Salome was Jesus' aunt gives us a fresh new insight about what was happening at the Cross when Jesus ordered John, in the presence of John's mother (Salome), to take care of Mary. Have you ever been taught that Jesus was settling family business there?—because he was.

- ...Jesus was settling family business there.

How sweet that moment at the foot of the Cross and at the feet of Jesus was. How pure it is for a man to take care of his mother, and how natural it was for Jesus to charge John with that task. Jesus merely asked John to care for John's own aunt—and Mary was more than an aunt for John, she was his mother's beloved sister. We could even say that she was more than his mother's beloved sister—Mary was a widow in need of special care. We're talking about Mary here—a woman highly idealized, often idolatrized, but poorly studied and scarcely understood.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus' brothers wouldn't do a better job than John of taking care of Mary? They were not yet believers when we read John 7, so was it spiritual im-

maturity? They may not have been believers by the time the crucifixion took place, but by the time we read Acts 2 Jesus' brothers had already become believers—so they at least had to be close. They were at least sympathizers by the time the crucifixion took place. They were with their mother, and prayed continually with the apostles by the time Pentecost rolled around just 40 days later. So Jesus' brothers eventually became believers.

Perhaps Jesus' brothers were not yet mature enough to assume responsibility for Mary at that point. Maybe that's why Jesus wanted John to take care of her. As we look back on history, through the Middle Ages, and consider all of the Marian-idolatry that spread and grew from as far back as the second century, we can see that Jesus was wisely trying to split up his biological family at the Cross. He knew that they would be tempted in the future and wanted to prevent them from falling into that temptation. One of the earliest Christian heresies was idolatrizing Mary.

But let's just imagine that Jesus' mother and brothers had been mature enough to resist the temptation of basking in the fame of being Jesus' family. There was still a good reason for Jesus to want Mary to live with John and her sister Salome—Mary's happiness! Could Jesus' motivation have been that simple? Yes, we believe that it was. Jesus had enough wisdom to know that Mary would be happiest if she were close to her sister. Don't forget: Salome had become even more than a sister—she was a sister in the faith.

Near the Cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved [John] standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:25-27).

Knowing that Salome was Jesus' aunt also allows us a rare insight about how to deal with family pressure in the ministry. It was Salome who made the bold—and improper—request that Jesus do a special favor for her sons. Looking forward to the time when Jesus' Kingdom would be established, she requested that they be seated at his left and right hand, respectively.

- ...Mary would be happiest if she were close to her sister.

- how to deal with family pressure in the ministry

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 'What is it you want?' he asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your Kingdom.'

'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father' (Matthew 20:20-23).

When Salome made this request, notice that she brought her two sons along with her. They were so close that they were able to jump right into the conversation. As soon as Jesus asked them a question, they answered. Our Lord was tactful and kind to these three members of his family, but he firmly resisted the pressure they were putting on him. Jesus wisely avoided the appearance of favoritism.

The other disciples (none of whom were related to Jesus) would have been offended if Jesus' ministry had suddenly turned into a family affair. In Jesus' ministry, blood was thicker than water—but we're not talking about family blood. It's the blood of martyrdom that counts for Jesus. John and James would drink of the cup of martyrdom eventually (just as Jesus told them they would)—and that's what would earn them glory in the Kingdom. If you shed your blood, it will also give you a high place of honor in God's Kingdom. So when our Lord said to John and James "You will indeed drink from my cup," he was confirming those two cousins of his would eventually die for the faith.

• In Jesus' ministry, blood was thicker than water—but we're not talking about family blood.

b. A mother and a step-father

Jesus was raised by his mother and a man—a good man. Everyone considered that man to be his father. His name was Joseph. Now, although Joseph was actually Jesus' step-father, their relationship was like any natural father-son relationship. Jesus considered Joseph to be his father, and Joseph considered Jesus to be his son. It was just like a normal family. Jesus' parents didn't ever let his miraculous birth make him feel odd. Neighbors never suspected that Jesus wasn't Joseph's legitimate son. For them, he was.

• Joseph was actually Jesus' step-father.

They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from Heaven?’” (John 6:42).

A boy should live in subjection to his parents, and Jesus was no exception. He followed God’s commandment and honored Joseph and his mother, but God never intended for Jesus’ boyhood submission to Mary to apply to us. We are not to put our faith in Mary. Jesus taught that we should trust in God and in him. Jesus didn’t expect anybody to show his mother any of the special honor he gave her.

It was quite the reverse because Jesus told people not to honor Mary. On one occasion, Jesus resisted a woman who wanted to praise Mary. Yes, there was once a woman in a crowd and she expressed her belief that Mary was someone special. Deducing that Jesus’ grace must have come to him through his mother (that was poor logic), this lady blessed Mary. Jesus was quick to correct her.

- Jesus told people not to honor Mary.

While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed.’ But he said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it’ (Luke 11:27-28; NASB).

Notice how Jesus uses the expression *on the contrary* here. The NIV translates it as *rather* as does the New American Bible (a popular Catholic version). Why did Jesus choose to say *rather*? He was painting a stark contrast, the one that existed between his mother and believers. He was highlighting the difference between his mother (who had a natural relationship with him), and believers (who had a spiritual relationship with him). Those were two different relationships and one was superior to the other.

Reinforcing Jesus’ teaching that Mary should not be venerated, and to help people to understand that the Jesus’ grace was not transmitted to him naturally (through his mother), the apostles only referred to Mary as the *mother of Jesus* (Matthew 1:16; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19; John 2:1,3; Acts 1:14) and never did they use any other title for Mary. Not once did they use any of the titles of veneration used by Marianists today like *Mother of God* or *the Virgin*—never.

- ...the apostles only referred to Mary as the *mother of Jesus*.

Those titles²⁶⁰ contradict the teachings of Christ.

The funny thing is that, in spite of the special veneration Catholics give her, the Bible depicts Mary to be like any normal woman. The Bible shows her doubting Jesus for a time. The Bible shows her getting faith and then growing in it. Mary was grieved by Jesus' death, and then encouraged by his resurrection. She lived in the same house with her nephew John. She attended prayer meetings. She learned from the apostles just like everybody else: by hearing them preach (she didn't get any private tutoring).

If there was ever a time to venerate her, it would have been while she was still alive, but the people she spent time with didn't give Mary any special reverence. No special mention is given of Mary during the times of the apostles except this: that she attended prayer meetings. Why should anybody give her special treatment anyways? Weren't all of the believers too busy waiting for the Holy Spirit? Yes, they were—and so was she!

b. The brothers and sisters of Jesus

Let's break the silence on an issue that has been taboo for too long: Contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, Jesus certainly had brothers and sisters. The fact that Catholic priests contradict such an obvious Bible truth demonstrates how utterly desperate their opposition to the doctrine of Christ is—I mean, they are willing to say the exact opposite of the Bible (and still call themselves teachers of the Scriptures). How far they are from being Christian teachers!

Why do these priests put up so much resistance to the plain truth of Scriptures? Catholic priests make a gargantuan effort to prove that Mary was what they call a “perpetual virgin.” They make this effort preaching sermons, writing books, developing web-sites, constructing buildings, maintaining cathedrals, running colleges, supporting seminaries, promoting tourism (in the Holy Land and in Rome), sponsoring funds, organizing charities, doing missions, and selling trinkets, images, and idols, among other things. Their

- Jesus certainly had brothers and sisters.

²⁶⁰ And there are many more titles Catholics use for Mary such as: Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Church, Mediatrix, and Our Lady. All of them are void of divine inspiration. Men made them up.

“Virgin” is immensely important to them. Their popes bow down before her statues and kiss them, along with millions of other Catholics around the world. They even worship her. The Catholic Catechism states with absolute clarity:

The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.²⁶¹

The Catholic priests strive hard to defend their beloved doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary—and do you know what they mean by it? (Most people, even Catholics, don’t). They mean to tell us that Mary never had an intimate relationship with a man—that’s right, not even Joseph, the man she was married to.²⁶²

• Catholics...mean to tell us that Mary never had an intimate relationship with a man.

²⁶¹ “Devotion to the Blessed Mary § 971”. Catechism of the Catholic Church. Vatican. Retrieved October 1, 2010 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veneration_of_Mary_in_Roman_Catholicism#cite_note-catechism-1

²⁶² Where is sexual intimacy with one’s spouse considered to be a sin in the Scriptures? On the contrary, to be intimate with the person you are married to (both the husband to the wife and vice-versa) is what the Scriptures call the *marital duty*. Paul spoke plainly on the matter:

... each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:2-5).

According to this passage, under the covenant of matrimony every spouse is responsible to be attentive to the sexual needs of their mate. In other words, every spouse is supposed to satisfy any of their partner’s healthy, natural desires. This responsibility is what makes matrimony *pure*.

If you are bound together in matrimony, you are in a relationship blessed by God and society. Your marriage has a purpose: to raise children in the knowledge of God (Malachi 2:15). It is also your duty to share your body with your spouse so that their sexual desires can be controlled. If you don’t, their natural desires might become sinful. That would be harmful to them, to you, your children, and all of society.

But try to look beyond the Catholic “perpetual virginity”

This is the reason why people get married: To establish a relationship in which sexuality can be enjoyed with purity, security, health, and God’s blessing. If a husband and wife do not help each other to control each other’s natural desire for intimacy, then who *will* help—a prostitute? An adulteress? An adulterer?

Now, since Catholic priests teach that Mary didn’t fulfill her marital duty to Joseph, they’re indirectly-subconsciously affirming that Mary was a sinner—aren’t they? Of course they are. They are saying that Mary was one of those women who deprives her spouse. With their doctrine, Catholic priests therefore teach a model of sinful behavior to their female parishioners! They make sin the example for their flock.

Furthermore, these priests also subject Catholic men to sexual temptation—how so? If they make the ideal female behavior one of denying one’s husband, then certainly Catholic wives will not fulfill their marital duty. That will cause Catholic husbands some serious (secret) sexual crises, won’t it? These things are never mentioned in public, but if the most spiritual women among the Catholics are those who are following the example of a “perpetual virgin,” then be sure that Catholic women are a thorn in the side of their husbands and not a rib, like they were intended to be. They’re not going to be the help-mate God designed them to be if they are taught of Catholic priests. What problems these priests have caused! How they have destroyed families!

Of course, it is public knowledge that many priests are homosexuals and pedophiles themselves. Francis himself admitted that about 8000 Catholic clergy (that’s 2% of the total), including higher-ranking men of the Church, were pedophiles (Barrett and Squires, July 2014, *The Telegraph*, Retrieved on March 1, 2015 from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/07/13/pope-francis-says-about-8000-pedophiles-are-members-of-catholic-clergy-including-bishops-and-cardinals/>). Knowing that statistic, it’s not surprising to discover that these priests are corrupting their parishioners sexually.

Maybe it’s time for some comic relief: The Catholic Church affirms that *Joseph* was a virgin. If Mary remained a virgin, then he did too—right? I mean, unless he was an adulterer, his only option was to remain chaste, being married to a virgin. He couldn’t have had another woman because the Bible says that Joseph “was faithful to the law” (Matthew 1:19). So the Catholic doctrine also affirms that Joseph was also a virgin.

Since that’s their doctrine, why don’t Catholic priests come right out and say that Joseph was a perpetual virgin too? He should be the Catholic role model for male self-control. Indeed, if he married a sweet young woman like Mary, took her into his house with him, and then remained celibate, he certainly had a special gift!

We’re speaking a little facetiously now, of course, but not to criticize anybody. This is a very serious issue. Because it’s so serious, we have to try to open people’s eyes to the absurdity of the logic of those who teach that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Make your own determination: Either 1) Joseph was a virgin like his wife (very unlikely); 2) he was an adulterer (a contradiction of the Scriptures); or 3) the Scriptures are true—Mary and Joseph were a normal couple and they slept together. We have to go with option #3 because indeed, the Scriptures state clearly that Joseph and Mary were a normal couple:

- Catholic priests... teach a model of sinful behavior to their female parishioners!

- The Catholic Church affirms that *Joseph* was a virgin.

lie. What is their absurd doctrine really about? This man-made teaching about Mary's nonsexuality is actually the priest's denial of Christ's humanity. They are doing it indirectly, but they are certainly denying the doctrine of Christ!

Of all Biblical doctrines, the doctrine of Christ is the one that Satan hates most. Satan's strategy is to destroy it, and the Antichrist will spearhead Satan's final effort against it. They Antichrist will deny it outright. If the Catholic Church can make people believe that Mary had no human nature, no *flesh of sin*, then Satan already has Catholics perfectly set up to draw the conclusion the Antichrist wants them to draw: that Jesus didn't have a human nature either.

The Antichrist doesn't want you to believe that Jesus was like us. The most effective way for him to get you to fall into sin is to undermine the central doctrine of Christianity: that Jesus came in the flesh. The Apostasy has already moved teachers in the Church to pervert the Gospel—but they're not outright contradicting it. That would make their heresy too obvious. The Apostasy is subtle, a tricky decep-

- ...the doctrine of Christ is the one that Satan hates most. Satan's strategy is to destroy it

- the central doctrine of Christianity

... before they came together she [Mary] was found to be pregnant (Matthew 1:18).

What does this passage mean? Notice the words *came together* and you'll understand exactly what it means: Joseph and Mary became sexually intimate. When did they become intimate? It happened after Mary gave birth to Jesus, of course, but Joseph and Mary cohabitated like any married couple does. Please do yourself a favor and believe what the Bible says.

But wait. That's not the end of the matter. There is yet another passage that gives us a beautiful insight into the healthy relationship Joseph and Mary shared. You may read it here:

... Joseph... did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son (Matthew 1:24-25).

Please zoom in on the word *until* here. It's really important. God is telling us that Joseph waited until Mary gave birth, and *then* they began to have normal sexual relations. They became partners—does that sound wrong or right to you? It sounds holy and right to us.

So we learn from this passage that Joseph did in fact have a lot of self-control—he exercised it for some months. Maybe 6 or 5, but not for his entire life. He had Mary in his house while she was pregnant with Jesus, and he didn't touch her *until* she had the baby. Now that's a good degree of self-control, and that's the truth people need to hear!

tion, in which Church leaders teach *another Gospel*, not the true Gospel. The true Gospel is one of a Savior:

- who was like us
- who struggled against every temptation
- who sought the anointing of the Holy Spirit
- who had to pray to get through his trials
- who depended on God for all his needs
- who relates to us
- who sympathizes with us
- who shows us the road to holiness
- who is an example to all: boys, girls, men, and women
- who paid the authentic price for our lives
- who gave his human body to redeem our human bodies

All of the above teachings are nullified if Mary didn't have the normal human flesh of sin. But that is exactly what Catholic priests mean when they say she was "immaculate"; they mean to say that she did not have normal human flesh. They mean to say that she had no weakness with temptation.

• the reality that Jesus had brothers and sisters

• ...everybody has a family and they need to know how to deal with their family's unbelief.

You can see now that the reality that Jesus had brothers and sisters is truly a point worth fighting for. The reason why we fight for it is not to have a theological battle with Catholics, but because to preach the Gospel effectively we must overcome the arguments that oppose it. Besides that, everybody has a family and they need to know how to deal with their family's unbelief. How can we show people how to deal with family if Jesus didn't have any difficulties with his? But Jesus indeed had to deal with difficulties in his family—including the unbelief of his mother!

Jesus knows by experience how to resist the temptations common to family life. He has faced the unbelief, criticism, and rejection of his own family. He has been where you are—in a family—and has felt the same weakness you feel when you face the obstacles family puts on your path to God.

... [speaking of Jesus] we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

• ...one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.

When Jesus spoke about the need to be born again spiritually, he meant that you need something beyond a natural birth. You need something much greater than being born to a woman. Even being born to a Christian woman won't get you into the Kingdom. There is no other way to enter into the Kingdom, but by getting a new life in the Spirit.

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

'How can someone be born when they are old' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:3-7).

The new birth in the spirit is a spiritual birth given by God. It is not physical. It is not something your mother or your father can give you. Jesus got it and—understand this—his spiritual life was not something that Mary gave him. She didn't even understand it when she saw it.

• ...his spiritual life was not something that Mary gave him.

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart... [the boy Jesus said] 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they [Joseph and Mary] did not understand what he was saying to them... but his mother treasured all these things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 49-51).

If you have indeed been born of the Spirit and have the life of Jesus in you, you will have a great appreciation for your spiritual family. You are officially a part of the family of God, and you know that the grace of your new birth didn't happen naturally.

... to all who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:12-13).

When Jesus spoke about his own mother and brothers, what was his message? Did he say, “Everybody try to be like us, the Holy Family”? No way. Not even close. His family was just like every other family: one where everyone had the same physical birth—one in which most still needed the spiritual birth.

• Jesus...
drew a
sharp
contrast
between his
biological
family and
those who
were his
true family.

Jesus didn’t tell people to follow the example of his family. He did something quite the opposite actually: He drew a sharp contrast between his biological family and those who were his true family. Who is in Jesus’ true family? Those who hear God’s Word and do God’s will! Jesus’ disciples are his true family. Are you a disciple of Christ?

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’

Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother’ (Matthew 12:46-50).

Now let’s get back to those Catholic priests who deny that Jesus had brothers and sisters. How is it possible for them to ignore the reality of Jesus’ family? These priests have to be highly-skilled theological acrobats²⁶³ because to deny Jesus a human family requires twisting, bending, and flipping the Bible over backwards. As we witness such a performance, we have to ask ourselves: With such tremendous mental efforts to deny a plain Biblical truth, what are the Catholic priests trying to hide?

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. ‘Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?’

²⁶³ An example of some “acrobatics” more skillful than what you might see in the Summer Olympics is found at this Roman Catholic web page: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02767a.htm>.

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home' (Mark 6:1-4).

The simple Biblical fact is that Jesus had brothers and sisters. Since the Bible uses the plural form of *sister*, it means that he had at least two; but *sisters* probably means three or more. If you believe the passage above, then you believe that Jesus had at least 4 brothers—so you can safely conclude that Joseph and Mary were the parents of at least 7 children.²⁶⁴

Now that we know that our Lord was the brother of at least four men: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, what can we say about those brothers of Jesus? We don't have much information about the last three,²⁶⁵ but the first one (James) is well known. Let's study James' life a little.

According to what Paul tells us, James was married to a Christian woman and he took her along with him as he ministered the Gospel. How do we know that? Well, in the following verse, Paul refers to "the Lord's brothers." James had to have been one of them.

Don't we [Paul and Silas] have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5).

• ...Joseph and Mary were the parents of at least 7 children.

²⁶⁴ It is likely that they had upwards of 13; God knows. It wouldn't be at all out of the ordinary for a rural Jewish family back then to have 6 sons and 7 daughters. Although we're only talking about possibilities. The point is that Jesus definitely had at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters. That means that his nuclear family had at least 9 members, counting the parents.

²⁶⁵ There is a long Church tradition which says that Jude, the author of the epistle of Jude, is the same brother of Jesus mentioned in Mark 6:1-4. This is probably true because he distinguishes himself as a brother of James:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (Jude 1).

As we explained already, James was certainly a brother of Jesus. Now, he was also famous enough so that a person would readily use him as a reference: "I'm James' brother," so it's likely that the Bible-author Jude was another brother of Jesus. Of Joseph and Simon we know nothing. The Bible makes no more specific mention of them except to mention "the brothers of Jesus"—and we do well to note that they eventually were believers.

James rose to great prominence in the Early Church. He was the principal author of the first general letter to the Gentile churches—that’s a big deal. He presided over the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-29), the first great Christian council in history—another really big deal (especially for people who are fans of later councils like Nicaea)!²⁶⁶

James actually rose to greater eminence than Peter, the man of whom Jesus said “on this Rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). James led the Church in Jerusalem with Peter for a time (Galatians 1:18-20). Paul visited both Peter and James during those times, and tells about it:

... after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas [Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:18-19).

²⁶⁶ For students of the Councils, we would say that the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD) reflected the orthodox apostolic faith pretty accurately, but that confusing thoughts were present even since Nicaea through the influence of Athanasius who, although he didn’t dare push hard for Trinitarianism at that time, would do so in the following decades (getting exiled by emperors 5 times and being run out of Alexandria Egypt 6 times).

Through Athanasius’ influence and the fervent arguments of bishops such as Cyril of Alexandria, the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) declared that Mary must be referred to as the “Mother of God”, and the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) from which the confusing Chalcedonian Definition of Christ was written, marking a strongly philosophical bent in theology, and not the simple apostolic doctrine of One God and One Lord which so characterized the writings of the Bible writers such as James. Here’s what the Chalcedonian Definition looked like:

... we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same Perfect in Godhood, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man... [Jesus is] acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis (Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcedonian_Definition on April 19, 2015).

The doctrine proposed by the Councils was so far from the pure apostolic truths by the time 500 AD rolled around, we’re convinced that God allowed Islam to rise up (in 610 AD) to challenge the Church to recuperate (at least) the lost doctrine of monotheism, and to have a return to simplicity.

The case in point is that the doctrine at the time when James presided was at its purest. James is a man worth heeding.

- the confusing Chalcedonian Definition of Christ

- ...the doctrine at the time when James presided was at its purest.

Not only would James eventually write an epistle (James 1:1) to the churches, but he was one of the approximately 120 believers (Acts 1:15) who received the initial pouring out of Holy Spirit. He was there with the apostles on the day of Pentecost. So James was one of the original Church leaders, directly anointed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues—the greatest of all his honors.

[Right before Pentecost it says] They [the disciples of Jesus] all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his [Jesus'] brothers (Acts 1:14).

What do we derive from all this information about James? Well, we can learn that Jesus' life was convincing enough to persuade his brother to convert. James, of course, knew his older brother Jesus very well. Is there any doubt that they played together since they were children? Of course they did. And they shared their lives together in Joseph's house in Nazareth. James would have had little difficulty believing in someone to whom he was bound so closely by natural affection—or would he? The fact is, there was a time when James didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

- Jesus' life was convincing enough to persuade his brother to convert.

- ...there was a time when James didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

d. The unbelief of Jesus' family

Don't all Christians have to deal with family members who think that we're crazy? Don't all of us have family members who try to dissuade us, and even pull us out of the ministry? What should we do if our brothers and sisters don't believe us? What if our parents act like they are still in charge of our lives—when they're not? Jesus shows us how to respond to all of these situations.

i. A family that doesn't believe

Jesus shows us how to deal with family members who do not believe. He himself had to deal with unbelieving and scornful brothers. Among these brothers would have been James, later to become an apostle. In the passage you're about to read, he didn't consider himself to be his big brother's disciple, but he would eventually become a leader in the Christian Church.

But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples [other people] there may

see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.’ For even his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:2-5).

Among other things, this passage reveals that Jesus’ brothers struggled with feelings of jealousy. They weren’t happy about their small-town brother’s growing popularity. They thought that Jesus was trying to be famous because they categorized him as someone “who wants to become a public figure.” Their tone is scornful and sarcastic, especially the words “show yourself to the world.” The passage continues here. Note the wisdom in Jesus’ response to his brothers:

Therefore Jesus told them, ‘My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come.’²⁶⁷ After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee (John 7:6-9).

• ...how do you deal with family members who refuse to believe in you?

So, how do you deal with family members who refuse to believe in you? Outside of simply loving them (which shouldn’t be too terribly difficult since you should already feel plenty of natural affection for them), some tips we gather from the passage above are:

- **Don’t give in to them** if they pressure you to demonstrate your spiritual gifts. Only use God’s anointing in God’s timing.
- **Don’t get discouraged** by their chiding words, which are just a sign of their unbelief. Pity them instead.
- Respond to any sarcasm with **firm words**. Don’t be fazed, just tell them that you are aware of where the problem lies: in their hearts, not in yours.

²⁶⁷ You might notice that this expression “my time has not yet fully come” is the same one Jesus used with Mary at the wedding feast at Cana. That means that it’s a phrase that might come in handy for you too when you have to deal with unbelieving family members.

Family members frequently pressure us to do things which, though not necessarily evil, are outside of God’s timing. We need to let them know, like Jesus let his brothers know, that we only make decisions based on the will of God. These family members need to be put in their place. Our family cannot guide our decision-making. They cannot steer our ministry. Only God should do that.

- **Confront them** in their sin. In Jesus' case, his brothers had two sins:
 - They **weren't sensitive to the voice of God**. Because of that, they did not know when Jesus should do God's will.
 - They were men of **weak character**. They just went along with the crowd. They were conformists.
- **Position yourself strongly** in God's will and don't give in to your family's coaxing. Show them that you are not dependent on them, but on God.

ii. A family that thinks you're crazy

His brothers and mother thought that Jesus was crazy. Very few Bible teachers dare to point this out, even though it's right there in the Bible, but Mary was convinced that Jesus was out of his mind. After seeing him leave the family business (as stable as it was), his trade (carpentry), the comforts of home, and the quiet life of Nazareth, they figured that he had gone off the deep end! Why would anybody give all that up?

Your family might think the same thing about you. Even if you perform miracles, they are so sure that they know you that your miracles still will not convince them that you are a servant of God. For them, you're the same old brother or sister they have always known. If you have them, your family will probably think that your followers are deluded. If you're a pastor, your family might consider your congregation to be crazy. In Jesus' case, it seems like his family got really worried about this: they heard that he wasn't eating properly. Sound familiar? Your family worries about you when you don't eat three square meals a day too, I'm sure.

And when his family heard this [that there were lots of people following Jesus, so many that he didn't have time to eat], they went out to restrain him, for they [his mother and brothers] were saying, 'He has lost his mind!'... And his mother and his brothers arrived, and standing outside [the house where Jesus was teaching], they sent word to him to summon him (Mark 3:21, 31; LEB).

• Mary was convinced that Jesus was out of his mind.

• ...they are so sure that they know you that your miracles still will not convince them that you are a servant of God.

- ...what do you do when your family wants you out of the ministry

So, what do you do when your family wants you out of the ministry? What do you do when they try to restrain you physically, like Jesus' family tried to do with him?²⁶⁸ Here's some good advice: Do nothing. Jesus just ignored his family—try that. Just act like you don't even know them (that is, after all, their problem with you—they don't know you).

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked (Mark 3:31-34).

At the same time you ignore your family, you might want to take advantage of the situation to teach your believing friends a lesson about what it means to be a real part of Jesus' family. The *doers* of the Father's will (who were sitting there as Jesus spoke) heard this:

Then he [Jesus] looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3:35).

The ones who had left their own families to be with Jesus that day must have felt vindicated by Jesus' words. They

²⁶⁸ You really can't translate this any other way. You can't tone it down. Other translations of Mark 3:21 say something very similar to the example we are using as our primary text. They say:

- ... they went out to lay hold on him; for they said, 'He is beside himself' (KJ21)
- ...they went out to take him by force, for they kept saying, 'He is out of his mind!' (AMP)
- ...they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control (CEV)
- ...they went out to lay hold on him. For they said: 'He is become mad' (DRA)
- ...they went to get him. They said, 'He's out of his mind!' (GW)
- ...they went out to take custody of him; for they were saying, 'He has lost his senses' (NASB)
- ...they went to take him. They said, 'He must be crazy' (NLV)

felt honored by the attention he gave them. The disciples might have called to mind the promise that Jesus gave them for the sacrifice they made when they also left families and homes:

Then Peter spoke up, ‘We have left everything to follow you!’

‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life’ (Mark 10:28-30).

iii. A mother who won’t let go

In any mother-son relationship, when the son leaves home, the relationship changes. Jesus and Mary are no exception. Their relationship had to change when Jesus left Nazareth. From the day he stopped living under her roof, he was no longer subject to Mary’s authority. He was free from having to do what she wanted.

As a boy, of course Jesus submitted to his mother (Luke 2:51); but after the calling of God came upon him, when he was around 30 years old, Jesus didn’t even call Mary *mother* anymore. Instead, Jesus began to address her as *woman*.

Now, there’s no doubt that the term *woman* sounds a little cold. It sounds cold if you use it with any female, how much colder does it sound when you use it with your mother? Some Catholic priests try to say that when Jesus used *woman* for Mary he was using some greeting of honor that was common in the times of Christ.²⁶⁹ They’re wrong. *Woman* meant then what it means now: woman.

• ...there’s no doubt that the term *woman* sounds a little cold.

When Jesus saw his mother there [at the foot of the Cross], and the disciple whom he loved [John] standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son’ [using *son* to refer not to himself, but to John] (John 19:26).

²⁶⁹ One example of this can be found at <http://www.cmri.org/94prog9.htm> which I retrieved on April 19, 2015, written by Bishop Mark A. Pivarunas from the Religious Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen in Omaha, NE (USA).

Jesus addressed Mary by the term *woman*. In Hebrew the word used by Jesus was a term which would be addressed to a queen or a woman of high rank. It was a term of great respect.

- ...honoring parents and submitting to them are two different things.

Even as a full-grown man Jesus still owed Mary the honor God commands in the 5th Commandment, to be sure; but honoring parents and submitting to them are two different things. When Jesus was a man, he didn't need to be submissive to Mary anymore. If he had submitted to Mary, doing what she wanted, Jesus never would have gone to the Cross! Because the time for Jesus to submit to his mother had ended, and his new commitment was to act according to God's leading, Jesus let Mary know it.

And on the third day, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. And when the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine!'

And Jesus said to her, 'What does your concern have to do with me, woman? My hour has not yet come' (John 2:1-4; LEB).²⁷⁰

Although Jesus' words were firm, they couldn't have been harsh because "love is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4). If you read the passage out loud, be sure pronounce Jesus' words with a gentle voice. We know that his words were gentle because Mary's reaction shows it: She was not discouraged. She was not fazed, but even energized by Jesus' words.

Mary could accept the fact that Jesus was not under her authority anymore. He let her know it with love, and his loving tone allowed her to still feel hopeful about the situation. She knew Jesus well enough to believe that he would find a solution to the problem.

²⁷⁰ It's pretty hard to get around the toughness of Jesus' words here. There are very few teachers who deal with this passage (most avoid it), but among those who do, most try to lighten the effect of Jesus' words. Their attempts are in vain. The Scriptures speak for themselves, and the best translations of the Bible maintain the same meaning in verse 4, saying:

- 'What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?' Jesus asked. 'My hour has not yet come' (HCSB).
- Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come' (KJV).
- Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come' (NKJV).
- 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come' (TNIV).

It's worth noting that Mary demonstrated a particularly strong faith in Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana. Keep in mind that she had never seen him perform any miracle before—verse 11 says that this would be Jesus' *first* sign—so the fact that she knew that he had the power to do something was not because of anything she had seen before. It was something she knew by faith. She knew because she treasured in her heart the things the angel Gabriel told her about Jesus for decades, and still believed them.

Now, a really cool thing about what happened in Cana was that Mary got the message Jesus was trying to give her. She didn't push the issue. She stopped worrying about the wine. She didn't bother Jesus any further. By desisting, Mary demonstrated to Jesus that she understood that she was no longer in charge of Jesus' life.

- Mary got the message Jesus was trying to give her.

Knowing Jesus' good heart and having great confidence in his love, Mary was certain that Jesus would do something to help. Instead of nagging him, she spoke to others about Jesus. She spoke of him in a way that demonstrated her confidence in him.

His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever he says to you, do it!' (John 2:5).

Her words to the servants demonstrate that Mary's faith in Jesus as Lord was strengthened by the situation. This is not to deny that she probably felt a little hurt—but it was easy for her to quickly get over those motherly emotions.

What we learn from Jesus' way of dealing with his mother is that our relationships with our parents change when we start our ministries. We have to deal firmly but lovingly with those changes. But you can act the way Jesus did with your parents only if you have actually already left their house to answer God's calling. If you have left their house, you are no longer under their authority, so in love show them that their timing but God's that matters. Go ahead and show your parents some tough love—you'll need to if you're going to resist the naturally-strong emotional pull they have on you.

- ...our relationships with our parents change when we start our ministries.

At the same time, you are also free to do what your parents ask of you. Submitting to God does not necessarily mean

that we always say no to our parents. If you're not sure whether their choices conflict with God's will, just tell them firmly but respectfully "Not until I know what God wants" and start praying about it. God will guide you and give you the wisdom to deal with your folks later.

§

4. Trinitarians and the One Lord

- a. The Holy Spirit is not the One Lord
- b. Jesus' special position as Lord
- c. How they work together
 - i. Jesus' intermediary role

A Trinitarian does not believe that the One God is the Father. He thinks that the One God is the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together. That's what makes a Trinitarian a Trinitarian. Furthermore, a Trinitarian believes that this three-in-one "revelation" of God is actually the central doctrine of Christianity. You are a heretic for Trinitarians if you don't believe that there are three Persons in the One God.

• A Trinitarian...thinks that the One God is the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together.

Trinitarians will not use logic to explain who God is. They glory in their conviction that God as a mystery. They will tell you that they can't explain how three can be one—they just believe it. For them, this is their sacred faith. They won't spend much time discussing it with you because they think that everybody just has to believe the mystery they call the Trinity. They don't call people to reason, they call people to faith.

We need to be ready to explain the truth to Trinitarians because a very high percentage (perhaps 98%) of all so-called "Christians" in the world consider themselves to be Trinitarians. A wise first step in dialoging with these folks is this:

- affirm Jesus' current **authority**
- affirm Jesus' current **divine nature**

Trinitarians will normally feel some degree of confidence towards you after you make these two affirmations because they believe in both the authority and the divine nature of Jesus; but then comes the hard part: You have to insist that Jesus is not the One God. If you're going to speak the truth, and you're going to make some progress with Trinitarians—seeking the unity of the spirit—, then you'll eventually have to insist that the One God is the Father. We wrote a whole book to prove that the *One God* is the Father, so you can share that book with anyone who is interested.

• Jesus is not the One God.

Another great way to explain who Jesus is to a Trinitarian is by highlighting that Jesus is the Lord, and showing how ex-

- It would be hard for them to be offended by someone who esteems Jesus as Lord.

actly that high honor was given to him by God. It would be hard for them to be offended by someone who esteems Jesus as Lord. That's because most of them are worried about one main thing when they hear that you don't believe in the Trinity: They are worried that you might somehow dishonor Jesus.²⁷¹ Far be it from us to ever do that! Our doctrine shouldn't be offensive to the not-so-zealous Trinitarians. If someone who is rational-minded really listens to us, they'll like what we have to say—so our first objective should be to try to get a hearing with them.

a. The Holy Spirit is not the One Lord

You'll probably never hear it anyways, but what should you think of a Christian who calls the Holy Spirit *the Lord*? It doesn't sound right to us. First of all, the Bible never calls the Holy Spirit *the Lord*. Secondly, the Bible never confuses the Holy Spirit with Jesus, the One Lord. Since there is no ambiguity between Jesus and the Holy Spirit in God's Word, may we never be guilty of producing it.

The closest the Bible gets to actually calling the Spirit *Lord* would be in the passages where he is called *the Spirit of the Lord*. Now, this is a great name for the Holy Spirit, of course, but it might not mean what you think it does. In the following passage, *the Spirit of the Lord* does not mean that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. It means that he is the Spirit of God. Who says? Jesus said so.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he [Yahweh God] has anointed me [Jesus] to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4:18).

If you read the passage closely, you'll see that Jesus' intended meaning was not that the Holy Spirit was his spirit (i.e., that the Holy Spirit belonged to him), but that the Spirit is the Spirit of God the Father. If you study the context, you'll see that Jesus was using the *Lord* title for God on that occasion.

²⁷¹ That's why serious (zealous) Trinitarians will not accept our use of the word *subordinate* when we describe Jesus' relationship to the Father. We insist that Jesus is subordinate to God—but they can't bear hearing it because they think that the two, with the Holy Spirit are "co-equal." May God help us to lovingly speak the truth to these friends.

The apostles also used the expression *the Spirit of the Lord* and they used it in the same way Jesus did above. In the following two passages from the Book of Acts, the first is a quote from Peter, and the second is an observation from Luke:

How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?
(Acts 5:9)

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away (Acts 8:39).

Both of these passages are referring to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God. That is, they are highlighting the fact that the Spirit actually belongs to the One God and Father. The term *the Spirit of the Lord* is almost always used with this sense in the NT; but there is one exception. Consider the passage below. In it, the expression *the Spirit of the Lord* uses *Lord* to refer to Jesus. In this passage, we come to see that the Holy Spirit is not only God’s Spirit, he’s also Jesus’ Spirit.

Now the Lord [Jesus] is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (1 Corinthians 3:17).

You may have to look a little more closely at the context of this significant passage, but we’re confident that you’ll conclude that the Holy Spirit belongs to God and to the Lord Jesus as well. Although we’re saving a more thorough study of the matter for our companion book *One Spirit*, for now it suffices to say that Jesus became the authority of the Spirit after Jesus was made Lord. It was after Jesus’ resurrection that the Holy Spirit became the Spirit of the Lord Jesus—and that’s a really important fact you’ll want to take note of.

b. Jesus’ special position as Lord

The theme of this book is that Jesus is the One Lord. We have already studied many ways that this fact is proven in the Scriptures, but here’s another way to prove it: Jesus’ relationship to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. You’ll notice that in passages which demonstrate the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit²⁷² Jesus is always the one who

- ...the Spirit actually belongs to the One God and Father.

- ...the Holy Spirit is not only God’s Spirit, he’s also Jesus’ Spirit.

- ...Jesus became the authority of the Spirit after Jesus was made Lord.

- ...in passages which demonstrate the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit Jesus is always the one who gets the title of *Lord*.

²⁷² And the Bible indeed affirms the unity of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. If believing in the unity of these three divine persons is being a Trinitarian, then we are Trinitarians. However, the official Trinitarian teaching is not just that the Father, Son, and Spirit are united. The idea of the Trinity is not just that the Father, Son, and Spirit work together either. We believe that they work together.

gets the title of *Lord*. Although there are many more examples, here are five of them from the NT:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me (Romans 15:30).

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:17).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

... we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

• The Father is never called *the Lord* when Jesus is mentioned together with him.

This is a fact which every Christian should know: The Father is never called *the Lord* when Jesus is mentioned together with him. As we just saw in a previous section, neither is the Spirit ever called *the Lord*.²⁷³ The matter we want to press here is that Jesus' special position as Lord distinguishes him from the Father and the Spirit.

What we don't believe is the official teaching of Trinitarians: that the three together constitute the One God. We could never affirm that. Why not? Because we believe that it is a denial of a fundamental Christian doctrine: The Father is the One God.

• ...the basis of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is that Jesus and the Spirit subordinate themselves to the Father.

Let's be specific. The unity of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is precisely this: That Jesus and the Spirit subject themselves to the Father's will. Never would Jesus or the Holy Spirit accept anybody's worship if it were directed to them as the One God—never. Don't you know that Jesus glorifies the Father, not himself; and that the Spirit glorifies Jesus, not himself? Put differently, the basis of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is that Jesus and the Spirit subordinate themselves to the Father. They treat the One God and Father as their Head. Indeed, God is their Head. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are unified with the One God by doing his will. That's how the three are one.

²⁷³ Jesus the Lord is however called *the Spirit*, but that is only written on one occasion in the Scriptures, in a verse that we mentioned just previously:

Now the Lord [Jesus] is the Spirit... (1 Corinthians 3:17).

c. How they work together

Why is it that only Jesus (not the Father or the Spirit) is the one referred to as *the Lord* in contexts where the three are mentioned together? We just saw that we distinguish Jesus from the Father and the Spirit when we call Jesus *the Lord*. But what's the reason why we should distinguish him as Lord? That is, how is Jesus so different from the Father and the Spirit that he would deserve a distinct title? The answer is found in Jesus' role. Jesus is the one whose role is to be in charge of us. That is not the Father's role and it is not the Spirit's role.

The Spirit distributes the gifts to each believer as he pleases. He is the giver of gifts, and Jesus coordinates the kinds of ministries in which those gifts are used. So Jesus, as our Coordinator, is in charge of the Church *per se*. Jesus is therefore the Lord—the Boss—because he is in charge. Meanwhile, the Father is *at work* in everyone, determining the *kinds of working*. Notice how the following passage describes how God puts people in the Church so that we might all work together.

God has placed the parts in the body [the Church], every one of them, just as he wanted them to be... The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you'!... But God has put the body together... so that there should be no division in the body...

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the Church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:18, 21, 24-25, 27-28).

If the Church were a company, the Spirit would be the supplier, Jesus would be the manager, and the Father would be the CEO. The Father still calls the shots. He decides who goes where. He determines what place each believer has in the Church.

God has determined what each Christian's style of ministry will be. There are some Christians who have a more intellectual style, like Paul or Apollos. God gave them that *kind of working*. God wisely gave them their distinct style and

- Jesus is the one whose role is to be in charge of us.

- ...Jesus, as our Coordinator, is in charge of the Church *per se*.

has set them right along others who minister with a more compassionate style. For example, didn't God put Paul and Apollos in the Church at the same time God put the apostle John in the Church? John does not have an intellectual style, but a sensitive and tender style, right? But he still ministered right along with Paul and Apollos.

Some Christians have a culturally-specific style—like the missionaries who minister best to Jews, or Arabs, or Latinos, or Chinese, or Indians, or Africans, or Europeans, or Turks. Others are better at ministering the Word cross-cultures—they have a different style. They might be more adaptive. Some Christians minister better to children, others to youth, adults, men, women, or to the elderly. The Father has given each person a style, and he places them right where he wants them in the Body of Christ.

You'll notice how this all works out if you study the process described in the following passage:

- There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.
- There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.
- There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

In this passage, even though the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned, please notice that it is only Jesus who is referred to as *the Lord*. That's because Jesus is the Church's Boss—the one who makes sure that we work together smoothly. Jesus doesn't want the gifts of the Spirit to be distributed in vain. For example, if the Spirit has given the gift of tongues to two different people in a congregation, Jesus decides whether those two people should get two different ministries or if they should share one. Jesus makes sure that Christians don't compete with each other, but complement each other.

Okay, but how does Jesus do it? How does he manage our ministries? Jesus' commandment for us to love one another is one way that Jesus coordinates our ministries. If one brother has the *tongues of angels* gift, Jesus makes sure that he appreciates the brother who has the *tongues of men* gift.

• Jesus is the Church's Boss.

• Jesus makes sure that Christians don't compete with each other, but complement each other.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

You see, Jesus coordinates ministries so that Christians might strengthen each other. His job is to make sure that we use our gifts in the most efficient and effective way. The following passage contains the words of Paul, but they might as well be the very words of Jesus because they express exactly what Jesus does: harmonize ministries.

The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the Church may be edified... Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the Church (1 Corinthians 14:5, 12).

We just started to read the passage, so it's a good moment for some context: There were some problems in the Church of Corinth with regard to the order in which people were practicing their gifts, so Paul tried to straighten things out. You'll notice that Paul's biggest concern was to get believers to use their gifts for the common good. He calls that "building up the Church." So Paul gave them specific instructions to do just that:

For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say... If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret... (1 Corinthians 14:13, 27)

Jesus is the one who harmonizes the *different kinds of service* (1 Corinthians 12:5) in the Church, and he was clearly speaking through Paul in Corinth. Each Christian's particular ministry is a kind of service—but that ministry will not function alone. God has placed each of us among many other believers, and we are supposed to learn how to love each other by working together—even when it's hard.

Take this example: Peter and Paul had different kinds of service and they served in the same churches. Peter had a pastoral ministry and Paul had a missionary ministry. Now, watch this: When Peter's pastoral ministry got off track, guess who Jesus sent to correct the problem? Paul. Jesus put love in Paul's heart, made sure that Paul had enough humility to correct Peter, and then he sent Paul to Peter.

• Jesus coordinates ministries so that Christians might strengthen each other.

• Jesus is the one who harmonizes the *different kinds of service*.

• ...they overcame their differences because they had One Lord,

Two different ministries rubbed right up against one another: Peter's and Paul's. Was there conflict? A little, but they overcame their differences because they had One Lord, Jesus. The Church was made stronger even when one of its leaders gave a public rebuke to another!

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17; LEB).

When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

For before certain men came from James, he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles... I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?' (Galatians 2:11-14)

So Jesus managed Peter and Paul's ministries. He coordinated them. Paul didn't become the new Lord of the Church just because he corrected Peter—not by a long shot. Peter was never the Lord of the Church in the first place (and he knew it)! Rather, because Paul corrected Peter it in love, Paul gave Jesus enough space to smooth things out in the Church. What was the end result? Halleluiah, Jesus was proven to be the Lord.

• ...Jesus was proven to be the Lord.

Here are some more examples of ministries that Jesus coordinated:

- **Apollos** taught the Scriptures with great breadth of knowledge and an argumentative style (Acts 19:24, 28) while the apostle **John** spoke very affectionately and with soft simplicity (2 John 5-6). Both of them preached the same message, even though their style was so different.
- **Agabus** (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11) prophesied with dramatic warnings of doom, much differently from **the prophets of Corinth** who prophesied to win souls (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Both kinds of prophecy were important ministries in the Church.

- **Phoebe** (Romans 16:1), a deaconess who travelled among the churches, served in a much different way than **Tabitha** (Acts 9:36, 39) who was constantly making clothes and giving them to the needy. Tabitha had a ministry of mercy concentrated in one location, while Phoebe had an international ministry of service. Both of these ladies were important in Jesus' Church.

The Lord Jesus wants each of us to trust God who will complete his work in us.

... he who began a good work in you [God] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

In the meantime, while God perfects us, Jesus is going to do all that is possible to unite the Church's ministries. We should never consider our own ministry to be better than the ministries of other Christians. We should never compete with our brothers or sisters. Peter foolishly tried that, but you know how Jesus corrected him:

Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will' (Matthew 26:33).

When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him [John]?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me' (John 21:21-22).

Jesus is able to make even the weakest brother stand firm. We have to believe that. Sometimes we look at a fellow Christian and we doubt whether they will really be strong enough to persevere in the faith. We have to believe that Jesus will make the weakest person among us strong because it's a promise of Scripture.

... they will stand, for the Lord [that's Jesus] is able to make them stand (Romans 14:4).

Let's try to love all Christians and to believe in Jesus' work in them. Our job is not to criticize, but to work with other Christians. Jesus knows that we have differences, but strength comes from overcoming our differences.

If French-speakers say *Vive la difference*, Spanish-speakers say *En la variedad está el placer*, and English-speakers say

• Jesus is able to make even the weakest brother stand firm.

“Variety is the spice of life,” then Christians should confidently declare:

Our different ministries make us **stronger**.

So, while the Spirit equips the Church, and God works sovereignly through it, Jesus is in charge of its ministries. He’s the Lord of the Church. The Church is basically a group of people anointed by the Holy Spirit and doing the work of God under the leadership of Christ. That is to say, we do God’s work in the power of the Spirit through the ministries Jesus coordinates. Our Lord Jesus is the Coordinator. Just as a head coordinates the body, so is Jesus the Head of the Church.²⁷⁴

... Christ is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23).

i. Jesus’ intermediary role

Jesus has another very important role as he works in the midst of the Father and the Holy Spirit; and to understand it, you first need to remember that Jesus intercedes for us before the Father. You knew that already, but did you know how the Spirit is involved with Jesus’ intercession? Jesus’ intercession works like this: His basic request to God is that God give the Spirit to us.

... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things... (John 14:26)

As you can see from the verse above, God sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name. That means that God sends us the Spirit because Jesus asks him to. Being God’s Son, our Lord Jesus has more influence with God than anybody else in the Universe—so who better to mediate between God and us? And what better request could we ever make than to ask God for the Spirit?

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth... (John 14:16-17).

Does this sound important to you? We’re not talking about asking God for a bicycle here—the Holy Spirit is the su-

²⁷⁴ And let’s not forget: God is the Head of Christ.

... the Head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3).

• The Church is basically a group of people anointed by the Holy Spirit and doing the work of God under the leadership of Christ.

• God sends us the Spirit because Jesus asks him to.

preme gift of God. God can't give you any more wonderful gift than his own Spirit! Have you asked yet?

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:9,13).

So let's appreciate what Jesus gets for us—the best gift that God can give, the Holy Spirit. And be glad that it's Jesus who makes the request for us, because God listens to Jesus.

Can you handle a tough truth, a hard reality? It's this: You will never receive the Spirit if it isn't for Jesus. You will not get the Spirit any other way. Why not? Because the Spirit is the promise of the New Covenant, and Jesus is in charge of the New Covenant. Jesus is the Lord of the covenant—he manages your covenant with God. Remember what the New Covenant is supposed to look like: It's all about getting the Spirit!

[God promises us a water and Spirit baptism saying:] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart and put a New Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Jesus knows how to work with the Father, the Spirit, and with us. He has obtained great favor with God by his faithfulness to God—and because of Jesus' obedience to him, God has given Jesus authority to give the Spirit to anyone Jesus wants. With such authority, Jesus should be able to command our obedience like no one else, right? I mean, Jesus has what we most need in life: the Spirit.

Since he's the Lord, we obey Jesus. And that's what it means to love Jesus: to obey him. The reward for those who love Jesus is that the Father will love them. Not only that, but Jesus and the Father will live within those people who obey Jesus—but how? Through the Holy Spirit.

- ...the Holy Spirit is the supreme gift of God.

- You will never receive the Spirit if it isn't for Jesus.

- ...because of Jesus' obedience to him, God has given Jesus authority to give the Spirit to anyone Jesus wants.

- ...that's what it means to love Jesus: to obey him.

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (John 14:23).

- You will get God's love only if you obey the Lord Jesus.

Do you want God's love? Do you want God's Spirit? You will only get them if you love the One God has made Lord of the Church—Jesus. You will get God's love and Spirit only if you obey the Lord Jesus. There is no other way.

§

5. Lord confusion

- a. Who is the One Lord?
- b. One for all
- c. Directly Lord
- d. Jesus or God?

a. Who is the One Lord?

How can we preach One Lord if the word *Lord* is used for two distinct people in the Bible? God the Father is called *Lord* in the Bible, is he not? Yes, God is called *Lord* and Jesus is called *Lord* too. We should consider God the Father to be the primary Lord of the Universe—agreed? He is, after all, even Jesus' Lord.²⁷⁵ If God is the primary Lord, then

• We should consider God the Father to be the primary Lord of the Universe.

²⁷⁵ Where do we see it made most clearly in the Bible that God is Jesus' Lord? In the Gospel of Luke. Consider this list of verses that show the Lord-Servant relationship between God and Jesus. First of all, God is the Lord who gives a throne to his Servant Jesus.

The Lord God will give him [Jesus] the throne of his father David (1:32).

Jesus called God "Lord."

[Jesus said] I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth (10:21).

[Jesus taught] Love the Lord your God (10:27).

Jesus was presented to the Lord God when he was a baby. His parents presented Jesus to God in service to God. In other words, they dedicated Jesus to Jesus' Lord and God.

Joseph and Mary took him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (2:22).

Jesus belongs to the Lord God. Jesus serves the Father as the Father's chosen Messiah.

[Jesus is] the Lord's Messiah (2:26).

The Lord anointed Jesus. All that Jesus did was based on God's power working in him. God put his anointing on Jesus and made sure that his power was with Jesus.

[Jesus said] The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me... (4:18).

... the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick (5:17).

Jesus served in his Lord's harvest.

Jesus told his apostles to 'Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' (10:2).

Jesus came in the name of the Lord.

why is he not the *One Lord* we read about in Ephesians 4?

Spurred by this question, we do well to reflect again on the exact words of the “unity of the spirit” passage (Ephesians 4:3-6). It does not say that there is *only* One Lord, but that there is One Lord. There is a difference between having only One Lord and having One Lord. Let’s look at that a little more closely.

• It does not say that there is *only* One Lord, but that there is One Lord.

• Is the unity of the Church important for you?

The context of Ephesians 4 is how the Church must struggle to keep its precious unity. Is the unity of the Church important for you? It should be. God hates division. He wants us to be perfectly united in our thinking.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Now, if you consider the context of Ephesians 4, you will see that the idea behind the doctrine of One Lord is not whether we should use the title *Lord* for only one person or not. Ephesians 4 is not about whether God and Jesus, or just Jesus alone can be referred to as *Lord*. The context has nothing to do with how we use titles. It’s about how the Church should conserve its unity. The way for us to do that is to follow one man, and to follow him together. So here’s the point of One Lord: There is one man who all Christians must follow if we are going to keep our spiritual unity. Jesus is that man.²⁷⁶

• how the Church should conserve its unity

• There is one man who all Christians must follow if we are going to keep our spiritual unity.

Moses left Zipporah his wife with her father (Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law) while Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

[Jesus is the one] ...who comes in the name of the Lord (13:35).

[Jesus is] ...the king who comes in the name of the Lord (19:38).

²⁷⁶ Another theme of the passage is that there is one person who all Christians, if they are to maintain unity, must consider to be their God—and he is the Father. We don’t only need One Lord, the Church is divided if we don’t have the same God just as well. Imagine this: We won’t even be worshipping the same person if we don’t have the same One God! Without unity on doctrines as basic as our One God and our One Lord, we’d be a sorry excuse for a Church. In fact, any congregation which isn’t firm on those two truths has to be an apostate church.

With Pharaoh’s army in hot pursuit, it wasn’t a good time to have his wife and two sons tagging along with him—so he left them with Jethro. Most people would agree that it was a wise decision, especially considering that it was only supposed to be temporary.

After some time passed, it was safe for Zipporah to be back with Moses again so Jethro returned her and the boys to Moses. Do you get it? After the Exodus was through, Moses’ received his wife back again. What was the main reason why her father brought her back? Not only because it was safe, but because Moses was her husband. She belonged with her husband. Moses was Zipporah’s head, not Jethro.

- Moses was Zipporah’s head, not Jethro.

After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her... Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God. Jethro had sent word to him, ‘I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons’ (Exodus 18:2, 5-6).

Do you get the allegory? In the same way Jethro gave Zipporah to Moses, God has given the Church to Jesus. God has authority over us as Father, but he has delegated that authority to Jesus. God has appointed Jesus to be the Head of the Church. So then there are not two, but One who is in charge of the Church, our husband Jesus—not our Father, God.

- So then there are not two, but One who is in charge of the Church, our husband Jesus—not our Father, God.

God placed all things under his [Jesus’] feet and appointed him [Jesus] to be Head over everything for the Church, which is his body... (Ephesians 1:22-23a)

In most cultures throughout history, it has been the father who decides what man his daughter should marry. According to that tradition, after the marriage is consummated, the daughter is no longer under the direct authority of her father, but she is under the authority of her husband. Not only does that tradition work, the Bible affirms that the tradition is inspired by God:

- ...the father... decides what man his daughter should marry.

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly [unfairly] toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth [already a young lady of marriageable age], and if it must be so [she won’t have it any other way], let him do what he wishes [he can give her to a young man], he

does not sin; let her marry.

But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.

So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better (1 Corinthians 7:36-38; NAS-B).²⁷⁷

Let's get the spiritual truth straight here because it's not enough for us to learn wise human traditions. They might be helpful to guide our actions, but the truths they express are much more precious. We need to understand those truths.

• The tradition of a father giving his daughter's hand in marriage...

The tradition of a father giving his daughter's hand in marriage is a lesson about God, Jesus, and the Church. We need to comprehend how Jesus (like a groom) left his Father to establish a family with the Church (his bride). When a man leaves his parents, he becomes one flesh with his future bride. The bride does the same thing. She leaves her parents too.

Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father's house. Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord (Psalm 45:10-11).

'... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

It just so happens in our case—that is, in the case of the Church—that we have the same Father as our husband. God is Jesus' Father and God is our Father too. This scenario shouldn't sound so terribly strange to you since it's the

²⁷⁷ The NIV has made an unfortunate mistake by putting an incorrect modern interpretation on the passage. Due to the fact that there is so little appreciation for the tradition of fathers giving their daughters' hand in marriage [there is actually a strong movement against it], the NIV translators failed us. They allowed modern thinking to influence their translation. They have changed the meaning of the passage completely so that their translation speaks from the perspective of the groom, not the father.

The NIV error is grievous, but it shouldn't be surprising for you. You should already know that their thinking is simply a reflection of the feminist and anti-patriarchal Western society we (along with Bible translators) live in.

same one Abraham and Sarah shared. They had the same father (although they were born of different mothers).

... [Abraham said about Sarah] she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother (Genesis 20:12).

So, what goes on with the Church in clear terms? Our Father gives Jesus our hand in marriage, but we don't forfeit our Father by taking Jesus as our husband. We will never be without a Father. We continue to be under his watchful eye. Since he is God, he is sovereign—God is so sovereign that he is even the Father of our groom, Jesus.

The important thing is for the Church to decide wholeheartedly to go with Jesus and to be faithful to him. Why? Because that's what our Father wants! It's what our husband Jesus wants too, of course. Both of them want it for us because it's what is best for us. If we have the faith of Rebekah, we'll trust that they want what's best for us, and we'll go right along with it.

... they called Rebekah and asked her, 'Will you go with this man [Eleazar, Abraham's servant who came to bring her to meet her new husband, Isaac]?' 'I will go,' she said. So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men (Genesis 24:58-59).

The Father of the Church is still God, but the Lord of the Church is now Jesus. Just like any good father, God's wish is that his daughter might flourish and be happy. He knows that her happiness will be greatest if she is under the authority of a good husband. A married woman belongs with her husband *more* than she does with her father, correct? Of course she does. God is our Father because he is over all, and Jesus is our husband for a similar reason: because God says so. God has chosen Jesus for us. Our unity with Jesus under the New Covenant makes Jesus our Lord, officially.

b. One for all

Again, the theme of Ephesians 4 is not that there is only One Lord. It's not that God should never be called *Lord*, no. Just as Zipporah could have legitimately called her father *lord* even after her marriage to Moses, we very legitimately call God the Father our Lord today. There is nothing wrong

• The important thing is for the Church to decide wholeheartedly to go with Jesus and to be faithful to him.

• The Father of the Church is still God, but the Lord of the Church is now Jesus.

• Jesus is our husband...because God says so.

with that. It's just as natural for us to call God *Lord* just as it is for a young lady to honor her father by calling him "Sir."

In fact, it's more challenging for a young lady to honor her new husband than it is for her to honor her father, isn't it? It takes more faith for her to honor her husband, but she recognizes in her heart that that's what her father wants. She calls her husband *Lord* because she wants to honor her father. The honor she directly gives her husband is the honor she indirectly gives the father who chose him.

... [the Father] has given all judgment to the Son in order that all [that includes us, the Church] may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him (John 5:23; NASB).

Just as the spiritual women of times past called their husbands *lord*, so should the Church today call Jesus *Lord*.

Sarah... thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord [Abraham] is old, will I now have this pleasure [of giving birth to a child]?' (Genesis 18:12).

... this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord (1 Peter 3:5-6).

When a woman leaves her father and mother and joins her husband, the two become one flesh. The experience of matrimony, so common to all of us, was designed by God to show us what our spiritual unity with Christ is all about. Just as there is no dishonor done to a young lady's parents when she marries, no dishonor is done to God when the Church submits to Jesus as Lord. In fact, since God chose Jesus for us, our "cleaving unto" Jesus is a way for us to please God.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:24; KJV).

Good parents rejoice to see their children progressing to new stages in life, especially marriage. Although parents lose a son or daughter to marriage, and their children do not live in the same house with them any longer, the honor of

• ...what our spiritual unity with Christ is all about.

having grandchildren soon replaces that loss.

The crown of the elderly are grandchildren (Proverbs 17:6; LEB).

c. Directly Lord

Another way of explaining the Bible doctrine of One Lord is by presenting Jesus to others as our direct Lord. If we are able to explain to people outside the Church what it means for Jesus to rule over our lives directly, they might understand what it means for him to be our Lord. This kind of concise explanation of Jesus as our direct Lord would be a particularly helpful tool in the evangelization of Muslims. We need our Muslim friends to understand who Jesus is for us, and who he is for God too.

If you speak to a Muslim, you should start with the Christian doctrine of One God. Begin by explaining that you believe that God is “over all” (Ephesians 4:6)—even over Jesus.²⁷⁸ That should help them to see that we believe that God is Jesus’ direct authority. Muslims will have no problem saying *amen* to that doctrine because they are strict monotheists.

Next, you can explain to them that human beings have set up a barrier between ourselves and God by our sins. Tell them about the holiness of God—that he cannot look upon sin. They might not like to hear the next part, but let them know that even after a person repents, he still cannot have God as his direct authority. Tell them why: Because the sin in us separates us from God. He is still too holy for us.

... your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).

• ...presenting Jesus to others as our direct Lord.

• God is Jesus’ direct authority.

• ...even after a person repents, he still cannot have God as his direct authority.

²⁷⁸ Be sure to keep in mind that, like God, Jesus is also referred to as “over all” in the Bible (Romans 9:5), but Jesus is never said to be over *God*. Instead, Jesus is said to be “over all people” (John 17:2) and “over all Creation” (Colossians 1:15). The Bible is careful not to say more than that. It should be unthinkable for us that Jesus would ever have authority over God. Why unthinkable? Because the Bible itself says that it’s unthinkable. Never forget that God is the one who has subjected all things to Jesus. Our Lord Jesus is “over all” because God put him there!

... when it [the Bible] says that ‘everything’ has been put under him [Jesus], it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ (1 Corinthians 15:27).

We need a covenant with God. We need some guarantees—a formal agreement that will allow us to constantly find forgiveness for the sins that continue to pop up in our lives. We still have flesh, even after we repent, so the reality is that we will sin again. Tell them that this is why we need a mediator, someone to speak to God on our behalf. That mediator has to be a human being like us—why? Because only another human being could sympathize with the weaknesses of human beings.

• ...a mediator, someone to speak to God on our behalf.

... he [Jesus] had to be made like them [us], fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18).

That mediator also needs to be free from sin for a simple reason: He needs to enter into the presence of God if he's going to intercede for us. Tell the Muslims that. Then ask them if they know of anyone in history who has lived free from sin.²⁷⁹ Only Jesus is the man who fits the bill.

... we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

A Muslim (or anyone outside the Church) should be able to develop trust in Jesus if they understand his history. Invite them to study his life. If they do, they will see a man whose relationship with God was never interrupted by sin. Explain this to them: Because of Jesus' holiness, God always hears him. Jesus is therefore the perfect Mediator for us. Because of Jesus' obedience to God, God will give Jesus whatever Jesus asks.

• ...God will give Jesus whatever Jesus asks.

... no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Matthew 11:27).

[Jesus said] No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God [Jesus]; only he has seen the Father (John 6:46).

I [Jesus] always do what pleases him [God] (John 8:29).

Martha said to Jesus, '... I know that even now God will

²⁷⁹ Even the Qur'an mentions the sins of Mohammed at least three times.

give you whatever you ask' (John 11:21).

In order to save us from sin, God has put Jesus in charge of the Church. That's the way God saves us. Through Christ, you can see how much God loves us. How do we know God's love? Like this: God has done everything possible to restore us to fellowship with him—even sacrificing his only Son and making him our Savior.

- God has done everything possible to restore us to fellowship with him.

If a person does not understand the relationship between Jesus and the Father, they will have a mistaken belief system—a wrong religion. They won't understand God's love, and that's a huge problem. A Bible-based faith will open anyone's eyes to the great love that God has for Jesus, and when a person understands God's love for Jesus, then they will be able to comprehend God's love for us.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

[Jesus said to God]... you have loved me. Father... you loved me before the creation of the world... Righteous Father,... I know you... and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them... (John 17:23-26).

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).

Remember: You must have an accurate idea of who Jesus is to God if you're going to be saved. Some churches have a low view of Jesus. They think that he's just an angel. Others think so highly of him that they forget the Father altogether. For that latter group, Jesus is the only God. The pure teaching of the Bible is not the former or the latter. It is to honor Jesus as the One Lord sent by God. If you can get a handle on that as your belief, you will honor both God and Jesus as you should.

- ...honor Jesus as the One Lord sent by God.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him (John 5:23).

Here's some advice about how to deal with the two extremes of thinking too highly or thinking too low about Jesus:

- If someone has **too high a view of Jesus** (like Catholics or the United Pentecostals), explain to them that although Jesus is our Lord, the Father sent him.
 - Every believer needs to give honor to the Father the same way they honor Jesus. That will only happen if we understand that Jesus was sent by someone greater than he is. We have to understand that **Jesus is subordinate God** if we're really going to honor God the way we should.
- If someone has **too low a view of Jesus** (like the Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslims), let them know that they do not need to give God greater honor than Jesus. God will not feel shortchanged. God has nobody who competes with him in the Universe, not even Jesus.
 - Honoring Jesus is **honoring the One who sent him**.²⁸⁰ God put a lot of energy and

²⁸⁰ The Jehovah's Witnesses are very careful to make an effort to give all the glory to Jehovah God—but it's an unnecessary effort. If you speak to them, you'll notice that the JWs are always trying not to give too much honor to Jesus, fearful that they might offend God. The Muslims vehemently oppose the idea that God might have an associate. They are particularly offended by our Christian doctrine that Jesus is God's Son. What do the Witnesses and Muslims have in common? Their essential error is their own pride. They both imagine themselves as the defenders of God's honor. We have news for each of them: God is perfectly capable of defending himself! He doesn't need them to protect him or his honor. If we used the logic of these groups, Christians who know the One God and Father [unfortunately there aren't many of us] will be tempted to give Jesus less honor than he is due—but that would be wrong. As we see in Philippians 2:11 (above), we confess Jesus as Lord for the *glory* of God the Father! It actually *enhances* God's glory when we honor the one who God has designated as Lord, Jesus. After all, it was God who chose Jesus, anointed Jesus, raised Jesus, and who has seated him at his right hand—wasn't it? God has accomplished magnificent things through Jesus!

And the other side of the coin is that we know that Jesus can do nothing on his own. Nothing!

Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing... By myself I can do nothing... (John 5:19, 30)

What has made Jesus so great is God working through him. What makes God

• ...we
confess
Jesus as
Lord for the
glory of God
the Father!
It actually
enhances
God's glory.

planning into sending Jesus and he doesn't want his effort (or Jesus') to go unappreciated.

d. Jesus or God?

- i. Spirit of the Lord
- ii. Word of the Lord
- iii. Angel of the Lord
- iv. Lord of Heaven and Earth
- v. Lord of Lords
 1. 1 Timothy 6
 2. Revelation 19
 - a. Interpreting the fourth name
 - b. A name written on you
 - c. The mark of the Beast
 - d. Marked for the Kingdom
 - e. Jesus: God's biggest fan
- vi. The way of the Lord

Taking our One Lord study one final step further, let's examine some Scripture passages that may seem confusing at first glance. We should never shy away from difficult passages, you know. The most powerful inspiration comes to us through our study of hard passages. When God finally reveals the answers to our questions, we get inspired. It's only after struggling in our soul that we get the Spirit's revelations.

Here's the main discrepancy: Yahweh God is called *Lord* many times in the Bible, and so is Jesus. The fact that both God and Jesus are called *Lord* in the Bible may seem like a contradiction to skeptics. They think: How could the Scriptures present two people as Lord to us, and (at the same time) sustain that One Lord is a fundamental doctrine?

To begin with, let's not accuse God of confusing us. He doesn't confuse anybody. God puts difficult passages in the Bible to challenge our faith. He is trying to stretch that faith

so great is that he shares all that he has: his glory, honor, Kingdom, power, authority, and divine nature! Do you get it? The glory of Jesus is seen in God and the glory of God is seen in Jesus! If you can get a firm grip on how that works, you'll have a healthy Christian faith. You'll have the kind of knowledge of God that can save you.

- ...The most powerful inspiration comes to us through our study of hard passages.

- Yahweh God is called *Lord* many times in the Bible, and so is Jesus.

- God puts difficult passages in the Bible to challenge our faith.

- The glory of Jesus is seen in God and the glory of God is seen in Jesus!

out. God wants us to work at interpreting his Word—to wrestle with it until he gives us the blessing. We are supposed to wrestle by asking, seeking, and praying for him to reveal the meaning of any passage we’re not clear about.

One way of “wrestling” would be to face the fact that Ephesians 4 presents to us one baptism, one hope, and even One God—but each of these terms (*baptism*, *hope*, and *God*) is used in other passages of the Bible to refer to someone or something different than the one baptism, hope, and God that Ephesians 4 refers to. For example:

- **baptism for the dead** (1 Corinthians 15:29) is not the Ephesians 4 one baptism
- Paul’s **hope** of seeing the Thessalonians in the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 2:19) is not the Ephesians 4 one hope
- the **god of the Philistines** (Judges 16:23) is not the Ephesians 4 One God

Now let’s reflect upon how Ephesians 4 states that there is One Lord, Jesus. Just like the other “ones” on the list, Paul’s declaration that there is One Lord Jesus does not mean that Jesus is the only Lord. There are others for whom the title *Lord* is used in the Scriptures:

- Hanun was the **lord** of the Ammonites
- Elijah was called **lord** by his disciples (2 Kings 2:19)
- Elisha was called **lord** by a Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:28)
- Ruth called Boaz **lord** (Ruth 2:13)

A quick study of the term *Lord* will show you that the most common way the Scriptures use *Lord* is for God or his Son Jesus—but discerning which of the two each particular passage refers to (be it God or Jesus) is a great challenge. That’s why we have to read each passage with the word *Lord* in it carefully. The context gives us the best indication of who the *Lord* of a passage is, be it God, Jesus, or someone else.

So our primary task as we try to interpret difficult Bible passages is to analyze the context of every passage where the word *Lord* appears. God wants us to use the gift of in-

• The context gives us the best indication of who the *Lord* of a passage is.

terpretation—right? And he wants us to read the Scriptures prayerfully. Are you up to the challenge? God would have us leave no stone unturned.

For example, when the expressions *the Spirit of the Lord* or *the Word of the Lord* are used, to whom does *Lord* refer—Jesus or God? Did you know that the contexts prove that these two expressions almost always mean *God* when they say *Lord*? So when you come across passages that use these expressions, the Biblical writers use *Lord* as a title for God, and what they mean is:

- The Spirit of the Lord
 - This is the Spirit that God gives us.
 - It is **his own Spirit**.
 - It **originates** in him.
- The Word of the Lord
 - This is the Word that God **speaks** to us.
 - It is **his own Word**.
 - It **originates** in him.

The Spirit of God knows the deep things of God. The Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. It searches God's deep thoughts.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

The Word of God reflects the thoughts of God, not the thoughts of man. The Word of God comes from his mouth, so it originates in God. It works in those who believe.

... when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

There are at least two exceptions to the rule for interpreting the expression *the Word of the Lord*. We'll look at them below. In those two exceptions, the Word of the Lord is not God's, but Jesus' word!

• God wants us to use the gift of interpretation.

• ...these two expressions almost always mean *God* when they say *Lord*.

• ...understanding the different ways the Bible presents God as Lord and the different ways it presents Jesus as Lord helps us to appreciate both God and Jesus much more.

In the paragraphs that follow, we will study a number of different NT phrases that have the term *Lord* in them. We want to pay close attention to who the Lord is in each passage. Is it God or is it Jesus? This is a helpful exercise because understanding the different ways the Bible presents God as Lord and the different ways it presents Jesus as Lord helps us to appreciate both God and Jesus much more. And the Christian faith is founded upon an appreciation of both God and his Messiah, right?

i. Spirit of the Lord

Here are two cases in which Luke uses the expression *the Spirit of the Lord*.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me [said Jesus], because he [God] has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4:18).

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away (Acts 8:39).

If you have read the verses carefully, you should be able to understand that *the Spirit of the Lord* means the Spirit of God the Father. That's what it means in both of them. It is a rule for the *Lord of the Spirit of the Lord* to have to have this meaning in all of the Scriptures, with one exception which we explain in this footnote.²⁸¹

Looking at the passages above, *Lord* has to mean God. What are the reasons? In the first passage (Luke 4:18), because Jesus makes it plain that he is talking about God. How did Jesus make it plain? By saying "He has anointed me." The *he* Jesus used here could be none other than God because only God anointed Jesus with his Spirit.

In the second passage (Acts 8:39), Luke is simply following the long Jewish tradition in which the *Lord* of the expression *the Spirit of the Lord* means God. Here are two examples of that Jewish tradition:

I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry

²⁸¹ The exception to this rule is the passage which says: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). In that passage, *the Spirit of the Lord* is clearly the spirit of Jesus. "Lord" refers to Christ in the context of that verse—and it is made abundantly clear by Paul who wrote it. That's the style of the apostles: clarity. You can expect it.

you when I leave you... I your servant have worshiped the LORD [God] since my youth (1 Kings 18:12).

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel... He said: "... This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's'" (2 Chronicles 20:14-15).

ii. Word of the Lord

Although the expression *the Word of the Lord* may seem, at first glance, to be ambiguous (we could possibly take it to mean the word of *Jesus*), it is not. It almost always²⁸² means the Word of *God the Father*. Since the Scriptures are not designed to confuse anybody, you can be confident any time you read the Bible and have to interpret the expression *the Word of the Lord*. It will mean the Word of God 99% of the time.

• the Word
of *God the
Father*

Peter, for example, makes it plain that the message given in the OT is the same one repeated in the New. It is the same Word of the Lord [God] that it has always been:

'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the Word that was preached to you (1 Peter 1:24-25).

The expression *the Word of the Lord* was used in the OT to refer to the Scriptures, and that tradition was carried on into the NT. Don't forget that the writers of the NT were all

²⁸² The two exceptions to this rule include the following passages which use the term *Lord* to refer to Jesus, not God:

... remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35).

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

In this second passage, it's clear how Paul is recalling what Jesus (the coming Lord) said with reference to his own return in glory. Please notice how in both passages there is a direct reference to Jesus (as *the Lord* whose word is being interpreted). The apostles left little room for confusion. If we follow the tradition of the apostles, we should not allow anyone to confuse the Lord Jesus with the Lord God, especially when we use the expression *the Word of the Lord*, but worship music and preaching is as ambiguous as it's ever been in history.

Jews (except Luke) so they were carrying on the traditions of the patriarchs and prophets. The expression *the Word of the Lord* is used in the NT frequently. Here are five examples for you:

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord... When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region (Acts 13:44, 48-49).

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the Word of the Lord... Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the Word of the Lord and see how they are doing' (Acts 15:35-36).

Then they [Paul and Silas] spoke the Word of the Lord to him [the Philippian jailer] and to all the others in his house (Acts 16:32).

... all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord (Acts 19:10).

For Jesus and the other Jews that ministered with him, the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets were the Holy Scriptures. They used the phrase *the Word of the Lord* to refer to their Scriptures, and it is a phrase Christians continue to use even today to refer to our Bible. The only difference is that Christians have a longer Bible. Ours includes the 27 NT books Matthew to Revelation.

Now, when you read the Bible, you should remember that the NT had not yet been incorporated into the Scriptures during the time the apostles were teaching. That means that none of the teachings of Jesus were yet considered to be the Word of God in the traditional Jewish sense of being part of the cannon. The teachings of Jesus weren't part of the body of Scripture books. Because of this fact, the apostles distinguished between testifying about Jesus and proclaiming the Word of God.

• ...the apostles distinguished between testifying about Jesus and proclaiming the Word of God.

After they [Peter and John] had further proclaimed the Word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned [from Samaria] to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25).

Sharing the Word of God (what Acts 8:14 and other passages call *the Word of the Lord*) was different from telling people about what Jesus had done, but why? It's because there were no Gospels written yet. The apostles didn't tell people about Jesus by reading from the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) like we do today. They could only tell people what they had experienced personally. How did the apostles do that? They would give testimonies about what they saw of Jesus' miracles and what they understood of his teachings. They "testified about Jesus."

- The apostles didn't tell people about Jesus by reading from the four Gospels.

Although they told the truth, the apostles' testimony about Jesus wasn't yet perfected. When it was perfected, they wrote the four Gospels. Before then, the apostles were still trying to make sense of all that Jesus had taught them. They were praying, preaching, and perfecting their own lives in holiness and love.

Here is another example of how the apostles used the phrase *the Word of the Lord*.

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly... In this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 19:18-20).

You might notice that in this passage Luke contrasts the Word of the Lord with the written works (scrolls) of sorcerers. Let's think precisely about what God inspired Luke to contrast here:

The scrolls, with their instructions on the use of magic, were **burned**. The Word of God was not burned, but rather it **spread widely**.

Luke was not contrasting two different written forms (scrolls and books). He wasn't interested in forms. Luke was contrasting two different kinds of activity: The wildfire effect of the Word of God and the fiery destruction of the sorcerers' scrolls.

- two different kinds of activity

The Scriptures were written on scrolls too at that time so they were, in form, just like the writings of the sorcerers.

This passage shows us that the Word of God is much more than a the printed material sitting on your bookshelf. God’s word is free! It moves everywhere. No one can burn it, chain it down, or otherwise imprison it.

... the Word of God is not imprisoned (2 Timothy 2:9).

Another very helpful way to interpret the Acts 19 passage we just studied is using the context. Just 8 verses earlier, Luke wrote

... all who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord (v. 10).

So the phrase *Word of the Lord* is used right there in the same chapter with the meaning *Word of God*. That means again that Luke is talking about something greater than printed material. He’s talking about something greater than a scroll. Furthermore, just two chapters earlier, Luke tells us that

... the Word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also (Acts 17:13).

From these two passages we can easily deduce that Luke uses the terms *Word of God* and *Word of the Lord* synonymously. Please remember what are we getting at: We have just proven that the word *Lord* in the expression *the Word of the Lord* in Acts 19:20 means the Lord God. It does not mean the Lord Jesus. We are trying to help you to interpret the word *Lord* when you come across it in the Bible. There is no need to be confused. The Bible is not ambiguous.

- ...the word *Lord* in the expression *the Word of the Lord* in Acts 19:20 means the Lord God.

iii. Angel of the Lord

Now we come to a special case of Scriptural interpretation: the angel of the Lord. Here the title *Lord* is part of a name. The title *Lord* is used as part of the name of an angel, that is, in the name of a messenger²⁸³ from God.

²⁸³ The idea behind the term angel is a *messenger*, not necessarily someone with an angelic *nature*. Consider the following text to understand the matter more fully:

The word *angel* is used of a human messenger (as we ordinarily think of that term). Haggai was referred to as “Jehovah’s messenger [*malawk*]” (Haggai 1:13). God, through Malachi, referred to a priest as “my messenger [*malawk*]” (Malachi 2:7). And, John the Baptist also was referred to as a “messenger” [*malawk*—3:1]. Matthew (11:10)

There's quite a bit to consider when we come across the name *the angel of the Lord* in the Bible. Let's start by reviewing the five times the expression is used by Matthew:

... after he [Joseph, Mary's husband] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream (Matthew 1:20).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife (Matthew 1:24).

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 2:13).

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt (Matthew 2:19).

... an angel of the Lord came down from Heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it (Matthew 28:2).

Could the *Lord* of the *angel of the Lord* expression be Jesus in these passages? If it is, then the angel is an angel from Jesus—but in each case, that would be impossible. Jesus was already there in some capacity (either as a baby in the womb or as the one the angel opened the tomb for).

You can be sure that *Lord* will consistently mean God and not Jesus when you read about the angel of the Lord in the NT. Similarly, although we don't have enough space here to look at the many OT passages that use the term *the Angel of the Lord*, Jesus couldn't possibly be the Lord to whom they refer in the OT either.

• ...*Lord* will consistently mean God and not Jesus when you read about the angel of the Lord.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Zechariah], standing at the right side of the altar of incense (Luke 1:11).

An angel of the Lord appeared to them [shepherds of Bethlehem], and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified (Luke 2:9).

... during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them [Peter and John] out (Acts 5:19).

likewise called John the Baptist a "messenger" (*angelos*) (Retrieved from <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=424> on February 13, 2014).

... an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza’ (Acts 8:26).

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’ he said... (Acts 12:7)

Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:23).

You probably already know that the Angel of the LORD in the OT is Jesus himself. We studied that fact earlier in this book. Since he is that angel, that means that *Lord* couldn’t possibly refer to Jesus when the expression *Angel of the LORD* is used in the OT. It would make no sense for the Bible (a very rational book) to say that Jesus is the Angel of Jesus, right?

• ...*Lord* couldn’t possibly refer to Jesus when the expression *Angel of the LORD* is used in the OT..

iv. Lord of Heaven and Earth

Another case where you might perceive some ambiguity, a case in which the meaning of the term *Lord* might not be clear to you, is the expression *Lord of Heaven and Earth*. However, you just have to look a little closer. There really should be no difficulty in understanding to whom this term refers. Jesus himself twice told us that the term refers to the Father.

At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children’ (Matthew 11:25)

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do’ (Luke 10:21).

Jesus wasn’t the only one to use *Lord of Heaven and Earth* in his teaching. Paul used the same honorific title in his writing, and when he used it, like Jesus, he used it exclusively for God. It seems that both Jesus and Paul were following an ancient Jewish tradition in which this beautiful expression is used to describe the One God, Creator of the Universe.

[Paul, speaking, said:] ‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’ (Acts 17:24).

v. Lord of Lords

Now we come to a big challenge: What about the famous expression *Lord of Lords*? Who is it for? Maybe you have been singing praise music since you were a child and have used this title for Jesus in you worship. Maybe you’ve only used it for God. Your songs don’t make you theologically correct. To have orthodox beliefs, we need to know what the Bible says. Have you ever asked yourself “How do the Scriptures use *Lord of Lords*?” That is the right approach, one that will protect us against the very common temptation of basing our faith on our music. Real faith is based on nothing but the Word of God—and the best interpretations of it.

• ...the very common temptation of basing our faith on our music.

1. In 1 Timothy 6

So let’s get to it. Check out what Paul says in 1 Timothy:

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

We just read one of the only three examples of *Lord of Lords* in the NT. Now, that’s not much to work with, but it’s enough. Since it means that our interpretation of *Lord of Lords* will have to be limited to just three passages, let’s take it slowly. Let’s start with the passage we just read. See if you can interpret to whom *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* refers.

Did you do it? Could you do it? We hope that interpreting the passage was easy enough for you because only God fits the description given there. The One God and Father is the *Lord of Lords* of 1 Timothy 6 because God is the *only* Ruler, the one who *alone* is immortal, and the one whom no one has seen or can see. Those descriptions couldn’t possibly fit Jesus, right? I mean, Jesus died (making him mortal) and Jesus has been seen by many people. The passage speaks of one who cannot be seen.

• ...only God fits the description given there.

2. In Revelation 17

In Revelation 17 we find the title *Lord of Lords* again. Does it refer to God in this second passage in which it appears? Let's look at it here:

... the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14).

The interpretation of this passage is straightforward enough. Jesus is the Lord of Lords and King of kings because he is the Lamb. That means that we have one passage where the title belongs to God and another where it belongs to Jesus. The context of the current passage lets us know why Jesus deserves this title so much. He has *seven kings*, and an *eighth king*, and then *ten* other *kings* who oppose him. Jesus is King of kings because he is going to be king over those 18 kings. If he's not, we're all doomed.

• ...why
Jesus
deserves
this title so
much

Jesus is also the Lord over the 18 kings' lord, the Antichrist. That's why Jesus' title *Lord of lords* should be so important and such a consolation to us. Here's the context of the verse:

The seven heads... are also seven kings... The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven... The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast... They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:9-14).

So we have one passage that makes it clear that God is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and a second one that shows that Jesus goes by that same title.

3. In Revelation 19

Let's look at our last sample. To whom does the title *Lord of Lords* refer to in the third passage in which it appears? As you read it here, notice that Jesus wears the title *Lord of Lords* on his robe and on his thigh.

I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is

the Word of God.

The armies of Heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:11-16).

So, should we immediately conclude that the title *Lord of Lords* is for Jesus in this passage? Not yet. It may seem like an easy passage to interpret, but it is not. It’s time for us to offer you an extensive explanation. Try to follow it if you can.

a. Interpreting the fourth name

Although it’s true that God (in his great love) shares his name with Jesus,²⁸⁴ this is not one of those moments. Jesus is wearing the title *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* on his robe and thigh as a sign that he serves the One God.

• ...a sign that he serves the One God.

There are three names specifically used for Jesus in the passage. Two of them are plainly spelled out for us: *Faithful and True* and *The Word of God*. All of us should easily be able to agree that those are two names for Jesus. According to the passage, Jesus has a third name written on him—it’s not *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*. The passage says about that third name

... that no one²⁸⁵ knows [it] but he [Jesus] himself (Revelation 19:12).

So only Jesus knows what that third name is. Now we’ve got two names that we know, and one name that we don’t know. What we know about the first two names is that they point to an important aspect of who Jesus is: He is faithful.

²⁸⁴ We already looked at this in a previous chapter. The teaching that God shares his name with Jesus is based on Exodus 23:21, which is God’s warning the Jews to heed his Angel, the one who would lead them out of Egypt. In that passage, God said “my name is in him.” That Angel was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, the Word. Since he was called the Angel of *Yahweh*, God’s name was in Jesus.

• ...“my name is in him.”

²⁸⁵ We know that God is the one exception to this no one because God knows all things. The Scriptures say that “... he [God] knows everything” (1 John 3:20).

These names highlight Jesus' faithfulness—and to whom is Jesus faithful and true? To God of course. Whose word is Jesus? He is God's Word. Not only did he fulfill God's Word to the tee, Jesus spent his time speaking just one truth: the Word of God. That's why it makes perfect sense for *the Word* to have become Jesus' namesake.

I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me (John 8:28).

So Jesus' names say something about him. In this passage his names tell us that Jesus is faithful to God. You may ask: And what about the last name, the one which nobody knows? Well, the fact that it's a secret tells us that Jesus has such a close relationship to God, that God gave Jesus a secret name. The two of them keep it a secret between them. They have an intimate relationship. In like manner, Jesus allows all who are faithful to him to have a very private relationship with him. Jesus will give a name which no one else knows to those believers, as long as they are victorious.

• Jesus has such a close relationship to God, that God gave Jesus a secret name.

[Jesus said] To the one who is victorious, I will give... that person a white stone with a new name written on it, [the name is] known only to the one who receives it (Revelation 2:17).

Don't forget something we just said: Jesus' title *The Word of God* means the same thing as *Faithful and True*. To say that Jesus is *The Word of God* means that whatever God says, Jesus does it. Jesus has been faithful and true to God as far back as Creation. What happened then? Whatever God said, someone named *the Word* made into reality.

Jesus is in Genesis 1—do you see him? He's right there in the words "it was so." Jesus was the One who made things according to God's command, making them *so*. Jesus was the Word, the person in Genesis 1 who executed God's will immediately after God spoke it.

And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. God called the dry ground 'land,' and the gathered waters he called 'seas.' And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:9-10).

... all things in the Heavens and on the Earth were created by him [Jesus], things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, all

things were created through him and for him²⁸⁶ (Colossians 1:16; LEB).

Jesus has always been faithful to do what God wants. Since the theme of Revelation 19 (where Jesus' name *Faithful and True* is presented to us) is that Jesus is coming as God's representative, is it surprising to see that Jesus' faithfulness is highlighted there? Not at all.

• ...Jesus is coming as God's representative.

Now let's consider again what it says in Revelation 19.

He [Jesus] treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords (vv. 11-16).

Observe carefully that the title *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* is what John (in Revelation 19:16) carefully calls *this name*. Did you notice that? If three other times in the same passage John informs us about very specific names that Jesus has, each of which denotes that Jesus is subordinate to God, then why would John mention a fourth name in the same breath and not specifically say that it is for Jesus? That's what John did for the other three—why not for the last name in the passage? Why does he say that the *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* title is *this name*? Isn't John indicating that it is somehow different from the other three names of the passage? In fact, that's exactly what John is doing. That name belongs to God.

b. A name written on you

We have to understand that when the Bible speaks of having a name written on someone, it does not mean that the name written is the name of the person on whom it is written. Rather, it means that the person who has a name on him *belongs* to someone else. We'll give you five examples below.

• ...the person who has a name on him *belongs* to someone else.

First of all, the groom in the passionate poem the Song of Solomon asks his lover to put his name on her arm.

²⁸⁶ These words are immensely important. They show us the reason why God ever made the world in the first place: He made it for Jesus. He wanted Jesus to have a reward. He wanted to give him something nice—a gift. What a magnificent and ample love the Father has long had for Jesus!

Put me like a seal²⁸⁷ over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol... (Songs 8:6; NASB).

What does it mean for the groom to be like a seal on his bride's arm? Does it mean that she has the same name as her groom? Of course not. Did the Shulamite lose her name and take on a new name, the name of Solomon? No, of course that's not the meaning of making Solomon a seal on her arm. Instead, Solomon was challenging his bride to be so firmly committed to him that he would be like a tattoo on her body. That tattoo-seal would mean that she belonged to him. It meant that their "love was as strong as death."

- Solomon...would be like a tattoo on her body.

Solomon said in the same passage that his jealousy would burn if another man ever took his bride from him. That's another key for our interpretation of the meaning of the seal. A seal on her arm and on her heart would mean that she was his, and no other's.

c. Mark of the Beast

Names on people's foreheads and hands in the last times will indicate whether they belong to God or the Antichrist. Those who serve the Antichrist will have their bodies marked with the number of the Beast:

- the number of the Beast

It [the second beast] also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name... the number of the beast... is the number of a man. That number is 666 (Revelation 13:16-18).

The number of a man in the passage equivalent to a name. What name? The number of the Beast's name. Therefore this number is the identity of a person who is called *the Beast*—that's the Antichrist—but we're getting a little side-tracked getting into the interpretation of 666.

- The number is not the identity of the one who is bearing the number.

Here's what we're driving at: The number is not the identity of the one who is bearing the number. Did you get that? The number is the identity of the Antichrist, right? The point is that the Antichrist can lay a claim on the life of anyone who

²⁸⁷ Also translated as *signet*.

has his number. The 666 will be written on all those who belong to him. The identity of these poor souls is inextricably bound to the name of the Beast. They willingly receive the mark of the Beast on their bodies. Once they get that mark, they have permanently surrendered to the Antichrist's system. Whether it's by receiving microchip implants, barcodes, or tattoos—they belong to him from then on.

d. Marked for the Kingdom

In contrast, our hope is the Kingdom. The hope of sinners is this world, but we hope to be marked for the Kingdom. We don't want to be marked to be able to do business with the world. We want to be marked to get an unmistakable identity as servants of God and of Christ. We want the names of Jesus and his Father written upon us:

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his [God's] servants will serve him. They will see his [God's] face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:3-4).

Precisely, the idea of having a name written upon you means that you are a servant of that person—whether he be the Antichrist or God. Study below an OT passage that explains how having a mark placed on your body means that you were a servant-slave. Yes, during the times of Moses, slaves would have their bodies marked. The mark was a sign that they belonged to a particular household.

... if your servant says to you, 'I do not want to leave you,' because he loves you and your family, and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your female servant (Deuteronomy 15:16-17).

Many Westerners today like to get piercings. It has become a fad. Why is it so popular? There's an inner urge for every person to demonstrate that they are strongly committed to something. They like to express their devotion to musicals group, a special someone (like a girlfriend), or a sports team like Real Madrid. The one thing every piercing has in

- ...having a mark placed on your body means that you were a servant-slave.

- ...an inner urge for every person to demonstrate that they are strongly committed to something.

common is that it draws attention to how the person (whose body is host to the piercing) is willing to go through a painful and permanent process for some cause. That cause (or person) became a major commitment for the individual who has the piercing at the moment they were pierced, right?

e. Jesus: God's biggest fan

Now, let's get back to the passage at hand, Revelation 19:16. The reason why Jesus has *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* written upon him is the same reason why people get piercings today. This title is not a fourth name for him—names reveal a man's identity and the three names of Jesus already mentioned in the passage show us enough about who he is, remember? Jesus is the One who serves God faithfully. We got that already, but the *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* written upon Jesus' robe and thigh (yes, the name is written double: on Jesus' clothes and on his body), is not Jesus' name—at least not in this passage. Rather, those words mark Jesus as a loyal servant of God.

- Jesus as a loyal servant of God

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:
King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

People today love to wear shirts with brand names prominently displayed on them. They feel like they have a classy, sporty, trendy, or quality identity. Boy Scouts and soldiers like wearing the badges they have earned. It gives them prestige. Sports fans feel proud of wearing jerseys of their favorite teams. Why do they do it? To bear the identity of the team they love so much. These fans are showing their loyalty to their team. They want everyone to know who they follow.

- Jesus is God's biggest fan.

Jesus is God's biggest fan. He is after all, the captain of God's team, so being God's fan is quite natural to him. Jesus is loyal to God. At this point in the book, there should be no doubt in your mind that Jesus is our Lord; but don't forget this: God is Jesus' Lord. Please don't forget that God is Jesus' head and God is Jesus' God. If you believe that, it won't be hard for you to interpret the passage at hand. Due to the fact that God is Jesus' Lord, Jesus is proud to have God's name written on him.

- God is Jesus' Lord.

I want you to understand that... God is the Head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; NASB).

So God the Father is the *Lord of Lords* of this passage. He's even the Lord of the Lord Jesus! Can you believe that?

vi. The way of the Lord

Moving on to our last *Lord* Bible expression, you also find the words *the way of the Lord* in the NT. As you come across them, you will eventually have to ask yourself, "To whom does the title *Lord* refer in this expression?" Is it ambiguous, or can we define to whom it refers when we read about *the way of the Lord*? Let's start by looking at how it's used in the preaching of John the Baptist:

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'" (Luke 3:4).

You probably already guessed it—yes, *Lord* refers to the Lord Jesus here, and not to God. So by the time John the Baptist began his announcement of the coming of the Messiah, the term *Lord* had begun to take on an exciting new dimension. It meant *the Messiah*.

John was a trendsetter and John's use of the term *Lord* gained popular use among the Jews very quickly. In fact, as we move into the book of Acts and get into the apostles' preaching, the term *the Lord* was used almost completely as a title for Jesus. This was part of a revolution—not of Jesus taking God's place, but of the Messianic hope which had been fulfilled! The apostles wanted everyone to understand who the long-awaited Messiah had been revealed to be—Jesus of Nazareth.

At the times of the apostles, when Christians used *Lord* to refer to Jesus they were doing more than using a title to show their faith in Jesus' authority, they were affirming their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Nobody had ever done this before in all of Jewish history—at least not on such a large, even global scale. It was revolutionary because *Lord* was a title people only used for God, or (on rare occasions) for the Angel of the Lord. The disciples of Jesus, whose number were growing daily, would call Jesus *Lord* with the same reverence with which they called God *Lord*. How could they get away with it? Didn't the Jews think that it blasphemous?

- the Lord of the Lord Jesus

- ...the term *Lord* had begun to take on an exciting new dimension.

- ...a revolution—... of the Messianic hope which had been fulfilled!

- ...they were affirming their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

• ...calling the Messiah *Lord* was perfectly justified according to the hope of Judaism.

Those who hated the Christians thought that it was blasphemous indeed—but calling the Messiah *Lord* was perfectly justified according to the hope of Judaism.

[Paul speaking to the Roman Jews said] ‘My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans... It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain’ (Acts 28:17, 20).

The Lord, the Messiah had to be the Son of God—and the Son of God wasn’t just anybody. He had equality with God! The Jews knew that and hated Jesus for it.

... on account of this the Jews were seeking even more to kill him, because he [Jesus]... was calling God his own Father, thus²⁸⁸ making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Any authentic believer in the Scriptures was aware that the Messiah had such great authority from God that he deserved to be called *the Lord*. Sometimes the apostles would even refer to God as *Lord* and Jesus as *Lord* in the same sentence! They had no problems with that. This kind of bold faith in Christ the Lord is what you can see in the passages from Acts that follow:

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord’s hand [God’s hand] was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord [Jesus]... a great number of people were brought to the Lord [Jesus] (Acts 11:20-21,24).

[Paul rebukes a sorcerer] ‘... Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord [God]? Now the hand of the Lord [God] is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.’

Immediately mist and darkness came over him [the sorcerer], and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord [Jesus] (Acts 13:10-12).

²⁸⁸ The translators of the LEB give this footnote: “Here ‘thus’ is supplied as a component of the participle (‘making’) which is understood as result.” Like the LEB translators, we also believe that it’s important to include the *thus* in the translation so that the meaning of the passage is as clear as possible.

In Acts 18, the same chapter in which a household “believed in the Lord” (v. 8) meaning that they believed in Jesus, and the same chapter in which “the Lord [Jesus] spoke to Paul in a vision” (v. 9), we have another reference to *the Lord* which may not be as easy to understand as the others. Nevertheless, the passage is not too difficult to interpret if we understand how to make comparisons. Luke employs the comparative adverb *more accurately* in the passage. Pay close attention to its meaning by reading the text which follows. Hopefully, you’ll get the meaning.

•...understand how to make comparisons

This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus... but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:25-26; NASB)

Apollos understood the way of *the Lord*, but Priscilla and Aquila taught him the way of *God* more accurately. To understand this passage, you have to understand that *more accurately* is a comparative adverb. Adverbs let us know how actions are performed. They describe verbs in the same way adjectives describe nouns.

Luke (who wrote Acts) compares one way of teaching with another way of teaching. He compares teaching *accurately* with teaching *more accurately*. God inspired Luke to use the expression *more accurately* for a reason. God’s reason was to help us to see how Priscilla and Aquila improved upon the teaching which Apollos had already been teaching accurately.

Since it’s impossible to say that Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos *more accurately* something different (the comparative adverb can only be used when referring to just one activity), the *Lord* of the passage by necessity must be God. If Priscilla and Aquila improved upon the teaching of *the way of the God*, then it has to be the same thing as *the way of the Lord* that Apollos already spoke and taught about. That’s how we know that the *Lord* of the passage is most certainly the Lord God, our Father.

