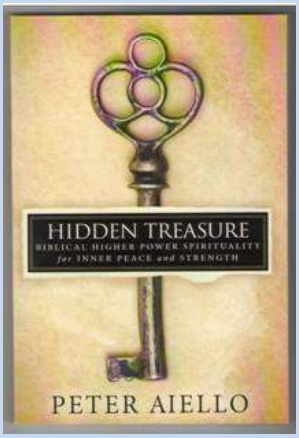

HIDDEN TREASURE

By Peter Aiello

BIBLICAL HIGHER POWER SPIRITUALITY
FOR INNER PEACE AND STRENGTH

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The purpose of this book is to present the unique Biblical method for connecting with God through Jesus Christ. It does not have multiple steps or complicated formulas because its power is in its simplicity. It has terms such as unconditional trust in God, humility toward God, surrender, self-abandonment, and self-emptying. I feel that it has been neglected for too long in historic Christianity, to the extent that it is considered an anomaly. It has been replaced primarily with legalism, which has no power to transform an individual; and things that were intended to supplement Christianity have been made primary. I show how the Biblical method opens us up to the Spirit of Christ, which brings us the Divine inner peace and strength to deal with our human weakness. The Spirit of Christ opens us up to His rest.

Among other things, human weakness manifests itself in excessive worry, anger, unforgiveness, compulsions, and addictions. I feel that the original New Testament spirituality needs to be presented to the modern world because it is usually not presented in its purest form by contemporary Christianity. Because of this, Christianity is not as effective as it should be; and people have gone elsewhere to seek inner peace. The Bible presents us with the peace that passes all understanding, which is an infused Divine inner peace that comes to us from beyond ourselves. This book is a product of my personal spiritual journey, and is a synthesis of psychology, spirituality, and theology. It is a mixture of knowledge and insights which I have gathered over the years: insights that came at unexpected times and circumstances.

I was born in New York City and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area of California where I found my relationship with God through His guidance and instruction from the Scriptures. I wrote this book as an evangelism tool for myself and others. I pray that God uses it for the furtherance of His Kingdom.

I dedicate this work to God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, without whom none of this would have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my earthly father, Girolamo Aiello, and my mother, Rosaria (Balistreri) Aiello for bringing me into this world to experience the wonderful love of God that is in Christ Jesus. They were both born near the city of Palermo in Sicily, Italy: my father in Aspra, and my mother in Sant'Elia (Saint Elijah). I couldn't ask for a better pedigree.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to present Christianity as it was during its earliest stages; therefore, I quote a great deal of Scripture to substantiate my thoughts. I pray that my insights are in line with the original intent of the writers. This appears to be a never-ending work in progress because it changes in concert with the changes in my thoughts and personal life.

When I was in my late twenties, I got into an Eastern philosophy that completely changed my approach to finding contentment and fulfillment in life. Even though I used it only for a few years, it taught me that it was impossible to find happiness and peace when we make them dependent upon acquiring things that we desire: a novel idea for me at the time; but it was an idea that I subsequently found also in the Bible. We never arrive at ongoing contentment by pursuing things for happiness, because pursuit never ends, and we will always want more. Humanity is wired for this; therefore, it is difficult for a person to recognize any other way of arriving at contentment. We need to abandon or reject the whole idea of pursuing things for contentment in order to arrive at it; but this needs to be taught to us.[1]

According to this philosophy, thoughts and desires are considered to be hindrances to awareness or observation, which is the place of inner peace and love; therefore, to be optimally aware, we would need to eliminate them by observing them as mindlessly as possible for arriving at peace and love. Inner peace is not viewed as something that we actively seek. It is already there when we eliminate the hindrances; but this is difficult to do. The fact that this philosophy even spoke of a place of inner peace for us was an idea that I had not been taught; but I was very attracted to it because of my lack of peace and strength.

It told me that I should no longer rely on my thoughts and desires for arriving at inner peace, because it resulted from being detached from thoughts and desires. This immediately caused a major change in the direction of in my life because I realized that they did not need to be my primary concern. This idea may have made me more aware of the instruction in the Bible for arriving at the inner peace from God, after I noticed that not leaning on thoughts and desires was also taught there; otherwise, I could have easily overlooked it.[2]

In the Bible, the carrier of peace is the Holy Spirit within us, who produces the fruit of the Spirit for us. This gives us peace and strength over our thoughts and desires so that we can

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[1] Cf. Romans 10:17; Ephesians 4:22

[2] Cf. Proverbs 3:5; Isaiah 26:3; 55:6-9; Philippians 4:6-7; 1Peter 5:5-7; James 4:6; 2Corinthians 10:5; Psalms 33:22; 112:7-8; 118:8-9; 138:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:2; Matthew 7:22-23

have greater control over them, instead of being enslaved by them.[1] We acquire peace from God by unconditionally trusting in Him; but in Eastern philosophy we are told that we are born with peace, and that we need to find it within us; but it did not offer a path for overcoming the perceived difficulty of arriving at it. I came to understand that Christ enables us to have God's sustained peace which is beyond our thoughts.

Peaceful thoughts can only be temporary because they are easily replaced by anxious thoughts. This happens because the law of sin thwarts our best efforts.[2] Under this law, we are enslaved by thoughts and desires even by those which are viewed as positive. There is freedom only with grace from God because, without it, we remain under this law of sin that prevents our thoughts and desires from being effectively managed by our wills.

Desires provide empty promises. The Law of Diminishing Returns sets in because, as you acquire more of something, satisfaction diminishes so that you require more and more of it to produce the same amount of satisfaction, until it is no longer useful for that purpose. This made sense to me because I tried to find contentment in this way, and it ended in frustration. The Bible speaks of deceitful lusts.[3] My personal experiences validated this understanding, so I immediately responded favorably to it; and it brought about a major shift of priorities for finding happiness, which changed the direction of my life.

This brought me to an understanding of my first major spiritual paradox, which is that we acquire by elimination. When we realize that desiring things for the purpose of finding our happiness does not produce ongoing happiness or contentment in life, we reject the process: or we don't take it quite as seriously. Many non-Christian spiritualities value the idea that pursuing desires for happiness is not conducive to peace and contentment in life, because it hinders the attainment of their view of enlightenment. This understanding is also important in Biblical spirituality because it enables us to more willingly and freely draw close to God for peace and contentment, and to arrive at a Christian enlightenment that comes from God. Without our interaction with the Biblical God, our worldly pursuits for finding happiness keep us alienated from Him, and unfulfilled.[4] Even our pursuit of God needs to end by resting in Him from the pursuit.

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[1] Cf. Galatians 5:22; Romans 6:17-18
[2] Cf. Romans 7:14-8:4; Matthew 26:41
[3] Cf. Ephesians 4:22-24
[4] Cf. James 4:1-10; Matthew 6:33; 26:41; Romans 7:14-8:4; Jeremiah 17:5-8

The Eastern philosophy also taught me my second major paradox which is that I have more control over thoughts, feelings, and emotions when I don't fear them or try to fight them: and I don't try to distract them with varying escapes. What I had concluded from this was that the method of removing them from my mind was to passively observe them without trying to push them out myself by using my own willpower. This effected a major turning point in my life because it immediately gave me a tool to use for dealing with the oppression in my mind. It was my first encounter with the idea that our own willpower and resolve are not strong enough to deal with worry, anger, stress, unforgiveness, obsession, compulsion, addiction, and frustration from unfulfilled desires; which is something that our own experience always tells us. I later saw that Biblical higher power spirituality has the idea that when we yield control to God for removing these feelings and emotions, we disassociate ourselves from trying to use our own willpower for removing them. Biblical spirituality also recognizes the insufficiency of our willpower for meaningful self-control; and for this reason, posits the yielding of the self, which, in the Bible, is done toward the Biblical God.

The instruction from the Eastern Philosophy was very helpful for me at the time; and it subsequently steered my inquiry within the Bible a few years later when I was searching for more answers. I wanted to see if the concept of emptying self for inner peace was also in the Bible. It was, and I may have not pursued it if I had not been exposed to this concept in Eastern philosophy which I was attracted to. I believe that these paradoxes made me receptive to the Biblical ideas of unconditional trust in God and the emptying of self toward God for inner peace, which I probably would not have otherwise been interested in or even noticed. I began to consider them as an alternative method for arriving at inner peace.

The Eastern philosophy did not recommend meditation practices such as visualization, concentration, or mantras because these were also considered to be diversions from simple awareness, but it immediately gave me a technique to use for dealing with my emotional life. Even though there was no Biblical God in it, it started the process of moving me away from my preoccupation with thoughts and desires. In the Bible, I found similar ideas, but a much more effective method for dealing with my emotions.

After I had started using the Eastern philosophy, I became interested in exploring other viewpoints. A few years later, I attended a lecture by an Indian guru who said that all religions are basically the same. He made me wonder what Christianity had to offer in regards to what I had been learning: this, in spite of not hearing of this type of thing when I was growing up. I

don't agree with the guru's opinion now; but he set in motion, a pursuit which ended with my inquiry into the Bible. Before that, I didn't know that the Bible had teachings on arriving at inner peace; and also strength, which are not available apart from God.

The Eastern philosophy didn't seem to have a clearly defined view of any god, except that it spelled the word *reality* with a capital "R". I later learned that this generally excludes the idea of a transcendent Biblical God; and is closer to the monistic idea that everything is god or a manifestation of god and that there is an innate presence of god in all things, including us. Even though it provided me with my initial instruction on inner peace, and made me aware that this was what I was actually searching for in all my pursuits, the Bible eventually taught me that the Biblical God was the only one who can provide a sustained reality of it.[1]

I didn't recall hearing these types of things during my Catholic upbringing, but I was immediately attracted to them when I did hear them; and started using them prior to revisiting Christianity through the instruction in the Bible. There, God has an active role in improving our emotional lives. He created us in such a way that, without Him, our own willpower or resolve is not enough for exercising meaningful self-control. I didn't know that Christianity had these very important elements. The ongoing frustration that was a part of my life prior to this understanding, apparently, made me receptive to these ideas in Eastern philosophy; and subsequently in the Bible where I was surprised to also find them.

At first, all of this appeared to be psychology; but after I inquired into the Bible, it morphed into spirituality. Without fully realizing it at the time, I was learning that spirituality has a strong psychological component. Christianity is supposed to affect us psychologically. Because of the similarities that I saw between the Eastern philosophy and the Bible; and because, at first, there didn't seem to be any clear lines of demarcation between the two, my curiosity brought me into a further inquiry of the Bible. Later, the opposite views of God and how to relate to Him became evident between the two; and by that time, I was willing to try the Biblical method.

It was at about the age of 30 that I started my inquiry into the Bible. Rather than looking for answers by attempting to wade through 2000 years of Christian history, which seemed like a daunting task, I ended up going to the Bible itself which contains the source material for Christianity. It seemed easier and more practical to go to the beginning, rather than to work my way back from the present time. I found this approach to be extremely rewarding because

[1] Cf. John 15:11, 16; Psalms 55:22; 1Corinthians 1:8; 2Timothy 1:12

I soon began to notice that the Bible has spiritual instructions that are not being used by most of today's Christianity, and that have been generally ignored for many centuries. I'll call it unconditional trust in God. I found it to be both extremely simple and powerful at the same time. Because it was different from the Eastern practice, it took me a while before I was willing to try it. When I did try it, I found that the benefits of the Eastern philosophy which I had been practicing for a few years prior, paled in comparison with the benefits from what I had found in the Bible through my own private reading: so the Bible became extremely important for me. I not only found a greater inner peace than in the past, but inner strength as well. Because non-Christian philosophies do not recognize that our weakened human nature is the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience and separation from God, their practices fall short and do not lift us out of our weakened state in spite of their attempts to promote inner peace. In Christianity, peace and strength are fruits of the Holy Spirit, whose presence we receive by repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ.[1]

This is true of everything in Christianity. The Biblical God provides a greater sustained reality of these things than we could ever have without Him. It comes about by following Biblical instruction on how to connect with Him, which has been available for thousands of years; and not by a supposed natural evolution into a higher consciousness, which excludes God's plan of salvation. If I had relied on Christian organizations to point these things out, I'd still be waiting: or not waiting. Biblical Christianity brought into fruition all that I had previously learned, and even more than I could have ever imagined, even though it was considered to be difficult to arrive at by the Eastern Philosophy. The Bible taught me how to internalize Christianity in a way that deeply affected my emotional life. When I was growing up, I had no idea that Christianity had these elements, and that this was even possible. Apparently, this is also true of many others because I often encounter people who have turned against Christianity because of a very superficial presentation of it when they were growing up. This is unfortunate because it is anything but superficial in its Biblical form.

A quasi Christian organization that I was interacting with during that time encouraged self-learning and using of various Bible tools such as lexicons, concordances, commentaries, and dictionaries. These were helpful for locating scriptures, and for finding the information that I was looking for. The reference material, along with comparing different translations of Scripture, was helpful in understanding texts that were difficult or unclear. At times, my personal conclusions were definitely in the minority. I was determined to read the Bible with

[1] Cf. Acts 20:21

as little denominational bias as was possible. The organization did have a theological point of view; but when it became evident to me that it conflicted with the one that I was developing, I separated from the group; but what I had found in Scripture was so important to me that it has taken me through all of the subsequent changes in my life, to where I am now; "For the word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the separating of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[1]

Our view of God determines the method that we use for arriving inner peace. Each view has its own practices, and its own results. Throughout this work, I use the words *dualism* and *monism* in referring to the major views of God in the world. Dualism views God and creation as separate from each other. God is the Creator who existed prior to His creation. He transcends His creation, which is why the Biblical God is called a transcendent God. The Bible is very dualistic in its worldview. Monism refers to god as immanent; which is the view that god is everything, including us; and that there is no transcendent Creator God. Most of the world's religions fall into one of these two categories, although, at times, the dualistic God can be somewhat immanent, and the monistic god can be somewhat dualistic. The Biblical God can be immanent in the sense that His Spirit can inhabit us if we are humble recipients of it; but this does not make us God. He does not want us to worship Him in His creation, which includes people who are carriers of His Spirit. There are those who excuse the practice by saying that they are worshipping only God in that object or person; but it is still not permitted. The monistic god can be dualistic in the sense that our thoughts are naturally dualistic, and that we always tend to view god as something other than ourselves even though we may philosophically believe otherwise; but still end up worshipping the objects of creation because of the view that everything is a part of god or a manifestation of god. This tendency is evident in human history.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a beautiful passage of Scripture in the Catholic Bible, which, when speaking about Wisdom, states: "If he entrusts himself to her, he will inherit her: and his descendents will remain in possession of her; for, at first, she walks with him through crooked ways bringing fear and dread on him, and plagues him with her discipline, and tests him by her laws until she can trust him. Then she will strengthen him, and lead him back to the straight way and give him joy: and will disclose her secrets to him. But if he goes astray, she

[1] Hebrews 4:12

will forsake him, and deliver him into the hands of the enemy. Son, observe the time, and fly from evil."[1]

I would like to share my insights.

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[1] Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 4:16-22

1. HUMAN WEAKNESS (Law of Sin)

Biblical spirituality, unlike others, is based on the premise that we are all born in a psychologically weakened state because of Adam and Eve's transgression. This happened abruptly when they disobeyed God and separated from Him. They immediately experienced a severe change of consciousness that was passed down to the rest of us.[1] Saint Paul describes it as follows: "I am carnal, relegated to be under sin, for I do what I don't want to allow for myself: I don't do what I want to do; and I do what I hate to do. If then I don't do what I want to do, I'm conceding that the law is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing; for being willing is within my power, but I don't find the strength to perform what is good. I don't do the good that I want to do; but I do the evil that I don't want to do. Now, if I do what I don't want to do, I am no longer doing it, but it is sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that, when I want to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God concerning the inward man; but I see another law within me, warring against the law of my mind, which brings me into captivity to the law of sin that is within me. Oh, what a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So, then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin."[2] Humans have a bent or a predisposition toward weakness called the law of sin that can only be corrected by God. This predisposition distorts our minds by exaggerating the importance of our thoughts and desires for arriving at happiness, and makes them difficult to control. Our thoughts need to be subordinated to God in order to correct this; therefore, we are told to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding."[3]

Regardless of whether a person philosophically believes in the law of sin or not, it is a reality within all of us. We have a propensity for worry, anger, stress, unforgiveness, obsession, compulsion, addiction, and the frustration that comes from pursuing desires which are always unfulfilled; but we don't have the basic resources within us to effectively counter these things. For example, I know that I shouldn't smoke or be excessive in any way, but I can't stop. I know that I shouldn't worry so much or be continuously angry, but I can't control it. I experience boredom or loneliness, but it keeps coming back even after I've done everything possible to distract it. I am frustrated because I have desires that are never completely satisfied or

[1] Cf. Genesis 3:6-11
[2] Romans 7:14-25
[3] Proverbs 3:5

fulfilled, even when I've acquired what I desired. We have willpower; but we lack the strength to effectively use it. Have I missed anybody? Our minds tell us to do one thing, but our emotions and impulses drive us in a different direction. They easily override our willpower. One part of the brain doesn't cooperate with the other. The feeling of powerlessness that we experience during a time of crisis is a reminder that, without God, powerlessness is our normal state of being. Some believe that humans will naturally evolve out of this state; but this implies that God did not create us to be dependent upon Him. The Bible tells us otherwise. Dependence on God should be our natural state.

Our own willpower or resolve doesn't work as efficiently as we would like. Even if we discipline ourselves and make a concerted effort for a period of time, the strong counter-tendencies remain. Our ability to make rational decisions is compromised; and we don't have as much control as we would like. This is our normal state of consciousness without the Biblical God. Recognizing the limitations of our willpower and our need for God are important first steps on the path towards acquiring Divine peace and strength. Admitting that we are weak without God is to admit reality.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."[1] "Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread; and He will be for you a holy place"[2]. What comes next? "You that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield."[3] This theme runs throughout the Bible, and is the essence of Biblical spirituality. Unconditional trust in God is the means by which we open up to Him, and to His peace and strength; and this is taught in both Old and New Testaments. We don't need to be afraid of God when we unconditionally trust Him, because we open up to His love. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love."[4]

Some will complain that God is being used as a crutch. The answer to that is: how true. He wants to be our crutch; it's for our own good. He created us in such a way that we function poorly without Him. He is the potter; we are the clay. "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the

[1] Proverbs 9:10
[2] Isaiah 8:13-14
[3] Psalms 115:11; cf. 31:19-20; Proverbs 22:4
[4] 1John 4:18; cf. Psalms 34:4; 2Timothy 1:7

way that you should go."[1] Human pride prevents most people from attaching themselves to God; and as a result, they do not benefit from His favor and support.

In the debate between those who say that we are born weak and flawed, and those who say that we are born perfect, Scripture says that we are all born weak and flawed. "But the Scripture has concluded all under sin"[2]. "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and my mother conceived me in sin."[3] Culture and conditioning play a part in our imperfection, but they don't totally explain it. We are born imperfect from the effects of Adam and Eve's original sin; and we start to experience it at a very early age.

Satan tempted Adam and Eve with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They discovered that their separation from God produced fear, weakness, shame, and death for them; which is something that Satan didn't tell them. Without God, knowing right from wrong wasn't what they thought it would be. Merely knowing this isn't enough to overcome our weakness. Our reason or intellect is inadequate for overcoming our human weakness or tendency toward sin and our compromised willpower. Observing ourselves and the world around us should make this obvious. We need to recognize that in order to overcome weakness, we need God.

This tendency or inclination towards sin manifests itself in sin actions. We sin (action) because we are sinners (weakness/law of sin); we are not sinners because we sin. Sin actions do not create this predisposition within us, because it is there from birth. Basically, Paul says that there is a struggle within us between what we think we should do and what we actually do, and that the "law of sin" has the upper hand over the law of the mind. We can all identify with this inner struggle, from the hardened addict to the respectable church lady. It makes our willpower operate at diminished capacity so that it cannot function at its best; and that is why we do things that we don't want to do. Our sin nature has a strong hold on us, and hinders us from doing what we know is right. This is the result of the law of sin. Once we are no longer hindered by this law, the will is free to function as it was originally intended to. This is the essence of Christian freedom.

When we don't acknowledge the effects of the law of sin that we all obviously experience, we will rely on temporary solutions. Because we are so accustomed to the effects of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we think that what we now experience is natural and

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[1] Isaiah 48:17; cf. Jeremiah 10:23; Romans 9:21; James 4:6; 1Peter5:5
[2] Galatians 3:22
[3] Psalms 51:5

human; but it is not. It is important for us to recognize the opposing laws within us, and understand their origin in order to find the most effective solution.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 says that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit.". The law of sin is a reality within us, and not just a theological concept; and just because people may say that they don't believe in it, it doesn't negate the reality of it within them. It may be attributed to something else, but the reality remains. Paul tells us that this tendency and weakness towards sin came about through Adam,[1] and not just some evolutionary fluke; and that Jesus Christ, the last Adam, became the remedy for the law of sin by becoming a life-giving Spirit that is able to reside in us, and enable us to more effectively use our willpower.[2] This initially became available for us after His death and resurrection during the Jewish feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Jesus Christ enlivens and transforms us by His presence within us; and we open up to His presence by our faith in Him; "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."[3] Christ, when He enlivens us, greatly increases our ability to freely exercise our willpower. In order to acquire His presence, it's important to understand how the word faith was used in Biblical times, in contrast with its current usages. I discuss this in the chapter on Biblical Spirituality.

Desire or lust requires special attention because it is one of the main things that shows our weakness, and hinders us from moving towards God. The word *desire* can be synonymous with the word *want*, which is quite acceptable; but it is can also be synonymous with *greed* and *lust*, which is what I am referring to when I use the word. A desired object becomes a substitute for God when we mistakenly think that it will give us lasting contentment or satisfaction that can only come from God. It maintains our separation from God because, unbeknown to us, the object that we desire can never ultimately provide the ongoing fulfillment that we are looking for; but we continue to pursue it with that expectation. This is not unusual. It is part by our sin nature.

The bible calls inordinate desires "deceitful lusts"[4]. They are the proverbial carrot on the stick, and are driven by self-deception because we mistakenly believe that eventually, there is going to be fulfillment, satisfaction, or contentment. This doesn't materialize because it is not possible for desire to arrive at this place; therefore, there is inevitable frustration. Desire is

[1] Cf. Romans 5:12-21
[2] Cf. 1Corinthians 15:45; Romans 4:25
[3] Romans 8:2
[4] Ephesians 4:22; cf. 1Peter 4:2; 2Peter 1:4

never supposed to be completely satisfied. It continually reasserts itself. What actually happens is that as we get intermediate gratifications, but never complete fulfillment, we get confused and frustrated, and don't understand why we never arrive at fulfillment even though we may have acquired the desired object; and this produces an ongoing frustration that increases with more episodes of non-fulfillment. We see this in people who can never get enough of what they are seeking. When I was experiencing this frustration, I didn't understand why it persisted.

Addictions and compulsions are linked to this because whatever we desire controls us.[1] The misguided hope of fulfillment drives us to continuously repeat the act. The escapes and distractions that we use to deal with the ongoing frustration also become addictive because the frustration remains regardless of the temporary distractions. The ongoing frustration keeps fueling the addiction.

Lust and greed are parts of the law of sin, and keeps us away from God. Our separation from God compels us to find remedies for its accompanying feelings and consequences; and its accompanying desires create unrealistic expectations of fulfillment from sources other than God. Unless God draws us to Himself, we remain misdirected and unfulfilled. When we want or need something, we only need to acquire it or pray for it with faith: not lust for it.

Many people die unfulfilled, thinking that if they had only acquired what they were seeking, they would be happy; but there is never a conclusion or an ending with desiring. It will always continue to assert itself regardless of how much we acquire; yet we are deceived into thinking that it will come to an end when we have enough of what we are seeking. Our own self-deception tells us that we will be happy and content when we acquire the object. When we come to realize what actually happens, we can stop pursuing the object altogether, or we can continue to pursue it with a more realistic expectation because the object itself may be good or useful, but the motive for wanting it may be unrealistic.

Another problem with trying to satisfy desire for arriving at contentment is that we continually postpone our peace or contentment until we've acquired the object. When we notice that the object doesn't produce the ongoing contentment that we expect, we, instead, go on to another one with the same expectation. The process itself is self-defeating because when we postpone peace, the process remains ongoing. Those engaged in this will never be content or at peace because ongoing peace and contentment come only from God after we reject the

[1] Cf. Genesis 3:16; 2Peter 2:19; 1Peter 4:2; Romans 6:15-16

process of looking elsewhere. They never need to be postponed because they are a part of God's presence within us when we acquire them by unconditional trust in Him; and not by attempting to acquire peace and contentment by fulfilling desires.

We surrender and rest from our desires when we unconditionally trust in God, including desires for things that we consider to be good. Even desiring God moves the relationship with God and its resulting peace into the indefinite future, and renders it unattainable. He does not want us to endlessly long for Him. He wants us to receive Him by unconditional trust. This can bring the relationship into the present, and makes it an immediate reality. This is how we live in the present: God's way. Peace needs to be a present reality for us, and not something that is indefinitely postponed.

Ultimately, the cause of human dissatisfaction is our sin nature; "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace."[1] Christians should operate within a framework of peace, and not frustration. Our Godly path should be a path of peace and moderation.[2]

God does not give us peace and contentment by satisfying our desires: even for Him; instead, He subordinates our desires when we surrender them to Him. God is not a substitute object of desire which invariably produces frustration. He is the object of trust which produces inner peace. He operates within the framework of our legitimate desires when we trust in Him. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him. Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him."[3]

We do not need to wait or hope for a certain feeling such as passion, obsession, desire, or a specific level of emotion for God in order to draw close to Him; we only need the willingness to do it. We will postpone our relationship with Him when we expect some feeling beforehand; or, we will believe that we are not approaching God in the proper way if we don't have that felling.

A person without feeling is not at a disadvantage when it comes to unconditional trust in God because trust is a resting of the mind on God regardless of our emotional level: and it can be done in a very methodical way. Everyone is capable of doing it: but not everyone is willing

[1] James 3:17-18.
[2] Cf. Romans 3:17; Philippians 4:5-7; Isaiah 55:12
[3] Psalms 34:8-9; cf. Matthew 6:33

because it requires us to relinquish control over ourselves. Those who feel that God is supposed to be approached with emotion may actually be less willing to unconditionally trust in Him, or will resist it entirely because it may seem too passive for them.

Using only our emotions to approach God implies that our level of emotion is more important than trust in God, and that we receive God through our own feelings. They actually keep us confined within our own minds, and block us from receiving that which is beyond, which includes God's agape love that we need to effectively minister to ourselves and to others. Surrender of our minds to God is what takes us beyond the limitations of our thoughts and emotions, and brings us Divine peace and strength. Expecting an emotional feeling towards God in order to approach Him merely postpones it. It not only postpones our relationship with Him, but it brings anxiety and confusion because emotions fluctuate, and we will never know to our satisfaction whether our level of emotion for God is sufficient. It's best to let God establish our emotional level after we have surrendered all.

What we have left after we surrender our minds to God is a mind that is enhanced by God's peace and strength in our lives. What appears to be a form of psychological suicide, is a life enhanced by the Holy Spirit and grace. When I rested my entire mind on God, I got much more than the inner peace that I was seeking at the time; I received His strength as well. I didn't know what to expect until I actually did it; but I immediately had the most transforming experience in my life. I believe that the extremely passive-receptive stance toward God is what immediately drew Him in. It was as easy as literally being anxious for nothing by casting all of my care on God.[1] I rested my entire mind on God.

Instruction on how to unconditionally trust in God is found in the Word of God.[2] I personally found the Bible to be the only reliable place to find it in its purest and most effective form. Trust is surrender; emotionalism is not regardless of what we affirm or declare in the process. When we relinquish control over ourselves towards God, we actually gain more control because He greatly reduces the power that our sin nature has over us. Trust in God requires an act of the will because, as a result of the law of sin, we do not do it automatically. "All we like sheep have gone astray; everyone has turned aside into his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."[3]

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[1] Cf. 1Peter 5:5-7; Philippians 4:6-7; Proverbs 3:5; James 4:5-10; Isaiah 55:7-9
[2] Cf. Romans 10:17; 1Peter 5:5-7; Philippians 4:6-7; Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalms 37:7; 55:22; Isaiah 26:3-4; 55:7-9
[3] Isaiah 53:6; cf. Psalms 14:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10

Our inner struggle is one of the obvious results of the law of sin, and is an important reason for why Jesus Christ came into this world. He strengthens us to individually overcome our human weakness or tendency toward sin. When we connect the law of sin with our weakness, we get a better understanding of what Christian spirituality is supposed to remedy. Christianity is more than just a belief system. It is supposed to have a transforming effect on us, which gives us the peace and the strength to deal with our human weakness so that we are free to use our human wills for doing good, for both ourselves and others.[1] The law of sin hinders us from making objective choices.

During my early Catholic upbringing, my main challenge was to avoid, what Catholics call, mortal sin so that I could participate in the Eucharist or Table of the Lord on Sunday. If I did lapse into mortal sin, which was often, I would confess it to the presbyter for absolution. This was the extent of my Christian spirituality. Catholics believe that they can literally bounce in and out of salvation hundreds of times during their lifetimes. I had no concept of a personal Savior who was willing and able to help me deal with my inner struggles, and no concept of unconditional trust in God. There was no peace and strength to deal with my weakness in spite of my many religious activities and observances. Unfortunately, outside of the Bible, concepts of inner peace and strength are difficult to find anywhere in Christianity, but they are an essential part of it. I later found that Divine peace and strength were available for me, and that I needed a deeper form of Christianity than the one I grew up with in order to open up to them.

Even though we may not know how we will eventually find what we really need, Christ tells us to "seek, and you will find"[2]. In my case, it came about in totally unexpected ways. When I was growing up, I may have had a fair amount of intellectual knowledge about Catholicism, but I didn't know that Christianity could help me deal with my emotional issues. There is no need for Christian counselors, spiritual directors, or therapists when we experience the fullness of Christianity. Relegating parts of it to the field of psychology denotes a lack of Biblical understanding.

Most of us understand the process of accumulating knowledge, but most of us don't know how to effectively subordinate our minds to God. I now realize that in order to be well-balanced individuals, we need to subordinate our minds to God, and not just feed the intellect. By subordinating I mean that we need to rest our minds rest on God and allow Him to bring us

[1] Cf. Romans 5:6; 1John 5:3-5
[2] Matthew 7:7

into His rest. In the Bible, this is called repentance which is more than feeling guilty about our sinning. It is a move towards God that enables us to be strengthened from sinning.

Again, we notice that our own willpower or resolve doesn't work very well. We need God as our Higher Power in order to more effectively use our willpower. This is not only for people with obvious addictions but for all of us because none of us are in full control of ourselves. When we, for example, have ordinary tendencies toward worry, anger, or unforgiveness, the circumstances are not the problem: our tendency is the problem, which is a part of our human weakness or law of sin. We need to subordinate everything to God. He understands that there are things that we may not have thought of; but He looks at the intent of the heart. This is why it is not a difficult thing to do. The only thing that's required is the intention to surrender everything to God, which includes our desires. This is because, at the actual moment of surrender, we are only able to consciously surrender the thought that is in our minds at that moment. By our intention, we can rest our entire minds upon Him all at one time; and we can do it whenever we are willing to do so: at any place or time. When we are consciously selective in our surrender, we are holding back from God: and He notices it.

Surrendering to Christ enables us to more effectively use our willpower when Christ's Spirit is within us, even towards addictions. This affects everything that we deal with, including more than one addiction that we may have. It prevents replacing one addiction for another, or trying to deal with one addiction at a time. Total abstinence is advisable if the object itself is harmful; otherwise, moderation is in order. Total abstinence isn't always an option for us because, for example, if we have a food disorder such as overeating, we have no choice except to go for moderation. This may give us a greater incentive to go for the spiritual option because its effects are more beneficial and lasting. Those who use total abstinence in place of the spiritual option continue to struggle without God, in every way.

We can enhance our intellect by accumulating knowledge, but we enhance our emotional state by subordinating our minds to God. This is possible because the accumulation and subordination happen on two different levels: the mind and the heart; and this is why we don't need to be anti-intellectual or blank out our minds in order to be spiritual. We are supposed to end up with a rested heart: not a blank mind.[1] Our heart can be at rest and at peace while the mind continues to function. We can intellectualize without being anxious. Both the mind and the heart can be active simultaneously. With God, this is possible. We do

[1] Cf. Matthew 11:29; 19:26; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:1-2, 12; Proverbs 3:5-6

not lose our mind or our capacity to use it when we surrender it to God. In fact, a surrendered mind has a greater capacity for objectivity because we are not as easily distracted by negative thoughts and feelings; and we are not as self-absorbed; "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of moderation."[1]

When we enter into this existential state, the difference between heart and mind becomes apparent. Faith doesn't negate the intellect, and the intellect doesn't negate faith; they work together and support each other, and they can operate simultaneously. In this way, God can be part of everything that we think and do, and not be relegated only to a church building or a monastery; or only to prayer time. We don't have to think of God in order remain in His presence. If faith was purely intellectual, this would not be possible because thoughts of God would compete with the other thoughts in the intellect for attention; and faith would not be able to undergird everything that we think and do. Faith, when it is merely a belief in something that we don't understand, is only an intellectual function. Our view of faith needs to be expanded in order to break through into the realm of the Spirit; and to get into its deeper levels. This has been ignored for too long. Many people have abandoned Christianity because of an exclusively intellectual or a shallow legalistic presentation of it. It needs to give us peace and strength in order for it to be meaningful, as was originally intended; and not just leave us with continued weakness and accompanying guilt when we don't measure up to rules and regulations. There are church leaders who are afraid of real Christianity because of its freedom. They believe that people will interpret it as a freedom to sin, instead of freedom from sin; but this is no excuse to avoid preaching real Christianity. Saint Paul did not compromise with Christian freedom even though he was aware of this possibility. Teaching Christianity the correct way is the only viable alternative, even if there are those who will pervert it.[2]

Much of non-Christian philosophy, because of its monism which views everything as god, has a problem with separating heart and mind. The attempt to blank out the mind during meditation cannot be done at the same time as performing other activities that require the mind to be active. The same is true for visualization and concentration because they will compete with the other day-to-day mental activities for attention. Non-Christian philosophies are also incompatible with a strict monism, because if everything is god, that part of us that is trying to connect with the god that is already within us, is also god; therefore, the whole thing

[1] 2Timothy 1:7
[2] Cf. Romans 6; 14:17-18; Galatians 5:13; 2Peter 3:16

doesn’t make sense. In fact, a strict monism leads to total hedonism and relativism because our darkest instincts are also considered to be god.

The dilemma that I experienced when I was involved with Eastern philosophy was that it seemed like non-thinking was the ideal state for inner peace; but, as much as I tried, my mind would not fully cooperate. The ideal and the practical appeared to be at odds. Biblical spirituality eventually resolved this by, first of all, instructing me that I didn’t need to shut my thoughts down in order to have inner peace, but instead, to simply trust God unconditionally and not lean on my own thoughts; and, secondly, that Divine inner peace comes from the presence of God’s Spirit within me, and is not the product of negating thoughts and desires through my own practices or efforts.[1]

Unconditional trust in God subordinates our thoughts. It does not negate them. Our thoughts are part of our humanity. Arriving at inner peace is considered to be difficult by monists because they don't recognize that there is a law of sin that diminishes our capacity for controlling our thoughts. As a result, they believe that thoughts themselves are the problem. With Biblical spirituality, it seemed like I could almost think and not think at the same time because my thoughts were subordinated by the peace of God without rejecting them.

Prior to their disobedience, Adam and Eve were thinking beings with peace. After they removed their trust from God and applied it to themselves, they began to uncontrollably rely on their own thinking, and became subject to fearfulness and shame. They became self-absorbed and weak. We were not created by God to be fearful; but, to be at peace by trusting in Him. Fearfulness is an aberration that resulted from the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Because monism does not have this understanding, it has no basis for separating fearfulness from thought; and consequently, all thought needs to be negated in order to have inner peace. I recall how confusing this was for a period of time because, as part of our nature, we are thinking beings. The Bible doesn’t tell us to stop thinking; it tells us to not lean on our thinking. It recognizes the reality that we are thinking beings.

Because the monistic idea of negating all thoughts puzzled me, the Biblical idea of unconditional trust in God, or total subordination of all thought toward God, did not seem so unacceptable when I first encountered it: and made more sense. The idea of being anxious for nothing by casting all of my care on God didn’t seem like a huge leap or change. When I eventually adopted it, I realized that thoughts themselves are not the problem; but it’s our

[1] Cf. Proverbs 3:5-6; 2Corinthians 10:5; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:6-7; 1Peter 5:6-7; Deuteronomy 29:19-20; John 16:33

leaning upon them instead of God that creates a lack of peace. The Bible can make this distinction because we have a transcendent God to lean upon, who gives us a sustained Divine peace that is beyond all thought. We don't need to look elsewhere for an inferior peace. Because of this, I became aware that thoughts themselves do not need to be a hindrance to peace; but, without God, they are. We need the willingness to enter into God's place of peace in order to experience it.

With inner peace comes spiritual discernment. Because Divine inner peace comes from the presence of the Biblical Creator within us, it is not simply our own discernment. Divine discernment comes from our interaction with God. He infuses it for guiding us. The process begins when we receive truth through our intellect. Then truth tells us that our thoughts need to be subordinated to God in order for us to have spiritual discernment. Subsequently, spiritual discernment emerges automatically when the hindrances of ego and self are released toward God. Divine discernment resides in God's Spirit. It does not exist apart from the presence of God's Spirit within us by our faith in Him.[1]

Spiritual discernment works best when we are at peace. It is not something that we work to acquire, but something that emerges through elimination or release. The process of releasing ourselves toward God does not require effort; it only requires our willingness to do it. Biblical spirituality requires us to release our entire minds by using unconditional trust towards the Creator, in order to receive His presence and guidance. This concept is foreign to most of us because we usually assume that we receive things by accumulation and effort, rather than by elimination. Biblical spirituality is acquired by elimination toward God. Paradoxes are difficult to understand and accept, but spirituality is replete with them. The mind needs peace and rest to function well, and to rejuvenate itself. When it is overloaded, it will be prone to exaggerations and distortions. Addictions are, in part, the product of an unfettered mind that exaggerates the importance of a particular thing. This is also true of worry.

Have you ever noticed that when you are worried about something, the worry takes on a life of its own, and then starts to create scenarios that don't materialize? When the worry lessens or is distracted, possibly by another worry, we look back at the previous one and wonder why we ever gave it so much of our attention. A common worry or fear is that we will revert back into the unpleasant psychological state that we have emerged from; but Christ is able to

[1] Cf. John:16:13-15; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1; 1Thessalonians 5:21; 2Timothy 3:15; Isaiah 50:4-7

prevent this; "for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."[1]

The peace of God that comes from trusting in Him and yielding to His presence within us is like preventive medicine for our minds. It helps us to keep things in perspective and it prevents our minds from going off into a tangent: and keeps us centered in Christ. Trust and yielding to God maximize the fruit of the Holy Spirit within us. They neutralize the fear that gives our thoughts and emotions their power; therefore, they lose their power to keep us enslaved. The power of the Holy Spirit enables this. As a result, we have more God-given strength and control because we have surrendered our inferior strength and control

The Christian process of releasing ego or self is unconditional trust in God; and it results in a Divine discernment that is produced by the presence of the Creator within us, which is His guidance in our lives.[2] Even advancing age is not a barrier to continued discernment because, in God, we need not be limited and enclosed by fear at any age.[3] Unconditional trust or faith is a resting of the mind upon God, which includes resting the mind from spiritual practices such as visualization and concentration because these require the use of thought. These practices postpone and hinder our arriving at a relationship with the Biblical God when we substitute them for unconditional trust. They are attempts to use thought in order to get beyond thought, which is not possible. They are the opposite of what we are supposed to do in order to connect with God.[4] Unconditional trust is the opposite of self-striving to approach God.

Unfettered emotions and thoughts hinder discernment. They prevent us from realizing full awareness, and are a waste of energy. When our minds are preoccupied, we are not at our best; and trying to distract ourselves from our preoccupations is difficult. The lack of control that we experience is distressing. Many solutions are presented to us, but they are not all equally effective. Different methods produce different results. Not all enlightenments are the same. Christian enlightenment is the presence of Christ's Spirit within us; and "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"[5]. These qualities are the outgrowth of Christian spirituality and enlightenment; and are not caused by ascetic practices and exercises, or special diets, but by faith in Jesus Christ who is

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[1] 2Timothy 1:12; cf. Romans 6:11; 16:25
[2] Cf. Psalms 16:7; 25:9; 32:8; 48:14; 73:23-28; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 2:13; 1Corinthians 12:14-18; Titus 2:14; 2Peter 1:4
[3] Cf. Psalms 92:13-14
[4] Cf. Isaiah 55:6-9; Ephesians 3:20; Psalms 62:1; Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 4:9-10
[5] Galatians 5:22-23; cf. 1Corinthians 13; 1Timothy 6:11

the light of the world. He receives His light by His faith in the Father; and then Christ shares His light with us by His presence within us, which we receive by our faith in Him.

The Father sends the Spirit of His Son within us by our faith in His Son; therefore our enlightenment is actually Christ's own enlightenment from the Father that He shares with us. We can't have Christian enlightenment directly from the Father for ourselves without Christ. In much of non-Biblical spirituality, external things such as ascetic practices are used for producing spirituality; but they are useless for producing Christian spirituality because Christian spirituality is a product of our faith in Christ and His presence within us. Faith is the only practice that a Christian needs.[1] Other practices and things do not reconcile us to God; but they keep our separation from God intact: and they are therefore counterproductive.

The Old Testament previews New Testament enlightenment when it says: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined. You have multiplied the nation, and increased the joy; they rejoice before you according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil; for you have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."[2] This becomes a metaphor for what God does within us when He lifts our burdens.

Spiritual methods differ, depending upon the world-views that produce them. If I believe that everything is god and that I am god, I will go within myself to find god; and my method of releasing self will probably consist of yoga, breathing exercises, visualizations, or mantras. These practices are from earth or nature-based spiritualities; and our interaction is only with our own breathing, thoughts, or words, and not with the Creator. This is why they do not connect us with the Creator. Instead, they attempt to connect us with the creation.

They presuppose a god has always been within us, only to be discovered; but not a God to be received. These practices are also used by many Christians today, but they are modified to include Christian imagery or words. This does not essentially change them or make them more Christian, but gives the illusion that they are. You will not find them in the Bible despite their widespread use because they are not compatible with the dualistic view of Creator and creation in the Bible. They postpone or hinder us from receiving the Biblical God because our faith remains in our own actions, thoughts, or words rather than in Him; and interfere with the

[1] Cf. Colossians 2:20-23; Romans 14:17-18
[2] Isaiah 9:2-4

receptivity of our heart toward God that He requires of us. We continue to lean on our own minds instead of trusting in Him.[1] Within the dualistic Biblical framework they are called pride, which is resisted by God because we are attempting to do something that only He can do for us. The Biblical God is received by our faith in Him. He will not respond to practices that exclude Him, regardless of whether Christian imagery and words are used. Faith in the Biblical God requires a strict dualism that recognizes the difference between the Creator and His creation, which includes us.

Other examples of misplaced faith are faith in the Bible that excludes its Author; and faith in a church instead of in God. There is no substitute for direct faith in God through Jesus Christ. This is the only practice that is necessary. This is also true even after we have received Christ within us, because when we pray, it is required that we have faith in the One that we are praying to.[2] We, in all circumstances, go outward in trust towards the Creator God. Christ said: "I am the light of the world; he that follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life…believe in the light, that you may be the children of light."[3] Christ, because of His humanity, prayed to the Father and had faith in Him during His earthly ministry even though the Father was within Him; and He continues to do so with His immortal humanity, interceding for us at the right hand of God.

When we believe in a transcendent God, that there is a Creator God, and that we are a part of His creation, we need to acknowledge our dependence upon the Creator, and release our minds outward toward Him by unconditionally trusting in Him. This provides the means for releasing self. The Creator Himself becomes a part of the release method. He is not just some obscure thing already buried inside of us, that we are trying to contact with by using spiritual exercises or practices that include only ourselves but exclude Him. Releasing ourselves toward God is how we draw close to Him and receive His presence within us; and this is done by unconditionally trusting in Him and resting our minds upon Him. Christian transformation requires this type of interaction with God. This may not sound familiar to most Christians, but the Bible presents it in many different ways. It presupposes that we are not born with the presence of God, but we open up to Him after we are born. This complements the dualistic worldview that creation is not the Creator; and that we are able to acquire the presence of the Creator within us as an inhabiting Spirit if we become humble recipients of Him. We do not

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[1] Cf. Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 55:6-9; Ephesians 3:20
[2] Cf. Colossians 2:6; Hebrews 3:6, 14; James 1:6-7; Romans 14:23
[3] John 8:12; 12:36; cf. 3:18

discover a presence of a god which is already there; we open up to a presence of God that is not there to begin with. We need to become His dwelling place.[1]

Different world-views produce different perspectives and mindsets. Transcendent God or Higher Power spirituality is quite different from nature or earth-based spirituality. With Biblical Higher Power spirituality or mysticism, the thrust of the mind goes outward in trust towards the personal Creator God. He is the object of trust; not us or something else. Trust in God is imageless, and consists of resting our minds upon Him. In this way, we can connect with the unimaginable and eternal: that which is beyond our own minds, and limitless. This is how we avoid the problem of interacting only with ourselves in our spiritual practices. If, for example, we attempt to visualize God, we are not relating to God, but only to our own thought or mental image of God; and this is no different than having a relationship with a statue or a picture because these are also merely products of human imagination. They do not take us beyond ourselves and our limitations, even though we may rationalize that we are not relating to the statue or picture itself, but to the person that it represents.

It is impossible to visualize God or to have an accurate representation of Him; therefore, God is not going to require us to do the impossible. Visualizing God for worship or interaction constitutes idolatry: forbidden by God, which is worshipping and serving the creation rather than the Creator.[2] We end up worshipping a product of our own imagination, which is the same as worshipping any other object of creation. Evil spirits, which are created beings, will also present themselves as objects of worship, and will attempt to divert our attention from God; but spirits that are holy will not accept worship; they will always point us to God.[3] The same is true of evil and holy people.[4]

If we believe that everything is god and that we are god, we will not practice the required dependence and humility that open us up to the Biblical God and His grace, which make us one with Him without us being God at the same time. The duality of the Creator and us remains even when God's Spirit dwells within our spirit. Human beings *need* humility and dependence toward God because we are part of creation. Even Jesus Christ, the Creator incarnate, whose humanity and divinity are merged into one person while remaining separate

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[1] Cf. John 15:4; 17:22-23; Colossians 1:27
[2] Cf. Romans 1:21-25; Deuteronomy 29:19-20
[3] Cf. Matthew 4:9; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9; Tobit (Catholic Bible) 12:15-18; Colossians 2:18-19
[4] Cf. Acts 10:25-26; 12:21-23; 14:14-15

within Him, prays and has faith in the Father, because His humanity at the right hand of the Father in heaven still requires it. Jesus is Creator and creation within the same person.

Also, Christ's humanity requires humility toward the Father because His justification by faith by His faith in the Father, is not possible without it; and if Christ doesn't have justification by faith, we won't have it either because it will not be a part of His Spirit within us. This is the only way that it is available for us. God's plan of salvation requires Christ's humanity and humility. Christ's Spirit within us contains His human spirit which, like ours, needs to be humble. Everything that we receive from God comes to us as a result of the faith and intercession of the man Christ Jesus toward the Father.

Nature or earth-based spiritual practices promote oneness with God's creation because they are based on the view that everything is god including us. This is why self-deification is implied in any system that does not recognize the need to depend upon a personal Creator God; and includes any Christian group that promotes dependence on itself, rather than on God. In the Bible, this is called pride, which God resists because we are attempting to create our own righteousness and peace, instead of submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God. Everything that is labeled Christian is not necessarily Christian.

The Biblical God also differs from the god or gods of philosophy. Many philosophers, by using their own human reasoning, have speculated about the attributes of God, and have subsequently ended up with a view of god which is at odds with Scripture. I find that fully understanding the Biblical God is impossible, apart from trying to reconcile Him with all the other views. The different facets of the Biblical revelation, including its view of God, are so intertwined and dependent upon each other that, when we introduce foreign elements, we diminish the understanding and effectiveness of the whole. Too many extraneous items have been introduced into Christianity during the past two thousand years that have rendered it ineffective. This is why there is so much confusion in Christianity today. Because of this, it does not provide us with what was originally intended; therefore, it is mistakenly considered to be outdated in many quarters; but, the Bible itself is still very relevant. "Thus says the LORD, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."[1]

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[1] Jeremiah 6:16

2. GUILT AND SHAME

Guilt and shame are emotions that accompany our human weakness (law of sin). These were the first recorded emotions of Adam and Eve after the fall; "And their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."[1] They obviously went through a consciousness change as a result of eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[2] This was the beginning of their inner struggle, which was subsequently passed on to their succeeding generations up to the present time. The higher consciousness that they were expecting, diminished the effectiveness of their willpower and self-determination; and we, as their descendants, experience this to this very day. Separation from the Biblical God is always accompanied by weakness; which is the reason why we will always need Him. Humans can never evolve out of our dependence on God because He created us that way. Humanity regressed from its true and best humanity because of Adam and Eve. The whole Biblical revelation is about bringing us back to the Garden. Nothing else can.

Saint Paul, when discussing the remedy for this, says: "And hope makes us not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly…Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed on all men, for all have sinned…For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, many will be made righteous."[3] Christ is the remedy for guilt, shame, sin (human weakness/diminished willpower/law of sin), and physical death: all of which we inherit from Adam and Eve. The peace of God that we receive from unconditionally trusting in Jesus Christ, takes us beyond guilt and shame. God's agape love, which is given to us through the Holy Spirit, is the fruit of the Spirit that contains His inner peace and strength, in addition to the other fruits.

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they thought that they were going to be like God. What they didn't anticipate when they separated themselves from God was that, unlike God, it would not be easy for them to choose good over evil. They ended up with diminished self-control and willpower; which must have surprised them. The serpent conveniently didn't inform them of this. They tended towards evil when separated from God;

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[1] Genesis 3:7
[2] Cf. Genesis 2:17; 3:4-6
[3] Romans 5:5-6, 12, 19; cf. Galatians 5:22-23; 2Timothy 1:7; 1John 2:15-17; Psalms 34:22

and we inherit this trait from them. They separated themselves from one master, to be subjected to another.[1] When God was their master, they had full use of their wills. When they became free from God, they became slaves to sin, and had less self-control and use of their wills. Slavery to God ends in freedom. Freedom to sin brings us into slavery.

The difference between God and us is that He can be objective when making choices; but we can't be truly objective without Him. He gives us the peace and spiritual discernment to be objective.[2] We don't have to look beyond ourselves to see the results of the fall because we all experience them. We have to get back to the Garden. When we rely only on ourselves, we rely on a weak humanity separated from God: by no means perfect. Any belief system that says otherwise is not promoting reality.

For all of humanity, guilt and shame accompany the knowledge of good and evil because our weakened human nature makes us prone to sin. We are never able to choose good over evil perfectly; therefore guilt and shame are inevitable. A religion of rules and regulations does not remedy this because it lacks the Spirit; therefore, it cannot produce the inner transformation that is necessary to overcome our weakness; and because of this, it only uses guilt and shame from inevitable law breaking in order to control its members and to keep them in line. This is why Paul tells the Galatians to "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say to you, that if you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ has become of no effect to you, whoever of you that are justified by the law. You are fallen from grace."[3] This warning also applies to any other religious system of rules and regulations for supposed righteousness.

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[1] Cf. Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13; Romans 6:17-18
[2] Cf. 1Corinthians 2:9-16
[3] Galatians 5:1-4; cf. Romans 4:4-5; 11:6; 14:17-18

3. BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY: DEPENDENCE AND HUMILITY

Drawing close to God can be done in a very methodical way, rather than only when we have a specific need. Scripture instructs us on how to go about it: "be clothed with humility; for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation, casting all your anxiety upon Him; for he cares for you."[1] These verses define humility as casting all of our cares on God. He wants us to be humble towards Him in order to express our dependence on Him; and not just to verbalize it and continue in our pride and self-autonomy. Mere words or affirmations do not create humility or bring it into reality. As extreme as it sounds, this passage tells us that in order to receive grace, we are to cast all of our care on God, and not just part of it by holding back anything.

Christ said: "Verily I say to you, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he will not enter into it."[2] Our reliance on God is what moves us into His realm and under His influence: not just words and intellectual belief. There is a veil that prevents us from perceiving the spirit world. For human beings, trust and reliance upon God opens us up to His divine favor or grace which, at least, provides a partial lifting of this perception veil. Angelic beings fully perceive, but not all of them receive God's favor because they also need humility, just like we do.

These few verses are extremely important because they present the Biblical process of drawing close to God, and how we are to relate to Him on an ongoing basis. He favors the humble. He exalts us if we are humble. He defines humility as "casting all your anxiety on Him", which denotes total dependence on Him. No anxiety is exempt; and it's as all-encompassing as it sounds. Just as we tend to apply fear, worry, anger, and lust to everything in our lives, we can also apply trust in God to everything. This is how we bring God into everything in our lives, and live in His peace. When we yield to Him, and refrain from attempting to push out or distract negative feelings and thoughts with our own strength, He neutralizes and dissolves them. Just as the law of sin affects us psychologically, spirituality also affects us psychologically. This is what made Biblical spirituality meaningful and relevant for me. Prior to this, it was academic and distant.

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[1] 1Peter 5:5-7; cf. James 4:6; 2Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:6-7; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalms 33:22; 112:7-8; 118:8-9; 138:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:2; Matthew 7:22-23

[2] Mark 10:15; cf. Matthew 18:3-4; 15:8-9; 1Corinthians 1:26

God cares for the humble. He doesn't require us strive after, desire, lust for, or passionately want Him, because these things are the opposites of unconditional trust. "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never allow the righteous to be moved."[1] This is the definition of Biblical repentance and humility. It is not just a verbal formula or affirmation. If you don't cast all of your burden on the Lord, He will not sustain you. He primarily wants us to recognize our dependence upon Him: and then to act upon it. For this dependence and humility, God sends His very presence within us, which contains His inner peace and strength, among other things.[2] This is what is called the state of grace. Satan has worked against this from the fall of Adam and Eve because it reestablishes the Garden of Eden relationship with God.

James tells us to "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of Lord, and he will lift you up."[3] This passage is not as grim as it sounds. Our own laughter and joy provide us with a temporary distraction from our discontent; but only God can really lift us. It tells us that we have a responsibility to draw near to God before He will draw near to us; and that this is done by humility towards Him, which is necessary because we can't save ourselves apart from Him. This is the principle that makes Biblical higher-power spirituality effective. Jesus Christ is the only one who can save us from the law of sin and its effects: we can't. The primary difference between Christianity and other religions is that other religions question the premise that we need salvation at all.

We also need to recognize our inability to be cleansed without God. When we are told to let our laughter be turned to mourning and our joy to heaviness, we are told to stop trying to use our usual escapes to lessen our pain which includes things like boredom and loneliness, as well as worry and anger, and to just be in that uncomfortable place without trying to lift ourselves out of it. Just remain in it, and let God lift us out of it by humbling ourselves towards Him, because He can do it a lot better than we can.

We don't need to be afraid of negative feelings. Our usual response is attempting to push them away by our own willpower or practices, but this isn't as effective as we would like. God wants us to make use of Him emotionally and psychologically because this is how we can be at

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[1] Psalms 55:22. The word *sustain* can also be translated, "maintain", "nourish" or "feed". Cf. James 3:17
[2] Cf. Hebrews 4:1-11; Philippians 4:6-7; John 16:33
[3] James 4:8-10; cf. Zechariah 1:3; 2Corinthians 1:9

our best. This is required if we want the real peace and contentment that comes from God, which Adam and Eve originally had.

In Eastern philosophy there is a method which is offered for dissolving our thoughts and feelings even though our willpower or resolve does not. It is called awareness, which tells us to observe them without doing anything to distract them or drive them away by using our own efforts; and just be passive observers of them in order for them to be dissolved. When I first encountered this practice I found it very helpful, and subsequently used it for dealing with all of my thoughts. I initially interpreted it as good psychology instead of spirituality because I wasn't familiar with different types of spiritual practices at that time; but later noticed that this practice was similar to the Biblical idea of unconditional trust in God, in that we rest our minds on God because we recognize our inability to effectively neutralize our thoughts and feelings with our willpower or resolve; but with God, the results are sustained by His Spirit.

We instinctively try to remove them ourselves unless we are taught to do otherwise. When we are the principal actors in trying to remove them, they stubbornly remain regardless of how much control we would like to have over them. When we try to resist them with own strength or escapes, they remain resilient. They will not be restrained if we try to restrain them ourselves. Because this is our usual way of dealing with our thoughts, emotions, and feelings, we assume that there is no other way; and feel trapped in this mode of resisting, with no tangible results. We end up believing that this will never change, or that there is no remedy for this. When the pain is excessive, some will even take their own lives because they think that there is no other alternative.

God wants us to draw close to Him by a deliberate act of the will to trust Him unconditionally because this is what He requires of us and responds to. He always responds to us within the framework of our choices, regardless of how much influence He may exert in the process. When we relinquish control of ourselves to God by resting our minds on Him, and yielding ourselves to Him, His Spirit then lessens the power that our feelings, thoughts, and desires have over us. This enables us to be more in control of our actions and to live in the present, which means that we are not constantly living in our minds. God dethrones the self. This, in effect, puts us in a constant state of awareness or observation. It is a place where the activities of the mind are subordinated to God; and a place that is sustained by His power. Without God, this is not possible.

When we are no longer the principal actors in dealing with our thoughts and emotions, their power is greatly reduced, and we are able to be much more objective when observing the world around us; and God's Spirit gives us an added spiritual discernment which is not otherwise available. It is called the mind of Christ.[1] We withdraw ourselves (self and ego) from being the principal actors by yielding to God. This is possible when Christ, the Light of the World, resides within us by His Spirit, and shares with us His righteousness and enlightenment by His faith in the Father. This gives us peace, strength, and clarity of mind.

The Law of Sin gives our thoughts and feelings their power over our wills. When we surrender them to God, we are no longer the principal actors in dealing with them. Without the Spirit, we can try to control feelings, thoughts, and desires arise within us; but only from a position of weakness because we cannot override our tendency toward sin. We can when we are led, and walk in the Spirit.[2]

When we yield ourselves to God, the Spirit greatly boosts our ability to be in control of ourselves and modify our behavior, including addictive behavior. Yielding overrides our attempts to use willpower as a means of neutralizing our thoughts and desires when it is combined with the power of the Spirit that we have received. The neutralizing is greatly enhanced and expedited. Yielding must not have any fear of our feelings, emotions, or thoughts associated with it. It disengages our self or ego from the process, because when we yield to something other than ourselves, we are expecting the other thing to act upon them. Unconditional trust or resting in God initially accomplishes this because the entire self is surrendered outwardly to God. We then receive His Spirit which has the inner rest and strength that reduce the power that our minds have over us. After this, we yield to the Spirit to maintain and grow in it. We are at rest in the Beloved.

Fear and inner peace cannot coexist. Christian Higher Power spirituality enables us to place ourselves in a position of extreme passivity or receptivity to God that is not otherwise possible. The passive requires an object (active) to act upon the passive; and if God is not considered to be the Actor for spiritual enhancement, we will not surrender to or unconditionally trust in Him. Verifying the existence of an actor that is not perceptible requires a passive act of surrender to, unconditional trust in, or resting the mind upon the actor, which creates a vacuum that draws in the actor towards oneself. I believe that this is the means by which the Biblical God reveals Himself to His elect, and inhabits and empowers them. Biblical spirituality

[1] Cf. 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1; 1Thessalonians 5:21; Proverbs 11:2
[2] Cf. Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 8:12-13

always has the Biblical God as its object of surrender and trust; anyone or anything else is not permitted. Expecting intellectual certainty of God's existence prior to this always lends itself to doubt and postponement. Faith provides the evidence for the unseen.[1] I had the most transforming experience in my whole life when I tried it. This is what immediately removed the doubts that I had about the existence of God.

Paul says to "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."[2] This is Paul's statement of how to develop and sustain a relationship with God that produces an ongoing inner peace; and is another important verse because it specifically mentions the inner peace that results from being anxious for nothing.

When we are told to "be anxious for nothing", we are being told to have unconditional trust in God, and yield to His presence after we have received His peace. This needs to be taken literally if we are going to have the peace of God through Christ Jesus. We are told to trust in God and not worry about any aspect of our lives. This is how we bring Him into everything in our lives, and invite His peace and strength to deal with our tendency towards sin. It is not a license to sin as some would like to think, or too passive an act.

The world tells us to worry about the things we can control, and to not worry about the things we can't control; but this ends in worry about whether we are worrying about the right thing or not. All worry is non-trust in God. Scripture tells us, in principle, to not worry about anything at all: which is God's method even though we may subsequently be tempted to worry. We attempt to keep our minds rested on God regardless of circumstances, good or bad, which is more difficult to do during a crisis; but this is what is called a test of faith, which may require us to be even more resolute for maintaining our inner peace from God. This builds patience or endurance, which is our ability to remain peaceful and strong in difficult situations.[3]

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[1] Cf. Hebrews 11:1

[2] Philippians 4:6-8. In the old KJV, the word *careful* is used instead of *anxious*. It is the old English word for *anxious*. The word *careful* is no longer used in this way. Cf. Colossians 3:15; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 55:7-9; 2Corinthians 10:5

[3] Cf. Romans 5:3; James 1:3

Prior to learning that we are to be anxious for nothing, I had always heard that worry doesn't do us any good, but I had never heard of it stated as a principle for connecting and maintaining a relationship with God. If I constantly worry, and pray for God's peace that passes all understanding, but I don't draw close to God in unconditional trust, I will not receive it because it is something that we ultimately receive through unconditional trust in the Biblical God. The same is true for His strength, and other graces.

Through this relationship of unconditional trust, God is able to infuse His grace into us through His Son, which includes His peace and strength. This is a Divine peace and strength which is not available through our own spiritual practices. We present a void for Him to fill when we unconditionally trust in Him. This is the only spiritual practice that we need within the framework of Biblical spirituality. Everything else is a hindrance and a barrier to connecting with God, and postpones it. We can't hold back anything at all from Him, because if we do, the self remains in control. It is either God or us.

I was surprised when I first encountered the concept of non-worry in the Bible. It happened during my late teens when I was reading the passage on the lilies of the field in the gospels.[1] I was very attracted to it, but did not make use of it at that point. Even though worrying about not sinning seemed to be more important during that period, I never forgot it.

The Eastern philosophy that I was involved in also said that we shouldn't worry about anything; but because it did not include the Biblical God, the peace was transitory, and not sustained by God's presence within us. The philosophy did not recommend meditation practices because it recognized that the self remains in control within these practices, but it promoted awareness of our surroundings without interference from our thoughts, even though this was viewed as difficult to do. It familiarized me with concepts of non-anxiety, inner peace, and not taking thoughts and desires seriously: concepts which immediately changed the course of my life; but when I subsequently found these concepts also in the Bible a few years later, I wanted to learn more about the similarities and differences between the Bible and the Eastern philosophy.

In the Bible, unconditional trust in God, which is a simple act of the will and a function of the heart, is how we get beyond our thoughts and desires and into the realm of grace from God. I found that I actually needed to do it in order to benefit by it; and not just read about it or verbally affirm it. It is the vehicle that takes us to a relationship with the Creator God; and then

[1] Cf. Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31

He sustains our act of trust with His peace that passes all understanding and His strength. He reciprocates our gesture of drawing close to Him. This is how He draws close to us.[1] God's peace is not within the realm of our thoughts or understanding; therefore, it isn't anything that is produced by our own imagination, or that we can imagine. It resides in our hearts. Thoughts and words can attempt to describe it, but we need to surrender our understanding to actually experience it.

This is the essence of Biblical spirituality, which is the patriarchal spirituality that provides us with the means of abandoning ourselves towards the Highest Power. It provides the interaction with the Biblical Creator God that brings us His peace and strength. Goddess or matriarchal spirituality does not require us to go outside of ourselves to find or experience its view of god; therefore, the Creator God remains elusive and distant, along with His special benefits for those who trust in Him. When goddess spirituality does go outward, it usually ends up in nature worship, which is the worship of God's creation. "I am the LORD and there is none else, there is no God beside me"[2].

Christianity is operating way below par because it generally does not encourage unconditional trust in God. Things that were intended to supplement Christianity have been made central or given undue importance; and, as a result of this, Biblical spirituality is ignored, and Christianity is not as effective and transforming as it was intended to be. It has been replaced primarily by legalism, ritual, and verbal declarations and affirmations, among other things. Many churches are waiting and hoping for an end-time revival before the return of Christ; but they are ignoring the very thing that could bring it about.

Even when we let God have all of our anxieties, He still wants us to ask Him for what we need. The place of peace and strength that comes from God purifies our prayers, and ensures that they are effectively communicated to Him and answered; but don't bother to ask for anything to satisfy lusts.[3] They are released to God during the act of unconditional trust because anxiety, frustration, and discontent are unavoidable when you desire things with the expectation of contentment and satisfaction in life, which come to us only from God through faith; and not from God's creation. We are not given a choice in the means of arriving at contentment in life because we are pre-programmed to have it only with God. This is how we were created. It is part of our created nature.

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[1] Cf. Psalms 55:22; 73:28; 118:8-9; James 4:8-10; 1Peter 5:6-7
[2] Isaiah 45:5
[3] Cf. James 4:2-3

It is important to recognize that giving God our anxieties does not mean that we expect God to do everything for us, and that we do nothing. Our relationship with God, along with the abiding inner peace that comes from Him, opens us up to His guidance, and gives us a greater ability to make wise decisions; "For it is God who works [Gr. *energeō*] in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."[1] He guides us; but He also expects us to exercise choice: and to make the right choices; and then He responds accordingly.

The peace of God is beyond our thoughts; and therefore, it takes us beyond the limitations of our thoughts. It reduces the intensity of our attachments, and things like boredom and loneliness. When we are at rest in Christ, we are not as prone to emotional highs and lows. If we inadvertently move away from this trust and peace, emotions assert themselves again, but not as severely as when we were without Christ. We have maximum control only in Christ; therefore, we can never claim that we are strong only in ourselves, because the strength comes from the presence of God within us. To an outside observer we may appear to be strong in ourselves, but we know where the strength actually comes from. When we recognize our weakness without God; then we can move towards being strong in Him.[2] A posture of weakness and dependence toward God is a prerequisite for receiving Divine strength.

Lastly, we are told what to fill our minds with when we are at peace. This sounds like positive thinking, except that it needs to be done within the framework of humility toward God. This is positive thinking at its best because humility and the Spirit enable it to be done with God's guidance and discernment. Positive thinking has the same limitations as anything else when it is not done with humility toward God. Like prayer, positive thinking can be used for attempting to satisfy lust; and God will not respond to it.[3]

Attempting to arrive at a sustained inner peace by only using our thoughts is not possible because peaceful thoughts and imagery will be replaced by anxious thoughts; and they will eventually negate each other. Positive thinking that excludes unconditional trust in God experiences this same limitation. Positive thoughts will invariably be replaced by negative thoughts.

Positive thinking and unconditional trust in God can exist at the same time because the mind and heart are able to operate simultaneously without conflicting with each other. We can be

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[1] Philippians 2:13; cf. 1Corinthians 1:30; 2:9-16; Psalms 16:7; 25:9, 12, 14; 40:2; 143:8; 145:18; Proverbs 3:5-6; 4:18; 16:3; Isaiah 42:16; Jeremiah 31:33; John 4:24; Titus 2:14; 1Samuel 10:7
[2] Cf. 2Corinthians 12:9; 10:17-18; 1:8-9
[3] Cf. James 4:3

as intellectual as we want, and at the same time, still be at peace. There is no need for anti-intellectualism in Biblical spirituality; the intellect only needs to be subordinated to the Spirit, and operate within its framework.

Prior to consulting the Bible, I didn't understand this because I thought that the intellect always interferes with inner peace. Without God, it does; therefore the Eastern philosophy taught that it was preferable to keep the mind as blank as possible to remain at peace; but humans are thinking beings. This dilemma is common in non-Biblical spiritualities because there is no recognition that the law of sin is what actually compromises our peace; thoughts, of themselves, do not. Trust in God resolves this without requiring us to cease thinking. Thinking is required for understanding the Biblical instruction on how to relate to God for resolving this.[1]

A common misunderstanding is that peace will reduce us to inaction; but it actually liberates us to act, rather than hinders us from acting. Fear is what encloses us and reduces us to inaction. Trust in God does not because we are not encumbered by fear. The way of peace may alter our motivations for acting and our behavior, but Wisdom and Power will not permit inaction.[2]

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."[3] This is one of the best statements of Biblical spirituality. We are not told to disregard our own understanding; instead, we are told not to lean on it; and this includes everything in our mind, without exception: our entire self.[4] The mind can be pacified by God without discarding the mind. This produces an inner insulation from the oppression and weakness that come from the law of sin; therefore, physically isolating ourselves from things becomes unnecessary because the causes of distress are not the things themselves, but how we inwardly relate and react to them. Two people can have opposite reactions to the same stimulus. Physical isolation does not remove inordinate desire for things or settle the mind.

The word *trust* in Proverbs 3:5 means "to take refuge", and is one of the primary words used in the Old Testament to describe how we are to relate to God. Trust also means "to lean on" (Psalms 56:3), "to roll on" (Psalms 22:8), or "to wait for" (Job 35:14), depending upon the Hebrew word that it's translated from. They all imply dependence and humility. "Seek the LORD

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[1] Cf. Romans 10:17
[2] Cf. Titus 2:14; 1Corinthians 1:24,30; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 2:3; Proverbs 31:27
[3] Proverbs 3:5; cf. Isaiah 55:7-9; 65:2; Philippians 4:8-9; 2Timothy 2:14; Psalms 118:8-9; Ephesians 3:20
[4] Cf. 2Corinthians 10:5; Luke 12:15; Colossians 3:1-34

while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God; for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD."[1] Unconditional trust in God takes us beyond our thoughts. It is the means by which we get beyond their limitations; and it enables us to draw close to God and receive His inner peace.

Our own imagination cannot override our human weakness. Visualization and concentration do not take us beyond our own imagination because we can't use them to get beyond it. They are a part of our imagination; instead, we only need to unconditionally trust in God and not lean on our imagination in order to be strengthened by God. The same thing applies to rationalizations. For example, we can all think of reasons why we shouldn't worry, be angry, or be excessive, but we do it anyway. The limitations of our reasoning are evident when we want to control our emotions. Rationalizations can't bring us into the realm of the Spirit where there is God's peace and strength. In order to find a solution, we need to surrender our entire understanding instead of continuously leaning on it. When we do this, the line between psychology and spirituality becomes blurred because an act of faith is not only a spiritual act, but it is also a psychological act of the will; and our psyche is invariably affected.

We receive instruction from the Bible through our thoughts; but then the Bible instructs us to unconditionally trust in God in order to get beyond our thoughts. This puts God first, and consists of entirely resting our minds upon God because the thoughts themselves don't get us beyond them. The law of sin remains intact. For this reason, spiritual practices like concentration and visualization postpone drawing close to God, and provide no means for ever getting beyond them. There is too much of ourselves in these practices to enable us to get beyond ourselves and our limitations, and into the realm of the Spirit, which is limitless and timeless. We can only visualize and concentrate on what we already know; therefore they cannot take us beyond what we already know. We need to willingly draw close to God.

There can't be anything really new or different in our thoughts because they are products of what we have already experienced; and when we try to use them as a means of getting beyond them, there is no mechanism for getting beyond them at the same time. This same principle is true for desiring things for fulfillment: even intensely desiring God, because desire is also a product of our own imagination which is never fulfilled; and it does not take us

[1] Isaiah 55:6-8; cf. Deuteronomy 29:19-20; Romans 14:23; Ephesians 3:20

beyond ourselves. For the same reason, positive thinking doesn't bring us closer to God when humility toward God is excluded, even when our thoughts are about God. All of these postpone our fulfillment in God. When we surrender our thoughts to God, we circumvent this problem, and open ourselves up to the realm of the Spirit. Then we are able to use our thoughts as was intended, and also receive the promptings of the Spirit. When we surrender all, bad and good, we receive the wisdom and moderation of the Spirit to apply to everything in our lives. Even good things need the influence of the Spirit for their proper placement and use.

The Holy Spirit fills the void that we present to God; and this void is created when we release our thoughts and desires towards Him, and relinquish control; but this isn't possible as long as we withhold ourselves from Him and remain distant. We need to lose ourselves in Him and not in our own thoughts and desires.[1] When we get our inner peace from God, we will not seek it elsewhere; instead, everything will be blessed and guided by God because we will not have put them ahead of Him. They will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit and in their proper place, and will not be given undue importance.

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."[2] The word *trust* in these verses is from the Hebrew word that means "to take refuge". The point of all this is to show that the concepts of dependence and humility toward God are found in both testaments of the Bible. In the New Testament, the words *faith*, and most of the time, *believe*, have the same meaning as the word *trust* in the Old Testament. The word *trust* in the Old Testament is usually rendered as *faith* or *believe* in the New Testament.

Christ says, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me."[3] In this verse, the verb *believe* is derived from the same Greek root word as the noun *faith*; and both have the same meaning.[4] This is true in most of the New Testament. The Living Bible translates this verse: "Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me." Most of the time, the word *believe* means more than just intellectual belief. The important point is that the concepts of dependence and humility toward God are all over the Bible; and when we recognize this, we get a better understanding of what God expects of us. The dualistic

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[1] Cf. Mark 8:34-35; Psalms 25:9-10
[2] Isaiah 26:3-4; cf. 40:29-31; 45:24; Psalms 105:4; Philippians 4:13
[3] John 14:1; cf. Romans 15:13; 1John 5:1-2
[4] Faith = Gr. *pistis*; believe = Gr. *pisteuo* most of the time

spirituality in both Testaments is the same. Both require humility and unconditional trust, whether the object of trust is the Yahweh (Jehovah) of the Old Testament, or Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the New Testament.

God needs to be part of the process in order for us to have His peace. Attempting to quiet or clear our minds with non-Biblical spiritual practices before going to God, is actually an attempt to have peace without Him; and this results in an inferior unstable peace that can only come from us. The peace that comes from God is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This requires us to interact with Christ and His Spirit within us. We can't do anything to receive the Spirit except to open up to it. Trust in the human and divine Christ brings God into the process; and when we rest our minds on Christ and receive His Spirit within us, He can share His own rest or peace with us.[1] Trusting in Christ would not be permitted for us if He was only human. Without His own inherent divinity as the Word incarnate, Christ would be the same as we are; and we would not be allowed to regard Him as an object of trust and worship. Unlike Christ, having the presence of God within us does not make us God because we do not have inherent divinity.

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell"[2]. Christ derives His divinity from the fact that He is the Word incarnate; and has divinity within His own person, even apart from the presence of both the Father and the Holy Spirit within Him; therefore, we are allowed to make Him our resting place. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him. When His Spirit is within us, He can share with us His own peace and rest that He receives from His human trust in the Father. There is no one else who can do this for us because God sends only the Spirit of His Son within us for the purpose of giving us rest; therefore, only Christ's rest is given to us by God. This is our Christian enlightenment. We have the responsibility to willingly trust in Christ even though God draws us to His Son.[3]

Christ's own rest results from His faith and prayer towards the Father, which are a function of His humanity. His faith and prayer continue to this very day in the heavenly tabernacle, where He serves as our glorified, immortal High Priest and intercessor at the right hand of God.[4] This function is also a part of His Spirit within us; otherwise, He could not share His righteousness by faith and its accompanying rest with us.

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[1] Cf. Matthew 11:28-30; Deuteronomy 29:19-20
[2] Colossians 1:19; cf. 2:9; John 1:14; 3:34; 17:21-23; 1Peter 1:21
[3] Cf. John 6:65; 1Corinthians 1:30; 2Timothy 2:25
[4] Cf. Romans 8:34; Hebrews 2:9-13, 16-18; 4:15-16; 7:24-25; 1Peter 1:21; 1John 2:1

God wants more from us than intellectual faith or belief; He wants unconditional trust. This affects our heart: the center of our being, and our mind. Our salvation depends upon it. Modern Christianity is practically devoid of this concept, although it can still be found in hymns and readings; but it is generally not taught in homilies and sermons. When faith is defined only as intellectual belief in something that our reasoning cannot grasp, it is a very small part of Biblical faith. It encompasses that and much more: our entire beings.

In another interesting passage of Scripture, Christ says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Therefore, I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will put on. Is not the life more than food and the body than raiment? …Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature? …Wherefore, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? …But seek first the kingdom of God for yourselves, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."[1] We can't serve two masters. It isn't possible to serve God and money at the same time. The peace of God and the anxiety associated with pursuing money for happiness are opposites. The passage proceeds to tell us to have faith in God.

Notice that the word *faith* is associated with the state of not being anxious. In other words, faith is more than just belief in something; it includes dependence and humility toward God, as does the word *trust*. When we have our priorities in order, God makes sure that our needs are met. In my late teens, I read these verses, and received my first glimpse of Biblical spirituality. It seemed that these verses were telling me that, as a matter of principle, I wasn't supposed to worry about anything at all in order to please God. I was extremely attracted to this idea and wanted to believe it because I felt it would alleviate the scrupulous conscience that I was experiencing during this period; but because there was virtually no support for this interpretation, I thought that I may have been misreading the text: so I didn't go with it at the time. I later realized that this is the primary Biblical method for connecting with God, and that I wasn't misreading it.

Even though I didn't fully appreciate it at the time, a seed had been planted which came into fruition about 12 years later. This primal glimpse, which I never forgot, may have given me a clue that the Bible had more to it than what I had previously thought. Also, my godfather told

[1] Matthew 6:24-25, 27, 30, 33. Read 6:25-34 for the full context. Cf. Wisdom (Catholic Bible) 7:11; Mark 10:29-30

me something interesting before that. He said that the Bible contained information that wasn't being told to us by the priests. He didn't elaborate; but this was something that I also never forgot. At the age of 31, I discovered this for myself. I don't believe that most people maliciously withhold information about spirituality. It is more likely that they are either uninformed or uninterested; or, if they are informed, it is not important for them. Often, religious organizations promote their own spiritual practices without mentioning what may be of benefit to you. This happened to me. Fortunately, I found mine through my own inquiry into the Bible apart from any other support or validation that I was aware of.

The dependence of creation upon the Creator is a part of the Biblical world-view; and it requires a transcendent God to be dependent upon. This is basic to Biblical Higher Power spirituality. Our faith or trust is always upon the Creator, and not in ourselves or in someone or something else.[1] This dualism of Creator and creation in the Bible is required for the spirituality to operate as intended. Creation needs to be subordinate to the Creator in order to draw from Him what we are lacking. Monism is different because it teaches that everything is god or part of god. It does not make use of the higher power concept; therefore, it is closed to the Biblical God and to all the special graces and benefits that He provides to those who go outward and humble themselves toward Him. This spirituality is something we all need because our willpower or resolve is not only inadequate towards the obvious addictions and compulsions, but also towards the very ordinary things like worry, anger, envy, and unforgiveness. It enables us to draw peace and strength from a source outside of ourselves. Human nature has never and will never evolve out of this because if that were possible, it would imply that we don't need a dependence upon God with His provision for salvation through Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve tried to be independent from God, and it diminished their perfect humanity.[2] Even though humans can never evolve out of this dependence, much of humanity will continue to stubbornly resist God. The dire consequences which are recorded in the book of Revelation will result from this defiance towards God.[3] Its representation of human nature is very realistic.

The Biblical views of God and spirituality are not limited to any specific culture, place, or time; and can be used in modern times as in the past. Because Biblical spirituality is generally not

[1] Cf. 2Corinthians 1:9
[2] Cf. Genesis 3
[3] Cf. Revelation 6:10, 16-17; 9:6, 20-21; 11:9-10, 18; 13:6-8; 16:9, 11, 21; 19:19; 20:9

practiced in modern Christianity, access to the Biblical God is sorely lacking. He requires humility and trust: a relationship of dependence upon Him, so that we can open up to His presence. Without it, Christianity will not function as it was originally intended to; and Christ will only remain a theological concept, with no means of accessing Him for a personal relationship.

At its early stages, Christianity started to drift away from this type of spirituality or mysticism, and eventually became primarily a legalistic cerebral religion. Christianity is supposed to involve both heart and mind: not just the mind; and because of the limitations of the mind, Christianity began to regress, and lessen in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit; but, it is still fully available to those who will humble themselves toward God.

No vocation or lifestyle puts you at a greater advantage or disadvantage over the others when it comes to faith, because we are all able to exercise it wherever we are. Faith doesn't require major lifestyle changes except for those aspects of our lifestyle that need to be modified or avoided because they are not compatible with faith in God. He is accessible everywhere for those who have or want to have a relationship of dependence and trust on Him; and He is always willing to give us peace, strength, and guidance in all of our circumstances.[1] Faith gives God access to us, as well as giving us access to Him, and enables us to interact with Him. It also opens us up to answered prayer. Of course, He doesn't want us to test Him by deliberately placing ourselves in harm's way; but, short of this, we have His assurance of peace, strength, protection, and guidance.

"Now faith is the foundation of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."[2] Our faith in God is the means by which God brings into being those things that we pray and hope for; and it provides us with the evidence for the existence of the unseen spiritual world. Faith bypasses our thoughts; therefore, the evidence is not a product of our imaginations. By our faith in the Creator, He creates the evidence on our behalf. He can do a much better job than we can.[3] Self-deification tells us that we are the creators and that we create with our own thoughts or words; but faith in the Creator acknowledges that He is the source of creation. An extension of this is that when we surrender our minds to God, He works things out for us in a

[1] Cf. James 3:17-18
[2] Hebrews 11:1
[3] Cf. Isaiah 55:7-9; Ephesians 3:20; James 4:2-3; 1John 5:14-15

much better way than we could ever imagine. He enters into the circumstance for our benefit. When we surrender our anger and revenge to God, He performs the vengeance as He sees fit.[1]

Faith provides the evidence that the spirit world exists, and enables us to experience it. Without faith, our reliance on philosophy or theology, or anything else, will not produce intellectual certainty because doubt will intrude and interfere with it. The certainty that we hope for never arrives because we are using our own desire for certainty instead of faith. I believe that this is why I was unable to arrive at certainty about the spiritual realm prior to learning of Biblical faith.

Most of humanity remains in a state of separation from God that was not there at the very beginning. It remains with all religions who believe that the idea of a relationship with a personal God is passé because the god that we need is already within us. This type of god does not restore the separation. In the interests of ecumenism, many would like to reduce Christianity to this belief: and they have been largely successful. Humanity's connection with the Biblical God needs to be reestablished by faith in Him.

Faith is the means by which God can minister back to us because without it, we can only minister to God imperfectly with a one-sided interaction. Faith is different from anything that we do for God; but it needs to accompany everything that we do, from the ordinary to the extraordinary.[2] It is different from the sum total of all the external things that we do for God. Faith must undergird everything that we do. It precedes good works, but it must also be a component of all of our good works and deeds. With faith, our outward expressions of it receive their maximum benefit.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the prerequisite for salvation.[3] When we are carriers of the Holy Spirit, Christ accompanies us everywhere we go. We can't leave Him in a parking lot while we're doing something else; or leave Him in church after the service is over.

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[1] Cf. Romans 12:19; Psalms 58:6-11; 103:6; Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 27:24(27)-28:8
[2] Cf. Romans 14:23; James 1:25
[3] Cf. Ephesians 2:8-10; 2Timothy 2:13

4. WHY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST?

What does Jesus Christ have to do with all of this? He is the one who makes Christian enlightenment available to us by the presence of His Spirit within us.[1] "For you were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord; walk as children of light…Wherefore, he says, Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."[2] Christian enlightenment results from our oneness with Christ, along with everything else that He shares with us; whereas, non-Christian enlightenment is usually an experience of oneness with everything around us because it is a product of the monistic view that everything is god. In monism, there is no Father God as a higher power; therefore, no Son of God in the Biblical sense.

In the Bible, our oneness with Christ is never construed to be a total identity with the Deity because that would betray the dependence of the creation upon the Creator, and would render the relationship nonexistent. We do not receive an innate divine nature in addition to our human nature when we receive the Holy Spirit. Our human nature does not become divine; but divinity accompanies our humanity.[3] Even Christ's human nature is separate from His divine nature within His single personhood; therefore, like us, He needs to have faith and pray while at the right hand of God the Father in the same way that He prayed and had faith during His earthly ministry. He continues to do so in spite of His own divinity because His oneness is a function of His human faith in the Father, in the same way that our oneness with Christ is a function of our faith in Christ. His human oneness with the Father is like our oneness with God.[4] This is different from His divine oneness with the Father as the Word.

In the Gospels, Christ addressed and prayed to the Father as an entity apart from Himself because He was human, even though, at the same time, He was God as the Word incarnate.[5] If His human nature was not separate from His divine nature, He would not be a separate entity from the Father, and He would therefore be praying to Himself and would not be a suitable human mediator between God and us. But in spite of His humanity, Christ qualifies as our Higher Power because of His divine nature as the Word incarnate, and not because of His human oneness with the Father which is the same as our oneness with Christ.

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[1] Cf. John 1:4-9
[2] Ephesians 5:8, 14; cf. John 17:22-23
[3] Cf. John 14:16-18; Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:26-27
[4] Cf. John 17:21-23
[5] Cf. John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8; Matthew 11:28-30; Micah 5:2

If Christ was not the Word incarnate, we would not be allowed to give Him the worship, dependence, and unconditional trust that are reserved only for God; and He would be no different than us. All other created beings, human and angelic, have non-divine single natures; and therefore, cannot qualify as higher powers for us regardless of whether the Holy Spirit is within them, or how holy they are. This is why we point people to Jesus Christ instead of to ourselves or others when they recognize their need for a Higher Power.

Our faith needs to be directed towards Christ because when we receive His presence, His own personal faith in the Father and His intercession within us make everything available to us from the Father: including the Father Himself.[1] As part of the Godhead, He has a proximity to the Father that no other intercessor can have. This is how we benefit from our faith in Christ. His presence must be within us in order for the Father to be present within us and impart his grace.

Saving faith is present only in the immortal Jesus Christ abiding in us. Our faith in Him opens us up to His Spirit within us, and we then become beneficiaries of all that He carries with Him, including His own personal faith in the Father which is imparted into us by His Spirit. His is the only justification or righteousness by faith that is available for us. Only Abraham and Jesus Christ were eligible for it, but Abraham's spirit is not imparted to us; therefore, we can have righteousness only when Christ's Spirit is within us by our faith in Him; and there is no Scriptural guarantee that faith in anyone or anything else will make us recipients of Christ's Spirit. You would never know this by looking at today's Christianity with its faith in anything but Christ. Real Christianity does not exist for us without our faith directly in Jesus Christ which brings His presence within us.[2]

Christ's humanity requires Him to pray and have faith, just as we do. As our heavenly High Priest at the right hand of the Father, He intercedes for us with continued faith and prayer. If it was our own faith that makes us whole apart from faith in Jesus Christ, He would not be necessary; and all that He did on earth would have been a waste of time. God's plan of salvation requires us to obtain Christ's righteousness by faith by our faith in Him and with His presence within us; then grace will flow into us. Many in the Old Testament had faith, but their faith looked forward to the promised Messiah for its reward.[3] Their perfection needed to wait

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[1] Cf. Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9-15; Acts 3:16. Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:24-25; John 14:6, 10; 2John 1:9
Galatians 2:16, 3:22, Romans 3:22, and Philippians 3:9 in the old KJV, and Galatians 2:16, 3:22 in the Catholic Douay Version speak of the faith *of* Christ instead of faith *in* Christ. Most of the newer translations do not.
[2] 2Corinthians 11:3
[3] Cf. Hebrews 11:39-40

until Christ completed His mission and the promise of the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. Christ's resurrection and immortality are necessary because without them, we would not be able to have His Spirit within us; and without His Spirit empowering our spirit, none of the benefits of Christianity are available to us. This concept isn't prevalent in today's Christianity because the Biblical method of acquiring the presence of Christ within us has been largely ignored or lost.

John the apostle said of Christ before His death and resurrection: "But this spoke he of the Spirit, whom they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."[1] The Holy Spirit, as presently constituted, was not available for humanity during Christ's earthly ministry, or prior to it. The Holy Spirit, which now includes Christ's humanity, was poured out at Pentecost after He ascended into heaven.

Peter, when referring to Christ, said: "Who by him do believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God."[2] This is the glory that He had as the Word of God before His birth. In Scripture, surrender and unconditional trust are always directed toward God. They can now be directed toward Christ because Jesus is the only person that has both a human nature and a divine nature. The Godhead now has a human component which was not there before Christ's conception.

Jesus is the suitable mediator between God and man because His humanity enables Him to have faith in the Father and identify with us; and His divinity gives us permission to unconditionally trust Him. With Christ's Spirit within us, we also have the Spirit of the Father within us; and we are seated in heaven at the right hand of God in the Holy of Holies as parts of Christ's Body. Our oneness with Christ brings us as close to the Father as is possible for us. We have this closeness to the Father, both within us and in heaven at the same time.

"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is vain, and you are yet in your sins."[3] Our Higher Power needs to be alive: not dead. Jesus' value is not only in what He taught us, but it is primarily in the availability of His presence within us. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever"[4]. A Jesus, who is only a good and wise teacher of 2000 years ago, is not enough; and a dead Jesus doesn't do us any good because the man Christ Jesus could not be our ongoing mediator

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[1] John 7:39. The word *believe* (Gr. *pisteuo*) in this verse is from the same Greek root word as the one for *faith* (Gr. *pistis*). Cf. John 6:28-29; 1John 3:23; Ephesians 4:10
[2] 1Peter 1:21; cf. John 1:1-5, 14; 17:5, 21; Ephesians 2:6, 18; Romans 8:9; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:9
[3] 1Corinthians 15:17; cf. Romans 4:25; 14:9
[4] Hebrews 13:8

with His Spirit within us. Our job is to open up to Christ's Spirit. Without His Spirit, we can't have the Spirit of the Father because He alone is able to directly embody the Father who inhabits us at the same time.

Christ says, "Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"[1]. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but by me."[2] He wants us to be one with Him, as He is one with the Father. Christ tells the Father that "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and you in me"[3]

Jesus is also God in His own right because He is the Word or Creator incarnate;[4] and this qualifies Him as our Higher Power in spite of His humanity. Our oneness with Christ does not make us God. We are guaranteed salvation only when Christ is our Higher Power; which would not be permitted if He was not also divine. If He was only human, this would be idolatry. Christ's full identity as a God-man was revealed gradually to His apostles. Even they had a difficult time understanding that He was more than what He appeared to be.[5]

Christ has both a human nature and a divine nature within His single person. No other creature was or is like this. We can only "partner with the divine nature"[6]. We do not intrinsically have or become divine nature because that would violate the duality of Creator and creation in the Bible. The concept of the "spark of the divine", which is the divinity that we are all supposedly born with, complements the monistic view of god. This concept is foreign to the Bible.

Unlike us, Jesus Christ preexisted as God the Word before his incarnation. He was a God-man throughout His life on earth, and continues that way as our resurrected, immortal, and ascended heavenly High Priest. This is true only of Christ, and this is why Jesus is in a category of His own. No other human being is like this. The virgin birth made this possible. He didn't have a human father and therefore did not inherit the sin of Adam. His blood was untainted; and He was therefore the perfect sacrificial lamb, without spot or blemish. The shedding of His

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[1] John 14:10.
[2] John 14:6; cf. 1Corinthians 3:23
[3] John 17:21-23; cf. 1Corinthians 6:17
[4] Cf. John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8
[5] Cf. John 14:6-12
[6] 2Peter 1:4. The word *partaker* can also be translated, "fellowship" or "partner". Cf. 1John 4:7-13

blood was required for the implementation of God's plan of salvation; and the shed blood would not have been possible without His humanity.[1] All of the past animal sacrifices of the Old Testament prefigured this final event. I believe that the ritual shedding of blood throughout history has existed since Adam and Eve, as evidenced by the animal skins that God made for them after the fall; and by the animal that Abel offered to God. The instructions must have been received from God Himself, at the very beginning.

The community of those who direct their faith towards Jesus Christ is called the Body of Christ; and Christ Himself is the Head of the Body; but our interaction with the community is not a substitute for our personal faith in Christ. Even when we are in community, our primary trust needs to be in Jesus Christ.[2] This is how we receive the resources to minister to each other effectively: which would not be possible otherwise. Dependence upon the community should never be viewed as a replacement for dependence on Christ. Community should point you to Christ, and not to itself.

Even with Christ in us, we are not empowered to send His Spirit into another person because only God distributes the Spirit of Christ by personal faith. "God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."[3] Christ's composite Spirit of human and divine natures needs to be imparted to us by God; and then we receive the entire Godhead within us through Christ's presence. No human being, dead or alive, has the power to give Christ's Spirit to another person. God is the one who calls us, and sends us the Spirit when we have faith in His Son.

Surrender to each other is not permitted even with the Holy Spirit within us; but surrender directly to Christ is the only way to be inhabited by Christ's Spirit. Christ then becomes a life-giving Spirit for us. There is no Scriptural guarantee that we can be one with Christ and have the Holy Spirit within us, by surrendering ourselves to anyone else who is dead or alive. This needs to be said because, believe it or not, there are those who rationalize that there is more than one name by which we can be saved.[4]

As with the human body, each part of the Body of Christ is unique, and needs to receive its direction from the Head in order for the Body to function as a unit.[5] The Eucharist or Table of

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[1] Cf. 2John 7; Hebrews 2:9; 9:15; 10:1-10
[2] Cf. Psalms 118:8-9; Colossians 2:19
[3] Galatians 4:6; cf. Romans 8:15; John 14:26; 17:22-26; 1Corinthians 1:12-13; 15:45; 2Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 2:9-10
[4] Cf. Acts 4;12;
[5] Cf. Colossians 2:19

the Lord associates us with the body and blood of Christ when each person takes a part of the bread, and drinks of one cup.[1] The parts of the whole bread represent each unique person in the Body of Christ who is dependent upon the Head of the Body.

This doesn't leave any room for envying another person's gift. When we try to be like someone else, we neglect our own gift or position in the Body, and the Body of Christ is deprived of it; and, we are usurping God's position in the selection process. "But now has God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it has pleased him."[2] God "raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all."[3]

The thing that binds us together in community is the peace of God from the Spirit. We are "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."[4] The peace of God within us breaks down the barriers and thought structures that keep us psychologically isolated from one another. When we are locked into our own thoughts, it is difficult to get beyond them and relate to what is outside of ourselves. This is the essence of self-centeredness, from which we get the idea of self-esteem, which is an attempt to be complete and fulfilled by our own thoughts and efforts, apart from God.

Even though we have Christ within us, we don't qualify as higher powers for each other; therefore, we are not allowed to use each other as substitutes for Christ. This would result in an unhealthy co-dependence: humans using each other as crutches. God is the only reliable crutch who can deliver Divine peace and strength. We can't supply that for each other. Saint Paul recognized his own boundaries in relation to other Christians when he said: "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith you are set."[5] Our job is to point each other to Christ, and not to ourselves or to each other, because it is through Christ that "we have access by faith into this grace in which we are set".[6]

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[1] Cf. 1Corinthians 10:16-17
[2] 1Corinthians 12:18
[3] Ephesians 1:20-23
[4] Ephesians 4:3; cf. Colossians 3:15
[5] 2Corinthians 1:24; cf. Romans 5:1-6; 1Peter 1:5; 5:3
[6] Romans 5:2; cf. Ephesians 2:8-9; 2Corinthians 5:19-20

Everything in Christianity revolves around Jesus Christ: our trust in Him, His presence inside of us through His Spirit, and His enabling us to overcome our weakened fallen nature. God strengthens us from the law of sin. This is God's forgiveness of our past. It is more than the individual sins that we had committed. Without Him we can do nothing.[1] When we surrender ourselves to Christ, we surrender our minds to Him so that He can transform them into His image. This act affects us psychologically as well as spiritually, and eliminates the need to believe that we have to forgive ourselves after God has forgiven us. The concept of self-forgiveness comes from a secular worldview that excludes forgiveness from God.

Our original surrender is supposed to include all of those things for which we are told to forgive ourselves. If we have surrendered them to God, there is no need for any additional self-forgiveness. Our evidence of forgiveness is God's peace and strength. There is no possibility of any kind of forgiveness without Him. There is nothing that we need to do after God has forgiven us, unless we need to correct some wrong that we did to someone. When someone thinks otherwise, it shows their lack of appreciation for the psychological component of surrender to God, which is the release of self towards God. This is an aspect of faith which is almost totally absent from modern Christianity.

The type of thinking which tells us that we can forgive ourselves is the product of a Christianity that doesn't understand the fact that forgiveness is a result of faith in Jesus Christ; and that He needs to be a part of the forgiveness process from beginning to end. When we surrender ourselves to God, we surrender the sinful tendencies in our lives, and there is no longer anything left that would require self-forgiveness. Even when we forgive others, we let God have our anger so that He can neutralize it; and this is also done by our trusting in Him. Forgiveness results from a deliberate psychological act of the will to draw close to God by trusting in Him unconditionally. Without God, sin remains because "whatever is not of faith is sin".[2]

Judicial forgiveness should not even be a consideration, because when we surrender to Christ, the religious laws that required it no longer exist for us. Christ abolished the Mosaic Law at His death, along with its legal sin penalty; therefore, we are not under the curse of the Law any

[1] Cf. John 15:5; Isaiah 12:2
[2] Romans 14:23

more, with its legal death penalty. This includes any subsequent versions of legalism. When we subject ourselves to legalism for righteousness, we are fallen from grace.[1]

Our faith in Christ comes by hearing or instruction from the word of God.[2] In Scripture, we are instructed to perform an act of the will to rest our minds upon Christ; this is how we arrive at a relationship with the transcendent Creator God of the Bible; and not by doing spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, centering prayer, or other practices which are suited for the monistic all-is-god-including-me view of god, and which exclude faith in Christ.

Before the first Gentile family received the Holy Spirit, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was told to send for Peter because Peter would tell him what he needed to do. After Peter entered the house of Cornelius, he began telling them of Christ, and that "whosoever believes in him will receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word…Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."[3]

Peter had to explain himself when he returned to Jerusalem because he interacted with Gentiles, and ate with them. He explained to the Jewish Christians that Cornelius was told that Peter "will tell you words by which you and all your house will be saved…Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he did to us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?"[4] The household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit because of their faith in Jesus Christ after they heard the word of faith, and before they were water baptized. In the case of the Samaritans, who were the prior non-Jewish group that received the Holy Spirit, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus before they received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John went to Samaria to pray for them and lay hands on them to receive it.[5] The household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit without the ritual laying on of hands. Apparently, God doesn't always do things exactly the same way.

We receive God's word through our intellect, but we implement it with our heart. The spirituality of the Bible complements the Bible's dualistic world-view; therefore, the thrust of

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[1] Cf. Galatians 5:1-4; Romans 4:4-5; 10:4; 11:6; Romans 14:17-18; Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14, 20-23; 1Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 10:9-10
[2] Cf. Romans 10:17
[3] Acts 10:43-44, 46-48
[4] Acts 11:14, 17
[5] Cf. Acts 8:14-17

the mind goes outward in trust towards God; not inward. When we rest our minds on Christ as towards an outside person, we open ourselves up to receive His Spirit inwardly. Even with His Spirit within us, we continue to trust outwardly to maintain it. This is what we do when we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior, who is the Creator or Word incarnate. This is the type of trust that Christ has in relation to His Father. Trust is more than just a verbal declaration; and doesn't require a specific location, or time of the day. It can be done at any place or time. When it is done, the results will permeate our entire days and nights, and produce a sustained moderation and quiescence of mind which cannot result from performing specific acts; but it *will* express itself outwardly in good works.

Christian good works presuppose faith. They are not substitutes for it. "Then they said unto him, What will we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered, and said to them, this is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent."[1] Christ is telling them to apply the same faith to Him that they have in God the Father; and that this is the starting point. Christ's response was simple because we can do nothing of merit without Him.

Applying faith to Jesus was difficult for a Jewish person to readily accept because, from all appearances, He was only human and not God. This is also difficult for those who believe that good works are the most important aspect of Christianity. They are important; but what is more important is our connection to Jesus Christ that enables us to do effective good works. This is why the first of the two great commandments is the greatest.[2] It empowers the second one. When the Spirit is within us, we have God who is love. Without Christ's Spirit within us, through whom agape love flows into us, all of the good works in the world won't do us any good.[3] The Spirit facilitates our good works; and it makes us zealous of good works. It also brings us righteousness by faith, and opens us up to God's grace.

There is no trust in the Creator in non-Biblical spiritual practices such as yoga, visualization, concentration, and mantras because they are usually based on the view that god is everything and everything is god, which includes us; therefore, there is no personal God to trust. They do not take us beyond our own thoughts and imagination, or God's creation; therefore, they do not connect us with the Biblical God even though they may have been modified to include Christian imagery. The "spark of the divine" and the Biblical Holy Spirit are not one and the

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[1] John 6:28-29; cf. 15:5; Acts 2:37-38; Galatians 6:15
[2] Cf. Matthew 22:38
[3] Cf. 1Corinthians 13:3; 2Corinthians 5:17-20; 9:8; Ephesians 2:8-10; 2Thessalonians 2:16-17; 2Timothy 1:7; Titus 2:14; 1John 4:8; John 15:5

same. This is why these practices are not found in the Bible. It is not an oversight on the part of the writers. These are a serious hindrance because they prevent us from taking advantage of a relationship with the Biblical Creator, along with the special benefits that result from it. Also, there is no trust specifically in Christ as Creator in these practices because He is considered to be no different than we are in terms of divinity. Even though adherents may say that Jesus Christ is God, they actually mean that Jesus Christ is god in the same way that we are all god. Their Holy Spirit is the "spark of the divine" that they say we are all born with, and not the Holy Spirit of the New Testament who is received by our faith in Jesus Christ. Their aim is to remove blockages to their realization of the "spark of the divine" that is supposedly within them; and because they view themselves as god, they see no reason to interact with anyone higher than themselves to accomplish this; therefore, the grace of the Creator is closed to them.

Many of them use the terminology of the Bible, but they actually mean something entirely different because they superimpose a monistic view of god on the Bible. This presents them with many Biblical inconsistencies of their own making because the Bible is unapologetically dualistic, and their world-view just doesn't fit. It is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The Jesus Christ of the New Testament, if they bother to read it, sounds arrogant to them because He claimed to be more than the god that you or I are supposed to be. For them, His claims are unacceptable because, within a monistic world-view, there is no transcendent God to have faith in. They usually say that the Bible is primarily metaphors, with the implication that the events in the Bible did not occur as they are recorded, or that the Bible is not history. This cannot be proven because it would involve an attempt to prove a negative, which cannot be done. Also, historic events and metaphors are not mutually exclusive. Extracting a metaphor from an historic event is totally permissible in Scripture.[1]

Trust in the Creator is uniquely suited for the dualistic world-view of Creator and creation; but it doesn't lend itself to a monistic world-view that has no personal Creator to rest the mind upon with unconditional trust. Salvation is very much intertwined with and dependent upon the Biblical world-view because there is no salvation without trusting in Jesus Christ.

Humans are inherently dualistic in relation to God. This is also true of those who profess to be monistic. It is difficult to reconcile monism with the tendency of humans to view their God or gods as something above themselves. Even when the monistic god is intellectualized as an

[1] Cf. Galatians 4:21-31

impersonal energy force that is everything or is in everything, humans will tend to worship some tangible object in God's creation, including themselves; and will justify it by saying that the object they are worshipping is a part of or a manifestation of their god, or that their god is in the object.[1] Sun worship, usually found in nature or goddess spirituality, is a universal example of this.

Because monists do not acknowledge the Creator God of the Bible, they shut themselves off from the special graces that are for those who will humble themselves towards Him. People without the Biblical God will then be prey for demonic forces that hate humans. They will often influence these people to perform immoral acts and human sacrifice for spiritual purposes.

Spirit entities, good and bad, are able to take on a form that is visible to humans; but it is an illusion. What we see may not always be who or what we think it is; or it may not be what the entities themselves want us to believe.[2] Knowledge of Scripture is important because the deceptive spirits often convince the uninformed of what they want them to believe, which includes doctrinal error.[3] What we see may not be the spirit of grandma or grandpa.

A Christianity that does not emphasize a relationship of unconditional trust with the personal Creator God of the Bible will, like the monists, find something else to worship, or will promote religious practices and rituals in its place. In Catholicism, some will ascribe to Mary, the mother of Jesus, attributes that belong only to God or to His Son, and will consider her to be interchangeable with Christ in terms of entrustment even though she is not part of the Godhead; this, in spite of the clear teachings of Vatican Council II that Mary is a creature of God who is subordinate to Christ.[4] Others will not go beyond Sunday praise and worship. In Protestantism, the written word will be given a place interchangeable with unconditional trust in the living Word who is Christ.

Without Biblical spirituality, people will tend to worship something other than God, including themselves or each other; and they will always rationalize that what they are worshipping is equivalent to God. Others will immerse themselves into doing good works or deeds, where social justice replaces inner justice or righteousness, thinking that this is the only thing that God expects of them. What all of these have in common is that a relationship with the Biblical

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[1] Cf. Romans 1:20-25
[2] Cf. Hebrews 13:2; 2Corinthians 11:14-15; Tobit (Catholic Bible) 12:15-22
[3] Cf. 1Timothy 4:1
[4] Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Chapter VIII:62

God is excluded. When it comes to salvation, these people are no better off than the non-Christian monists.

Nowadays, non-Christian practices and world-views have found their way into Christianity, which makes it hard to distinguish it from everything else. Christianity needs to inform the culture, and not be corrupted by it. The opposite has happened, and continues to happen. Familiarity with the Bible is important for understanding and countering these trends; but instead, it is ignored and relegated to myth in many circles, which does not bode well for the future of Christianity or humanity. The Bible provides the only clear alternative to the prevailing culture, as it always has.

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5. HOLINESS

Holiness is usually thought of as something otherworldly; but it is supposed to be our natural state as human beings. Holiness is to be human in the fullest sense because it results from being connected with the Biblical God. It has different meanings such as being separate or pure; but ultimately it means separation from the world for God's use. For the Christian, it is a state of being that is brought about by unconditional trust in Christ, which brings the presence of Christ within us and the fruit of the Spirit. This separates us from an inordinate attachment to the things of the world, and toward an attachment to God. We are so accustomed to an excessive attachment to things that it feels natural for us. This should not be the case.

Trust in Christ places God first in our lives, and everything else second. It resets our priorities. Christ's own faith in the Father, which is a part of Christ's Spirit within us, accomplishes this for us because our faith in the Father without Christ's is insufficient for righteousness and separation from the world. Our responsibility is to continue to remain surrendered and yielded to Christ's Spirit so that holiness does its greatest work in us. Holiness is not exterior pious acts, although a person who is holy may perform them. It is essentially an interior spiritual disposition.

Our desires or lusts are what keep us excessively attached to the things of the world. Usually, the problem is not the things themselves, but our excessive attachment to them; therefore, we don't always have to physically remove them from ourselves in order to be holy. When God created the earth, He saw that it was good, not evil. Peter speaks of "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."[1] Paul tells us that "in regards to your former manner of life, you are to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."[2] Lust is what corrupts us; not our physical proximity to the world. The problem is within us, and how we relate to the outside world. This realization becomes especially important when dealing with addictions, because it enables us to address the real problem rather than the symptoms. Our excessive demand for the object is the problem, rather than the object itself.

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[1] 2Peter 1:4; cf. Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 25; Romans 8:1-21; 13:14; Galatians 5:24; Ephesians 2:3; 4:22; Philippians 3:3, 19; Titus 3:3; 1Peter 1:14-15; 4:2

[2] Ephesians 4:22-24; cf. Colossians 2:11

When we surrender our lusts to God in the person of Jesus Christ we become one with Christ as Christ is one with the Father, and we become separated from the world for God's use; but oneness with Christ does not make us God, because our human nature doesn't become divine: it is inhabited with divinity. In the same way, Christ's human nature isn't divine only because He is one with the Father; but Christ, because He is the Word incarnate, has a divine nature in addition to His human nature within His own person; and this is what makes Him divine. He is God the Word even apart from His human oneness with the Father. This is why Christ is God and we are not even though we may have the presence of God within us.

Human nature needs to be surrendered to God: even Christ's human nature. Christ surrenders Himself to the Father; and we surrender ourselves to Christ. When we surrender our lusts, we are also surrendering the source of addiction; therefore, we are addressing the real problem. This surrender is also called self-abandonment or self-emptying toward God. Christ's Spirit within us then enables us to share in His holiness, which results from His human faith in the Father and His intercession. Christ gives us an enhanced ability to avoid acting out on our lusts.[1]

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord"[2]. "Whosoever abides in him sins not; whosoever sins has not seen him, neither known him."[3] Holiness is required for everybody. "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a father unto you, says the Lord Almighty. Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."[4] Sanctifying grace is what keeps us separate from the world. Grace is God's favor on us through the presence of Jesus Christ within us. The words: *saint*, *holy*, *sanctify*, *holiness*, and *sanctification* are all derived from the same Greek root word (*hagos*); and they all basically mean the same thing. In the Body of Christ, everyone is a saint. There is no two-tiered sainthood.

Holiness does not require us to physically remove ourselves from interaction with the world, or to turn off our electronic devices. There is no need to enter a monastery. When Christ was praying to the Father for His disciples, He said, "I pray not that you should take them out of

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[1] Cf. Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 8:12-13
[2] Hebrews 12:14
[3] 1John 3:6
[4] 2Corinthians 6:17-7:1; cf. Romans 1:7; 1Corinthians 1:2; 2Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2

the world, but that you should keep them from the evil."[1] We are told to be as "Obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he who has called you is holy, so you also be holy in all manner of behavior because it is written: You will be holy; because I am holy."[2] Lust is what excessively attaches us to the things of the world. Our outward behavior should not reflect our prior lustful attachments. This implies that there is a legitimate way of interacting with the things of this world; and that when we are relating to the Creator in the proper way, we are also in a proper relationship with His creation.

Our primary motivation for behavior change is not the attempt to live according to a system of rules and regulations, but to avoid the slavery of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit; "For sin will not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Are we to sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Don't you know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"[3].

Specific dress codes and hair styles are not true holiness. The issue is how we *relate* to the things that we interact with. It is generally not the things themselves that are the problem. There are circumstances and things that we need to avoid; but not to the extent that some groups encourage. A Christian group that isolates itself from the world is usually immersed in legalism, and not the Spirit. Cult leaders are threatened by the Spirit because the attention of the group will not be centered on them. Political tyrants are also threatened for this same reason. They will attempt to suppress religion, and keep the people absorbed and into themselves by ignorance and immorality in order to maintain power and control.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is inner freedom, and also more outer freedom because there is less reason for governments to maintain order. The Spirit is always a threat to those who want power and control over people, whatever their motive. It is always in their interest to keep religion as shallow and ineffective as possible. As long as religion is kept within the confines of a church building, it isn't much of a threat or a benefit to anyone. No institution that traffics in human weakness will have an interest in helping people to overcome weakness, because their power and livelihood will be threatened.

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[1] John 17:15
[2] 1Peter 1:14-16
[3] Romans 6:14-16; cf. 6:22; 8:2-4, 12-13; 14:17-18; Galatians 5:13; Colossians 2:20-23

Jesus was able to associate with sinners, while, at the same time, remain sinless: something that the religious leaders of His day did not understand.[1] They avoided associating with sinners because they did not have the strength to remain sinless: Jesus did. This continues in today's Christianity because, without the benefits of Biblical spirituality, it remains weak, and misunderstands what it really means to be separate from the world; therefore, it always finds a substitute for real holiness. Modern Christianity has strayed from its roots to such an extent that real holiness is the exception rather than the rule. The strength from the Holy Spirit is still available to us. It does not need to remain distant. Christ shares His own strength and holiness with us when we have His Spirit within us.

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[1] Cf. Luke 19:7; Matthew 9:11-12; 11:19; John 8:1-11, 43-44; 1Corinthians 5:9-13–only to discipline a Christian

6. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW

The place of the Old Testament Law in Christianity was the earliest recorded doctrinal controversy that the early Christian church had to confront. This is understandable because the earliest Christians were all Jews who continued to attend the temple and the synagogues after their conversions, and continued to observe the Mosaic Law. At that time, they did not view themselves as part of another religion. They viewed themselves as Jews who acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Messiah. When Gentiles began to be evangelized and converted, the question of whether any Christian should be under the Law of Moses needed to be settled.

Most of the commentary concerning the place of the Law in the New Testament church is found in the writings of Saint Paul; "For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak because of the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."[1] Walking in the Spirit replaced walking in the Law. The Spirit is Christ's presence within us; and as a result of this, we have His righteousness by faith through His faith in the Father; and we also have Christ's righteousness of the Law because He fulfilled it. We have the Kingdom of God within us.

The "law is holy"[2], but because of our human weakness or tendency toward sin, we are incapable of performing the Law perfectly, which is the requirement for having its righteousness. Christ was the only one who could fulfill it perfectly and obtain its righteousness for Himself and for us. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly…But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."[3] Christ came to strengthen us from sin.

Christ ushered in a new regime: not of the Law, but of the Spirit; "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has enlivened us together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross"[4]. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law"[5]; "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in

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[1] Romans 8:3-4; cf. Romans 8:1-4; Colossians 2:20-23
[2] Romans 7:12; cf. Matthew 5:17-18; John 15:10, 12; James 2:10; Galatians 5:1-4
[3] Romans 5:6; 13:14; cf. Psalms 105:4; Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 8:3-4
[4] Colossians 2:13-14; cf. Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 7:12; 8:6-13
[5] Galatians 5:18

Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."[1] "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."[2] There are no longer any sins pertaining to the Law of Moses, or its curse for breaking the Law.

Because our faith in Christ opens us up to His Spirit, and Christ fulfilled the Law, we now have the righteousness of the Mosaic Law within us through the presence of Christ's Spirit, which includes the benefits of His own physical circumcision and His identification with Judaism; and we also have His righteousness by faith within us as a result of His personal faith in the Father. We have all of this by proxy when we have Christ's presence within us by our faith in Him. He shares all of this with us; and because of this, God's grace is available to us; otherwise, it would not be. The veil of the temple was torn so that we can now, individually, have access to the Holy of Holies that was behind the veil.[3] Jesus Christ is now in the heavenly Holy of Holies at the right hand of the Father; and we are there with Christ when we are parts of His body by His Spirit within us.

In the Old Testament, the Jewish high priest was the only one who had access to the Holy of Holies in the temple. There is no longer the veil of the Law to keep us out of God's presence. Christ's righteousness by faith superseded the Mosaic Law after He fulfilled it.[4] If He hadn't done this, the performing of the Law would still be required and the veil of the temple would still be present; therefore, Christianity would not have happened.

Saint Paul scolds the Galatians for submitting themselves to the Law when he asks: "This only would I learn of you, did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?"[5] The Galatians were being seduced by those who wanted them to submit to the Mosaic Law for righteousness. "Wherefore, if you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"[6]; "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy

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[1] Philippians 3:3; cf. John 4:23
[2] Hebrews 10:16-17; cf. 8:8-13; 10:16-17; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 2Corinthians 3:2-9; Romans 11:6; Philippians 3:9
[3] Cf. Matthew 27:51; Ephesians 1:3; Hebrews 10:19-20
[4] Cf. Matthew 3:15; 5:17-18; Hebrews 12:18-24
[5] Galatians 3:2-3
[6] Colossians 2:20-22

Spirit."[1] Christian spirituality is a function of faith in Jesus Christ and His Spirit within us, which is God's means of salvation, and has nothing to do with food and drink. Dietary rules don't apply because God doesn't care how physically cleansed we are before He sends us the Spirit of His Son. They are important for those who want to create their own righteousness because they either don't understand God's righteousness or don't want to submit to it.

Christianity needs to go back to its beginnings of having righteousness by our personal faith in Jesus Christ, and not to a purported righteousness by anything else. There is no adequate amount of personal cleansing that we can do prior to coming to God. Only God can cleanse us; and only after we receive His presence. Faith is the only preparation that we need. Paul states: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes"[2]. You can't have the power of God unto salvation unless you humble yourself to the Biblical God. Also, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed."[3] Paul repeats the same warning in the next verse. This applies to anyone who changes the Gospel message. There would be less changing of it if people really understood it, applied it to their lives, and reaped its benefits. This warning also applies to those who want to change it because they want to make it more like other religions or because they think it is outdated. Compromising with Jesus Christ removes the gospel from its power source. The primary reason why people don't want to receive Christ is that they want to persist in their evil deeds.[4]

The Epistle to the Romans

In the book of Romans, Paul says that "Therefore by the deeds of the law there will no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin"[5]. Knowing only what is sinful does not ensure that we will do the right thing. The law of sin prevents it, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[6] None of us merit salvation regardless of whether we are under the Mosaic Law or not. "For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all."[7] Human weakness prevents us from keeping the whole law perfectly. Christ

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[1] Romans 14:17; cf. Hebrews 13:8-9; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15
[2] Romans 1:16. The word *believeth* (Gr. *pisteuo*) in this verse is from the same Greek root word as the one for *faith* (Gr. *pistis*)
[3] Galatians 1:8; cf. 1Corinthians 1:24; Hebrews 13:8
[4] Cf. John 3:18-21
[5] Romans 3:20
[6] Romans 3:23; cf. Romans 7:14-8:2
[7] James 2:10; cf. Romans 8:3-4; 14:14, 22-23; Galatians 5:1-4

was able to do this. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not provide Adam and Eve with continued inner strength; instead, it sapped their strength along with the strength of their descendants.

When the Law of Moses came into existence, it added penalties for breaking it "Because the law works wrath; for where there is no law, there is no transgression…For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law."[1] This lack of imputation or legal charges also applies to us as long as we don't place ourselves under a system of rules and regulations for attempting to be righteous. "But now the righteousness of God, separate from the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets…Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the deeds of the law."[2] The words *justified* and *righteousness* in these verses are derived from the same Greek word. "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise becomes of no effect."[3] Righteousness by faith happened to Abraham prior to circumcision and the Mosaic Law; and, it could not be annulled by the Mosaic Law. Abraham's seed (singular) is Christ; and when we receive Christ's Spirit within us by our faith in Him, we also have Christ's own righteousness by faith within us which He has from His own faith in the Father. Abraham's spirit is not available to us by faith in him; therefore, Abraham cannot share his righteousness by faith with us; and it is also not available to us by our faith directly in the Father. It is only available through faith in Jesus Christ.

According to God's promise made to Abraham, it was possible only for Abraham and Jesus Christ to be recipients of righteousness by their faith directly in the Father. For us, there is no possibility of righteousness by faith unless we have Christ's Spirit within us by our faith in Him. This enables Him to share *His* faith in the Father with us, that results in spiritual discernment and the fruit of the Spirit for us from righteousness by faith which cannot be separated from it. This is why faith in Jesus Christ is essential for righteousness, faith, grace, enlightenment, salvation, and eternal life. He has to share His own righteousness by faith with us in order for us to have it, along with everything else that accompanies it. We can't bypass Christ and get it directly for ourselves from the Father because only Christ is the promised singular seed of

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[1] Romans 4:15; 5:13

[2] Romans 3:21, 28. The words *righteousness* or *justice* (Gr. *dikaiosune*), *justified* (Gr. *dikaioo*), and *justification* (Gr. *dikaioma*), are from the same Greek root word *dikaios*, which means "holy" or "innocent"

[3] Romans 4:13-14; cf. Galatians 3:16-18; 4:6; Romans 3:22; 4:20-25; 5:18-19, 21; 8:15; John 15:5

Abraham who has it directly from the Father; and only He is able to share it with us, because His Spirit can inhabit us.

Everything that we receive from the Father pertaining to salvation is directed to us through the man Christ Jesus, who is within us by our faith Him; and He acquires it for us by His human faith and intercession toward the Father.[1] This is why Christ's humanity continues to be essential for our salvation, as well as His divinity. Our faith in anyone or anything else will not save us or do us any good, including our faith directed towards the Father without Jesus. This is why Jesus Christ said that we can't do anything without Him, which may sound offensive to some people, but He was making a simple statement of reality because He knew that He was more than just human; and He also knew what His function would be after His resurrection and ascension. Christ gives us an access to the Father that is not possible without Him.

Paul compares us to a wife whose husband dies, and, as a result, is released from the law of marriage to that husband. She is then free to marry someone else. "Wherefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."[2] We are no longer under the Mosaic Law because Christ, our first husband, died after fulfilling the Law, and took it out of the way. We are now free to marry the resurrected Christ, our second husband, who represents righteousness by faith. God made Christ, "who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we may be becoming the righteousness of God in him"[3]. Because of the resurrected Christ, our new husband, we are now under the law of faith and its righteousness, through Christ.[4]

Jesus Christ, prior to His death, subjected Himself to the Old Testament Law, and then completely fulfilled it. This is why He restricted His earthly ministry to Israel.[5] When He fully completed the prior covenant (Old Testament Law of Moses) and suffered the death penalty for breaking the Law even though He was innocent, He was then able to supersede it after His death and resurrection with the law of faith, which benefits both Jew and Gentile alike. Because righteousness by faith happened to Abraham prior to the Law and Israel, and it was promised to his single seed, Jesus Christ, it is now available for everyone, and not just for Israel.

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[1] Cf. Romans 8:15, 26-27, 32; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18; 1Timothy 2:5
[2] Romans 7:4; cf. Colossians 2:13-14; Ephesians 2:15; Matthew 5:17-18
[3] 2Corinthians 5:21; cf. also Galatians 3:10-14
[4] Cf. Romans 3:27
[5] Cf. Matthew 15:24; 10:5-6; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:11-18; Hebrew 2:9-13; 9:15

Paul describes the effects of the Law of Moses when it was introduced. He asks, "What will we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You will not lust. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of lust. For without the law sin is dead. At one time, without the law, I was alive; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good: that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin"[1].

The legal death penalty accompanied legal sin from the Law of Moses. Prior to the Law, there was no legal sin; and therefore, no legal death penalty for it even though people physically died since Adam and Eve: "For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses"[2].You can't have a legal penalty for something that is not imputed or legally charged against you. This was the case prior to the Mosaic Law. The Law itself is not sin; but when the Law was introduced, no one except for Jesus Christ could fully perform its requirements for righteousness because of human weakness from the law of sin; therefore, everyone except Jesus Christ was guilty of legal sin and its penalty. At His death, He fulfilled the Law of Moses, and abolished the necessity of performing it, along with the curse of the Law and its legal death penalty; and He superseded it with righteousness by faith, and eternal life.

The Epistle to the Galatians

Apparently, the idea that Christians are not under the Mosaic Law was gradually becoming accepted early in the Christian church because, by the time Paul went to Jerusalem approximately 17 years after his conversion, he took Titus, a Gentile, with him, and he says

[1] Romans 7:7-14; cf. Romans 2:9-29; 3:19
[2] Romans 5:13-14; cf. 1:32; 3:9, 19-20; 5:20-21; 7:9; Act 17:30; Galatians 3:10-14; Ephesians 2;15-16; Colossians 2:13-23; James 2:10; Deuteronomy 11:26-28; 27:26; 28:15; 29:19-20

that "neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised"[1]; but, in spite of this, the controversy remained.

Paul subsequently says in the same chapter: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. We also we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law will no flesh be justified…I do not disregard the grace of God; for if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."[2] The word *believe* in this passage is translated from the same Greek root word as the word *faith*; therefore, they mean the same thing. In this passage, most of the newer translations of the Bible change "faith *of* Christ" to "faith *in* Christ"; therefore, they lose the sense that it is Christ's own personal faith in the Father that justifies us when Christ's presence is within us. The faith of Christ supersedes the Mosaic Law for obtaining righteousness; otherwise, "Christ is dead in vain". Our faith in Christ is required for having His Spirit within us, which contains His faith in the Father with its accompanying righteousness by faith. His faith in the Father is the gift of faith that we receive. Both the old King James Version of the Bible and the Catholic Douay Version use "faith *of* Christ" in this passage. These distinctions are very important because, without them, we won't know what our responsibilities are toward God. We may end up praying for the gift of faith, and waiting endlessly for it; rather than acquiring it by our faith in Christ, which is ultimately how we receive it. Bad or incomplete theology can cost us dearly. Our faith in Christ is done by our own deliberate choice: an act of our will; but it is motivated by the Father drawing us to His Son: which raises questions of predestination and the election of grace.

Regardless of what God does behind the scenes, He rewards and punishes us according to the choices that we make, good and bad, because they are viewed by God as our responsibility. The pharaoh of Egypt made freewill choices when he was preventing the Israelites from leaving Egypt during his negotiations with Moses, even though God hardened the pharaoh's heart against freeing the Israelites; but in spite of this, the pharaoh was culpable, and Egypt was punished because of his choices. Judas Iscariot was punished for his choices even though he was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Prophecy not only demonstrates God's foreknowledge of future events, but also His control over them. Predestination and the use of our wills have been subjects of debate for a very long time.[3]

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[1] Galatians 2:3; cf. 2:11-14
[2] Galatians 2:16, 21; cf. John 6:37-45; 17:6; Romans 8:29-30; 11:5; Philippians 2:13
[3] Cf. Romans 11:33; 9:14-24

In the book of Galatians, Paul expands on the notion that Christ, and only Christ, is the promised seed of Abraham who supersedes righteousness by the Mosaic Law with His righteousness by faith. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He didn't say, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to your seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ; the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore, then, serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made…But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." [1] Again, note that Jesus Christ's own personal faith in the Father is what provides us with justification by faith, and saves us.

A further confirmation that this is the correct translation is found where it says: "Wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster". This obviously refers to Christ's faith because faith did exist before the Law. The Mosaic Law brought us to Christ so that we can be justified by His own faith in the Father after He fulfilled the Law. Only Jesus Christ is the promised single seed of Abraham. Our faith in Christ is required for having His Spirit within us. It contains His faith in the Father that gives Him the righteousness by faith which He can then share with us. Christ's Spirit within us is the means by which He can share His own righteousness by faith with us. This is the only way that we can have it for eternal life. "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."[2] "And in thy seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."[3] "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, announced before the gospel to Abraham, saying, In you will all nations be blessed. So, then, they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."[4] Faith in Christ unifies both Jew and Gentile because the Mosaic Law no longer separates the two. Righteousness by faith is accessible to all nations (Gr. *ethnos*).

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[1] Galatians 3:16-19, 22-25; cf. Genesis 12:3; 13:15; 22:18
[2] Galatians 3:29
[3] Genesis 22:18; cf. Romans 8:17-25
[4] Galatians 3:8-9; cf. Genesis 12:3; 22:18

Christ's faith in His Father, along with its accompanying righteousness, peace, and strength became available for us at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Historically, without the type of faith in Christ that brings us His peace, presence, and righteousness, faith has turned into an intellectual belief in Christ, with faith for the objects of God's creation. There is no humility toward God in this level of faith. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."[1] This is one of the most important principles in Scripture because without it, we end up with today's Christianity: shallow and materialistic. Grace, protection, and guidance from God come to us by our faith in Christ; then, God determines how He dispenses them to us. Our function is to trust in God and not lean on our own understanding; and then He does the rest.

Christ needs to be the focal point of our faith: not other people or things because all of the benefits of Christianity, which include His justification or righteousness by faith, flow into us only from His presence within us. Everything that we receive from the Father which pertains to salvation flows into us through Christ; and this can only happen when Christ's Spirit is within us by our faith in Him.

"But, when the fullness of the time arrived, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."[2] Christ restricted His earthly ministry to Israel, and subjected Himself to the Mosaic Law in order to fulfill it.[3] After He completed it, He abolished it by nailing it to His cross. All who have Christ's Spirit within them, both Jew and Gentile, are now able to benefit from the completion of His earthly ministry, share by adoption in His Sonship, and also share in His righteousness from His fulfilling of the Mosaic Law and His faith in the Father. The need for us to perform the Law died with Him, along with the performing of any other system of rules and regulations that is ostensibly needed for righteousness.[4]

"For as many as are under the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them…Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law; being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree; so that the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through

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[1] Matthew 6:33; cf. 1Peter 5:6-7; Wisdom (Catholic Bible) 7:11; Mark 10:29-30
[2] Galatians 4:4-5; cf. John 4:34; 17:4; 19:30; Galatians 3:13; Malachi 3:17
[3] Cf. Matthew 15:24; 5:17; 10:5-6; Luke 24:44; Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9-10
[4] Cf. Colossians 2:14-23; Galatians 2:19; Romans 7:4; 8:4; 10:4; Galatians 5:18; Ephesians 2:11-18; 1Timothy 1:9

faith."[1] Christ was able to perform the works of the Law perfectly, which was the requirement for fulfilling it and having its righteousness. Christ paid the death penalty associated with the curse of the Law, even though He was innocent. Other than Christ, humans are too weak to perform the Law perfectly; but through the presence of His Spirit within us, He shares His righteousness of the Law with us. This is why those who belong to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, do not need to perform it; and are the real Jews regardless of ethnicity.[2] By His presence within us, He connects us to Israel, God's covenants of promise, and the blessings of Abraham. Christ is the bridge between the Old and the New Testaments: between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity would not exist without His completion of the Old Testament Mosaic Law.

After Christ's earthly ministry was complete, and the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, His presence became available to the whole world.[3] Christ's faith, righteousness, peace and strength can now be ours regardless of who we are. The practical aspect of this is that, without Christ, our own faith is fleeting and temporary; and therefore, our inner peace is fleeting and temporary. The peace that comes from the presence of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is sustained and lasting. His righteousness and peace are intertwined. Because of what Christ accomplished, "righteousness and peace have kissed each other"[4]; and they are now married to each other. Christ's inner peace or rest accompanies His righteousness by faith; and both are now available to us by His Spirit.

The resurrected and ascended Christ does this by His continued intercession and faith in the Father. He also shares with us His place in heaven at the right hand of God because we are parts of His Body; and this, in turn, enables us to share in His human role as High Priest, intercessor, and king.[5] Our priesthood is conferred upon us automatically by the presence of Jesus, the High Priest, within us. The Holy Spirit and His fruit provide us with our Christian enlightenment: and are our inner confirmation of this.[6] Theology needs to have a corresponding reality that we are able to experience. We must get beyond the words, concepts, and ritual.

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[1] Galatians 3:10, 13-14; cf. Deuteronomy 27:26; James 2:10; Romans 9:24-33; 10:19-21; Ephesians 3:3-6; Colossians 3:10-11; 2Corinthians 5:21; Hebrew 2:9-14
[2] Cf. Romans 8:3-4; 2:25-29; 9:6-8; Ephesians 2:12-13; Colossians 2:11-17; 2Corinthians 1:20-22; Matthew 5:17-20
[3] Cf. Acts 1:8; Matthew 24:14; Romans 4:25; Mark 10:45; 1Peter 3:18
[4] Psalms 85:10; cf. 72:3; Isaiah 32:17; Romans 14:17; James 3:18
[5] Cf. Ephesians 2:5-7; Romans 8:26; 1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 2:26-28; 3:21; 5:10; 19:14; 20:6
[6] Cf. Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:16; 1Corinthians 13; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:9-11; 1John 2:5-6; 5:10

Paul encourages the Galatians to "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say to you, that if you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you that are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness in virtue of faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which is powered by love."[1]

Paul evidently had harsh words for those who wanted to withdraw from simple faith in Christ, and adopt the system of rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law. Modern Christians should also heed this warning. We fall out of grace when we subject ourselves to any system of rules and regulation for righteousness because law-breaking subjects us to legal sin and, as a result, we withdraw ourselves from Christ's righteousness by faith. We become guilty of trying to establish our own righteousness apart from Christ's. God withholds His grace from us when we reject His means of salvation. When we hold back communion with God, He will not override our choice.

"For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You will love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, contentions, jealousies, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and the like; of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is not law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."[2]

Paul talks about liberty from the Old Testament Law of Moses, and also liberty from the law of sin that drives us to do things that are against our better judgment. Christ is our liberty from both. We have victory over the law of sin if we "walk in the Spirit"; and "the fruit of the Spirit"

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[1] Galatians 5:1-6; cf. Romans 11:6; Colossians 2:20-23

[2] Galatians 5:13-24. *Variance*=dissension; *emulations*=rivalries; *strife*=contest of emulation. Cf. Philippians 4:5-7

contains those qualities that actually give us victory and freedom. Notice that Paul tells us to use our Christian freedom to serve one another by love, and not use it as an excuse to do the wrong things. Some will pervert Christian freedom into freedom to sin when the moderating influence of the Spirit is not present.

The Epistle to the Colossians

In the epistle to the Colossians, Paul speaks of Christ "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross…Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days…Wherefore, if you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, you are subject to ordinances (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which are all to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"[1] These passages of Scripture warn against trying to use all systems of human imposed rules and regulations for righteousness or salvation besides the Mosaic Law. Attempting to measure up to any system of rules and regulations is doomed to failure because of our human weakness. Self-discipline without the Spirit does not provide lasting results because the law of sin remains intact. Only the Holy Spirit is able to effectively raise us out of our weakness. He alters our consciousness by putting us in a place of peace and strength. The only discipline that we need in this place is to remain in it when it is tested. The discipline needed to remain in peace without God is much greater.

The Epistle to the Ephesians

Paul, when speaking of uniting both Jew and Gentile in Christ, says: "For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us, Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, to make in himself of two, one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, having slain the hostility thereby, and came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that were near. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."[2] The Mosaic Law, which caused the separation between Jew

[1] Colossians 2:14, 16, 20-22; cf. Ephesians 2:15-16; 2Corinthians 3:17
[2] Ephesians 2:14-18; cf. Colossians 2:14; 1Corinthians 12:13; Hebrews 10:9-10; Psalms 147:20

and Gentile because it was intended to be only for Israel, was abolished by Christ through His death on the cross.

In the Old Testament, only Israel had the presence of God the Father behind a veil in the Holy of Holies over the Ark of the Covenant in the Jerusalem temple; and prior to that, in the Tabernacle. The Jewish high priest was the only one allowed to enter the Holy of Holies; and this, only once a year. The veil of separation was torn at Christ's death so that everyone can now have access to the Father through Jesus Christ, who is the heavenly High Priest at the right hand of the Father; and who is also within us when we have his Spirit. Christ's Spirit contains the Spirit of the Father. We have access to the Father only through Christ because there is no provision for receiving the Father directly or through any other person or thing.[1] When we have faith in the Son, we receive the presence of both Father and Son.

Humans, at this juncture, have the capability of being in a very privileged position in relation to God. Christ will not always remain at the right hand of the Father. He will eventually leave that place to rule and reign over the earth. At that point, there will be no Christianity as we know it today. There will be a literal Kingdom of God on the earth. Generally, those who believe that the rapture or resurrection of the just occurs prior to this, also believe that the raptured Christians will return to earth with Christ to rule and reign over the earth with Him.[2]

The Epistle to the Hebrews

The book of Hebrews uses a different approach for dealing with the Old Testament Law in relation to Christ. There, He is presented as a high priest of a different order than the Levitical high priest of Israel. Christ's Melchizedek priesthood corresponds with the law of faith; and it is with this priesthood that He presently functions as our heavenly High Priest, clothed with His immortal human body, interceding for us, seated at the right hand of God. The Levitical priesthood corresponds with the Law of Moses. The change of priesthood effects a change of law. "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed,

[1] Cf. John 14:6, 10; 17:22-23; Romans 8:9; 1Corinthians 3:23; 1Timothy 2:5. Galatians 3:16; 2John 1:9

[2] Cf. Psalms 110:1; Matthew 22:44; 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; Romans 15:12; Hebrews 10:13; 1Corinthians 15:51-57; 1Thessalonians 3:13; 4:13-18; Jude 14-15; Revelation 3:21-22; 2:26-29; 5:9-10; 17:14; 19:14; 20:6; Luke 12:44; Isaiah 13:3; Job 14:14; Wisdom 3:8 (Catholic Bible)

there is made, of necessity, a change also of the law."[1] "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted."[2] Without His human nature, Christ could not be our High Priest.

The resurrected Christ is the antitype of both Melchizedek and the Levitical high priest of Israel. Christ has righteousness by faith and the righteousness of the Mosaic Law. Because of His humanity, He is someone that can identify with our temptations, and is our brother; therefore, we should not hesitate to approach Him directly, "For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need."[3] Scripture does not support the idea that Jesus Christ is too distant or remote for us, and that we need other intermediaries who are more human and accessible. Views like this keep us separated from salvation in Christ; and there is no salvation available through anyone else.

In heaven, Christ has a function similar to that of the Levitical high priest who ministered in the Jerusalem temple during the feast of the Atonement, in that Christ intercedes for us, seated at the right hand of God. There is also a heavenly Ark of the Covenant and tabernacle as there was on earth.[4] The tabernacle in ancient Israel was modeled after the heavenly one.

In the prior epistles, Christ's divinity is emphasized, which allows us to have faith in Him because this would not be allowed if He was not divine; but His human faith in the Father is what provides us with justification by faith that supersedes the Mosaic Law.[5] When we apply our faith to Christ, we implicitly acknowledge Him as our Higher Power, and we receive His Spirit within us along with the benefits of His humanity, which include both His righteousness by faith and the Mosaic Law. This means that we don't have to perform the Law ourselves because He abolished it on the cross after He fulfilled it. In other words, we are not obligated

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[1] Hebrews 7:11-12; cf. 8:1; Romans 8:1-4; Colossians 2:20-23
[2] Hebrews 2:16-18; cf. 2:9-11
[3] Hebrews 4:15-16; cf. 7:24-25; Romans 5:2; Isaiah 53:12
[4] Cf. Revelation 11:19; Hebrews 9:11, 24
[5] Cf. Hebrews 8:10, 10:9-10, 16; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 3:2-9; 1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14; Galatians 2:16 (In this verse, the old KJV and the Catholic Douay Version say faith *of* Christ instead of faith *in* Christ. Most of the later translations do not.)

to do that part of the Old Testament because Christ performed it to perfection for us; which is something we would be unable to do because of our human weakness. Our faith in Christ is required so that we can have His presence within us and thereby benefit from His completion and righteousness of the Mosaic Law, His sacrifice on the cross, atonement, righteousness by faith, priesthood, and kingship: all of which are functions of His humanity, and which He is now able to share with us by His Spirit; "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ; In whom you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."[1] Faith in Jesus Christ is our guarantee of receiving the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of salvation.

Christ is also our primary human intercessor "Called of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."[2] The Melchizedek priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood of Israel; as the law of faith supersedes the Law of Moses. The earlier supersedes the later in both cases. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."[3] A different priesthood represents a different order of things. The Levitical priesthood was a product of the Mosaic Law; but Abraham was under the law of faith prior to the Mosaic Law, and Melchizedek was his priest. Because the Melchizedek priesthood preceded the Levitical priesthood, Melchizedek was also the priest of the Levites because they were the descendants of Abraham.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abides a priest continually."[4] Melchizedek was both King of righteousness and King of peace. Righteousness and inner peace finally met each other in Christ, who is the antitype of Melchizedek because there is no record of Melchizedek's death; therefore, symbolically, his priesthood has never ceased. Because Jesus Christ is now immortal, His priesthood also doesn't cease. Melchizedek

[1] Ephesians 1:12-14; cf. 2Corinthians 1:22
[2] Hebrews 5:10; cf. 7:24-25; 1Timothy 2:5; Galatians 3:16; 1Corinthians 15:45
[3] Hebrews 7:12
[4] Hebrews 7:1-3; cf. Psalms 85:10

is also like the eternal Christ in the sense that because there is no record of Melchizedek's birth and death, and there is no genealogy for him, he is symbolically eternal.

Melchizedek is both a type of Christ and the Spirit filled Christian. "Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."[1] "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from where it comes, and where it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."[2] This last verse speaks of the guidance that comes from the Spirit. The Spirit-filled person may not even be conscious of it while it is happening because it can occur beyond our comprehension.

"And as I may so say, Levi also, who receives tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him"[3]; "But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better"[4]. Levi, a great-grandson of Abraham, was the patriarch of the Levitical priests. Even though their priesthood was established after Melchizedek's, they indirectly paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, their ancestor; and were also indirectly blessed by Melchizedek through Abraham who had God's promises. Whoever blesses you is greater.

"(For those priests were made without an oath, but this with an oath by him that said unto him, the Lord swore and will not repent, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek), By so much was Jesus made a sponsor of a better testament. And they, truly, were many priests, because they were not allowed to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them."[5] Jesus' priesthood was initiated by God's oath to Him; the Levitical priests were not of oath, but of ancestry, and they eventually died. Jesus will not die; therefore, His priesthood is unchangeable and lasting. His intercession is reliable and powerful. It is undergirded by His faith in the Father; and His righteousness is undergirded by that same faith in the Father. The risen Christ is able to save us because He is the heavenly high priest who lives to intercede for us at the right hand of God; and Christ's Spirit within us functions as our inner intercessor who "also helps our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for

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[1] Hebrews 6:20
[2] John 3:8 (compare this with Hebrews 7:1-3); cf. 1Samuel 10:7
[3] Hebrews 7:9-10
[4] Hebrews 7:6-7
[5] Hebrews 7:21-25

as we ought; but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."[1] Christ's Spirit within us, and the human Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, are perfectly synchronized in their intercession because they are one and the same. Christ's intercession at the right hand of God happens simultaneously within us when we have the Spirit of Christ. We benefit to the maximum when we are yielded to the Spirit.

The Spirit of Christ within us also makes us, simultaneously, a part of Christ's Body at the right hand of God; and we therefore have immediate and unhindered access to God the Father through Christ. There is no space and time separation between us and Christ. This is our oneness with Christ. Because the Spirit of the Father is in Christ, we share in the benefits that Christ receives from the Father because there is no separation between Christ and His Father; and therefore there is no separation between us and the Father because of our oneness with Christ.[2] The only limitation that we have is the measure of faith given to us by God who assigns our place in the Body of Christ.[3] None of us have it all, and we do not have the responsibility to perform every function of the Body of Christ. Regardless of our oneness with Christ, it is always important to emphasize that whatever fellowship we have with the divine nature does not make us Christ or God. Christ is God because of His inherent divinity as the Word. We are partakers of the divine nature; we fellowship with it. Creation is never the Creator.

In the Bible, our prayer is always supposed to be directed outwardly even though Christ's Spirit is within us; and Christ, in relation to His Father, likewise intercedes for us outwardly towards the Father because His ongoing humanity requires it. He prayed and had faith during His earthly ministry, and continues to pray and have faith at the right hand of God. Our connection with God can be maintained every moment of our lives regardless of where we are. All we need to do is to rest our minds unconditionally on His Son. Prior to Pentecost, angels had to fight their way to carry our prayers to God because the connection that we now have with God through the Spirit of His Son was not available.[4]

"Call unto me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you know not."[5] As long as we don't lean on our own understanding, but lean on God, He will not limit

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[1] Romans 8:26-27; cf. 8:34; Ephesians 1:3; 2:6 (seated with Christ in heaven); James 1:6-7 (pray with faith)
[2] Cf. John 17:22-23; Romans 8:32-39; 1Corinthians 6:17
[3] Cf. Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:4-7; 1Corinthians 12:12; Psalms 90:17; 2Peter 1:4
[4] Cf. Daniel 10:12-13; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4; Genesis 18:21
[5] Jeremiah 33:3

Himself to our own understanding when He answers prayer because man is not the measure of all things, as humanist philosophy would have us think.

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7. INDIVIDUALITY WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Individuality is initially expressed in our personal repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ which break down the fears and thought structures that keep us bound and confined, and impede our true individuality: which are aspects of the law of sin. No one else can do this for us. As a result, our thoughts have less of a hold on us. When our minds are not surrendered to Christ, our thoughts keep us enclosed within a rigid pattern of fear that blocks our receptivity to God, and prevents us from being open to His guidance and benefits. When we are surrendered to Christ, the Spirit within us enables us to move under its influence.[1]

Paradoxically, our oneness with Christ increases our individuality by His Spirit. Christ's own personal faith in the Father that is within us by His Spirit, has a subduing effect on our minds, and facilitates "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"[2]. This is what occurs when we trust the Lord with all our hearts, and don't lean on our own understanding, thoughts, imagination, or reasoning; and enables us be receptive to the promptings of the Spirit. Christ's faith in the Father gives Him perfect peace, which He, in turn, can share with us by His Spirit within us. This trust and peace enables God to intervene in our lives and make us unique parts of Christ's Body. This enables both our cohesion and our individuality.

Our cohesion is not one of human dependence on each other; but a cohesion produced by dependence upon God. Without God, humans tend towards an excessive dependence upon each other. This is usually evident in groups that are based upon ethnicity, race, or social status; and it always results in feelings of separation from other groups. Divisions and factions develop because of this, including divisions among and within Christian groups.[3] Trust in God breaks down excessive human attachment because our dependence is on God and not on His creation; and we come to know that there are certain things that only God can provide for us, which His creation can never provide. This promotes a healthy interaction with God's creation.

With trust in God, emotional dependence is greatly reduced; and our thinking and interaction with others are enhanced because they are guided by the spiritual discernment from the Holy

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[1] Cf. John 3:8; 1Samuel 10:6-7
[2] 2Corinthians 10:5; cf. Proverbs 3:5-6
[3] Cf. 1Corinthians 1:12-13

Spirit within us.[1] Our ability to freely exercise our will is increased because compulsions and addictions no longer enslave us. Faith puts reason, and everything else, in its correct place; and it facilitates proper balance by tempering any exaggerated importance that we may give to anything. It puts our minds at rest. Our faith in Christ, along with Christ's faith in the Father, which is a part of the Holy Spirit within us, can do this because Christ's faith becomes present in every aspect of our lives, and enables us to apply His faith to everything we encounter.

The normal reaction to this is that it is difficult for us to do, but this does not take into account God's response to us when we trust Him unconditionally: He reciprocates and sustains our gesture of faith.[2] This would not be possible without the indwelling Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit enlivening our spirit, our own faith can only be applied selectively and intermittently because of our human weakness that we inherit from Adam and Eve. Christ's Spirit and His personal faith in the Father do not have these limitations; therefore, Christ's presence within us brings us out of the law of sin and its accompanying weakness. Yielding ourselves to His Spirit helps us to fully experience His own peace and strength within us because He is then able to share them with us without hindrances on our part; and yielding helps us to maximize His influence in our lives.

Much of what we do cannot be controlled only by our own willpower or resolve. When we cast all of our burdens on the Lord, a passivity or vacuum is created that draws God into us. After we have received His Spirit and yield to it, we are strengthened in relation to what has kept us out of control. We yield because we know that our own willpower or resolve is not strong enough to overcome our weakness. When we don't yield, we continue to struggle on our own even with the Spirit within us.

It is important for us to know that we are hindered by fear. Unconditional trust and yielding toward God enable us to surrender fear and its accompanying manifestations, and to be removed from being the primary actors in attempting to alleviate fear. The Holy Spirit facilitates the process.

The Holy Spirit guides us into our assigned place in the corporate Body of Christ. This would not be possible without our individual connection with Christ, who is the Head of the Body. Every part of the body needs its individual communication with the Head in order for it to work in unison with the rest of the body. Paul says to "work out your own salvation with fear

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[1] Cf. 1Corinthians 2:9-16
[2] Cf. Psalms 55:22; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7; James 4:8-10; 1Peter 5:5-7

and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"[1]. When we are one with Christ, we are guided by God.

Paul tells us: "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith you stand."[2] Peter tells us that Christ is the bishop of our souls. We need to take ownership of our own salvation by individually surrendering ourselves directly to Christ, and allowing God to guide our wills and give us peace, because no one else that can do this for us. In Scripture there are no intermediaries appointed by God between Christ and us. We are required to surrender ourselves directly to Christ.

Elders are exhorted to "Neither be as lords over God's heritage, but be examples to the flock."[3] Human authority has its limits in Christianity. Leaders in the Body of Christ should never attempt to usurp the position of Christ. They are not mediators between Christ and us. Ultimately, we are accountable only to Him. When we place others between us and Christ, we have placed a wall of separation between us and Christ: and salvation. Others can never provide what Christ can.

The level of individuality that exists in the Body of Christ does not exist in cultures with monistic world-views. Because monists don't recognize that there is a Creator God to be dependent upon, human relationships are stronger, and people will be much more dependent upon each other or upon something else in God's creation. This distorts their relationship with creation because too much importance will be placed on things for emotional well-being or fulfillment that were meant only for our use. This results in an excessive attachment to people and things, and produces the frustration that occurs from not receiving the emotional lift that we expect from them. We will attempt to extract from people and things, something that can only be acquired by faith in God. This will strain human relationships because we will demand from others, a satisfaction and contentment which they cannot provide, and that can only come from God.

Our contentment in life depends upon the quality of our relationship with God, rather than the quality of our circumstances.[4] There is always ongoing confusion and frustration when our attempts to find happiness are misdirected; and this is always an indication that we are not putting God first. His creation is limited in what it can provide for us. The Creator had the

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[1] Philippians 2:12-13; cf. Psalms 90:17; 1Samuel 10:6-7; Colossians 2:19
[2] 2corinthians 1:24; cf. 1Peter 2:25
[3] 1Peter 5:3
[4] Cf. Philippians 4:11-13

prerogative to create us any way that He wanted; and He created us to thrive only when we have humility towards Him. Creation functions at its best when it is humble towards the Creator. We can willingly choose not to participate in this; but this implies that we willingly reject God's special blessings for those who humble themselves towards Him. God will bless and punish according to our choices: and even when we don't choose.

In any church organization, there needs to be sensitivity to the guidance of the Spirit, for the well-being of the organization as a whole, and particularly for the well-being of the individuals. At times, the two are not in harmony. Not everyone may identify with the overall mission of an organization. As with everything else, the proximity of the individuals to the Spirit determines how well everything works. An organization that is not led by the Spirit will impose its perceived mission on its members, and will require a great deal of conformity. In more extreme cases, it will even attempt to isolate its members from their own families in order to have total control over them. They will have no interest in promoting real Christian freedom through the guidance of the Spirit because they will perceive it as a threat, or they may not understand it at all. Human institutions coerce people by using fear; but the Spirit guides and tempers in ways that are known only to God.

The Spirit guides us in our individual ministries; and yet there is, simultaneously, a cohesion that is called the Body of Christ which exists among those who are connected to the Head. "But now has God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it has pleased him."[1] Clergy needs to realize that God is the one who places us in the Body of Christ: not ordination, or membership in a particular church. God Himself is the one who really knows a person's place in the Body and whether their heart is directed toward His Son. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another"[2]; "holding the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God."[3] In the human body, the head coordinates the functions of the body; so too with the Body of Christ. Not diverting our attention away from Christ is the most important thing that we can do for ourselves in maintaining the primary benefits of Christianity. He is our Head.

We "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in

[1] 1Corinthians 12:18; cf. 1Corinthians 12:12
[2] Romans 12:5
[3] Colossians 2:19

the Lord; In whom you also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."[1] The cohesion within the Body of Christ is caused by the Spirit of Christ who resides within each individual member: a cohesion which transcends the organizational structures and divisions within Christianity. Those who have the Holy Spirit are the true members of the Body of Christ.

Any Christian church that does not point its members towards a personal trust directly in Christ is not doing its job because it is substituting itself or something else for Christ. It is, therefore, hindering its members from receiving the Spirit, and participating in the Body of Christ. In light of this, we are not supposed to believe everything that comes our way. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."[2] We need to take ownership of our instruction because ignorance is not an excuse, and to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."[3] This is especially true now that there is so much conflicting information easily at our disposal. We can't always assume that the Christian organization that we interact with is going to instruct us in the basics of salvation.

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[1] Ephesians 2:20-22; cf. 1Corinthians 12:13
[2] 1John 4:1; cf. 1Thessalonians 5:21; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1; 2Timothy 3:15-17; 2Peter 1:19
[3] 1Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Acts 17:11; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1

8. CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Christian freedom is twofold. It is freedom from the need to conform ourselves to any religious law for righteousness; and it is freedom from the slavery to sin that results from the law of sin. The religious laws of the old covenant were a schoolmaster for bringing us to Christ. Our human weakness from the law of sin prevented us from arriving at righteousness from the Law.[1] We can only have the righteousness of the Law when we have the Spirit of Christ within us because He alone was able to fulfill the Law, and then abolished it so that we are not obligated to perform it. Christ strengthens us from the human weakness that comes from the law of sin so that we can live lives according to His will. This is the new covenant that was prefigured in the Old Testament.[2]

Paul tells us that Christ blotted out the ordinances of the Old Covenant from the time of Moses, and took them out of the way, nailing them to his cross. Therefore, if we are dead with Christ, why, as though living in the world, are we subject to ordinances?[3] Many Christians will ask that if this is true, what is there to keep us morally in line. Most continue to rely on guilt from breaking legal sin to do the right thing; but legal sin does not exist in Christianity. It never was effective for dealing with our tendency to sin from the law of sin. This is why Paul tells us concerning our sin actions that "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me."[4] The law of sin is what makes us sinners.

Our state of sin is what condemns us before any of the actions that flow from it. They are only the outward symptoms. This is why Jesus says: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."[5] Christ brings us rest when we imitate His humility toward the Father.[6] Unfortunately, in today's Christianity, this is not emphasized as it should be. Verbal declarations of making Jesus our Lord and Savior fall short of this. Confession of legal sin to God or anyone else doesn't do any good because legal sin doesn't exist. Scrupulosity often accompanies legalism because there is always the fear of punishment for breaking a law; and the law of sin will not allow a person to be at rest. We need to draw

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[1] Cf. Romans 5:6; 8:3; Galatians 5:1
[2] Cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 2Corinthians 3:2-9; Hebrews 8:8-13; 10:16-17
[3] Cf. Colossians 2:14, 20; Romans 14:3
[4] Romans 7:20
[5] John 3:17-18
[6] Cf. Matthew 11:28-30

close to God to be lifted out of the law of sin by grace. It requires repentance. The efforts of those who choose any other way will be thwarted by the law of sin. Merely refraining from sin actions only by self-control does not remove the law of sin; nor does confessing it to another person, or performing acts of penance.

Christian freedom is not the freedom to sin, but freedom from sin. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your resources unto holiness, and the end everlasting life"[1]. The death and resurrection of Christ represent our own death to sin, and our being alive to God through Jesus Christ.[2] Those who interpret Christian freedom as an excuse to do anything that they want don't understand Christianity or themselves.[3] Sin is a snare and a slavery, which is associated with our human weakness.[4] When we are servants of God, we have more freedom than when we are servants to sin because God's influence is not coercive. Sin's influence is coercive and compulsive; yet we are afraid to let go of this false freedom.

Christ's death and resurrection were for the benefit of the whole world "because we thus judge that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again."[5] This applies to everyone. Christ's death without His resurrection and immortality wouldn't do us any good. His immortality enables Him to dwell in us by His Spirit.

Christianity is not supposed to be a religion of rules and regulations; it is a religion of yielding to the Spirit. Obeying rules and regulations does not produce Christian freedom or inner transformation; whereas, the Spirit does. After we have received the Spirit through unconditional trust, yielding to the Spirit is essential because when we recognize that our own willpower or resolve is insufficient for temperance or self-control, we can yield and rest in the Holy Spirit in order to benefit from His peace and strength. Divine peace and strength frees us from ourselves, and enables us to be in control.[6] When we totally relinquish control of ourselves and yield to Christ, we obtain the maximum benefits of the Holy Spirit. They are the ultimate acts of surrender and unconditional trust.

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[1] Romans 6:22 (all of Romans 6 is worthwhile reading); cf. John 8:34-36
[2] Cf. Romans 6:6-7, 11
[3] Cf. Romans 6:15-23
[4] Cf. 2Timothy 2:26; Romans 6:17-18
[5] 2Corinthians 5:14-15
[6] Cf. Galatians 5:13-14, 22-23; Philippians 3:3; Romans 8:38-39

There is always the tendency to try to use our own strength or effort to deal with our emotional issues even after we have received the Spirit; but periodically we are reminded of its difficulty, and that yielding to the Spirit is the most effective way. This involves yielding our whole mind; therefore, spiritual practices that use our own thoughts and quieting techniques actually hinder our interaction with the Biblical God because they prevent us from receiving that which is beyond ourselves. They cannot take us beyond ourselves and into God's realm. Unconditional trust and surrender to God take us beyond our limitations because we surrender everything that is in our minds. Only this type surrender to God can accomplish this. When it is done towards God with faith in Jesus Christ, God enters into our lives. This is the method that God requires in His Scriptures to connect with Him and His Son, and to receive the Spirit. Faith and repentance are both required.[1]

Christ's Spirit within us is required to receive everything from God that pertains to salvation because Christ's human faith and intercession attain it for us. Christ contains the fullness of the Godhead bodily, both in His own person as the Word and by the inhabitation of the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is why baptism in the New Testament, after Pentecost, is specifically in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism symbolizes our death through surrender of self to Christ, and our rising to new life through His inhabiting Spirit: all of this prior to our physical death.

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you will die; but if you, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[2] We need to use the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts"[3], "That he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God."[4] "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Neither yield any part of your bodies as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness unto God"[5]; "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present

[1] Cf. Acts 20:21; 26:20; Romans 6:19, 22; Hebrews 12:14
[2] Romans 8:12-14
[3] Galatians 5:24
[4] 1Peter 4:2
[5] Romans 6:12-13

world"[1]. Christ gives us a greater ability to use our willpower for the good, and to avoid lust which brings us into bondage because "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."[2]

Christian restraint is facilitated by temperance or self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit; but this fruit is activated by a committed relationship with Jesus Christ that is Biblically based. Spiritual practices that involve only our own thoughts or quieting practices will not bring this about, including thoughts of the Biblical God. The same is true for words, diets, and body positions. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit that was evident in the New Testament Christian church happened within the framework of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. They take us beyond ourselves and our thoughts. We need to go back to Scripture, and revisit and understand this type of interaction with God. We are those "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."[3]

Christ is supposed to help us overcome our human weakness (law of sin) so that we can be effective channels of His love. "For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh; but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; You will love your neighbor as yourself."[4]

The fear that unconditional trust in God may reduce us to inaction is unrealistic. Trust actually frees us from the fear and worry that prevents us from doing many things. It is always easier and better to do things with peace and confidence, rather than with fear. Most religions and spiritualities have this idea in common; but they differ in their methods of arriving at peace and confidence: methods which have different results.

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."[5] If Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law when sin was imputed, what incentive is there to abstain from immorality? "What then? Will we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"[6] "Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin."[7] Sin is always addictive. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the

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[1] Titus 2:11-12; cf. Ephesians 2:8-9
[2] 2Corinthians 3:17
[3] 1Peter 1:5; cf. Hebrews 4:9-10
[4] Galatians 5:13-14
[5] Romans 4:8; 5:13
[6] Romans 6:15-16; cf. Romans 8:2-4 for a further explanation
[7] John 8:34; cf. Romans 6:22-23

power of any"[1]; "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin."[2] All things are lawful because there is no religious law in Christianity as there was under the Law of Moses; but, Christian freedom is not a license to sin. The Christian's practical motivation for not sinning is to remain free from the slavery of sin.

James refers to freedom from sin as the "law of liberty"[3]. Peter tells us to be "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak for maliciousness, but as the servants of God."[4] We need to use our freedom to serve God; not for sinning. Jude warned against those "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness"[5]. The many warnings against using Christian freedom as an excuse for sin show that it can be easily rationalized in this way; but, nevertheless, freedom was preached in New Testament Christianity. There is no real Christianity without Christian freedom. Legalism is not Christianity. Legalism and grace are mutually exclusive.

Humans have a basic yearning for freedom. This is why addictions and compulsions cause us so much distress. We don't like being out of control in spite of the pleasure we may receive from a certain activity. If it takes control of us, we become very frustrated. We enjoy the sensation that it gives us, but we hate the control that it has over us. When our lives revolve around pleasure-seeking, and not the Spirit, we will invariable be drawn into an addictive pattern; and we will experience lack of freedom, along with the frustration that accompanies it. Pleasure-seekers can never be at peace, even though peace is what they are actually looking for. "There is no peace, says the LORD, to the wicked."[6]

Pleasure-seeking is actually a misguided attempt to find God, because, unbeknown to us, the peace and satisfaction that we are seeking doesn't come from pleasure, but from faith in God. We are hard-wired for a connection with God, and are miserable without it: we're supposed to be. Our separation from God causes feelings of discontentment, dissatisfaction, and lack of fulfillment; all of which are caused by our sin nature which produces desires that cannot be fulfilled; but in spite of it all, we always tend to look for a remedy outside of God. We are so accustomed to this separation from God, that anything else seems abnormal. Those who do not recognize that we need God for ultimate peace and contentment will never find lasting

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[1] 1Corinthians 6:12; cf. Romans 6:1-2; Jude 1:4
[2] Romans 6:6-7; cf. Galatians 2:20
[3] James 1:25; 2:12
[4] 1Peter 2:16
[5] Jude 4; cf. Galatians 5:4
[6] Isaiah 48:22

peace elsewhere. When we have the peace of God, we know from our own experience what real peace is; and we know that it doesn't come from anything else.

We will not connect with God if we try to use our emotions or desires to do so. Because they are transitory, we will experience anxiety when our emotional sense of God comes and goes; and this invariably causes us to doubt whether we are really connected to God. Trust is a surrender of our emotions and desires to God, which produces lasting peace: not anxiety. The Holy Spirit reduces our excessive attachment to things so that we are better able to use our wills for making dispassionate and objective choices: choices according to the will of God; and He gives us a greater freedom from being controlled by our desires. When we attempt to use our freedom to indulge our desires, we end up in slavery to those desires: the opposite of freedom. In essence, we trade our lesser freedom for a greater freedom when we connect with God. All humans are required to make this choice. If we don't choose, we remain weak and in slavery to sin.

This is a primary incentive for choosing Christ instead of remaining in the state of sin; it is for our own well-being, and the well-being of everyone and everything around us. Paul says that "the creature itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God; for we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now."[1] Connecting with God is the best thing that we can do for the environment because when we have God's wisdom and moderation within us, we relate to the environment according to the will of God.

Once we have been given the ability by the Holy Spirit to overcome our human weakness, most of us will not want to go back to where we came from. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."[2] Apparently it is possible to once again be overcome by sin after we have been set free from it.

We need to resist the tendency to change Christianity into a political or economic movement that produces a superficial freedom rather than genuine Christian freedom. The freedom that is produced by political or economic systems can never surpass the authentic inner freedom that we have in Christ. Christianity influences the culture; but it does so at its best when it

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[1] Romans 8:21-22; cf. Luke 12:15; John 1:12
[2] 2Peter 2:20; cf. also Hebrews 6:4-6

remains true to its primary mission of reconciling the world to God. Social justice can never be a substitute for inner justice or righteousness. Inner justice and social justice are different from each other, but social justice will follow inner justice. Inner justice or righteousness is a function of faith in Jesus Christ and repentance; social justice is equivalent to the good works which accompany that faith. Christian social justice presupposes faith because, without faith, it is dead works. Good works are always supposed to accompany faith in Jesus Christ; but good works may not always be done within the framework of faith in Christ. In Scripture, there isn't any requirement for them to produce faith in Jesus Christ.

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9. BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

It is interesting to note that the baptismal formula used immediately after Pentecost in the early New Testament church was baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission of Christ which He gave after His resurrection and prior to Pentecost to "Go you, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"[1], apparently was interpreted by the apostle Peter, at least ten days later, as baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ. Instead of using His own name, Christ used a description of the Holy Spirit who would eventually reside within His followers, which was actually a description of Himself who is the indwelling place of the entire Godhead.[2] Christ spoke these words to His disciples after His resurrection and prior to His ascension, clothed in His immortal body; but His Spirit presence would not be within them until Pentecost.

The Son has the dual natures of human and divine. The Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, contains the whole Godhead indwelling Christ's human body. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ would not be performed until after Pentecost because Jesus was not able to dwell within them by His Spirit prior to that. This may explain why Jesus did not use His own name at the Great Commission. He was also indirectly providing additional information on the full composition of His Spirit which Peter refers to as the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was a teaching moment.

Immediately after the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter and the rest of the apostles, while still reeling from its effects, were asked by the people that had assembled, "what will we do? Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."[3] Peter apparently realized that Jesus was talking about Himself in the baptismal formula of the Great Commission; but Peter used the term Holy Spirit to describe what he and the others in the group had just received. He was probably referring to the composite Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Later, Peter said: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."[4] Maybe Peter was fulfilling the words that Christ had said: "But the Comforter, who is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance,

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[1] Matthew 28:19
[2] Cf. Colossians 1:19; 2:9-10; Romans 8:9-11, 14-15; Galatians 4:6
[3] Acts 2:37-38
[4] Acts 4:12; cf. 1Peter 1:21

whatever I have said unto you."[1] Peter had come to a greater understanding of Christ's total identity and purpose. After Pentecost, Jesus was presented as the only object of surrender and unconditional trust that brings us to the Father and salvation.

Through the name of Jesus, we have: the Spirit, Spirit of Christ, Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth, Spirit of God, Spirit of the Lord, or the Comforter. In the Old Testament, there was the Spirit of the LORD; but Christ's human spirit, which is necessary for salvation, could not have been included in it at that time. The word *Comforter* (Gr. *parakletos*) is defined as "one who is alongside to help". The term *Spirit of God*, at times, is used when referring to those things that originate specifically from the Father, as opposed to the things that emphasize Christ's human faith and intercession by which we are justified and saved; otherwise, the term *Spirit of Christ* is used: but there are exceptions.[2] The term *Spirit*, when used by itself, seems to encompass the whole Godhead, including Christ's human functions; but there doesn't seem to be any tidy way of explaining it all.

Christ's human functions within the Holy Spirit could not have been present prior to Pentecost, during both the New Testament gospel period and the Old Testament because Christ either had not fully completed His earthly mission or had not been born. During those periods, the Holy Spirit did not provide immediate salvation to those who were empowered. Their perfection had to wait for Christ to have complete His mission and sit at the right hand of God before they were able to receive what is now available for us after Pentecost.[3]

After the Great Commission, subsequent references to baptism in the New Testament either specifically mention Jesus, or nothing at all.[4] There is no further mention in Scripture of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in relation to baptism. This is actually in line with Saint Paul's theology of Christ. He says: "Know you not that, as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."[5] In order to participate in Christ's resurrection in this life, we need to participate in His death. We die to our sin nature when we surrender ourselves to Christ, because we surrender our whole beings. We then qualify for our resurrection, which is our

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[1] John 14:26; cf. 14:16-18; 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 9:31
[2] Cf. Romans 8:9-11, 14-16; 1Corinthians 6:17; 15:45; 2Corinthians 3:14-18; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; Philippians 1:19; Hebrews 9:14; 1Peter 4:14
[3] Cf. Hebrews 11:39-40
[4] Cf. Acts 8:16, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 19:5
[5] Romans 6:3-4; cf. John 17:2; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3

inner transformation that results from the presence of Christ's Spirit within us. Our life is now Christ's own life within us which we now live by Christ's faith in the Father. We have all of this automatically when we have Christ's presence within us by His Spirit through our faith in Him. Much of today's Christianity seeks resurrection without a prior death. Its reliance upon affirmations, declarations, and claiming of promises are an attempt to use words instead of actual surrender to Christ in order to arrive at inner resurrection.[1] These are shallow substitutes for real Christianity. Higher power spirituality directed towards Christ should be the core of Christianity.

Paul baptized or had people baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When he found some disciples who knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, but had been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist, he told them that "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"[2]; "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[3] When we read the words *baptized into Christ*, we usually don't associate them directly with the words in the baptismal formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the New Testament Church, the connection was evident.

Even if we are water baptized, we need to surrender ourselves to Christ in order to be children of God; we need to put on Christ. Water baptism presupposes faith. In the case of infant baptism, the faith of at least one of the parents is required.[4]

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was not a problem for Paul because in Jesus "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in him"[5]. The fullness of the Godhead resides in Jesus' humanity. He is the incarnate Word, who is God the Son. He is God the Word in human flesh. No one else has this dual nature in themselves. This is why our faith or trust can be applied directly to Him, and why we can be baptized in His name. In His singular person, He has the nature of God as the Word, and the nature of man; and has the Father and the Holy Spirit also dwelling in Him. We also are carriers of the full Godhead when we have the presence of Christ within us, but we do not have a personal divine nature as Christ has; therefore we are not allowed to direct our faith to each other, and to use each other as

[1] Cf. Matthew 15:8-9
[2] Acts 19:4-5
[3] Galatians 3:26-27; cf. Mark 16:16; John 1:12
[4] Cf. 1Corinthians 7:14
[5] Colossians 2:9-10; cf. 1:19; John 12:44-45

substitutes for Christ. We are not God even with Christ's presence within us. We are "partakers of the divine nature"[1], and can only fellowship with it; therefore, we don't qualify to receive the worship and trust that are reserved only for God. When we are baptized by the one Spirit into the one Body, we are all made to drink into one Spirit.[2]

The Spirit of Christ within us also contains Christ's human functions, which are essential for us because His humanity carries and gives us direct access to His blood atonement, faith, righteousness, peace, priesthood, intercession, Sonship, and His access to the Father. God's grace flows into us through Christ; "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus"[3]. Notice the reference to Christ's humanity in this verse. Justification or righteousness by faith requires a human mediator who has the faith which is acceptable to God the Father for righteousness. Only Christ is the promised seed of Abraham who has righteousness by faith. The only way that we benefit by it is when Christ shares His own righteousness by faith with us; and He can do this only when we have His Spirit within us by our faith directed towards Him. We can be justified or made righteous only by Christ's faith in the Father residing within us. This is the only way that we can participate in righteousness by faith. We cannot have it directly by our own faith in the Father. The name of Jesus is the only name by which we can be saved. Jesus Christ, who is both human and divine, became a life-giving Spirit for us at Pentecost. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."[4]

When divisions arose within the early Corinthian church, Paul's reply was: "Now this I say, that every one of you says, I am of Paul; or I, of Apollos; or I, of Cephas; or I, of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"[5] The same question could be asked today by just adding some additional names. The obvious answer to Paul's question is that they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ: not Paul or anyone else. Only Christ was crucified for us. No one has His uniqueness of person so that we would have the option of having faith in anyone else beside Him.

Faith specifically in Jesus Christ makes us one with Him; and when we are one with Him, we have the Father because He is one with the Father.[6] If we want the Father, we need to find

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[1] 2Peter 1:4 (the word *partaker* can also be translated, "fellowship" or "partner"); cf. 1John 4:7-13
[2] Cf. 1Corinthians 12:11-13; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:4-6; 2:18
[3] 1Timothy 2:5; cf. Galatians 3:16; 1Corinthians 15:45; Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:24-25; 1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10
[4] 2Corinthians 4:7; cf. 1Corinthians 15:45
[5] 1Corinthians 1:12-13
[6] Cf. John 17:22-23; 14:6; Matthew 11:27; Acts 4:12; 1Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 2:18

Him in Jesus because we do not have direct access to the Father, or through anyone else besides Jesus. Philip asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been such a long time with you, and you have not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"[1]

The uniqueness of Christ is that He, unlike anyone else, is the Word incarnate. He has both a human nature and a divine nature within His single person. This is what makes Him God in His own right, even apart from His human oneness with the Father by the presence of the Father within Him. This permits us to give Christ the worship and trust that are reserved only for God. No one else can claim this for themselves regardless of their holiness, stature, presence of God within them, or oneness with Christ, because no other creature of God has a divine nature. When "doubting" Thomas saw Jesus after the resurrection, his reaction was: "My Lord and my God."[2] It took a while before the apostles fully comprehended the identity of Jesus as the incarnate God.

Jesus also identified Himself with the Comforter or Spirit of truth. He spoke to His disciples and said: "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you…Judas said to him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered, and said to him: If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him."[3] Christ spoke these words while He was still on earth; and He spoke of the time, after His resurrection, when the Holy Spirit was to be sent to those who love Him.

The Holy Spirit includes Christ and the Father. Christ, as the Word incarnate, has a separate divine identity from the Father; but because Christ also has a human nature, He is required to have faith in the Father and pray to Him. This separate identity is also reflected in the terms *Spirit of Christ* and *Spirit of God*.[4] Unlike the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ always includes Christ's human spirit.

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[1] John 14:8-11
[2] John 20:28
[3] John 14:16-18, 22-23; cf. Galatians 4:6; John 17:22-26; Acts 4:12; Romans 8:9; 1Corinthians 15:45; 2John 1:9
[4] Cf. Romans 8:9

The Spirit of Christ is the Comforter or Spirit of truth. He is the Spirit of truth because He not only spoke the truth: He is Truth.[1] Christ said that He would eventually indwell His disciples. This was not available to them during His earthly ministry prior to Pentecost. Because the Spirit of Christ contains Christ's humanity as well as the whole Godhead, we can benefit from all that He obtained for us by His death and resurrection when His Spirit is within us; otherwise, without His immortal humanity, we could not. We need Christ's human faith and intercession, both within us and at the right hand of God, in order for us to receive all that God has for us.

When we have the Spirit of Christ, we also have the Spirit of the God.[2] The Father is not available to us without the Spirit of Christ. Christ also has the Holy Spirit without measure, which is also within us when we have His Spirit. We are limited only by the measure of faith given to us by God.[3] This measure of faith is what gives us our individual roles in the Body of Christ; and it is why others need to accompany us who also have their measure of faith, so that the Body can function as a unit with its unique parts. The term *measure of faith* may refer to Christ's faith: not ours.

Without our faith in Christ, we don't have the Spirit of Christ within us; and without Him, we will not have His human spirit to mediate between us and the Father so that we can receive the Father's benefits. The Spirit of the Father, which resides in Jesus, uses His Son's humanity to direct His graces into us. The Father makes Himself available to us only through the human faith and intercession of His Son within us; therefore, Christ's humanity continues to be essential for us because it enables our salvation with eternal life.

God's plan of salvation cannot be separated from the man Christ Jesus as our human mediator between God and us; and it also cannot be separated from Christ's divinity as the Word incarnate, which is what qualifies Him as our Higher Power. This is what allows us to have faith in Him and receive His Spirit. No one else can qualify; and this is the only righteousness by faith that is available for us. We get Biblical righteousness by faith only with the presence of Christ within us. Our faith in Him brings us His own faith in the Father.

Prior to the Incarnation, the Godhead of Father, Word, and Holy Spirit did not include Christ's humanity because the Word had not taken on human form to become the physical Son of

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[1] Cf. John 14:6, 16-18; 16:7; Romans 4:25

[2] Cf. Romans 8:9. This verse seems to be saying that if we don't have the Spirit of Christ, we will not have the Spirit of God (Father). This would be in line with John 14:6, 10-12; 17:21-23; 2John 1:9

[3] Cf. John 3:34-35; Luke 3:22; Romans 12:3-8; Matthew 3:16; John 1:32-33; Ephesians 4:4-7

God, the incarnate Word. The Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit spoken of in the Great Commission does include Christ's humanity because the Son Jesus Christ has the dual natures of human and divine in His single person; therefore, it has all of the provisions for salvation. This is another clue that the Great Commission describes Jesus Christ who contains all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and that when we have Christ within us by our faith in Him, we have the whole Godhead, including Christ's humanity. There is no other way to have it. God's plan of salvation requires Christ's humanity within us because His human faith and intercession are necessary for our access to the Father and to the benefits of the atonement.[1] There was no immediate full salvation available for anyone until Christ completed His mission, and His Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. The Word had to be made flesh and dwell among us in order for all of this to occur.

The words of the Great Commission, and the way they were actually implemented, show that the divinity of Christ was fully recognized from the earliest days of Christianity, and that our faith needs to be directed towards Him. In later Christianity, as the focus began to shift away from Jesus Christ and Biblical spirituality; so did the baptismal formula. This opened the door to foreign elements that corrupted Christianity and gradually closed the door, for the most part, to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit; which continues to be available, but still needs to be accessed according to the Scriptures. Biblical spirituality is the means by which we embrace Jesus our own personal Savior, and receive His Spirit; otherwise, He remains distant from us, and doesn't do us or anyone else any good. He is our only option for salvation.[2]

Christ is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God."[3] When we compromise with Jesus, it comes at a cost, because we eliminate the Power and Wisdom of God in our lives and in our organizations. The change in the baptismal formula evidenced a major theological shift in Christianity. The importance of our direct link to Jesus Christ as our Higher Power was compromised; and Biblical spirituality, the means of appropriating Christ, is practically non-existent today. Real Christianity doesn't exist without both.

At this point, "primitive Christianity" doesn't look quite so primitive. It was powerful in its day, but it hasn't been quite the same since then. Maybe we should take a closer look at it: we may learn something. Historic Christianity has evolved away from its original power and effectiveness. Today's Christianity is inferior to primitive Christianity. Jesus and Biblical

[1] Cf. Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:25; 11:39-40; Ephesians 2:18
[2] Cf. Acts 4:12
[3] 1Corinthians 1:24

spirituality must go together, and both are necessary otherwise Christianity is just an empty shell. We need to understand the Biblical views of faith and God, rather than to superimpose, on Scripture, our current views of faith, or a world-view that does not include a transcendent Creator God. Nowadays, many different views of God and spiritual practices are presented to us that are not compatible with Scripture. They do nothing but diminish the impact of Jesus in our lives. The dark spiritual realm knows this, and presents us with as many obstacles as possible to receiving the fullness of Christ. Christ said, "Strive to enter in through the narrow gate; for many I say to you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able."[1] The gate is very narrow. "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he will be saved, and will go in and out, and find pasture."[2]

Christianity is supposed to inform the values of the culture, and not be corrupted by them. The opposite has happened. Watered-down Christianity produces watered-down Christians. The theology of Jesus has more or less survived to this day, but the method of receiving Jesus, Biblical spirituality, has for the most part been forgotten. The Holy Spirit is still available, but we need to know how to connect with Him. It is done by faith specifically in Christ, along with an understanding of Biblical faith. It seems like Christianity continues to get even further away from its beginnings. It needs to get back to its roots because anything else will diminish it. "Thus says the LORD, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."[3] This is still true today: more than ever.

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[1] Luke 13:24; cf. Matthew 7:13-14
[2] John 10:9
[3] Jeremiah 6:16

10. LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

Divine agape love is described in Scripture as follows: “Love is patient, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up; does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Bears all things, trusts under all circumstances, hopes under all circumstances, endures all things. Love never fails…The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”[1]. Notice that these are all personal qualities from God. We usually think of love as what we do for ourselves and others; but this is only partially true. Christ says: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”[2] Divine love (Gr. *agape*) is a fruit of the Spirit, and therefore comes to us from God as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ: through His presence within us. It is not otherwise available. Peter apparently knew this when Christ asked him if he loved (Gr. *agapao*) Him because Peter responded by saying that he loved (Gr. *phileo*) Him with human filial love.[3]

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love…Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."[4] Divine love was not available for humanity until Christ ascended into heaven, and the Holy Spirit was subsequently poured out during the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Christ’s faith in the Father and His intercession, which are functions of His humanity, make God’s love available to us through Christ’s role as the human mediator between God and us, with His presence within us. Because the whole Godhead resides in the humanity of Jesus, the effects of His human High Priest intercession can’t be duplicated by anyone else.[5] The man Christ Jesus receives it from the Father by His human faith in the Father; and we receive it from Christ when we have His presence within us by our faith in Him. Everything that we receive from the Father pertaining to salvation flows into us through Christ’s Spirit. Agape love is God’s love that resides in the Holy Spirit, who we

[1] 1Corinthians 13:4-8; Galatians 5:22-23
[2] John 15:4-5
[3] Cf. John 21:15-17
[4] 1John 4:7-8, 13
[5] Cf. Colossians 2:9-10; 1:19; Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:24-25

now receive individually through our faith in Jesus Christ;[1] then God displays His love throughout the world through us. We are the means by which God has chosen to do this: through the Holy Spirit that is within us. Yielding to the Spirit maximizes the usefulness of this abiding love, for our benefit and others, and allows us to use it so that God can do His greatest work outwardly through us. We are then faithful carriers of His love to the world.

Sometimes we are told that we need to love ourselves in order to love others. This may be possible with human love; but it isn't possible with divine love because we cannot truly love (*agapao*) ourselves or anyone else until we have this love within us through the presence of the Holy Spirit.[2] This implies that we have to love God first, before we can love ourselves or anyone else. The order of the two great commandments also reflects this, with loving God as the first and greatest of the two because we need agape love from God in order to effectively perform the second. Even in the Old Testament, turning to God with heart and soul needed to accompany the performing of the Mosaic Law.[3]

Worldly views of love are very different from agape love from God. It is impossible to live happily ever after only with worldly love. Even a fairy tale like Cinderella could create unrealistic expectations. When we have divine love, it affects us, and everyone and everything else around us. It is not an emotional state that comes and goes, but it is an existential state of being. It is not restricted to a specific person or thing because it is a part of who we are; and when we carry it, it affects and informs everything that we are and do, including how we relate to our enemies. Divine love is peaceful and moderate; therefore, even nature benefits from it through us. When we have divine love, dominion over nature doesn't automatically translate into its destruction or misuse. Greed is destructive to nature. Nature benefits when humans are connected with God.[4]

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing."[5] This verse shows us that love and good works are not one and the same, and that it is possible to do good deeds without agape love. In order for good deeds to benefit us, they need to be done with agape love. It exists within us apart from our actions, yet it sanctifies all of our actions and good works, and makes them profitable

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[1] Cf. Romans 5:5; 1Timothy 2:5; 1John 4:11-13
[2] Cf. 1John 4:7-8; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; Galatians 5:13-14
[3] Cf. Deuteronomy 30:10
[4] Cf. Romans 8:18-22; Isaiah 55:12-13; Psalms 98:6-9
[5] 1Corinthians 13:3; cf. Revelation 14:13; 1Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; 2Corinthians 5:10; Luke 6:35; Hebrews 11:35; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 1:25

toward our final reward. Good works are dead works without the love of God that we receive through the Holy Spirit.

Good works are easier to do when we do them with agape love. For example, if we are agitated, impatient, worried, or angry, it is much more difficult to be outgoing and helpful to others. Agape love from God gives us patience and kindness, which we can apply even to our enemies. It gives us the capacity to love our enemies. They may not be interested in it, but it is their loss. There are times when people just don't like us, but we don't have to respond to them in the same way. We need to be carriers of this love, so that we have it available for the benefit of ourselves and everyone else. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."[1]

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[1] 1John 3:23; cf. John 6:28-29

11. FAITH UNTO GOOD WORKS

In Christianity, there is always the vertical interaction with God and the horizontal interaction with each other. It is faith unto good works: in that order, and not the other way around.[1] The two great commandments to love God and to love our neighbor also reflect this; they are separate commandments but they always accompany each other.[2] Notice that they are in the same order as faith unto good works. Our obligations to God are prior to our obligations to each other because we need God's resources to effectively minister to each other. Faith and agape love from the Holy Spirit prepare us for good works. Righteousness is by faith: not of works: but works will follow faith. Good works are never a substitute for faith. There is no guarantee that faith in Jesus Christ will follow good works.

The words *righteousness* and *justice* are interchangeable in Scripture versions because they are both translated from the same Greek word.[3] Social justice is an aspect of good works; inner justice is by faith: Christ's faith. Christ has inner justice or righteousness by His human faith in the Father; and then Christ shares His own righteousness with us when we have His Spirit within us by our faith in Him. This is what is commonly called justification by faith which we can receive only through Jesus Christ. An accumulation of good works cannot produce it. This is why emphasis on Christ is not misplaced, but is necessary for salvation. Social justice without inner justice is merely dead works.

We need God's grace and agape love from His Spirit to be effective ministers of reconciliation: which is our most important task.[4] The context of the word *justice* in Scripture determines whether it is talking about inner justice or social justice. We should not always assume that it refers to social justice because, most of the time, when Saint Paul uses the word, he is referring to inner justice or righteousness. He sums it up well when he tells us that "the kindness and love of God, our Savior, toward man appeared, Not by the works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus

[1] Cf. Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; 1Peter 1:2
[2] Cf. Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; 2Corinthians 9:8; Deuteronomy 30:10
[3] The words *righteousness* or *justice* (Gr. *dikaiosune*), *justified* (Gr. *dikaioo*), and *justification* (Gr. *dikaioma*), are from the same Greek root word *dikaios*, which means "holy" or "innocent"
[4] Cf. 2Corinthians 5:17-18

Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."[1]

The renewing of the Holy Spirit results from our interaction with Jesus Christ: by our unconditional trust in Him. The disconnect between New Testament Christianity and contemporary Christianity becomes evident when we see the emphasis that is placed on social justice in today's Christianity. The world is defining the Church's mission, rather than Scripture. This should be unacceptable. It is occurring because Christendom does not understand real Christianity; therefore, it does not discern the difference between truth and error.

Christianity must not lose sight of its primary mission which is to bring people to Jesus Christ. Too much of contemporary Christianity tries to promote good works unto faith, or good works without faith. The works of the Mosaic Law were ineffective for righteousness because they had to be done perfectly; only Christ could do them perfectly: we can't.[2] Also, there is no righteousness for performing any other version of good works. Christ's faith in the Father which is within us through Christ's Spirit is what makes us righteous: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes."[3] The presence of Christ within us also makes us beneficiaries of the legal righteousness of the Mosaic Law, because He fulfilled it. At His death, the Law died with Him. He nailed it to His own cross.[4]. He had to perform it completely and abolish it so that His personal faith in the Father, which produced His righteousness by faith for Him and for us, was able to supersede the Law. This is why we are not obligated to perform it. Without Christ's Spirit within us, we have no possibility of either righteousness by faith or righteousness by the Mosaic Law. Christ bridges the Old and the New Testaments.

Our righteousness, which is part of Christ's Spirit within us, includes the same judicial righteousness that Christ received by fulfilling the Mosaic Law that He was subject to during His earthly ministry. It also includes the righteousness by faith that was promised through Abraham, because Jesus Christ was the only one who was eligible for it after Abraham. Christ shares all of this with us when His Spirit inhabits us by our faith in Him. He is able to do this for us because He is the only one with righteousness or justification by both faith and the Law. Righteousness is not possible with faith in Abraham because his spirit is not available to act as

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[1] Titus 3:4-7; cf. Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-10
[2] Cf. James 2:10; Romans 3:20-21, 28; 10:3; Galatians 3:2-5; Colossians 2:20-23
[3] Romans 10:4
[4] Cf. Colossians 2:14-17; Ephesians 2:15-16; Hebrews 8:8-13; 10: 9-10, 16-17

a conduit for God's righteousness and grace; and we cannot get it by our own faith directly in the Father because God's plan of salvation does not provide for this. Righteousness by faith resides in Christ's human Spirit by His faith in the Father; and without our faith in Jesus Christ which brings us His Spirit, we have no access to righteousness or to the Father. We have them only by proxy. This is why Jesus Christ is so essential for all of us; and why He cannot be bypassed as the object of our faith with our attention diverted to someone or something else; or be replaced by an external observance or ritual. Everything in Christianity presupposes our faith in Jesus Christ; and all of the benefits of Christianity that we receive from God, flow into us through Christ's presence within us. He acquires them for us by His human functions of faith and intercession toward the Father.

New Testament righteousness by faith, which became available for us at Pentecost, is completely different from any idea of righteousness that may involve observing laws or doing good deeds. It could not have been available without Jesus' completion of the Old Testament righteousness by the Law.[1] Christ could not have fulfilled the Mosaic Law without strength from His Father. Our faith in Christ, which brings us His presence, is for us, the prerequisite for effective good works. By themselves, are not a relationship with God that bring us His Spirit and strengthen us; therefore, they cannot bring us righteousness. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."[2]

Our initial salvation is not of good works; yet we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works; and they are expected of us. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."[3] Our connection with God needs to precede our good works so that we can have God's resources to do them effectively. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, who has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."[4]

Grace is the unmerited favor that we receive in order for our good works to count toward our final reward. Our works do matter in eternity. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from

[1] Cf. Romans 3:21, 27-28; 4:25; 8:3-4; 10:5-13; Philippians 3:9; Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 2:11-18; Psalms 85:10
[2] Ephesians 2:8-10; cf. Philippians 2:13; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; 1Peter 1:2; Psalms 73:28
[3] 2Corinthians 9:8
[4] 2Thessalonians 2:16-17

henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."[1] In Christ, our labor of agape love is rewarded. Christ is the one "Who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself an acceptable people, zealous of good works."[2] Our good works must always be done within the framework of our faith in Jesus Christ, because we need the Holy Spirit to make them count toward our final reward. This can't happen without the type of drawing close to God that brings the Holy Spirit within us: who magnifies the benefits of our good works. Our works, by themselves, cannot do any of this.

A proper balance between faith and good works should never be our concern because God energizes us towards good works when we are in His children. Attempting to arrive at a balance will be another source of anxiety for us because we will never know for sure if we are doing it properly. The anxiety will be self-defeating, as always.

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[1] Revelation 14:13; cf. 1Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; Luke 6:35; Hebrews 11:35; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1Corinthians 15:58; James 1:25
[2] Titus 2:14

12. SCRIPTURE

Knowledge of Scripture is essential for being a well-equipped Christian. Paul says to Timothy "that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"[1]. Notice in this passage that even our knowledge of Scripture needs to be accompanied by 'faith which is in Christ Jesus'. This wording is interesting because it sounds like it is specifically Christ's personal faith in the Father that is within us by Christ's presence, which enables the Scriptures to make us wise unto salvation. This would be in line with the idea that Christ's faith in the Father brings us everything pertaining to salvation. Scripture starts the process by teaching us to have faith in Christ; then our faith in Christ opens us up to His Spirit and His faith; and the Scriptures continue to give us guidance throughout our journey of faith. Timothy knew the Scriptures as a child; which tells us that we also need to know them regardless of our place in life. At the time that this epistle was written, the Scriptures were the Old Testament.

Knowledge of Scripture is not a substitute for faith; but it does bring us to the step of faith. "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."[2] The Bible itself requires us to act on it, and not just read it. Faith in the written Word of God is not the same as faith in God Himself. If our faith is only in His written Word, there will remain a distance between us and God. We can rely on His Word only when we personally trust in *Him*, and not only His Word. The reliability of a person's word is contingent upon the reliability of the person.

There is a symbiotic relationship between Scripture and faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God; but then, faith brings us to a better understand of the Word of God; and this, in turn, strengthens our faith. They feed on each other. Faith gives us the presence of mind and spiritual discernment to better understand Scripture; and helps us to remove the denominational and cultural biases that may hinder our receptivity to what is actually there.

The person with faith and the guidance of the Holy Spirit has a definite advantage when interpreting the Bible because the spirituality of the Bible and its theology are based upon dualistic Higher Power spirituality. The person of faith already has this mindset, and will therefore read the Bible from this perspective and understand it better. Christianity doesn't

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[1] 2Timothy 3:15 cf. 1Timothy 1:14; John 6:28-29; Romans 10:17; Ephesians 6:14-15; Acts 3:16; 17:11; Proverbs 2:6-7; 11:2; Psalms 111:10; 119:99-100

[2] James 1:22

work without faith; and most of it will not make sense outside of this framework. Those with a monistic world-view will find much of the Bible confusing; and this is why they reduce it to metaphors. Most people are content with a superficial or cursory reading of the Bible because they already feel set in their spirituality, and do not intend to learn anything really new or different from it. It needs to inform our spirituality.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished to all good works."[1] Understanding what is in Scripture is essential for our spiritual growth; and it is also essential for getting started on a Biblical spiritual journey, as it was in my case. I found my spirituality through my own personal study of the Bible. It has all of the information that we need to be completely equipped for our journey.

Because of the continuity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches with New Testament Christianity, the New Testament books were written by early Christians with direct historic connections to today's Churches; and were compiled in the Fourth Century A.D. by these combined Churches. With this in mind, we can be confident that the Bible contains the source documents of Christianity from which everything in the Christian religion is nourished and regulated.[2] No one should hesitate to refer to them for any reason because they are too important to be neglected. Unfortunately, they are neglected all too often. Relying only on the opinions of scholars or clergy may not necessarily bring us to a connection with God.

Making use of Bible lexicons, concordances, dictionaries, and commentaries, helps us to understand how certain words were used at the time that they were written. These resources may also have a bias, so we need to use them wisely. No translation of the Bible is perfect. If something doesn't sound right, reading other versions is helpful. At times, our opinion may be in the distinct minority. We should allow the Scriptures to reveal themselves to us. We may be surprised at what we will find. I found the spirituality that was taught in the Bible, which I had never heard of before from anyone.

A major clue that a religious group has veered off of simple faith in Christ is when it emphasizes something different than what the Scriptures emphasize. Christian organizations need to have the same balance and priorities as Scripture. At the present time, this is rare. Because humans have a difficult time coming to terms with dependence and humility toward

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[1] 2Timothy 3:16-17

[2] Cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter VI:21

God, modern Christianity is replete with substitutes for faith in Christ. Things that were intended to supplement faith have, instead, become replacements; and, because they are not combined with faith, they lose their effectiveness. The result of this is that the impact of Christianity is diminished. You don't have to look very far to see this. When undue emphasis is placed on a legitimate Christian practice, it is usually done at the expense of real faith in Christ.

Some want to ensure that a relationship with Christ does not get too passive or restful. At times, they actually belittle Biblical spirituality. The idolization of personal achievement in our culture contributes to this because it is usually done with self-striving: with God as an afterthought. This mindset has supplanted humility toward God in most of Christianity. Usually they have replaced this humility with some external observance or practice, or something that resembles a motivational seminar; and then they wonder why their congregations are spiritually anemic. They try to motivate people to act like Christians after a verbal declaration of faith, which, of itself, is not faith at all. They often speak of a future revival, but the basic ingredient of unconditional trust in God that is required for a revival is always missing from the discussion. If the leaders are not led by the Spirit, the congregations, for the most part, will be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."[1] Beware of Christian fads that only serve to distract us from real faith in Christ.

Humility towards God opens us up to strength, peace, and the motivation to do good works. An organization that does not emphasize it will try to motivate people to act like Christians, and will tend towards legalism. Strength and peace will remain distant realities. Group-think that is not Biblically based will prevail in an organization that is not led by the Spirit; and even if the organization claims to be Biblically based, the group-think will not be properly balanced with the other important things in Scripture, and will be given an undue emphasis. Rigid conformity may be demanded; and a person led by the Spirit will generally not fit in. "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from where it comes, and where it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."[2] The Spirit filled person is not easily corralled; especially if the corral isn't supportive.

Fortunately, early on, the combined Catholic and Eastern Churches compiled the New Testament writings into the Bible that we have today with Old and New Testaments. Since the invention of the printing press, the Bible became readily available to those within the ancient Churches and those outside: and we all have individual access to it. The cat is out of the bag. I

[1] Ephesians 4:14
[2] John 3:8

think that the ancient Churches had a difficult time dealing with this because up to that time they had almost total control of the message and the medium. The Bible could no longer stay within the confines of those Churches. Apparently God didn't have a problem with this because the Holy Spirit didn't seem to want to restrict Himself only to those within their organizations. I benefitted greatly from it during a time that I had distanced myself from Christian churches.

The personal availability of Scripture gives us a great advantage that the early Church did not have. At that time, someone either had to read it to you, or you had to get it directly from a prophet or a teacher. Christ directly instructed His apostles during His earthly ministry and during the 40 days after His resurrection; and after His ascension through the Holy Spirit.[1] Scripture was ordinarily read at synagogues and churches. If a bishop was heretical, those under him would not usually be aware of this. Large areas of Christianity were affected in this way.

Now, we can read Scripture for ourselves, anytime we want. If we have questions about the teachings within an organization, we can compare the teachings to the source documents of Christianity; but we need to be aware that when we read the documents, we usually read them with our present understanding of certain words, as they have been taught to us by the current Christian organizations. We can't always assume that the current usage of a word is the same as its ancient usage. The words: *faith*, *trust*, *believe*, and *love* are words that often fall into this category; and are words that are of the greatest consequence in understanding the Biblical message.

The ancient Churches that emphasize the importance of apostolic succession have had a difficult time coming to terms with the widespread availability of Scripture because they view themselves as the custodians and interpreters of Scripture: which is fine; but they also restricted much of it to scholars and to those within the hierarchal structure. The laity was generally viewed as unqualified for the task; and most of the laity agreed with them.

Many older Catholics have informed me that, at one time, they were told that they should not read the Bible for themselves; but by the time I was growing up, I was required to purchase a Bible in the Catholic school that I was attending at around the year 1950, and I started to use it almost immediately. Attitudes have changed to the point where Bible studies are encouraged in many Catholic circles; although, people are often told to read the Bible with Church teaching

[1] Cf. John 21:25; Acts 1:2-3

in mind. Bible quoting is often met with suspicion as to whether a person is Catholic enough. The teaching authority of the Catholic Church is not confined to a select group of people who are mostly in the hierarchy. Christ is the one who ultimately bestows the gift of teaching.[1]

The authority and inerrancy of Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church was formally documented by Vatican Council II. It states: "Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life"[2]. This sounds like "Sola Scriptura" Roman Catholic style because even sacred tradition, dogma, and the teaching authority of the Church are all subject to the regulation of Scripture, and are not allowed to contradict it. This gives Scripture a stature that the other writings don't have because whatever regulates you has authority over you. This principle may help reconcile some of the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants concerning the place of Scripture in Christianity. Also, the force and power in the word of God has affected countless people outside, as well as inside, the Roman Catholic Church organization.

"Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful…The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3:8)."[3] This needs greater emphasis because there is still resistance to the idea that all of the Christian faithful should learn from the Scriptures themselves the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" when it is done without Catholic teaching in mind. Church cultures do not change very easily. Using the Scriptures for devotional purposes is generally accepted; but not for comparing Scripture with current Catholic teachings and practices. I wanted to see what the Bible taught on inner peace when I was not practicing any religion. The verses that I found for this, led me to more than I anticipated.

Scripture should not be perceived as a threat to anyone. The lay person who does have an interest in understanding Scripture should not be treated as an upstart, or looked upon with suspicion. Cursory reading is quite acceptable; but how can the lay faithful participate in

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[1] Cf. Ephesians 4:8, 11
[2] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter VI:21; cf. 1Corinthians 4:6
[3] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter VI:22, 25

ensuring that the Church remains true to its Scriptural roots if they don't know what is in Scripture, or if their understanding of Scripture is not considered?

There are those who want to diminish the role of Scripture in the Church because it doesn't suit their agenda. A question about whether a generally accepted Church teaching is in line with Scripture, is often met with the response that the Church has always taught this, therefore: end of discussion; and no attempt is made to determine whether the question is even valid. The idea that scholars are the only ones who are qualified to ask or answer questions is rapidly becoming outdated, but it is not totally gone. Settled dogma plays a part in this because, according to many Catholics, it is not supposed to be questioned; but because dogma (including infallibility) is supposed to be regulated by Scripture, it cannot be placed above scrutiny. Scripture tells us to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"[1].

In spite of Vatican Council II teaching, many Catholics still do not avail themselves of the private reading of the Scriptures. "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation."[2] Those who comprehend what they are reading, and put their understanding into practice, can do it regardless of organization. God is the one who chooses people for Himself, and draws them to His Son.

Here is another interesting statement: "Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence. Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (see Acts 2, 42, Greek text), so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort. But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief

[1] 1Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Acts 17:11; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1
[2] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter III:11

as divinely revealed. It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."[1] This may sound untenable to most Protestants without the prior statement that: "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture"; and, in spite of the three being so linked together that one cannot stand without the others, it is clear that the teaching office of the Church is not above the word of God and is there to serve it, and that all three need to be in harmony, with Sacred Scripture regulating everything. Only as long as this is the case can it be construed that sacred tradition and the teaching authority of the Church are so linked together with Scripture that one cannot stand without the other; that both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence; and that sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God. Sacred tradition and the teaching office of the Church must be regulated by Scripture, and are under its authority according to Vatican Council II.

All Christian teaching must be in harmony with Scripture, and must not contradict it. Because Scripture regulates tradition, tradition cannot be totally separate from Scripture. If it was, it would not be tradition. Tradition cannot stand alone, apart from the regulation of Scripture. Protestant commentaries and books on Scripture are similar to tradition when they accurately reflect Scripture. Notice that the word *Scripture* is capitalized but the word *tradition* is not, even though the two "are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence". This can only be the case when Scripture regulates tradition. All Christian tradition, dogma, and doctrine must be regulated by Scripture in order to be valid. This has not been fully appreciated by many Catholics.

The preeminence of Scripture in the Catholic Church is reflected in the fact that all of the readings in the Mass are from Scripture; none of them are from tradition. "Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that

[1] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter II:9-10

actions and signs derive their meaning."[1] Tradition doesn't seem to be as well-defined as Scripture because, for example, not all of the writings of the early fathers of the Church are considered to be part of sacred tradition. Some of them have been labeled as heretical. The same is true of later writings. Also, there isn't an authoritative book published by the Church called Sacred Tradition. I'm quite sure that opinions within the Catholic Church are not unanimous concerning the contents of tradition. Scripture must regulate and be the arbiter of sacred tradition, as well as everything else in the Christian religion.

The prominent place of Scripture presented in Vatican Council II seems to be similar to the traditional Protestant view of the place of Scripture. If everything is supposed to be regulated by Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church, there seems to be common ground between Catholics and Protestants on the preeminence of Scripture, in spite of its disregard in many Catholic and Protestant circles.

In Scripture we have the writings of those who were closest to the original events; and because they were recorded early on, we don't have the corruption that may occur from the telling and retelling of a story.[2] Though this is true for almost the entire Bible, the early stories in Genesis were apparently passed down from generation to generation until the first books of the Old Testament were written. At that time, prior to Genesis being written, there may have been a consensus of knowledge which had been recorded in Egypt and elsewhere concerning the early events in human history. Moses had access to all of this because He was part of the pharaoh's household; and he also knew the Hebrew traditions that were handed down by word of mouth or in writing.

Scripture transcends denominations. God may use the Bible itself to draw someone to Himself regardless of what an organization may teach, or regardless of the person's denomination. The Catholic and Eastern Churches, which have historic continuity with the Christianity of the New Testament from the time of the apostles, have a serious responsibility to teach and use the word of God faithfully, because if they don't do the job, others will. In my own personal life, I started to be instructed by the Scriptures outside of the organizational structure of the Catholic Church, during a period of time that I was not practicing the Catholicism that I grew up in. At that time, I did not fully appreciate the fact that the combined Catholic and Eastern Churches had compiled the Scriptures that were teaching me, and that I was actually being

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[1] Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Chapter I:24; cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, Chapter VI:21

[2] Cf. Luke 1:1-2; Acts 7:22

instructed by the Catholic Church through my own private reading of Scripture. It not only contains Catholic teaching in its original form; but the Catholic Church requires that Scripture regulates all subsequent Catholic teaching, which includes tradition and dogma.[1] I could only wish that other Catholics would more fully appreciate what they have, and make use of it. During this period, I found, in the Bible, its own spiritual method for connecting with the Biblical God; but I also found that it is not given any importance by the most of the clergy of the Christian churches or organizations that I know of.[2]

Surrendering all to God is required for benefitting from Biblical spirituality. There is no way that we can adequately purify ourselves in preparation for this, because God purifies us when we choose to literally be anxious for nothing by casting all of our care on God. This is what opens us up to grace from God. I had concluded that without this type of surrender to God, the remainder of Christianity was meaningless; and that I had to try it or, otherwise, forget about the whole thing. I decided to try it. When I experimented with it, I was astonished because I immediately had the most transforming experience of my life even though I had thought of it only for getting the peace of God; and it happened while I was walking down a street in San Francisco, California. The result was much more than I had anticipated.[3]

This would never have happened if God had restricted Himself to act only through the clergy or ministers of a particular organization; and it happened years after any prior sacraments that I had participated in. I could now feel God inside of me, and the connection was complete. God's peace and strength felt like a single entity and were indistinguishable; and my impulsiveness toward sin was immediately gone. This affected every aspect of my life: good and bad: and gave me a much greater ability to avoid the things that were harmful.

What surprised me the most was that it happened outside of a church building, without any formal ritual or ceremony; and also, that God would respond to something so methodical and mechanical, without having a strong intellectual belief in Him up to that point. I quieted my mind with an attitude of unconditional trust in God, by totally resting my mind upon Him. I viewed it primarily as experimenting with a mental exercise instead of being motivated by something that I really believed in. I did commit myself to a belief in the resurrection of Christ just prior to the surrender, which was equivalent to a sinner's prayer; but it was difficult because I wasn't sure if I really believed it. The object of my surrender was also an issue

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[1] Cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Chapter VI:21
[2] Cf. 1Peter 5:6-7; Philippians 4:6-7
[3] Cf. Ephesians 3:20

because I wasn't clear with regards to the Godhead or the divinity of Christ. I decided to surrender to the whole Godhead, which included Jesus Christ with His divinity and humanity. Apparently, God ignored my lack of clarity.

The thought went through my mind that maybe I had received something that I wasn't supposed to, or that I had tricked God. This was understandable because of my upbringing in the Catholic Church. God probably tricked *me*.[1] At that time, Catholic spirituality revolved almost exclusively around the sacraments, which are outward expressions of faith; and are usually done in a formal setting. Personal trust in God was virtually unheard of in the Catholic Church when I was growing up prior to Vatican Council II.

When sacraments are not motivated by personal trust in God, they are usually motivated by guilt and obligation, and will not bear fruit. Vatican Council II formally documents the principle that the sacraments presuppose faith when it states that "The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called 'sacraments of faith'."[2] Without faith in God, the sacraments don't have anything to nourish, strengthen, or express. *Faith* is the core of Christianity. It is not the outward expressions of faith. This has not been fully appreciated by many Catholics because they continue to rely only on sacraments for their spirituality. Personal faith in God remains a distant concept for many; therefore the benefits of faith also remain distant.

Faith needs to be in a separate category of its own apart from any expressions of it; and it should not be labeled as something else such as prayer or worship because what often happens is that these outward expressions of faith are mistaken or substituted for it. Faith in God a relationship with Him, and is more than the sum total of all the external things that we do for Him. Everything in Christianity presupposes faith. Without faith, all of the external things do not add up to what God expects of us.[3] If unconditional trust in God is not applied to everything in our lives, it demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of Biblical faith; and it will not be applied to anything at all.

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[1] Cf. Jeremiah 20:7
[2] Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Chapter III:59; cf. Romans 14:23
[3] Cf. Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 14:23; 1Corinthians 13:1-3, 7; Galatians 6:14-16

When I surrendered myself to God in a very informal setting, He actually responded according to His Scriptures. "God, who made the world and all things in it, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands;…That they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from any one of us; For in him we live, and move, and have our being"[1]. I didn't have to go elsewhere to look for Him; and His response occurred with no discernible lag time.

"So, then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."[2] Faith in God doesn't come automatically to humans: we need to be taught; and because of this, private Scripture reading is particularly important because it can teach us important things that may not be usually taught in a particular Christian church or organization. Scripture itself may be the only source of knowledge for Biblical faith and spirituality if Christian organizations are not teaching it. I found this to be the case from my own personal experience.

When we obey the Scriptures, God does not limit Himself to act on His Word only within the confines of a specific organization. Chances are that if you remain only within the confines of most church cultures, you will not find a meaningful relationship with God because they do not teach simple faith directly in God; but instead, they teach outward observances, and verbal declarations or affirmations. In spite of themselves; at times, truth is taught from their Scripture readings, liturgy, and music; but the congregation will generally filter much of it through the organization's culture. The Biblical God expects us to approach Him in the proper way. "The LORD is near to all them that call on him, to all that call on him in truth."[3]

An interesting passage in the book of Revelation shows that God has His elect even in the worst of organizations. He tells the "angel of the church in Sardis…I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead…You have a few names even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white; for they are worthy."[4] Being told that you're dead is about as bad as it gets; but in spite of this, the Body of Christ needs the individual members who are faithful to His Word.

Apparently, God will honor His Word whenever we are ready to respond to it, regardless of the organization that we are interacting with or regardless of our lifestyle. In my case He responded after I had been to a bar, had a couple of beers, and was walking home. He drew

[1] Acts 17:24, 27-28
[2] Romans 10:17; cf. Romans 10:6-8; Deuteronomy 30:11-14
[3] Psalms 145:18; cf. John 4:23
[4] Revelation 3:1, 4

close to me when I drew close to Him.[1] God responds to us when we choose to draw close to Him with humility. A clue from Scripture may explain this: "And John answered, and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in your name; and we forbade him, because he followed not with us. And Jesus said to him, forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us."[2] Humans have a tendency to want to impose limitations that are not according to God's will. We don't always see things the way God does. This is why, to this day, I retain I great deal of respect for the Scriptures; they saved my life both physically and spiritually; and I continue to use them for spiritual direction.

"As you have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding with thanksgiving."[3] Then Paul warns, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?"[4] I continue to rely primarily on Scripture for instruction concerning my spiritual journey. I started out that way, and continue that same way regardless of the church or group that I interact with. There are too many conflicting interpretations. For this reason, I haven't used spiritual directors because I don't know where they are coming from, or if their advice comes from a non-Biblical perspective. For the most part, I suspect it does; therefore, it would be of questionable value for me.

Nowadays, a Biblical perspective is probably the exception rather than the rule. Denominational schools reflect the views of the organization that sponsors them: which makes them of questionable value. Even though I haven't found anyone who shares my spiritual journey, I occasionally get anecdotal validation or insights from unlikely sources. Scripture is generally the only thing that I can rely on for guidance when I'm confronted with something that is widely practiced, but doesn't seem to be compatible with the Bible. The reasoning behind it may seem to be persuasive, but the end result is contrary to the Biblical message. This is very common in today's world. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of Scripture to recognize these things.

When we are led of the Spirit, we can spiritually discern truth from error because we have an insider's view of the Scriptures. In the New Testament, we have the writings of the earliest apostles and evangelists at our disposal which we can compare with current writings and

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[1] Cf. James 4:8
[2] Luke 9:49-50; cf. Numbers 11:25-29; Mark 9:38-40
[3] Colossians 2:6-7
[4] Galatians 3:3; cf. Colossians 2:8

teachings; and it serves as a standard for future generations.[1] In the past, when Scripture was handwritten, it was not as available to everyone as it is today. It is now much more accessible in many different ways, and can reach many more people.

As important as Scripture is in discerning error, Christian denominations are often ambivalent toward the private reading of Scripture by the average member. Most of them, more or less, encourage the private reading of Scripture; yet they also try to control the message: a difficult thing to do at times. They may encourage Bible reading as a devotional practice, but not for the purpose of understanding what it is actually teaching because this is mostly reserved for the scholars and the clergy. Some try to undermine the Bible's credibility in subtle ways by saying that it contradicts itself, the stories are myths, or that the moral values in Scripture are outdated and not applicable in today's modern world: all in the hope that you will not take it seriously, or that you will ignore it entirely. Others will say that scholars disagree among themselves on a given subject or text, thereby implying that you're not qualified to have an opinion on what it says or that you're not qualified to understand its meaning, which often happens when you point out to another person that their opinion is out of line with Scripture.

When people, in good conscience, interpret something in the Bible which is different from the predominant view in their organization, reactions may vary, especially when the people in the organization, themselves, differ on how to handle this. Often people are told that the organization's interpretation should not be questioned. However, the Bible tells us "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."[2] In today's world, the private reading of Scripture is essential, especially when a church doesn't teach personal Biblical salvation; but one of the only ways of knowing this is by the private reading of Scripture.

When referring to parts of Paul's epistles, the Bible says that the "unlearned and unstable distort, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction"[3]; yet they continue to be read at church services and by individuals everywhere: as they should be. Scripture is too important to ignore, even though, at times, it may be improperly used. Just because some people, for example, have an eating disorder doesn't mean that the rest of us should stop eating.

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[1] Cf. Ephesians 4:11-12; Psalms 25:9
[2] 1Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Acts 17:11; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1
[3] 2Peter 3:16

Understanding the world-view and theology that are presented in the Bible helps us to avoid being misled or sidetracked by trends and teachings in Christian churches that are incompatible with the Gospel. This is especially true in large organizations where erroneous teachings can develop locally or regionally, even before the official organization is aware of them, has time to respond, or even cares to respond. Various gift ministries were bestowed by Christ on the Church "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive"[1]. This danger is just as true now, as it was then.

Scripture tells us to "Be not carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart is established with grace, not with foods, which have not profited them that have been occupied with them"[2] Faith is a thing of the heart: not the stomach. Biblical spirituality does not emphasize what you should eat; but, much of non-Biblical spirituality does. Because different world-views produce different conclusions in just about everything, it is much easier to veer off into error if we are not familiar or in line with Scripture.

Peter says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, to which you do well that you take heed, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."[3] Scripture instructs us on how to receive the light of Christ. Light enables us to see. If our minds are preoccupied, we are hindered. The peace of God makes us receptive to the guidance of the Spirit through spiritual discernment.

Some say that we shouldn't interpret Scripture for ourselves, yet how can we read Scripture without interpreting it? We would have read it with our minds shut off. Translations of the Bible differ on the following passage: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."[4] The Living Bible (Catholic edition) translates this same verse as follows: "For no prophecy recorded in Scripture was ever thought up by the prophet himself. It was the Holy Spirit within these godly men who gave them true messages from God." In the Living Bible, the second verse flows directly from the first and makes more sense. The old King James Version makes more sense when 'any private interpretation' refers to the prophet's exposition rather than referring to the person who

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[1] Ephesians 4:14
[2] Hebrews 13:9; cf. 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1; Vatican II's Lumen Gentium 12
[3] 2Peter 1:19; cf. Revelation 22:16; Numbers 24:17; 1Samuel 10:6-7; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1
[4] 2Peter 1:20-21

hears or reads the prophecy. When I looked up the word *interpretation* in two Bible lexicons, I found that the word *unloosing* or *explanation* could have been used in the translation, instead of the word *interpretation*.[1] This would tend to support the translation in the Living Bible.

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[1] Cf. *Young's Analytical Concordance* and *Strong's Concordance* (Gr. *epilusis*)

13. HOLY PASSIVITY OR RECEPTIVITY TOWARDS GOD

We receive the things of God through an extreme passivity or receptivity towards Him: a concept lost in antiquity, and antithetical to our modern world of self striving. The word *passive* is defined as being the recipient of an action, or being acted upon. What better posture is there in our interaction with God? This is the definition of humility. We express this humility towards God by unconditional trust in Him; and then, as a result of this, we receive the benefits of this relationship with Him.[1] When we cast all of our cares upon Him and rest our minds upon Him, we present the void that He requires for filling us with His Spirit. This is the extremely passive act towards God that makes us very receptive to Him. Also, this is how we receive the grace of God and His motivation for doing good works. God's peace and strength are inner evidences of grace and our relationship with Him.

The duality of Creator and creation in the Bible is essential for unconditional trust in God; otherwise there would be no Higher Power to trust. Biblical trust always requires the mind to consider God as being an object that is outside of itself. Because the thrust of the mind is always outward, a visualized image of God is not a suitable object because it is a part of the mind itself, and it would be surrendered along with everything else during the act of unconditional trust. Our object of surrender is defined by our prior intention. It is impossible to surrender to something that is within the mind itself because the act of surrender, by definition, ignores everything in the mind during the act, and requires us to surrender everything in our minds to God;[2] therefore, it must be imageless because anything we visualize is a part of self and creation, including a visualized image of God, who is impossible to visualize anyway. A visualized god is a figment of our own imagination, and would immediately disappear at the moment of surrender; and this could be disconcerting for some. Surrender to anyone or anything in God's creation is not permitted in Scripture because creation is not God. Jesus qualifies for surrender because He is part of the Godhead in spite of His humanity.

A monistic view of god does not lend itself to unconditional trust in God because its god is everything or in everything; therefore, there is no object of trust except for oneself or the objects of God's creation: which are unacceptable in the Bible. The Biblical world-view and unconditional trust in God cannot be separated. Unconditional trust produces an extreme passivity or receptivity towards its object, which is inherent in the act itself; and provides God

[1] Cf. 1Peter 5:5-7; Philippians 4:6-7; James 4:5-10; Galatians 5:22-23
[2] Cf. Isaiah 55:7-9; Proverbs 3:5; Ephesians 3:20

with an opening to send the Spirit of His Son into us when our unconditional trust is directed towards His Son. This act ends up with diminished emotional involvement with everything that we interact with; and makes us more tolerant of people who we don't agree with.

We don't need to be afraid of extreme passivity towards God. We will not lose our minds or lose our ability to make rational decisions; instead, our minds will be enhanced with peace, and a spiritual discernment that we would not otherwise have.[1] We actually receive wisdom and spiritual discernment to make better decisions for ourselves. Excessive mental attachment to things hinders our ability to objectively examine things; and the anxiety associated with this prevents us from making objective decisions. Trust in God brings Him into everything that we do; and it gets His presence, attention, and intervention in our lives, along with His answering of our prayers. It also opens us up to God's protection and guidance in all of our circumstances.[2] This is the total opposite of monism, which has no personal Creator God; therefore, it inherently limits people to their own thoughts and words. Whether done collectively or personally, eastern type meditations and incantations, even if they use Christian imagery, do not bring a person closer to the Creator God because they have their roots in monism. The Creator God will eventually trump all attempts by humans to set themselves up as creators in competition with Him. This is how the Book ends.

Unconditional trust is a function of the heart which does not require thought. It results in our minds rested on God; and does not compete or interfere with our day to day activities, but enhances them. As a result of this, trying to balance God with our activities is not required because the peace of God affects both our hearts and minds, and permeates all of our activities.[3] It is a settled peace. This could not be the case if it was primarily a function of thinking, because thoughts come and go. Unconditional trust in God unifies us both inwardly and outwardly, and affects our entire beings. God reduces the separation between what we think we should do and what we actually do, and reduces the hindrances to objectivity. This is what it really means to arrive at a higher consciousness, and to enter into our true self. God alters our state of consciousness. Without God, this is not possible. He enables us to realize our true humanity as He had originally created it. It is absurd to think that anyone other than our Creator knows what is best for our wellbeing.

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[1] Cf. 1Corinthians 2:9-16; 1:30; 1John 2:20, 27; 4:1; Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 4:5
[2] Cf. Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalms 25:9; 33:18; 34:15; 1Samuel 10:6-7
[3] Cf. Philippians 4:6-7; Ephesians 4:3

Spiritual practices that do not promote unconditional trust in God actually hinder a relationship with Him because we mistakenly think that they will draw us close to Him and bring us His peace, when they actually do not. They are not viable alternatives. This is why it is important to go to the Bible for instructions on how to relate to the personal Biblical God, rather than to rely on practices and instructions that are suited for the monistic all-is-god world-view. These will not draw us close to the Biblical God, but will render Christianity ineffective in our lives. Many of these practices are now part of most Christian churches; so we need to be especially vigilant and Scripturally well informed, and not assume that they are Biblically based. When Christianity is not regulated by the Bible, it ceases to be real Christianity; and this is what we have today. We need to stay close to the original sources so that we are not easily or inadvertently sidetracked from the original message.

Different world-views have different methods for being at one with their deity; and they are not all compatible with each other. The personal Biblical God requires us to thrust our minds outward in unconditional trust in order to receive Him inwardly; whereas, the monistic god tells us to go inward to connect with the "spark of the divine" that we are all supposedly born with and which is our connection to the pantheistic god. It purportedly makes us one with everything because the pantheistic god is considered to be everything.

The Biblical God requires the dependence of His creation because of the dualism of Creator and creation in the Bible. Creation is not God; and the creation is inherently dependent upon its Creator. People express this dependence with a deliberate act of the will to draw close to God by faith: which implies that many choose not to do this. Those who do not, remain weak from Adam and Eve's disobedience, and continue to be separated from God and their true humanity. Those seeking their true humanity recognize their dependence on God, act upon it, and reap the benefits. With the monistic god, we are our own personal creator god that we are dependent upon; ergo, self-deification, with no means of connecting with the Creator. As a result, they remain weak, and have no other remedy apart from changing their world-view and drawing close to the Biblical God.

Christ said that "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life will lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same will save it."[1] The word *deny* in this verse means: to utterly deny, disown, or renounce. Being a follower of Christ requires self-abandonment or self-

[1] Mark 8:34-35

emptying towards Him. “Verily, verily, I say to you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He that loves his life will lose it; and he that hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life.”[1] This is not as bad as it sounds. Self-abandonment is the use of unconditional trust in God to abandon oneself towards Jesus Christ who is the Word incarnate and who embodies the whole Trinity. This is the same method prescribed in the Old Testament for connecting with the Old Testament God. The result of this is the presence of Christ’s Spirit within us, and the resulting fruit of the Spirit, which includes the inner peace and strength that affects our entire beings. This is our Christian enlightenment, which is an infused enlightenment that comes from beyond us, that results from the presence of the Biblical God within us. He does not have to remain distant or separated from us. We embody the whole Godhead when we have the Spirit, but we are not inherently divine as Christ is within His own Person. He is Word incarnate, and we are not; which is why we are not allowed to abandon ourselves toward each other.

When we relinquish control of our lives to God through Jesus Christ, we gain more control over all of our weaknesses: which is an interesting paradox. Self-repression, which is the abstaining from specific things using our own strength and willpower, does not accomplish this. In Christianity, whatever we receive inwardly from God, results from our outward unconditional trust in Him. We need to lose ourselves in Him. Without humility towards God, our separation from His presence and grace remains intact. The peace of God and His strength that we receive through the Spirit of Christ is our indispensable place of receptivity from the Biblical God. The importance of inner peace for well being is also recognized by other spiritualities; but, without Christ, they lack the strength for maintaining it.

Receiving from God requires more than verbal declarations and affirmations: or claiming what we want from Him, because these are an attempt to receive things from God without drawing close to Him. They are actually hindrances to receiving from God because they constitute pride, and are based on the world-view of self-deification. We supposedly become creators with our own words; therefore even repentance is reduced to a mere change of vocabulary because we are only required to speak the words of repentance, and not actually do what we are saying.

[1] John 12:24-25; cf. Proverbs 3:5; Psalms 55:22; 1Corinthians 7:29-31

Our words are an expression of what is already in our hearts.[1] Words do not create it; and they are not substitutes for humility towards God. God does use them to accomplish His will on this earth. He can create by using our words: we can't. "This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."[2] Our hearts are changed by true repentance, and not by merely saying words or changing the words that we speak. We need to be instructed by Scripture on how to relate to God, and not by any other means.

Our words will change with true repentance; then God will influence our words. "The preparations of the heart are man's purview, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD."[3] "But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious about how or what you will speak; for it will be given you in that same hour what you will speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."[4]. The Spirit of the Father will speak through us when we have the Spirit of His Son.

Sadly, most of Christianity is in a state of pride today, which is the opposite of humility. "God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble."[5] Legalism is a sure sign of spiritual pride because churches will use rules and regulations to keep their congregations in line, instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. Because they don't understand humility, they don't know how to open up to the Holy Spirit, so they try to mimic Him; and, if they do know how to open up, but hold back from teaching it, they are shepherds that are keeping their flocks away from their resting place.[6] Some will ignore simple faith in Christ by emphasizing the gifts of the Spirit instead of the fruit of the Spirit that comes from walking in the Spirit; others will say that reading the words in the Bible is equivalent to receiving the presence of God: and so on. What they all have in common is that they are substitutes for real faith; and they do not take you beyond human pride. The power of the gospel is realized in the simplicity of faith; not by complicating it or placing barriers and obstructions in its way, or by diverting people away from it.

Christ says that "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name have cast out devils? And in your name done many wonderful

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[1] Cf. Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45
[2] Matthew 15:8-9
[3] Proverbs 16:1
[4] Matthew 10:19-20
[5] James 4:6; cf. 1Peter 5:5; Psalms 138:6
[6] Cf. Jeremiah 50:6

works? And then I will profess to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity."[1] This is probably true of most churches or groups that promote the gifts of the Spirit, at the expense of true humility towards God which does not depend upon the variety or quantity of things that we do for God; but the gifts will follow.

Generally, there is little to no mention of the fruit of the Spirit, for the obvious reason that it requires humility toward God to receive the Holy Spirit and experience its fruit, which is something that they are not familiar with. I've had to endure more than one Christian fad that had no Biblical basis. Some of these fads get deeply rooted in an organization. Sadly, this is the normal state of Christianity today. The fruit of the Spirit is what is supposed to keep us morally in line; and the Spirit of Christ is what makes it available for us.[2] Temperance or self-control is specifically the one that gives us victory over our tendency towards sin with its compulsions and addictions. Peace is for stress, worry and anger. Long-suffering is for patience for those who suffer while they continue to trust in God during the suffering. All of them in some way give us the ability to be peaceful, gentle, loving, joyful, and controlled individuals.

The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of Christ's presence within us. It contains His personal attributes and character traits that He shares with us through His Spirit, which include His rest or peace, and His strength. In light of this, it's important to recognize that we, by ourselves, can never have these qualities without Him. Those who believe that the fruit of the Spirit is a gradual process don't recognize that God determines when our lifting or exaltation will occur;[3] and the Holy Spirit maintains it by His presence within us. Our unconditional trust in God brings us the Holy Spirit, who in turn, maintains our exaltation by means of Christ's trust in the Father that is present within us.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to overcome our weaknesses. When this power is not present in us, we struggle to be moral and enlightened from a position of weakness; and this causes a lot of unnecessary distress because it really cannot be done. Christian Higher Power spirituality produces an infusion of Christ's Spirit within us, along with its attributes that are not available from any other source, including ourselves. God's righteousness is only available through the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

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[1] Matthew 7:22-23; cf. 1Corinthians 12:1-11
[2] Cf. Galatians 5:22-24; Hebrews 12:11
[3] Cf. 1Peter 5:6-7; James 4:10

The fruit of the Spirit, which includes inner peace, comes from the Spirit of God the Father within the Spirit of Christ. This was true of Christ during His earthly ministry because He had the Spirit of the Father within Him; and this gave Him the inner rest and strength that resulted from His meekness and humility toward the Father;[1] and this is also true of Christ today at the right hand of God the Father and within us. Christ's faith in the Father appropriates it for Himself; then Christ is able to share His rest and His strength with us by the presence of His Spirit within us, which we receive and maintain by our faith in Him. This is the only way that we can receive righteousness from God. He then treats us as His adopted children because we have the Spirit of His Son within us, and are parts of the Body of His Son. His Son's peace then binds us together.[2] This is a privileged position to be in. Christ's human spirit within the Holy Spirit is essential for us because His human faith in the Father and His intercession bring us everything pertaining to salvation. Without God's provision of having Christ's Spirit within us, we would be in the same predicament as the fallen angels who have no possibility of redemption.

Because the word *fruit* is singular, one opinion is that the primary fruit of the Spirit is agape love, and that the other qualities are parts of this love. Paul, in 1Corinthians, speaks of the many aspects of love: similar to the fruit of Spirit listed in the book of Galatians.[3] I believe that the different parts of agape love are all received at the same time. For example, when I am peaceful in a given situation, I am also patient; and the reason that I am at peace is because of faith. The fruit of the Spirit seems to be received as a whole; but the other gifts and manifestations of the Spirit appear to be distributed separately and selectively by God.

There are those who say that the Eucharist or Table of the Lord is the primary way of connecting with the Holy Spirit; but our interaction with the Holy Spirit works differently from the Eucharist. By our faith in God, we receive the Holy Spirit who puts us in the state of grace, and who gives us the peace and strength to deal with our sin nature. This requires an imageless surrender to God that brings us His presence, which can be done at any time or place. It is an act of the will that needs to be done prior to participating in the Eucharist; otherwise, we will not be in the requisite state of grace. We come to God in our weakened state, and rest our minds upon Him in unconditional trust, so that we can have victory over sin

[1] Cf. Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 8:9
[2] Cf. Romans 8:14-17; Hebrews 7:25
[3] Cf. 1Corinthians 13:4-8; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 12:6; 1Corinthians 12:7-12, 28-30

through His Spirit that inhabits us;[1] then Christ becomes our resting place. Without this, we will be driven by our sin nature, which seriously compromises our ability to exercise our wills for the good. The sacrament of Reconciliation (confession), without faith, is also not a substitute for this because it also presupposes faith, just like the other sacraments.[2] Sacraments are outward expressions of faith that must be undergirded by our unconditional trust in God because they do not stand alone apart from this.

In my younger days I would go to confession without even a concept of personal faith in Christ. The results were frequent lapses into sin and frequent confessions; which indicated that my tendency towards sin was still fully intact. We can have real victory over this pattern, and not just read or hear about it. We need to have this tendency dealt with before we can successfully avoid the recurrence of sin actions. A religion of rules and regulations with sin penalties is not going to help us overcome our weakened human nature; it only adds guilt to our actions.[3] The Holy Spirit overrides all of this. Real transformation and enlightenment come only from the presence of Jesus Christ, who is within us by our faith in Him. This usually does not require major lifestyle changes with the exception that we need to avoid the acting out of our sin nature.

The christ spirit and the Biblical Spirit of Jesus Christ are two entirely different constructs. The terms *christ spirit* and *holy spirit* are used in non-Christian spiritualities to mean something that we are all born with, and experience by spiritual practices. When the terms are used in this way, there is no personal Jesus Christ to unconditionally trust and open up to; and He is no more the Logos or Word incarnate than we are. Using a term that is similar to a Biblical term is a clever and a common way of deceiving the uninformed into thinking that the person who is using it, is using it in a Biblical way. The objective is to draw people into their group before they fully understand what it is all about.

There is theology which incorrectly tells us that we need to cleanse ourselves before we can approach God. The problem with this is that we are too weak to do it ourselves. Only Christ can cleanse us so that we can have access to the Father, which can only happen by faith in

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[1] Cf. Matthew 11:28-30; Psalms 55:22; Galatians 4:6. Burdens include all worry, anger, addictions, compulsions, frustration from unfulfilled desires, etc.
[2] Cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Chapter III:59
[3] Cf. Romans 8:2-4; 7:7-14; 6:23; 5:13; Galatians 5:1-4; Colossians 2:20-23

Jesus Christ and repentance toward God in our weakened state. This is how we receive Christ within us so that we can be cleansed by His blood and strengthened by Him.[1]

The idea that we can cleanse ourselves before coming to God is from the mistaken belief that we can have sanctifying grace before we have the presence of Christ within us by faith and the Holy Spirit. Only God can cleanse us. There are those who believe that we receive Christ only in the Eucharist or Table of the Lord; but If this were true, then we wouldn't have His presence within us and sanctifying grace before we participate in it, which is required; and we would need to cleanse ourselves without Him, which is impossible.

It is easy to have this kind of thinking because many Christians do not understand the concept of receiving Christ by faith. The sacraments presuppose faith and are not substitutes for it because sanctifying grace is imparted to us through the presence of Christ when we have received Him by faith. Sanctifying grace cannot be separated from the presence of Christ's Spirit within us; and without His Spirit, we cannot have the requisite grace prior to participating in the Eucharist. The Spirit is the means by which the mediator of all graces, the man Christ Jesus, imparts grace to us from the Father. The Eucharist, by itself, does not put us in the state of grace; therefore, we need to be in the state of grace and have Christ within us by faith before we participate in the Eucharist, otherwise we will receive it in a state of sin.

In the gospel of John, when Christ said that He was the living bread from heaven, and spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood for eternal life, His response to those who did not understand what He was saying was: "What if you will see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life"[2]. He seems to have been alluding to the Holy Spirit who was going to be poured out at Pentecost after His ascension; at which time, Christ became a life-giving spirit to inhabit us.[3] The Spirit is the reality behind the Eucharist, as well as everything else.

All of the externals of Christianity require faith in Jesus Christ if they are going to do us any good. They are not meant to stand alone.

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[1] Cf. 1John 1:7-10; 5:6-8; Hebrews 10:1-10
[2] John 6:62-63; cf. 6:35
[3] Cf. 1Corinthians 15:45; John 14:19-20

14. HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Physical death is a result of Adam's disobedience. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned. For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come…For if by one man's offense death reigned by one, much more they that receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came on all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came on all men to justification of life…Moreover, the Law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound…That as sin has reigned to death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, to eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord."[1]

Physical death has been around since Adam's transgression as a penalty for his sin, even though a legal sin penalty for sinning did not exist until the Mosaic Law. The Law made the offenses even worse because it added law-breaking into the mix, along with its legal sin penalties.

The sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) doesn't put anyone in the state of grace, whether it is to God or anyone else, unless the person who confesses his sins has faith in Jesus Christ; and if he does have faith in Jesus Christ, he wouldn't need the sacrament of Reconciliation in its present form because there is no legal sin penalty for sinning in Christianity as there was under the Law of Moses. Jesus abolished the Law when He died on the cross. Sin is no longer imputed or charged when there is no religious law and legal sin. Christians are not under religious law that imputes sin.

In the New Testament, James says to "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"[2]. The purpose of confession in this verse is to reveal your faults to others so that they will pray for you to overcome them: not to absolve you. The sacrament of Reconciliation, in its present form, seems to have evolved out of a Christianity that has insufficiently availed itself of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] Romans 5:12-14, 17-18, 20-21; cf. Philippians 3:9 in the old KJV; Galatians 2:20-21
[2] James 5:16

Christ has the righteousness of the Law and righteousness by His faith in the Father. His presence within us enables Him to share all of this with us, along with eternal life. Jesus Christ is the last Adam who connects us with God and eternal life. "The first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit."[1] At Pentecost, after Christ's ascension into heaven "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life."[2] Eternal life is available to us only through Christ's presence within us; whose presence we receive by our faith in Him. This is true of everything that we receive from God the Father because of the redemption. Christ appropriates it for Himself by His faith in the Father; and then He shares it with us by His presence and intercession within us. This is how the man Christ Jesus is the one mediator between God and us in all things pertaining to salvation, including justification or righteousness by faith. Christ's immortal humanity continues to be essential for us.

Along with the victory over our human weakness or tendency toward sin (law of sin) in this life, eternal life is the other main benefit that Christ provides for us. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."[3] "In him was life; and the life was the light of men."[4] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believes on him is not condemned; but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God…He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."[5]

Faith in the Son of God is essential for eternal life with God. It is our hope. Notice that inaction in relation to Christ is not an option. The consequences are the same as saying no because we are born alienated from God and condemned from the start as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. If we don't connect with Christ, we just remain that way. This seems normal for us because our weakened state has been with us since birth, and we don't know anything else. Our excessive attachment to sin needs restraint or moderation from the Holy Spirit.

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[1] 1Corinthians 15:45
[2] 1John 5:11-12; cf. John 5:26
[3] John 8:12
[4] John 1:4
[5] John 3:16-18, 36; cf. 5:26; 6:28-29; 17:2; Luke 11:23; 1John 5:11

In this present life, we start experiencing eternal life when we have inner peace and strength through faith in Jesus Christ: when we are at peace from the things of the past, present, and future; "That, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life"[1]; "For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."[2] The redemption of our bodies is the completion of our redemption. Hope is an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" [3] for those who have fled to God for refuge.

We need to get beyond the limitations of our own minds in order to connect with the infinite and timeless, and to get into the realm of eternal life. This happens when we open up to the inner peace and strength that come from Christ by unconditionally trusting Him. Our sense of time resides in our thoughts. When we get beyond our thoughts by the Holy Spirit, we are in the realm of the timeless; and as a result, we are more patient and peaceful, less prone to anger, anxiety, boredom, and loneliness; and less frustrated because we will be less likely to seek contentment or satisfaction by trying to satisfy desires. This is how we begin to participate in eternal life in a very real way even before we depart from this world. Most of Christianity has not grasped this, and this is why a relationship of unconditional trust with God is not as valued or as prominent as it should be. Without God's presence within us, there is no relationship with God; therefore, we continue having a dysfunctional relationship with ourselves and with either others or something else; and we will not reap the special benefits that are available from the Creator through the Holy Spirit when we trust in Him.[4] When our hope is directed toward satisfying our desires for merely passing joys, we will never arrive at real peace and contentment. When we seek peace and contentment by satisfying desires, we never arrive at them because desire, of its very nature, is insatiable: we never get enough; therefore, frustration is inevitable.

"Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"[5] "Beloved, now are we the sons of God,

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[1] Titus 3:7
[2] Romans 8:22-25; cf. Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; John 11:25-26; 1Corinthians 15:51-57; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 9:28; 1John 3:1-2; Job 14:14; Psalms 17:15
[3] Hebrews 6:19; cf. 6:17-20; 7:21-22
[4] Cf. Romans 15:13; Psalms 71:5; 1Corinthians 2:9-16; Galatians 5:22-23; 1Timothy 4:10; James 4:6-10; 1Peter 5:5-7
[5] 1Peter 1:13

and it does not yet appear what we will be, but we know that, when he appears, we will be like him; for we will see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure."[1] When we physically die in Christ, we temporarily lose our bodies, only to wait for an immortal body in the future. This is when Christian victory over death is fully realized. This is our hope.[2] If we are alive and in Christ Jesus at the time of His initial return, we don't die at all; instead, our bodies are instantaneously changed into incorruptible ones.

We are not destined to live eternally as disembodied spirits, as are angelic beings. Christ told His apostles, "Because I live, you will live also."[3] Without the resurrection of Christ and His ongoing immortality, we have no possibility of eternal life because He needs to be alive at the present time in order for His full presence and His High Priest intercession to be available for us. The incorruptible bodies that we are to receive will be the same as Christ's resurrected and incorruptible body.[4] He is our forerunner. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ will all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."[5] "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."[6]

As much detail as there is in Scripture concerning this teaching, it is not popular in today's Christianity except among those who take Scripture seriously. My guess is that this is so because it implies that all of the real Christians will be resurrected and changed, and removed from the earth prior to the end of the world. The only form of Christianity that will remain, if any, is a dead structure. This may not sit well with Christian denominations who think that they will be around until the end of the world. There will be a new heaven and new earth after this;[7] but, prior to this, the Christians that have been removed from the earth will return with Christ to rule and reign with Him over this present earth.[8] Many of those that were not part of the first resurrection will not like it. God's rule will not be popular with everybody: "And he will judge among the nations, and will rebuke many peoples"[9], "and he will smite the earth with

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[1] 1John 3:2-3
[2] Cf. Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; John 11:25-26; 1Corinthians 15:51-57; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 9:28; Job 14:14; Psalms 17:15
[3] John 14:19; cf. 1Corinthians 15:20-21; Hebrews 7:24-25; 4:15-16
[4] Cf. Philippians 3:21; 1John 3:2; Ephesians 2:1
[5] 1Corinthians 15:22-23; cf. 1Timothy 6:16
[6] Romans 6:23
[7] Cf. Revelation 21:1
[8] Cf. Revelation 2:26-29; 5:10; 19:11-16; 20:3,6; Isaiah 13:3; 65:18-25; Luke 12:44; 1Corinthians 15:24-26; Romans 15:12; Jude 14-15

[9] Isaiah 2:4; cf. 2Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation 13

the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips will he slay the wicked."[1] Christ is going to return to a hostile environment, to say the least, and He will reciprocate the hostility.

The popular belief that humanity is going to evolve into a higher consciousness will not do its advocates any good, but will only harden their rebellion against God: with its obvious consequences. *Higher consciousness* is code language for self-autonomy from God, and comes from the idea that people will evolve out of dependence upon the Biblical God, and evolve into a self-autonomy that complements the monistic all-is-god-including-me view of god. Another aspect of this idea is that people will evolve into a more loving and peaceful state without God. For those who believe that humans evolved from primates, our weakened state is considered to be only an evolutionary step away from full strength. This is impossible because humans can be strong and peaceful only with God; and He is not going to change the human nature that He created so that it can function well without Him. Only He is able to bring us to our full humanity.

God created a perfect humanity, and it was very good. Adam's separation from God caused our weakness and pride. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, enables us to restore our connection with God, along with its accompanying strength and other benefits. The only real higher consciousness that is available to us is through faith in Jesus Christ. Adam and Eve wanted a higher consciousness independent from God, but it resulted in weakness; and we, as their descendants, have inherited this weakness from them. Evolutionary higher consciousness independent from God, happens to be the latest incarnation of this idea, and is regarded as a logical evolutionary step; but it is actually another form of human pride and rebellion against God. The packaging may change, but the rebellion remains the same.

Religion is denigrated, and blamed for human conflict; but, in reality, it is the only real solution when it is done right. The Bible is reduced to myth and metaphor because it challenges the prevailing worldly wisdom. The history of the twentieth century shows that secular, political, and economic systems such as atheistic Nazism and Communism have the capacity for killing tens of millions of people who stand in their way or don't adhere to their ideologies. They don't have the capacity to transform human nature; therefore, they kill and instill fear in order to bring about the changes that they envision. Christianity required the death of only one person: Jesus Christ. All human systems, including religious systems, need the transforming

[1] Isaiah 11:4; cf. Psalms 2

power of God in order to function well. They will always be weak and will fail without the Biblical God. His message will always be relevant.

Scripture tells us how the story ends: "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them; for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."[1] "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment on all"[2]. "And I saw heaven opened and, behold, a white horse; and he that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire; and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he has on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."[3]

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"[4]; "And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations; And he will rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter will they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."[5] Whatever Christ receives from the Father as a result of His human faith in the Father and His intercession, He shares with us by His Spirit within us, including His own throne and rule over the nations. Are we listening?

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[1] Revelation 17:14
[2] Jude 14-15
[3] Revelation 19:11-16; cf. Zechariah 14:9; Psalms 72; 2Thessalonians 2:1-12
[4] Revelation 3:21
[5] Revelation 2:26-29; cf. 5:10; 19:14; 20:6; Luke 12:44; Isaiah 13:3

15. INNER PEACE AND STRENGTH

Inner peace and strength are the most evident and logical results of unconditional trust in God, which is at the core of Biblical spirituality in both Old and New Testaments, and is the meaning of humility towards God. Unconditional trust in Jesus Christ, which brings His presence within us, is required for grace to flow into us from God. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, that passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."[1] This scripture says it all. When it tells us to be anxious for nothing, it is telling us to have unconditional trust in God. The resulting peace of God that passes all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds through or in Christ Jesus.

Our faith in Christ makes this possible because the peace of God is Christ's own peace that He has from His lowliness or humility toward the Father, which He shares with us by the presence of His Spirit within us.[2] Everything pertaining to salvation that we receive from the Father comes to us through His Son. The peace of God comes from the Spirit of God, which resides in the Spirit of Christ through Christ's faith in the Father; all of which resides in our human spirit through our faith in Christ. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts"[3]. It needs to umpire our lives and be the place from which we make our decisions, because it is the best place to be for spiritual discernment and for being guided from God.

Any spiritual practice that does not include unconditional trust in God is not a practice that connects us with the Biblical God. As the transcendent Creator God, He requires it from us. If we don't comply, we close ourselves off from the graces that He has for those who will humble themselves.

He doesn't treat everybody the same because "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"[4]. He differentiates, based on our humility towards Him or whether we withhold it. This is basic Biblical spirituality. Unconditional trust requires an object of trust such as a personal transcendent God. Our minds go outward whenever we trust because they are naturally dualistic. An impersonal energy force that permeates everything, including our own minds, does not require our trust. When we unconditionally trust the Biblical God, we get special attention from Him.

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[1] Philippians 4:6-7; cf. 1Peter 5:6-7; Romans 15:13; 2Peter 3:14; John 16:33
[2] Cf. John 14:27; Matthew 11:28-30
[3] Colossians 3:15
[4] James 4:6; cf. 1Peter 5:5; Psalms 33:22; 138:6; 103:2-13; 145:20; 146:9; 147:6; John 10:17; Romans 10:12-13; 2Corinthians 9:7

The resulting peace is mentioned throughout the Bible. It is the peace *of* God, which is the evidence of peace *with* God, and results in His peace being manifested outwardly through us. There is also the "peaceable fruit of righteousness"[1] that comes from God's chastening. In the Holy Spirit, righteousness and peace complement each other. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and compliant"[2]. "For the kingdom of God isn't food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."[3] "The LORD turn his countenance on you, and give you peace."[4] "Acquaint now yourself with him, and be at peace; thereby good will come on you."[5] Christ is "The Prince of Peace"[6]. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"[7]. The inner peace from God, and Christ's promised rest, are one and the same; thereby, good will come on you.

The strength from the Holy Spirit is called temperance. Christ liberates us from the impulse to sin. When we are in Christ, our willpower is unencumbered and unhindered so that it can function more effectively; and we can more easily love one another. "For, brethren, you have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."[8]

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."[9] Because our righteousness by faith is actually Christ's own righteousness by His own faith in the Father that He shares with us, peace and strength always accompany each other. Without Christ's Spirit within us, strength will not accompany peace, and our peace will be not be sustained, but will be transitory because thoughts come and go; therefore, the peace from thoughts will come and go. This is also true of visualization, concentration, mantras, peaceful surrounding in nature, and places of silence. The peace of God is not limited by the mind and location because it resides in the heart.

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[1] Hebrews 12:11; cf. Psalms 85:10
[2] James 3:17
[3] Romans 14:17
[4] Numbers 6:26
[5] Job 22:21
[6] Isaiah 9:6
[7] Galatians 5:22-23; cf. Matthew 11:28-30
[8] Galatians 5:13
[9] Isaiah 26:3-4; cf. Psalms 105:4; 2Peter 3:14

The peace that comes from God starts with resting our minds on God in unconditional trust. God needs to be part of the process for getting beyond our thoughts, so that the peace can be solid and lasting. He wants to be trusted; and to have our minds rested upon Him. This is what a transcendent Creator God expects from His human creation. He does not require any attempt to visualize Him, even though He is a personal God; "For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his."[1] Our unconditional trust in the Biblical God brings us His rest, which does not have the limitations of our own thoughts and ways. God's rest is an infused rest that is a part of the Spirit within us; therefore, we only need to be yielded to the Spirit, and remain in His rest after we have received it. We do not need other practices for finding inner peace. We can rest from our worry, anger, and addictions; and also rest from our desires because know that our contentment will not come from elsewhere.

Our Humility towards God draws His peace; otherwise He will resist us.[2] We do not have God's peace because He works in our favor; God works in our favor because we have His peace through humility. When we find our rest in God, everything is at its best. We need to make the first move even though our tendency is to want to see the results first. Our faith in Him precedes the results. Peace, strength, and righteousness are all products of the Holy Spirit who we receive within us *after* we draw close to God by unconditionally trusting in Him.

The inner peace of God is a fruit of the Spirit;[3] therefore, it presupposes that we have the Holy Spirit. It is a state of being that we open up to; and not something that is part of our natural state apart from God. Then we continuously yield ourselves to God in order get the maximum benefit from His peace that is already within us through the Spirit;[4] a yielding which is facilitated by the fruit of the Spirit called faith.

Christ says, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."[5] Christ's peace comes to Him from His personal faith in the Father; and then, He is able to give it to us by His Spirit within us. "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you, and learn of me; for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

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[1] Hebrews 4:10; cf. Job 22:21; Isaiah 55:6-9; Deuteronomy 29:19-20; 2Peter 3:14; Ephesians 3:20
[2] Cf. James 4:6-10; 1Peter 5:5-7; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 11:1; Psalms 33:22
[3] Cf. Galatians 5:22-23
[4] Cf. Romans 6:13-16
[5] John 14:27

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[1] Christ is able to impart, to us, the inner rest that He has from His humility toward the Father. This provides the interior silence for us that cannot happen in any other way. At Pentecost, these verses of Scripture were fulfilled because He was then able to transmit this peace and rest to us through His Spirit. Prior to Pentecost, He could not. When Christ spoke these words, He knew that His meekness and humility toward the Father would eventually benefit us, by giving us access to the Father and be saved. He was describing His essential role in the plan of salvation that brings us justification or righteousness by faith, which is His faith in the Father. The man Christ Jesus needs to be humble and subordinate to the Father in order to acquire peace and rest for Himself; and we need to be humble and subordinate to Jesus in order to acquire His peace and rest that He has from the Father. The Father was Jesus' Higher Power. Our Higher Power is Jesus.

Christ's presence within us makes His rest flow into us. When Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit, and we live in Him, He shares with us His own inner rest that He has by His faith and humility towards the Father. His own meekness and humility acquires this rest for Himself; and we acquire Christ's own rest when we have His presence within us through our faith in Him. This is a Divine rest that is available to us only with Christ's presence within us. Without Him, we can never have it. This is why He told us that His peace comes to us in a way that is different from the way that the world provides peace.

In the New Covenant or Testament, whatever we receive from God the Father, must first have been received by His Son through His personal faith in the Father. Whatever we receive from the Father must come to us through the Son. We cannot bypass the Son and receive directly from the Father.[2] This is because Christ shares with us the benefits that He receives from the Father through His justification or righteousness by His faith in the Father. For this to be possible, Jesus must still be alive, and His Spirit must be sent to us from the Father. Everything that Christ accomplished was for our benefit; but we can't have any of the benefits without His presence within us. This must also include His human spirit because it is His human faith in the Father that brings us righteousness by faith, and salvation, through His intercession. Without His resurrection and ascension, the man Christ Jesus could not be our living heavenly high

[1] Matthew 11:28-30 (the word *lowly* in this verse is translated from the same Greek word as *humble* in other verses); cf. John 14:28; 1Timothy 2:5; Ephesians 2:18

[2] Cf. John 14:6, 10, 23; 15:4; 16:15, 32; 17:7-8, 21-23, 26; 1Corinthians 3:23; Galatians 3

priest.[1] This is the heavenly fulfillment of the Jewish high priest's function at the feast of the Atonement.

The Old Testament Joshua is a type of the New Testament Joshua (Jesus). The names Joshua and Jesus are the same. Joshua is translated from Hebrew; Jesus is translated from Greek. The Old Testament Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised-land rest; the New Testament Joshua brings us to inner rest and interior silence. In both cases, faith was and is required. Inner peace from God results from unconditionally trusting in Him through Christ. God's grace is compared with "the waters of Shiloah, that go softly"[2].The wisdom from above is peaceful and gentle.

In summary, Christ's Spirit is available to us by faith in Him.[3] Our faith needs to be directed towards Him because this is how we open up to His presence and that of the Father. Christ's personal faith in the Father is a part of Christ's presence within us; and Christ's faith in the Father is the thing that justifies us and makes available to us the benefits of the Atonement, which include inner peace and strength.[4] This is how Christ shares His enlightenment with us. Even if we pray for Christ's Spirit, we actually receive it by our faith in Him because, ultimately, it is a product of relationship or drawing close to God rather than by prayer. Subsequently, yielding ourselves to the Spirit within us brings us the maximum benefits from the Spirit. We need to draw close to God, before He will draw close to us: a basic Biblical principle. The logical question is: what are we waiting for?

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[1] Cf. Hebrews 7:24-25; 1Corinthians 15:17
[2] Isaiah 8:6; cf. Psalms 23:2; James 3:17
[3] Cf. Galatians 3:14, 26; 4:6; John 14:23; 17:20-26; Acts 4:12; 11:17; 1Corinthians 15:45; Colossians 2:9-10
[4] Cf. Galatians 2:16, 20 in the old KJV and Catholic Douay Version

16. UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty about the past, present, and future is basic to humans. Life is inherently uncertain; but this doesn't need to be distressing. How well we handle it affects our well being and peace of mind. We generally handle it with fear unless we've found an effective way to cope with uncertainty; and fear usually translates into worry or anger. Uncertainties about health, finances, or relationships usually disturb us the most; but it can be anything else. Our experience tells us that we can control only so much.

How do we deal with uncertainty so that it does not become a serious preoccupation? The Biblical answer is faith in Jesus Christ, which opens us up to His Spirit and His peace, and guarantees that the unknown will ultimately work in our favor.[1] Christ's faith in the Father, which is a part of Christ's Spirit within us, not only brings us peace of mind, but it also affects the course of the events in our lives because we are sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. His faith within us puts us in the shadow of God's wings, and within the realm of God's grace. Psalm 91 tells us a great deal about the benefits of faith in God. Christ's Spirit brings all of this into fruition and ensures that our ultimate fate is not uncertain or haphazard. We receive greater benefits from His Spirit within us when our faith in Him is more complete and all-encompassing. This is the best that we can do for ourselves within the framework of uncertainty.

Much of the time we worry about things that may not even happen. An example of this is when we worry about how we will care for a parent who could be incapacitated in their old age. Actually, this may either never happen or they may die prior to this. If this is the case, we will have worried for no reason at all. Trusting in God is the best that we can do for ourselves and for the person that we are concerned about because we invite God's participation in the circumstances; and we make better decisions about preparing for possible eventualities.

When something unexpected happens, good or bad; the worst thing that we can do is to withdraw our faith from God. It is probably a test of faith; and how we respond during the event affects the outcome. To ensure that it will work in our favor, we need to stay faithful to God by continuing to trust Him because He will then participate in the outcome for our good; "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are

[1] Cf. Romans 8:28; Psalms 57:1; 23:4; Galatians 3:26; 4:5, 7; Philippians 4:12-13; James 4:6; Job 22:21

the called according to his purpose."[1] This scripture is realized in our lives only when we trust Christ on an ongoing basis; otherwise, we have good reason to doubt that it applies to us. When we worry about uncertainties, we hinder God's participation in them. When we leave uncertainty in God's hands, He controls the outcome for our good. Inner peace and strength aren't the only benefits from trusting in God.

Also, we need Christ's own wisdom and power for handling the uncertainty in our lives; therefore, we need to stay connected to Him regardless of the circumstances, because this is the best that we can do for ourselves, considering that we humans are not privy to all of the forces, spiritual or otherwise, that affect us. God has the resources and knowledge for directing them toward our benefit: we don't. We need to keep Him close so that we can remain in His sphere of protection and guidance. All of this resides in Christ because He alone is the Word incarnate who has the righteousness by faith to receive all of this for Himself, and which He can impart to us through His Spirit. We can have it only insofar as we have His Spirit within us, so that He can share it with us. Christ does not share with us from a distance; therefore, there is no need for any human or angelic mediator between Christ and us.

Another aspect of uncertainty is: how do we arrive at objective truth while, at the same time, we use our personal experiences to process the information that we receive? Is it possible to be certain or objective about anything? Within the framework of the Biblical revelation, the answer is yes. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we also receive peace, wisdom, and the certainty of salvation.[2] The Spirit gives us spiritual discernment which is the mind of Christ. The world tells us that we are unable to discern truth, and that everyone has their own subjective truth which is only valid for them, regardless of how much it contradicts that of another person. Scripture tells us that we can discern truth. Our opinion of something is able to correspond with reality and not be totally subjective. A false opinion remains false and unreal, and does not correspond with reality.

When we have faith in Christ, and His Spirit is within us, we don't live a life of anxiety because of uncertainty; but in a relativistic universe with no personal God, we do, because uncertainty and anxiety are our normal state without God.

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[1] Romans 8:28; cf. 1Samuel 10:6-7; Psalms 112:7-8
[2] Cf. 1Corinthians 1:30; 1John 3:24; 5:10-15; Romans 8:16; John 7:17; James 1:17; 1Corinthians 2:9-16

17. WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

God's wisdom is one of the benefits that we have in Christ Jesus; and is an aspect of our salvation.[1] Christ has wisdom by His human faith in the Father; and Christ is able to share it with us when we have His Spirit within us by our faith in Him. God uses Christ's human nature to infuse it into us. It flows into us through Christ. The Father uses only His Son Jesus Christ to direct His grace and blessings into us; and it all comes about by faith: our faith in Christ and Christ's faith in the Father: faith to faith. Our faith in Christ elicits a response from God, which is an infusion of Christ's Spirit within us that contains His faith in the Father, and brings us righteousness by faith. "And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's"[2]. This is how the man Christ Jesus functions as our only High Priest mediator and intercessor between God and us.

For those who are called, there is "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."[3] Wisdom is what we need to make the best decisions in our daily lives: decisions that are aligned with God's guidance. The extent that we are in Christ determines how well wisdom operates in our lives, because it is an aspect of His Spirit presence within us. We remain in His presence through unconditional trust in Him and yielding to His Spirit.[4] "For the LORD gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous".[5] The Wisdom that is personified in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament is a veiled version of Christ.

When prophesying about Christ, Isaiah says: "And the spirit of the LORD will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding"[6]. Christ shares this with us when we have His Spirit within us. "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually examined. But he that is spiritual examines all things, yet he himself is examined of no man. For who has known the mind of the LORD, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."[7] When we have Christ's Spirit presence, He is alive within us, and we have His own mind residing within us, which gives us wisdom and understanding that are not otherwise available. A person without Christ is at a disadvantage when evaluating what is truthful and beneficial. In Christ "are hidden all the

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[1] Cf. 1Corinthians 1:30; Romans 1:17
[2] 1Corinthians 3:23; cf. 1Timothy 2:5
[3] 1Corinthians 1:24; cf. 1Samuel 10:6-7
[4] Cf. Philippians 4:6-7
[5] Proverbs 2:6-7 cf. 11:2; 8:33-36; Psalms 16:7; 25:9, 12-14; 111:10; 119:99-100; Acts 1:3
[6] Isaiah 11:2
[7] 1Corinthians 2:14-16; cf. Isaiah 40:13-14; 50:4-5; John 7:17; 16:13-15; Romans 11:34; Ephesians 1:17-19; Philippians 1:9-10; Malachi 3:18; 1John 3:1

treasures of wisdom and knowledge"[1], and we have access to them; "But we have this treasure in vessels of clay, that the abundance of the power is of God, and not of us."[2] The wisdom that we have from Christ's presence is a treasure. God uses mostly the ordinary or less than ordinary people of this world to display His wisdom in order to demonstrate the fact that humans can never have this kind of wisdom on their own regardless of their wealth, social status, or intelligence. Godly wisdom requires humility towards the Creator, which is something that everyone needs, but not everyone will recognize the value of this humility; least of all, those who are of privilege. Those with humility are of privilege because they are able to receive the Spirit and the things of God. Humans tend to measure others by outward appearance or attribute; God measures us by our humility towards Him, and not by our human standards. All can be humble toward God.

The wisdom from God will affect everything that we think and do. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and does not reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord."[3] When we ask God for anything, our prayer needs to be combined with faith because faith creates the conditions for a response from God, and for experiencing the realm of the unseen; and He requires it for answered prayer. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."[4]

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[1] Colossians 2:3; cf. Proverbs 11:2
[2] 2Corinthians 4:7; cf. 1Corinthians 1:26-31; Isaiah 50:10
[3] James 1:5-7; cf. Acts 3:16; Hebrews 11:1
[4] Luke 11:9; cf. verses 10-13

18. PRAYER

In Scripture, faith and prayer are always directed toward God: whether it is the Yahweh of the Old Testament, or Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the New Testament. "I am the LORD; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another"[1] "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us; And if we know he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."[2] Our faith needs to be directed towards the Son of God because "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry."[3] "And they who know your name will put their trust in you; for you LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you."[4] Notice that seeking God involves trusting in Him. "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they who seek the LORD will not want any good thing."[5] Faith is required to bring into being, the things that we pray for; and this is why faith is always required for answered prayer. Without faith, it is impossible to please God;[6] it carries God's response to our prayers. With the Biblical God, our words and petitions, by themselves, do not elicit answers to our prayers. Faith always needs to accompany our prayers in order for them to be answered by God.

Nature spirituality, which has no Creator God, tells us that we are the creators, and that we create with our own words and thoughts. This places a great deal of responsibility on the unregenerated person who believes this. False prophecy is an example of presumptuously trying to use words to create a certain outcome. True prophecy speaks what God has spoken.[7] When we have faith in God, we don't need to be afraid of false words and curses directed toward us.

Biblical Higher Power spirituality acknowledges that the Creator creates on our behalf, and that our words are used for asking or praying: not for creating. Creation for answered prayer requires the intervention of the Creator, and our faith in Him. This is because prayer and faith are separate things. Prayer is primarily words and thoughts directed toward God. Faith is a

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[1] Isaiah 42:8; cf. Luke 16:31
[2] 1John 5:13-15; cf. 3:21-23 in old KJV; John 9:31; 15:7
[3] Psalms 34:15; cf. 4:3; 10:17; 33:18; 86:5; Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 15:19(20); Acts 3:16
[4] Psalms 9:10
[5] Psalms 34:10
[6] Cf. Hebrews 11:1, 6; Philippians 4:6; James 1:6-7
[7] Cf. Deuteronomy 18:22; Isaiah 8:10; Psalms 31:19-20; Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 27:27(30)

heart relationship with God that consists of a deliberate act of the will to unconditionally trust, lean, and rest our minds upon Him. This is what elicits a response from Him. Faith is also different from words, concentration, visualizations, mantras, and images; which do not connect us with the Biblical God and answered prayer; and are not substitutes for simple faith. In much of non-Biblical spirituality, these practices are intended to produce enlightenment without faith in God: an enlightenment that cannot be the same as Biblical enlightenment.

Within the dualistic Biblical world-view, these practices fall within the realm of pride because they are used for arriving at a place that only God can bring us, He resists them because they are not the unconditional trust in the Biblical God that we ultimately need for Biblical enlightenment. Jesus Christ's enlightenment from His faith in the Father is ours when we have His Spirit presence within us; therefore we don't need to try to do it ourselves: which we can't do anyway. What Christ has from the Father is ours when we have Christ's presence within us; but we can't have any of it without our faith in Christ.

Because prayer and faith occur in different levels of the mind: the intellect and the heart; they can exist simultaneously. As a result, faith can undergird and accompany prayer, along with everything else that we do; "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"[1]. Prayer and devotions should be viewed as accompaniments to our faith or connection with God rather than its causes. When faith is not viewed as something which needs to accompany prayer, faith will not have the importance that it ought to have; and it is unlikely that it will be a part of everything else in our lives. This is because a person may get the mistaken impression that a relationship with God is exercised only when we are in dialogue with Him. Faith or trust in God needs to constantly permeate our entire beings and every aspect of our lives. It needs to be in a category of its own, and not buried in another. Prayer or anything else, without faith, does not constitute a relationship with God. What we don't want to do is to pray, and then to stop there, without humility and surrender. Prayer is not to be used as a replacement for going further with God. It needs to accompany our ongoing humility toward God.

The one that we pray to must be trusted, and the one that we trust requires our prayer; "you have not because you ask not. You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it on your lusts."[2] Trust and lust are opposites. We should not pray for things that are for our own self-gratification, because they become substitutes for God when we view them

[1] Colossians 3:17
[2] James 4:2-3; cf. John 15:7; 16:24

as essential for our inner peace. Faith neutralizes self-gratification and lust, and it purifies the motives for our prayers. "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."[1] Righteousness, which comes from faith, is essential for answered prayer. Our inner peace from unconditional trust in God, which is a fruit of the Spirit, needs to permeate our prayers.

Christ tells us to "Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it will be opened"[2]. "And will not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night to him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"[3] If what we now see is any indication, the answer is no. Notice that faith is associated with God's election and His speedy responses to prayer.

Trusting in the promises of God is not the same as trusting in God Himself. Our primary trust needs to be in the giver of the promises, otherwise there is no bridging of the separation between us and God. If we are only trusting in the promises, we are still approaching God from a distance, without humility toward Him, and detached from a connection to Him. Claiming the promises of God, by itself, is also not a relationship with Him because this leaves us open to wanting God's promises in order to satisfy our lustful tendencies; and this prevents answers to prayer.[4]

Only with faith directly in God, are we freed from the dominance of the self. Only in Christ, can God's Biblical promises become a reality, "For all of the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen"[5]. Even the promises made by God to Israel apply to us because the Spirit of the Jewish Jesus Christ within us connects us to Israel; but we do not replace Israel. The word of God is operative in those who have faith. Faith enables us to experience the reality of the unseen world and to actively participate in it.

Prayer is supposed to supplement our faith in Jesus Christ, and not be a substitute for it. It needs to be done within the framework of faith. James tells us to "ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let

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[1] James 5:16; cf. Philippians 4:6-7; John 15:16; Psalms 4:3; 7:10; 10:17; 34:17-19; 66:18; Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 35: 16-19 (20-22)
[2] Matthew 7:7-8; cf. 21:22; Luke 11:9-13
[3] Luke 18:7-8; cf. Psalms 4:3
[4] Cf. James 4:3
[5] 2Corinthians 1:20; cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Psalms 91; 1Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 9:27-30; Mark 1:40-42; Acts 3:16; Hebrews 11:1

not that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord."[1] When Christ's disciples asked Him why they were unable to cast out a demon, Jesus' reply was, "Because of your unbelief"[2]. Before He spoke of being able to move mountains Jesus told them to "Have faith in God"[3]. Without trust in God, our prayers are ineffective.

There are times when we may be praying and asking God, from a distance, for something that is received only by drawing close to Him; or we may be asking someone to intercede on our behalf for these things. Divine peace and strength, for example, are integral parts of His presence within us; and if we pray for these, we will have a long wait if we don't ultimately draw close to God and receive His Spirit. All of this is due to misinformation about how God operates. There are things that we inherently have from God because of His presence within us; and then there are things that we receive by prayer. It's important to recognize the difference and to be informed.

Prayer and faith involve two entirely different processes. Prayer is primarily petitioning God, which is a mental activity. Faith is trust, along with its accompanying inner peace. It is within this calm that prayers are answered. Most of us do not have an understanding of Biblical faith, so we approach God from a distance, and our prayers are hindered. We need to be taught how to exercise faith in God; and we can never assume that the person who prays knows how to do this. Those who trust in God have a huge advantage over those who don't, because they are God's favorites, and he looks after them in a special way.[4] We are supposed to be trusting in Him, and He is supposed to be within us. We need to get into the process of drawing close to and connecting with Him. What are we waiting for?

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[1] James 1:6-7; cf. Psalms 112:7-8
[2] Matthew 17:20
[3] Mark 11:22
[4] Cf. Psalms 1:6; 2:12; 4:3-5; 5:11; 9:10; 17:7; 23; 28:7; 32:10; 33:22; 34:7-8, 15; 37:39-40; 57:1; 84:11-12; 91; 138:6-7; Proverbs 29:25; Isaiah 57:15; Jeremiah 1:8; 17:5-8; Nahum 1:7; John 10:9-10, 27-28; 1Corinthians 2:14-15; James 4:6-10

19. PRAISE AND WORSHIP

God requires praise and worship. "Give to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."[1] Praise and worship are to be done within the framework of our faith in Jesus Christ; and, like prayer, are not substitutes for trusting in Him: they are supplements. Jesus said, "But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeks such to worship him."[2] Jesus Christ is Spirit and Truth; and His Spirit presence within us ensures that our praise and worship are acceptable to God; otherwise, we praise and worship God from a distance. "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him and I am helped. Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song will I praise him…Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings will I rejoice."[3] "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I will yet praise him for the help of his countenance…who is the health of my countenance, and my God."[4] "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."[5] "Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous; for praise is comely for the upright…I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise will continually be in my mouth. My soul will make her boast in the LORD; the humble will hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together."[6] Being upright must precede praise because praise, of itself, does not make us upright. I can't help thinking that Christ, in addition to interceding for us with His faith in the Father, is also praising and worshipping the Father at His right hand and within us.

Praise and worship, like prayer, should be viewed as an adjunct to faith, and not the other way around. When we exercise faith only when we praise and worship, we may view faith as something that is done only at certain times of the day or week: or only in certain places. Faith is too important to be restricted in this way. It is supposed to be a constant in our lives, and permeate everything that we do. Faith makes our praise and worship acceptable to God. Because it needs to be taught to us, we can never assume that the person who is praising or worshipping is doing it with Biblical faith; especially if the church that the person attends does not teach it.[7] Just like prayer, praise and worship can be misused when they are not coupled

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[1] Psalms 29:2; cf. Deuteronomy 26:11
[2] John 4:23
[3] Psalms 28:7; 63:7; cf. 33:21; 95:6-7; 118:21
[4] Psalms 42:5; 43:5; cf. Isaiah 61:11
[5] Philippians 4:4
[6] Psalms 33:1; 34:1-3; cf. 92:1-4; 118:13-15; 130:4
[7] Cf. Romans 10:17; Isaiah 66:2-4; James 4:3

with humility toward God. Some churches promote praise and worship as their main form of spirituality and ignore Biblical faith. Usually, they attempt to use praise and worship, instead of faith, to receive God's presence and get prayers answered. Outward observances and rituals are never a substitute for unconditional trust in God. Humility towards God needs to precede everything that we do: whether in church or out of church. It needs to be the foundation of our entire lives, with no exceptions permitted. With God, this is possible.

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20. THE EUCHARIST (Table of the Lord)

Saint Paul's teachings on the Eucharist are found in chapters 10 and 11 of First Corinthians in the Bible. He tell us that "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are partakers of that one bread."[1] Christ is the one bread. Communion is another word for fellowship or joint participation, which refers to the participants in the ceremony. The individual pieces of the one bread that are distributed symbolize our individual role or function that we have as parts of the Body of Christ. We all have individual functions in the Body of Christ that are not the same; and which are commensurate with the measure of faith and the grace that are given to us. The Eucharist is an enactment of the corporate Body of Christ. When we drink of the one cup, it symbolizes that we "have all been made to drink into one Spirit"[2]. Just as there is one Body of Christ that we all participate in; so too: the one Spirit of Christ. We do not receive individual, fully intact, Spirits of Christ: we all participate in the One.

We don't have to do it all ourselves; in fact, we can't do it all ourselves. There are no parts of the Body of Christ that can act in isolation. The Head coordinates the rest of the Body, and makes it act as a unit. Our individual connection to the Head makes us dependent upon each other; and it enables us to work in concert toward "the mature measure of the fullness of Christ"[3]. Paradoxically, a strong individual connection with Christ creates a strong interconnection with the other parts of the Body because we are well connected to the Divine Coordinator of the Body. The Eucharist is an ongoing reminder of this, and is the ritual of our interconnectedness.

God is the one who motivates our individual function in the Body of Christ.[4] We are required to individually trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head; and then, by His Spirit, He places us into His corporate Body and actuates our function. It is impossible for a real Christian to be unconnected: appearances or perceptions notwithstanding. There are examples of interconnectedness in the natural world. A bee hive functions as a unit in spite of the ostensible individual actions of the member bees. Other examples of this are an ant hill, a wasp nest, and a city.

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[1] 1Corinthians 10:16-17
[2] 1Corinthians 12:13; cf. Ephesians 2:18; 1John 5:8
[3] Ephesians 4:13; cf. 1Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:3-13; Ephesians 4:4-13
[4] Cf. Philippians 2:13

The Eucharist symbolizes "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."[1] The Spirit is the presence of Christ that is within us as a result of our trusting in Him; and His own inner peace or rest, which He shares with us, is the glue that binds us together into His single Body and Spirit. The bread represents Christ's broken body; the wine represents His shed blood which gave life and spirit to His body; and through which there is full remission of sin for us. As a result of this, we can now receive Divine inner peace through His living Body and Spirit in heaven. Our trusting in Jesus Christ, combined with His Spirit living within us, brings this about because we are "holding the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God."[2] "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."[3] When we are in Christ, we are treated as His own flesh and bones. Christ's Spirit within us makes this possible because it connects us directly with the risen Christ at the right hand of God.

Trusting in Christ keeps us communicating with the Head that coordinates the different functions of the body; and without this trust, we have neither unity nor peace because our distinct part of the body will not be communicating with the Head. Any spiritual practice that does not open us up to the Spirit of Christ is of no use for us; and is actually detrimental when it is viewed as a substitute for unconditional trust in Christ because it prevents us from drawing close to God. It diverts us from a connection with God that is Biblically based. If it is not Biblically based, it will not connect us with the Biblical God; although it may connect us with something else that is not beneficial.

In another reference to the Eucharist, Paul says "that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when had given thanks, he broke it, and said, take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he comes."[4] This occurred at Christ's last Jewish Passover meal: and is another purpose for the Eucharist. He identified Himself with the bread and the wine that was served.

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[1] Ephesians 4:3; cf. verses 4-7; Colossians 3:15; 2:18; Philippians 4:7
[2] Colossians 2:19
[3] Ephesians 5:29-30
[4] 1Corinthians 11:23-26

The broken bread serves as an ongoing reminder of Christ's death, and our own death to sin: and is the outward expression of this. The wine is an ongoing reminder of the shed blood of Christ that was necessary because "almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission"[1]. The life of the flesh is in the blood; therefore, the wine also signifies Christ's death by His shed blood. The Eucharist reminds us of Christ's death as the final fulfillment of the Mosaic Law: which is what finished it. Christ ended the Old Testament by His death on the cross. Justification by faith was about to begin for us. It began at Pentecost when Christ's Spirit was made available to us by our faith in Him. Christ can now directly share with us His own justification or righteousness by His faith in the Father.

The Passover meal is significant because it commemorates the passing over of the destroyer, who spared the Israelites from the judgment of God that was going to be inflicted upon the Egyptians. When the Israelites applied the blood of the lamb that they had slain on the two side posts and the upper door post of houses where they ate the lamb, the destroyer saw it and passed over that dwelling. They were then able to leave Egypt and eventually reach the Promised-Land rest. We arrive at our inner rest through the blood of Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God and the Door. Without His death, and His subsequent resurrection and ascension, we would not be able to able to receive His Spirit which carries His rest. At the Passover meal, He identified His body with the bread: and His blood with the wine; and clarified the meaning of the event so that it now unambiguously speaks of Him. His blood, when it is applied to us, entitles us to have the destroyer pass over us so that we can have eternal life. Jesus Christ's death destroyed our death. All of this is represented in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is not a substitute for our faith in Jesus Christ, but a supplement. In fact, our trusting in Jesus Christ is the *sine qua non* of our whole Christian experience, as well as being a requirement for participation in the Eucharist; otherwise, we will not have Christ's presence within us and be in the state of grace prior to participating in the Eucharist. This precludes faith in the Eucharist as the sole means of salvation because faith in Christ, which brings salvation and His presence, needs to precede our participation in the Eucharist; otherwise, we will not be in the state of grace prior to receiving it. If we expect to receive Christ only in the Eucharist, we will not be in the state of grace prior to it. The Eucharist does not put us in the state of grace. The man Christ Jesus, as the mediator of all graces, must reside within us by our faith and His Spirit in order for God's grace to flow into us. Christ's Spirit within us acts as a conduit for God's grace to flow into us; and grace is not otherwise available because it is

[1] Hebrews 9:22; cf. Leviticus 17:11; Luke 24:44-46; John 19:30; Hebrews 9:15; 10:9-10

Christ's human faith in the Father and His intercession that acquires it for us. This is why Christ's presence within us is essential in the plan of salvation. "Jesus saves" are not idle words.

When the Eucharist is falsely presented as the only means of receiving Christ, the ordained presbyter who produces Christ for the faithful through his words of consecration, becomes an indispensible mediator between Christ and us. This is unacceptable because there is only one High Priest mediator between God and us: the man Christ Jesus. Because of this, the ordained presbyter becomes a barrier between Christ and us because we must first receive Christ by our personal faith in Him before we participate in the Eucharist.[1] And when we have Christ's presence within us by faith, we share in His role as heavenly high priest. This becomes the priesthood of the faithful, and the only priesthood that is available for a Christian. There is not a separate priesthood for the clergy.

When people don't know this, it gives rise to a false distinction between clergy and laity. The role of the ordained presbyter becomes so prominent, that the place of the non-ordained is obscured to the extent that many are not even aware of the priesthood of the faithful, and that we must all have direct access to Christ by our personal faith in Him. No one can be a replacement for Christ. Every Christian who receives the presence of Christ by faith is a priest and a representative of Christ on this earth.[2] In New Testament Christianity, the words *priest* and *priesthood* apply to all Christians. When a presbyter is referred to as a priest, with the implication that I am not, it relegates the priesthood of the faithful to a second-class priesthood.

Jesus refers to Himself as the bread of life.[3].Bread is for strength; wine is for peace. These are perfect symbolic elements for the Eucharist, because strength and peace are our primary inner witnesses of trusting in Christ when we receive His Spirit. We experience the reality of the Eucharist when we surrender to Christ as our Higher Power. This connects us to the Head of the Body, who can then coordinate us with the rest of the Body, and bind us together in peace.

The bread that we break is the fellowship of the Body of Christ. Faith in Christ equalizes both clergy and laity when participating in the Eucharist because our personal faith unites us all to

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[1] Cf. 2Corinthians 1:24; Romans 5:1-4; 1Timothy 2:5; 1Peter 1:5; 5:3
[2] Cf. 2Corinthians 5:17-20; 1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6
[3] Cf. John 6:35; 1Corinthians 10:16-17; Proverbs 9:1-5; Colossians 2:19; Ephesians 1:22

the Head of the Body and to each other; and because of this, there is no distinction between the priesthood of the faithful and the priesthood of the ordained presbyter. Only, our functions and gifts in the Body of Christ differ. All of us participate in the same priesthood of Christ in the same way that we participate in His personal righteousness by faith; and this is why there is no mention of a two-tiered Christian priesthood in Scripture.

There is only one priesthood in the Body of Christ; and when Jesus Christ abides in us, all of us are vessels of His personal high-priesthood regardless of our functions within the Body: ordination notwithstanding. Priesthood is a part of His Spirit. This is the only one that is available for those of us who are parts of His Body. Our priesthood is actually Christ's personal priesthood that He shares with us only when we have His Spirit within us by our faith in Him.[1]

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[1] Cf. Hebrews 2:16-18; 1Timothy 2:5; 1Corinthians 12:22-25; 1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6

21. DIVINE MERCY

The fullness of God's mercy toward us results from our faith in Jesus Christ, who makes it available for us. "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"[1]. The ultimate expression of God's mercy is the provision that He made for humanity to overcome the effects of the sin of Adam. The only way to participate in this is by unconditionally trusting in Christ as our Higher Power and receiving His Spirit. God could have treated us like the angels who rebelled. For them there is no provision for repentance; but for humans there is. "What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands"[2] "Know you not that we will judge angels?"[3] "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God."[4] Apparently, humans are very important to God, seeing that He goes out of His way to lower His heavenly tabernacle over the new earth.

I wonder if God gives humans a second chance because we are born weak and separated from God, even before we do anything wrong. All of the fallen angels were created with a connection to God, but disobeyed Him individually and willfully while they were in their state of perfection. Humans are born imperfect because of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."[5] Christ is our Mercy Seat or reconciliation with God by the remission of sin.[6] Through Christ's Spirit within us, we have the fullness of God's mercy towards us; but we must first receive Christ's Spirit through faith in Him. Mercy, along with grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, is important enough to be included in the epistle salutations of 1 and 2Timothy, Titus, and 2John. God's mercy is basic to Biblical spirituality in general and Christianity in particular; and it is something that we all need. These three things are not only

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[1] 1Corinthians 1:30
[2] Hebrews 2:6-7; cf. Psalms 8:4-8; Proverbs 8:31
[3] 1Corinthians 6:3
[4] Revelation 21:2-3
[5] 1Peter 1:3; cf. 1Corinthians 15:12-20
[6] Cf. Romans 3:25; Psalms 116:6

important for the afterlife, but they also enhance our present life while we are alive and functioning in this world.

There is also the general mercy of God that extends to all. "The earth, O LORD, is full of your mercy;"[1] "It is because of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed: because his compassions fail not"[2]; and then there is the special mercy of God that extends to us individually in our lives only when we are in a relationship with Him through His Son. "Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[3] "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."[4] "Many sorrows will be to the wicked; but he that trusts in the LORD, mercy will compass him about."[5] "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me; for my soul trusts in thee. Yea, in the shadow of your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be past."[6] We need God at all times; but it becomes especially evident when things don't seem to be going well: which is the worst time to withdraw from God, but the best time to increase our faith. Trusting in Christ ensures God's participation and intervention in whatever we are going through, and makes everything work out for the good;[7] and it is the precondition which ensures that grace and mercy flow unimpeded in our lives.

"For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee."[8] God tells our enemies: "Take counsel together, and it will be defeated; speak the word, and it will not stand; for God is with us."[9] We don't need to fear those who believe that they are able to create harm towards us with their words. God is the only real Creator. When we have Christ in us, we have the power of God to protect us.[10]

Biblical spirituality provides us with the method for having faith in Jesus Christ; and is required for the fullest expression of God's mercy towards us. The mercy and grace that we receive from God is directly proportional to the amount of control that we cede over to Him. "Let your

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[1] Psalms 119:64
[2] Lamentations 3:22; cf. Psalms 25:8; Jonah 3:5-6, 10
[3] Hebrews 4:16
[4] 2Corinthians 1:3
[5] Psalms 32:10; cf. 32:7; 103:2-13; 31:7; 1:5-6; 2Chronicals 16:9
[6] Psalms 57:1; cf. 123:2; 33:16-21; 23:4; Philippians 4:12-13
[7] Cf. 2Corinthians 12:7-10; James 1:2-4, 12; 1Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-14; John 15:1-2; Romans 8:28
[8] Psalms 84:11-12; cf. 4:3-5; 11:7; 18:20-26; 66:16-20; 146:8-9; Deuteronomy 4:40
[9] Isaiah 8:10; cf. Psalms 31:19-20; Ezekiel 2:6; 1Corinthians 12:15-16
[10] Cf. Romans 8:32-39

mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in you."[1] Only then, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."[2] God's mercy is upon us through the Spirit of Christ, who is the Truth. Christ's righteousness by His faith in the Father is within us through His Spirit, and makes His inner peace and strength available to us. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they who put their trust in him."[3] Our trust in Christ gives God the opening to send the Spirit of His Son within us and to enter into every aspect of our lives; and allows Him to work on our behalf as we release our burdens on His Son. If we don't give Him our burdens, God leaves us on our own without His help; but life works much better when we have God intervening in our lives.[4] The abundant life that we are promised, not only applies to material things, but also to every other aspect of our lives. Without humility towards Christ, teachings on the abundant life easily turn into a prosperity gospel.

Interestingly enough, God's mercy extends to nature as well: through humans. This principle was established in Scripture from the very start. "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth has he given to the children of men."[5] "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth…And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."[6] When God created matter, it was good, not evil. After Adam and Eve disobeyed, God said: "cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow will you eat of it all the days of your life"[7]. Their disobedience affected the earth and nature. Our disobedience affects the earth and nature.

The interaction between humans and nature is also found in Deuteronomy 28. Some of the blessings and curses related to the behavior of the Israelites are events in nature such as locust plagues, and adequate or inadequate rainfall for crops. When we are in Christ, our presence on the earth blesses it because we are extensions of Christ.

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[1] Psalms 33:22; cf. Psalms 33:18-19; 34:15; Proverbs 8:34-36
[2] Psalms 85:10
[3] Psalms 2:12; cf. 13:5-6; Matthew 9:27-30; Mark 1:40-42
[4] Cf. John 10:9-10; James 4:6-10; Psalms 4:3-8; 11:7; 23; 91
[5] Psalms 115:16
[6] Genesis 1:26, 31; cf. Psalms 8:4-8
[7] Genesis 3:17; cf. Deuteronomy 28; Psalms 107:33-38; Jeremiah 12:4

Nature itself is waiting with the hope that humans will finally reach their true destiny in God. "For the eager longing of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who made it subject: in hope. Because the creature itself also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain until now."[1] Nature will share in our freedom from corruption, just as it involuntarily shared in our slavery to corruption because of Adam and Eve. When humans connect with God, nature also benefits. We are not as isolated as we think: we affect nature. The best thing we can do for the planet is to have faith in Jesus Christ, because, if human greed is destroying the planet, we will be treating the source of the problem, and not just the symptoms, as we are now doing. Nature cheers us on when we evangelize in joy and peace, because nature's well-being depends upon the well-being that humans experience from their relationship with God.[2]

We are so accustomed to seeing the world in its present state that it is hard to imagine a world that is not cursed because of human rebellion. In Biblical prophecy concerning future events, which also includes God's mercy towards Israel that is demonstrated in the re-gathering of Israel into the original homeland, "The wolf also will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the sheep together, and a little child will lead them…They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."[3] Biblical prophecy is potential history. When the prophesied event comes to pass, prophecy and history become one and the same. From God's perspective, there is never a separation.

In ancient times, Israel was chosen by God to be the carrier of His revelation for the eventual redemption of mankind, in spite of Israel's general lack of faith. Apparently, God was not going to abandon humanity after the disobedience of Adam and Eve. He will continue to honor His commitments and covenants to Israel even though Jesus was not viewed as the Messiah by the Jewish rulers. Prior to reigning over the earth, Jesus was prophesied to be the suffering Messiah for the redemption of mankind.[4] This is why He rejected the premature attempt to make Him king.[5] What appeared to be a fatal error for Israel in rejecting Jesus Christ as the

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[1] Romans 8:19-22; cf. Psalms 96:11-13; 98:6-9; Isaiah 55:12-13; 35:4-7
[2] Isaiah 55:12-13
[3] Isaiah 11:6, 9; cf. Baruch (Catholic Bible) 5; Isaiah 40:27-28; 27:1; Joel 3:20-21; Obadiah 17-21; Zephaniah 3:20
[4] Cf. Isaiah 53; 2Samuel 7:12-16; Psalms 89:3-4, 27, 29
[5] Cf. John 6:15; 18:36; Luke 9:20-22

promised Messiah, was actually what was supposed to happen at that time. It enabled the Gentiles to enter into the Kingdom of God by faith, and to provoke Israel to jealousy.[1] Even before the completion of Christ's earthly mission, which ushered in the availability of righteousness by faith for everyone, He rewarded Gentiles and the outcasts of society for their faith in Him.

If Christ's rejection was prophesied, why was Israel punished for having fulfilled prophecy? The reason is that people are still responsible for their motives, choices, and actions. The end doesn't justify the means. "The Son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born."[2] Jesus said this of Judas before the betrayal. In spite of all this, when the King returns, the world will be ruled from Jerusalem and Israel, as is prophesied.[3]

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[1] Cf. Romans 11; Matthew 8:8-13; 9:22; 15:28; Acts 3:17-18
[2] Matthew 26:24; cf. 18:7
[3] Cf. Deuteronomy 30:3-10; Psalms 2; 66:4,7; Isaiah 2:2-5; 11:1-16; 24:1-3, 18-23; 25:6-12; 27:1; 35:1-10; 49:8-26; 52:9-10; 62:1-7; 65:13-25; 66:10-24; 110:1-2, 5-6; Jeremiah 12:14-15; 16:12-21; 23:1-8; 24:6-7; Ezekiel 20:33-38; 36:24-38; 37:11-28; 38:8; 39:25-29; 47:6-23; Micah 4:1-8; 5; Zechariah 12-14; 9:9-10; Romans 11; Revelation 1:7; 2:26-27; 20:1-6; 21:2

22. JUDGING OTHERS

The subject of judging others needs attention. When a non-regenerated person judges others, it is the sure sign that the person misunderstands their own reality. The reality is that we are all born weak, and that we are in no position to belittle or correct another person's weakness before we have dealt with our own. "You hypocrite, first cast out beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to cast the mote out of your brother's eye."[1] This statement implies that it is possible to be helpful to others, if we have found help for ourselves. If we haven't found help for ourselves, how can we teach others to find it?

Christ's parable of the Pharisee and the publican was directed to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"[2] If you trust only in yourself, you are not acknowledging the reality that you are too weak to be righteous without God. "He that trusts in his own heart is a fool"[3]. "This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."[4]

We can be in a position to effectively instruct others, only when we have God's Spirit within us. If we haven't found a remedy for our own weakness, we are in no position to tell others how to go about it, because we really don't know how. Who wants to be with a person who only knows how to criticize, but doesn't offer workable solutions? "But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who has known the mind of the LORD, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."[5] Christ shares His own mind with us when we have His Spirit within us. "Know you not that we will judge angels?" [6] Maybe this is one of the reasons why Satan has such a hatred for humans. He would like to eliminate as many as he can. He is the antithesis of truth, and would love to keep us separated from our oneness with Christ; or keep us uncertain of it.

Another aspect of judging is the attempt to judge another person's standing with God; "For one believes that he may eat all things: another who is weak, eats herbs. Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him who eats not, judge him that eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or

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[1] Matthew 7:5
[2] Luke 18:9
[3] Proverbs 28:26
[4] Matthew 15:8
[5] 1Corinthians 2:15-16
[6] 1Corinthians 6:3

falls."[1] Even when a person does something that is clearly immoral, a person's standing with God is between that person and God. How do we know whether the person has repented or not, or whether the person knows that he is doing wrong?

Those who view sin as law-breaking because they have subjected themselves to a system of rules and regulations for righteousness instead of faith, remain in their sin, "for whatever is not of faith is sin."[2] Religious law can never be done perfectly; therefore, a person's conscience will always be violated because their human weakness remains. Everything in Christianity presupposes faith. With faith, all of the other aspects of Christianity will be in their proper place and will not be given undue importance.

Paul felt that it was acceptable to ostracize a Christian who was not behaving properly; but non-Christians were not included in this. "I wrote to you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then you would need to go out of the world…Do you not judge them that are inside? But them that are outside God judges. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person."[3] This is an important point because evangelism is hindered if we refrain from associating with the world because of its sinfulness. The world is supposed to be that way without Christ; and we are supposed to be ambassadors for Christ, with the ministry of reconciliation, for presenting the remedy for sin.

Jesus had to deal with the legalists of His day who, "Having a form of godliness, but disowning its power"[4], criticized Him for associating with the wrong people.[5] Legalists need to be careful of their associations because they don't have the strength to resist temptation. Legalism does not produce inner peace and strength. Like Christ, Spirit-filled Christians can mix with anyone because they are not as easily seduced by sin. Many churches talk about reaching the unsaved, but at the same time they avoid them for fear of being influenced. Usually these are the most legalistic; and they are this way, because they lack the power of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] Romans 14:2-4; cf. 14:17-18
[2] Romans 14:23; cf. Galatians 5:1-6
[3] 1Corinthians 5: 9-10, 12-13; cf. 5:4-5; 4:5; 2Corinthians 5:17-20
[4] 2Timothy 3:5 (the word *denying* (Gr. *arneomai*) can also be translated "rejecting" or "disavowing")
[5] Cf. Luke 19:7; Matthew 9:11-12; 11:19; John 8:1-11

23. WORSHIPING ANGELS AND HUMANS

The subject of angels is important because they are a part of God's protection on our behalf, and because they provide instruction in the Bible on how to relate to them and to God. "The angel of the LORD encamps round about those who fear him, and delivers them. O, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him."[1] "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who will be heirs of salvation?"[2] They perform in a special way for those who trust in God. This is important for us to know because our job is to trust in God; and then He is the one who chooses how He will extend His favor towards us, which includes His use of angels to minister to us. This is how we receive the maximum benefits from the ministry of the angels. Whoever God uses to help us or intercede for us, is His domain. This is why our primary dependence should be on God because, to the extent that we divert it away from Him and apply it to His creation, He correspondingly withdraws His favor and protection.[3]

The holy angels of God do not want human worship. They always point you to God. An angel corrected John the apostle two times in this regard. "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, you must not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy…I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, you must not do that; for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren, the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book. Worship God."[4] John had been an apostle for probably 65 or 70 years when this had happened. We would expect him to know better by this time. If he, the disciple whom Jesus Loved,[5] was inclined to do this, we need to be especially watchful.

The angel Raphael, upon revealing his identity to Tobit and his son, said, "For I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord. And when they had heard these things, they were troubled; and being seized with fear they fell on the ground on their face. And the angel said to them: Peace be to you. Fear not. For when I was with you, I was there by the will of God: bless him, and sing praises to him."[6] God is the one who dispatches His angels on our

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[1] Psalms 34:7-8
[2] Hebrews 1:14
[3] Cf. Psalms 33:22, 18; 34:15
[4] Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9
[5] Cf. John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20
[6] Tobit (Catholic Bible) 12:15-18

behalf. Our attention needs to be directed towards Him: not the angels. "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God."[1]

As the holy angels point us to God and not themselves, the same thing applies to human saints whether dead or alive. Why wouldn't a human saint react in the same way as an angel? Both are limited in their capacity to help us; and they do God's bidding: not ours. An example of human worship happened when Peter went to see Cornelius; "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man."[2] Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was one with Christ; yet he would not accept worship. One may ask why we not allowed to worship another person when the Spirit of Christ is within that person. The answer is: because that would be idolatry. Peter knew that, so he did not permit it. Jesus is the only exception because He preexisted as the Word of God and is part of the Godhead.

There is only one Spirit of Christ that we all participate in.[3] We do not receive individual copies of it or become deified. Also, there is only one Body of Christ that we all participate in; but we are assigned different functions by God in the one Body of Christ when our trust is directed towards His Son, who is the Head of the Body. No one person has all of its functions.

Only the members of the Godhead are able to disperse themselves among the many who pray to them for graces or protection. Those who have the Holy Spirit, have direct access to Christ within them, and to the throne of grace. Angels and humans are not able to disperse themselves among the many because they are not omnipresent. God directs them individually to bestow benefits on us when He chooses. If we want benefits from a specific angel or human being, we may have to wait our turn. Our responsibility is to remain faithful to God in order to be recipients of His benefits; and to leave the logistics up to Him. He knows what we need, better than we do.

We need to remain in Christ in order to ensure the greatest amount of protection from angels or from anyone else that God chooses. When we divert our attention away from Christ to

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[1] Colossians 2:18-19; cf. Ephesians 1:22
[2] Acts 10:25-26; cf. 1Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:18; Romans 12:3-8; Colossians 2:18-19; 2Peter 1:4
[3] Cf. 1Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22

them, we move ourselves away from God, who directs them. God doesn't want this, and His holy angels don't want it; but devils love it because they want to keep us separated from God by directing our attention away from Him, and open to them.[1] They keep us diverted from God by providing us with things that we crave because of our sin nature. We receive our spiritual nourishment from Christ and not from His created beings. Only God can provide us with the ongoing contentment that we seek. There are things that are only provided directly from God and not from His creation.

We need to worship God in Spirit and in truth, and not try to rationalize ways of placing God's creation between Him and us. I'm sure that Peter has not changed his attitude about who is to be worshiped even though he is dead. Scripture is clear on who qualifies for worship. Because only God is omniscient and omnipresent, how would created beings, angelic or human, know that there are prayers and devotional practices directed toward them while they are not present in our earthly realm? When we ask someone to pray or intercede for us, we talk to them directly, or indirectly through someone or something else. When prayers are not directed toward God, are angels instructed by God to bring prayers to His created beings? Does Jesus inform His dead saints of who is praying to them? How would we even know if a person is a real saint? I do not find answers to these questions in Scripture, although I do know from Scripture that *God* receives and answers prayer. In Scripture, God's servants always instruct people to direct their worship to God and not to themselves or anyone else.

When Paul and Barnabas were about to be offered sacrifices because of a miracle that God had done at the hands of Paul; "Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do you do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vanities to the living God"[2] I imagine that dead saints would have the same response for those who would want to worship them. Worship should always be directed towards God.[3]

In Scripture, there are examples of humans that accepted worship from others, and were severely punished.[4] Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, always accepted worship without any protest: which speaks to His divinity.[5] Paul criticizes those "Who changed the truth of God for

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[1] Cf. 2Timothy 2:26; Matthew 4:9; 2Corinthians 11:3, 14-15
[2] Acts 14:14-15
[3] Cf. Exodus 20:1-6; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Romans 1:25; Colossians 2:18-19
[4] Cf. Acts 12:22-23; Ezekiel 28:1-10
[5] Cf. Matthew 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:9,17; Mark 5:6; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; 20:27-28; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:6

a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen."[1] "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the LORD."[2] The first of the two great commandments points us to God; and it applies only to the Godhead.[3] The second applies to His creation. Any interaction that we have with God's creation, including ourselves, is within the scope of the second great commandment. There is a tendency in humans to blur the line between Creator and creation. Interaction with God's creation is never a substitute for relationship with the Creator. These two commandments cover our obligations towards God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

Our job is to have faith in Christ, so that we can have the greatest amount of protection from whatever source God chooses. Ultimately, the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven which provides us with mercy, protection, and salvation.[4] We benefit from all of this when Christ's Spirit is within us by our faith in Him.

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[1] Romans 1:25
[2] Jeremiah 17:5
[3] Cf. Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; Deuteronomy 30:10
[4] Cf. Acts 4:12; 1Peter 1:21

24. EVANGELIZATION

Evangelizing others is a natural response for a person who has been successfully evangelized. When something wonderful happens to you, you want to tell everyone about it. "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; For God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we exhort you for Christ's sake, be reconciled to God."[1] This well summarizes our response to being reconciled with God. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery that He would not condemn her; and to go and sin no more. He did not impute her trespass on her. This was symbolic of Christ's eventual abolishing of the Mosaic Law with His death.[2] God uses those of us who embody the Spirit of His Son, to reconcile the world to Himself. We are parts of Christ's Body; and God uses us as extensions of Christ to reconcile the world because Christ Himself is now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

When evangelization is accompanied by miracles, people are more attentive and responsive. I believe that this is why the early Christian church grew so rapidly. Jesus Christ drew a great deal of attention because of His miracles. They were also a verification of His claim to divinity. The religious rulers of His day felt threatened by them because the miracles gave legitimacy to Christ's claims and message. He could not be dismissed as a charlatan.[3]

There are those who are formal evangelists;[4] but the rest of us do it part-time, within the framework of our other activities. Peter tells us to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."[5] Paul tells Timothy that "the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that resist, in case God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his

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[1] 2Corinthians 5:17-20; cf. Galatians 6:15; Hebrews 3:13; Isaiah 55:11-12
[2] Cf. John 8:11; Romans 4:15; 5:13; Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9-10
[3] Cf. Acts 2:22, 43; 4:29-30; 5:12-14; 8:6-8, 13; 9:40-42; 14:3-4; Romans 15:19; 2Corinthians 12:12; John 4:48; 5:36; 10:19-21, 25, 38; 14:10; 15:24; Mark 6:2; 16:17, 20; Luke 7:13-17; Hebrews 2:1-4; 1Kings 17:22-24
[4] Cf. Ephesians 4:11
[5] 1Peter 3:15; cf. Luke 10:2

will."[1] There is no guarantee that the person we talk to will be reconciled to God, because He controls the outcome. Our job is to plant the seed and to water, but God gives the increase. "So will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it will not return to me void, but it will accomplish that which I please, and it will prosper in the thing where I sent it."[2] There will be unavoidable opposition to evangelization, but there is also the reward that accompanies it.[3]

When Paul was instructing those who are married to unbelievers, he said that "if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God has called us to peace. For what do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O man, whether you will save your wife?"[4] In other words, there is no need to feel guilty if the person that we evangelize does not come to Christ. Ultimately, God is the one who draws the person to His Son. When praying to the Father, Jesus said, "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world."[5] Some people take too much responsibility upon themselves, and feel that everything depends on them. This should not be the case.

Coercion is ineffective. You may be able to force people to perform the outward observances of faith, but you can't force anyone to have personal faith in Christ. We are told to evangelize in peace. "For you will go out with joy; and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands."[6]

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[1] 2Timothy 2:24-26; cf. 1Corinthians 3:6-8; Isaiah 55:11
[2] Isaiah 55:11
[3] Cf. Matthew 5:11-12; John 15:20; 2Timothy 4:17; Hebrews 11:24-26
[4] 1Corinthians 7:15-16
[5] John 17:6; cf. 6:37-46; Romans 8:29-30; Galatians 4:6
[6] Isaiah 55:12

25. THE ELECTION OF GRACE

The sovereign election of God is basic in Scripture. Exactly how He chooses to do it within the framework of our free will has been discussed for millennia. God influences our will, but at the same time, He holds us responsible for our choices. We always need to choose correctly. God expects us to come to Him with dependence, humility, and trust. We can decide to want or claim God's blessings, or work hard to get them in our own way, and not be vessels of honor if God doesn't show us mercy. We need to approach God in the way that *He* requires of us: "For God has put in their hearts to fulfill his will"[1]. The gate is narrow, and few find it. There are not numerous paths to the Biblical God; but numerous ones have been presented throughout the history of Christianity to the extent that the power of Christianity is now almost non-existent. This is why it is important to stay within the framework of the Scriptures. Don't expect others to figure it out for you because they probably won't.

We are always supposed to use our will when we to come to God, regardless of how much God intervenes in the process. He requires us to draw close to Him by choice, with a deliberate act of the will to unconditionally trust in Him because he always responds to us within the framework of our willingness. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."[2] This is the order in which God works. He does not draw near to us before we draw near to Him. "Therefore, brethren, be diligent to make your calling and election sure"[3] Prior to this verse, Peter lists a number of things to ensure this. This is the best that we can do for ourselves without trying to read God's mind: which we can't.

Christ often spoke in parables; and when His disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, "He answered and said to them: because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him will be given, and he will have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him will be taken away even that he has; therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."[4] This passage is significant because it tells us that the reason for the use of parables was because of the people's own predisposition to not receive His message. Christ cemented this by speaking in parables, and to take away "even that he

[1] Revelation 17:17; cf. Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:24
[2] James 4:8; cf. Zechariah 1:3
[3] 2Peter 1:10; cf. 2Corinthians 13:5-6
[4] Matthew 13:11-13

has". I believe that this is why Christ also said: "For many are called, but few are chosen"[1]. Few are chosen because many do not respond to the message; but the opposite is true when we are open to the message. God chooses us to "have more abundance" and to work with us. He tells us to “be clothed with humility; for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble"[2]. God's election either way is based on His foreknowledge of the person's prior free choices. Our choices precede His election and drawing near to us.

Paul discusses this at length: “What will we do then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So, then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You will say then to me, why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art you that replies against God? Will the thing formed say to him that formed it: why have you made me this way? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared to glory, even us, whom he has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”[3] God hardened pharaoh because he persisted in his disobedience.

The person, who responds by asking God why he is to be blamed if God made him a vessel of dishonor, really can’t say that because, in reality, he doesn’t know what God’s design is toward him. Also, he is still responsible for his choices and actions if he uses his will to reject God and do the wrong thing: just as the Pharaoh did. Judas Iscariot was responsible for his choices even though he was fulfilling prophecy.

It is paradoxical that the more self-autonomy that we exercise in relation to God; the less able that we are to use our wills freely. The reason for this is that without God, we have less operative willpower; and this results in compulsions, addictions, and other things that are difficult to control like worry, anger, unforgiveness, and lust. We have a tendency towards sin

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[1] Matthew 22:14
[2] 1Peter 5:5
[3] Romans 9:14-24; cf. Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach in the Catholic Bible) 15:11-22); Isaiah 45:1-5; 2Thessalonians 2:11; John 12:40

which is called the law of sin. Adam and Eve experienced this after their transgression, and we inherit this from them. In God, we have a greatly enhanced use of our wills because we have peace and strength from God.

We are "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father"[1], "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."[2] This is God's purpose for electing us. He then "works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"[3]. Christ said that "No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they will be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes to me"[4]. Apparently, God's election works in conjunction with our choices: which do matter. The remainder is academic.

The bottom line is: "He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself"[5]. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"[6]; "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."[7] Uncertainty about salvation is not a virtue. Christ never has to feel or be distant from us.

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[1] 1Peter 1:2; cf. Acts 13:48
[2] Romans 8:29
[3] Philippians 2:13
[4] John 6:44-45; cf. 2Timothy 4:22; Isaiah 54:13
[5] 1John 5:10; cf. 2Corinthians 13:5
[6] Romans 8:16; cf. John 1:12; 1Corinthians 6:17; 5:4; 2Timothy 4:22
[7] 1John 3:24; cf. 4:11-13

26. THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD FOR SIN

The concept of shedding blood to atone for sin goes back to the earliest stages of human history. Even before the fall of Adam and Eve, there was a death penalty for disobedience to God.[1] When Adam and Eve disobeyed, "they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."[2] God substituted animal skins for their fig leaves, which required the death of an animal.[3] After Cain and Abel were born; "And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect for Abel and to his offering"[4]

God had a preference for the animal sacrifice, but not murder. "Whoso sheds man's blood, by man will his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man."[5] The death penalty for murder was established shortly after the great flood, before the Law of Moses. The dark spiritual forces eventually perverted God's order and convinced people to do human sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals was supposed to be a remedy for death; instead, sacrifice became death for humans.

Animal sacrifices became part of the Law of Moses. "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God has enjoined to you. Moreover, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the sanctuary. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was, therefore, necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."[6] God's plan of salvation could not have been implemented without Christ's humanity and the shedding of His blood. The animal sacrifices according to the Law, prefigured the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, which, in turn, prefigures our own death to self and sin.

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[1] Cf. Genesis 2:17
[2] Genesis 3:7
[3] Cf. Genesis 3:21
[4] Genesis 4:3-4; cf. Hebrews 10:1-10; 11:4; 12:24
[5] Genesis 9:6
[6] Hebrews 9:19-23; cf. 10:10

The Christian ritual for death to self and sin is baptism into Christ. "Know you not that, as many of us that were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."[1] "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[2] Water baptism presupposes faith in Christ and putting on Christ that bring us His Spirit; and when Christ shares Himself with us through His Spirit, we are able to walk in newness of life. He also shares His Sonship with us; and this is why we are also sons of God. When we have the Spirit of the Son within us, the Father views us as adopted sons because we have become parts of Christ's Body. This puts us in a very privileged position in relation to the Father, provided that we continue in weakness and humility toward the Son.[3] Our recognition that we are weak without God leads us to the humility towards Him that brings us His peace, strength.

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[1] Romans 6:3-4
[2] Galatians 3:26-27; cf. also 4:4-6; John 1:12
[3] Cf. 2Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 3:26; 4:5, 7; Philippians 4:13; 1Peter 1:21

27. RELATIVISM

Relativism is a system of morality that is based upon the non-Biblical world-view that everything is god; and if everything is god, I am god, and I can create my own morality. If there is no personal Creator God, then there is no objective morality. Relativism is inherently subjective because without the Creator, humans are the measure of all things. Because we are all born in a weakened state, relative morality is easily perverted into whatever anyone wants it to be. It can be used to justify the worst instincts of mankind, with nothing to counter it when it is left unchecked. Fortunately this is not the case because the Creator does have an interest in mankind, and will see to it that evil does not ultimately triumph: but in the meantime it will try.[1]

Relativism is the morality of the secular humanist. Secular humanism tells us that there is no Creator God to whom we are accountable; that there is no divine revelation from the Creator to instruct us on how to relate to Him and to each other; and that all notions of God were created by humans for their own convenience. This is a product of Darwinism because if we evolved from primates, we are told that we would have gradually developed the idea of a personal God to explain our existence and surroundings; and that if we evolved into a conscious dependence on God and other deities, we can also evolve, without God, into a higher consciousness.

Even though there is no evidence for this, these views are common in today's world. Without God, we are accountable only to ourselves; and the special place that God has for humans within nature will not be acknowledged.[2] Rationalism is related to this because it tells us that human reason is the only source of knowledge and understanding. This idea entirely rules out divine revelation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit with its spiritual discernment that is available at the present time. In addition to the absence of God, there are different views of God which have been created by human reason and philosophy that are not compatible with the Biblical view of God; but it *is* possible to arrive at a knowledge of God by observing His creation.[3] The Biblical view of God is for everyone, and He exists for everyone to benefit from it.[4]

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[1] Cf. Revelation 21:2-3
[2] Cf. Matthew 6:26; Genesis 1:26-31; Hebrews 2:5-8
[3] Cf. Romans 1:19-20; Deuteronomy 4:34-35
[4] Cf. Psalms 47; 66:4; 67; 96:10; 97:5

A companion idea to rationalism is that humans are inherently good and that we do not need God to be peaceful and strong. This idea is contrary to the Biblical concept of a fallen human nature that is weakened by the law of sin, and that needs to connect with God for inner peace and strength. Whenever you hear that humans are evolving toward a higher consciousness, it implies that we are evolving into a self-autonomy that does not require a dependence on God. Creation is inherently dependent upon the Creator; and humans need to acknowledge this reality. Self-autonomy is a form of faith because it cannot be proven scientifically; and neither can the monism that it comes from. Everyone has faith in something, however misguided, whether they admit it or not.

Misplaced faith removes us from the reality that, in order to function well as God intended, we need God. History, with all its wars and atrocities, shows us that people are not at their best when left to their own devices. This is always problematic for those who think that humans are inherently good and do not need God; and they will always blame religion or something other than themselves when reality interferes with this. Reality will always impinge itself upon, and be a thorn in the side of those who hold unrealistic world-views. Sadly, at times, religion *is* part of the problem; but it should be the solution.

Many believe that God is uninterested in what happens on this earth, because if He was interested, things would be much better. Contrary to this, He has the hairs of our head numbered.[1] God doesn't operate by our suppositions.

Whenever people are distant from God or refuse to acknowledge His existence, relative morality becomes the norm, along with its undesirable consequences. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man sows, that will he also reap."[2] When we are close to God, and His Spirit is within us, we have a spiritual discernment for understanding the will of God that is not otherwise available. Just because we are not into relativistic morality, doesn't mean that we don't use our minds and instincts. Even with written divine revelation, the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit that comes from faith in Christ is also required; along with the resulting wisdom, understanding, and spiritual discernment that we are expected to use[3].

When discussing moral issues, a relativist will often say that whatever you feel about something is correct for you, even though you may totally disagree with someone else, and

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[1] Cf. Matthew 10:29-30; Isaiah 40:27-28
[2] Galatians 6:7
[3] Cf. 1Samuel 10:6-7; 1Corinthians 2:9-16

have opposite opinions on a given issue. When you believe in objective reality, this is an absurdity because both of you cannot be correct at the same time. In a relativistic universe, the only thing that you can be certain of is that you can never be certain of anything. This is totally impractical because even the most ardent relativist will act with certainty during the course of his ordinary activities; otherwise he wouldn't be able to function. Relativism is not reality.

With God, a person may be incorrect in their thinking, but if it is held in good conscience, God may excuse the person. "For one believes that he may eat all things: another who is weak, eats herbs. Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him who eats not judge him that eats; for God has received him. Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he will be held up; for God is able to make him stand…So, then, every one of us will give account of himself to God."[1] Notice that Paul is saying that the person who is weak in faith, only eats herbs; therefore, that person is not on an equal footing with the one who believes that he can eat all things, even though he may not be morally culpable in the sight of God.

Christianity and the values of the world are not compatible with each other. Christians should not be surprised if they experience hostility from the world. Christ warned that this would be the case.[2] Nevertheless, in Christianity, agreement among people is possible and desirable. Paul says: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."[3] Also, we are to verify whether a person is of God, because there are many people who will provide us with misleading information.[4] We are told to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."[5]

In spite of all the secular humanism and rationalism that exist in the world today, advances in science have made the existence of a spirit world and a transcendent God more plausible than ever. We now have examples of things such as radiation and electromagnetic fields, which we can't perceive with our senses, but we know exist because we now have instruments to measure them. Science did not create them when they were discovered and measured; they existed all along and were already part of reality. What else is there that already exists, just

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[1] Romans 14:2-4, 12
[2] Cf. John 15:19; Matthew 10:34-38; 1John 4:5-6
[3] 1Corinthians 1:10
[4] Cf. 1John 2:15-17; 4:1-6; Acts 20:29
[5] 1Thessalonians 5:21

waiting to be discovered? Science seems to be making us more open to the idea that a spiritual realm exists, rather than moving us further away from it. In the past, people felt more confident when doubting the existence of something that they could not see or touch; but this is no longer the case. Man is no longer the measure of all things: he never was. Reality, whether seen or unseen, does not need human permission to exist.

We now know that reality encompasses much more than what is apparent to our human senses. It sounds old-fashioned and dated to hear someone say that something doesn't exist because they can't sense it; or that it doesn't exist because the present level of scientific knowledge does not support it. At the present time, how would we know that we have arrived at ultimate human knowledge? What else is going to be discovered in the future? Our conception of reality has rapidly expanded to include not only the imperceptible, but also many things to be discovered that are unknown to us at the present time. This is as it should be.

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28. LEGALISM

Much of today's Christianity is a shadow of what it was in its beginnings because it has largely been replaced by legalism. Legalism replaces faith and grace with rules and regulations for controlling behavior, instead of teaching us how to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit for overcoming our human weakness from the law of sin. Christian laws are just as ineffective for righteousness, as was the Law of Moses which Christ nailed to the cross and abolished.[1] A church becomes an idol when obedience is directed only to the church organization and its rubrics, instead of faith in Christ.

Prior to the Law of Moses, sin was not imputed or legally charged, even though it was punished because it violated God's truth that was shown to humanity by the things that God created.[2] Later, the Law of Moses added a layer of law to God's truth that was enforced with a curse on those who did not obey it perfectly.[3] Because there was no one except Jesus Christ who could obey it perfectly, all of Israel was under a curse. Jesus died under the curse even though He was not guilty of breaking the Law, thereby paying the legal penalty of death as the spotless Lamb of God without blemish, and ending the Law of Moses which is the old covenant. His death redeems those of us who have His Spirit within us, and brings us life because of His resurrection from the dead.[4] Christ can share with us what He completed when we have His Spirit within us. His resurrection is the evidence that His death on the cross fulfilled His mission for humanity and God's requirements.

The new covenant is one of faith and grace, and not of religious law with legal sin penalties. In Christ, we are strengthened from sinning by the Holy Spirit, and not by trying to live up to religious legal requirements that are imposed on us.[5] The Law of Moses attempted to keep people in line by religious laws, but this did not do anything to strengthen a person from future sinning. Christian religious law is just as ineffective; therefore, people confess the same sins over and over again.

There are those who believe that, without religious law, people will inevitably fall into sin.[6] This should not be a problem for those who are under grace. Being under grace means that we

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[1] Cf. Colossians 2:14-17
[2] Cf. Romans 1:18-20
[3] Cf. Romans 7:7-14; Galatians 3:13
[4] Cf. 2Corinthians 5:21; John 14:19; Colossians 2:13
[5] Cf. Romans 8:13; 3:20; Galatians 5:16-26
[6] Cf. Romans 6:14-18; 8:1-4

are no longer enslaved by our weak human nature; therefore, it is not inevitable that we will fall into sin. In Christianity, what is supposed to keep us from sinning is the strength from the Holy Spirit that overcomes our human weakness toward sinning. If we place ourselves under religious law for righteousness, we are not under grace; and we will remain in our weakness from the law of sin.[1] Legalism is a caricature of Christianity.

Non-Biblical spiritual practices and exercises will not work because they do not draw God's peace and strength within us. Many of them use Christian imagery, but this does not make them more effective. They are not of faith. People are often told that if they continue doing them, they will receive comparable benefits; but they are also told that it takes time for this to happen. When God acts upon us, He controls the timing: and it could be immediate. He wants us to draw close to Him by humility toward Him.[2] Being anxious for nothing by casting all of our care on God doesn't need to be prolonged by doing it piecemeal. It can be done all at once. It's our choice.

I was never taught any of this in my religious upbringing. Instead, I was told to obey lots of religious laws so that I would not offend God by disobeying them. This ended later, when I was curious about finding inner peace within Christianity, and I went to the Bible to see if there was any instruction for it. There was lots of it. My search for inner peace ended when I found the instructions for getting God's peace by humility toward Him, through casting all of my care on Him. They were in the Bible all along. In the beginning, I didn't know that the only way to get His peace was to get God Himself in my life, because His Spirit contains His peace. The instructions for getting both were the same; but when you get God in your life, you also get His strength to walk in the Spirit and yield to God.[3] I tried it and it worked.

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[1] Cf. Galatians 5:4
[2] Cf. Philippians 4:6-7; 1Peter 5:5-7; James 4:5-10
[3] Cf. Romans 8:2; 6:13