

MY NEW COVENANT LIFE

A Devotional Journey Into the Heart of the New Covenant

*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy:
I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it
more abundantly. John 10:10*

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Breadcrumbs Ministries

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My New Covenant Life
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Dedication

This book is dedicated with gratitude to my loving wife, Anne, whose role as a helpmate has enabled me in all my endeavors for Christ during the past 49 years. Her constant encouragement, wise input, and helpful assistance have affirmed our full partnership in all of our endeavors.

Production Notice

This book is geared for both personal study and group use. A larger size Instructor's Guide for this material is in production. This guide will assist with chapter objectives, additional discussion suggestions, and resource materials.

A Request

While we have not overloaded the reader with Scripture references, it is very important for the Bible student to read this book with an open Bible. We strongly encourage reading the Bible references associated with the text.

Introduction

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Psalm 107:8-9

The purpose of this book

As a result of long hours of driving, going from one conference to another, I would bemoan to my wife that I was getting what I like to call road glaze, a kind of dull stupor.

It appears as though many believers are undergoing the spiritual equivalent. There is a pervasive sense of leanness commonly noticed among believers which has gripped us in a spiritual stupor or coma. Nothing satisfies us (especially our bland churches) and few things motivate us. We are neither deep in sin nor overly committed to ministry. Much is the result of the lukewarmness described in Revelation 3:16, where the solution is also offered.

Those who have recognized this lethargy have offered a range of solutions. Some would impose great burdens upon us. Others, who are repulsed by legalism would have us going through life with the abandon of school children on

the playground, savoring grace as though it were chocolate milk at lunch time or recess.

The intent of this book is to refresh the soul, not by offering novel remedies for spiritual stupor, but with a plea to return to the primitive, organic, and spiritually proven dynamics of the New Covenant. There is a satisfying Christ centered, Christ filled life which is available on a moment by moment basis. These New Covenant dynamics are freely available and they work wonderfully. This book is about life.

The mechanics of this book

While this book is the product of sound theological discipline, the reader will find very few theological terms within its pages. At the same time, the book represents a stepping stone for those who do want to expand their doctrinal awareness.

Though our chapters are not “outline driven,” readers will notice that we begin reasoning from the character of God and move into His relationship with us, His purpose and His plans for us. Initial chapters are shorter and simpler.

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Later chapters offer more truth to consider. Every chapter is warm, practical and, hopefully easy to understand.

Readers who want to move along to the next level of more intense Bible study are invited to follow up with a visit to the My New Covenant Life web site. This site is filled with video, audio, and downloadable printed materials to help ground the New Testament believer in the nuts and bolts of New Covenant truth.

This material is for everyone who is tired of spiritual road glaze, and offers a rich perspective of Christ and His purpose into our daily awareness. Our prayer is that it will also shed some light along the way for parents who wish to nurture their children with these same truths. Our desire is that this book will also be used in group studies. For this reason, we have made every effort to keep production costs low. We invite folks to reproduce this book when it is more practical and cost effective than purchasing.

Keep in mind that we stand ready to share and interact with readers. Let us know what we can do to help you grow. Enjoy.

A very important feature for moms and dads

For Your Family

One reason why we study the Bible is so that we may pass it along to our children. It is especially important for parents to do more than simply read a Bible story or hand off a devotional book for a child. We need to teach them how to reason from the Word of God. A good way to do this is to pass down the truths we are meditating upon in our devotions and studies.

For this reason, we have provided additional helps for each chapter in a special insert at the back of the book entitled **For Your Family**.

For Your Family, provided by Trisha Brandow, is designed to supplement each chapter with ideas to help the reader make these truths practical for children. Because we have limited these to one suggestion per chapter, the reader will notice that not all ideas apply to all age groups. Even so, they are easily modified, and our prayer is that they will stimulate parents to develop their own styles for family devotions.

How you can benefit from this book

(A personal note to you, the reader)

We assure you that this book is well organized and carries out some very important goals though you may not see them immediately.

Unlike many Bible studies, My New Covenant Life is intensely personal and devotional and should not be viewed as a textbook.

Throughout its pages, the author will lead you from a basic understanding of who God is all the way to a basic understanding of who you are and why you were meant to be.

This book is challenging in the sense that you are asked to discard the normally preconceived notions that most believers have concerning personal ministry in favor of understanding how and why the New Covenant changes everything.

In the end you should be rewarded with a fresh understanding of the New Covenant and its life changing dynamics. You should grow in a practical and non-threatening way.

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None of this will occur unless your focus is on the Word of God which is under discussion. For this reason, we urge you to keep your Bible at your side and make a special effort to look up most, if not all suggested scripture references.

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1 Beginning at the Beginning

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

- Isaiah 43:10-11

Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.

- Isaiah 45:11-12

Swedish Gasoline

In our world it was sometimes called Swedish gasoline. In order to avoid stunting our growth, our father smilingly insisted that we could not drink coffee regularly until we were six years old. This is not to suggest that we all drank coffee, but we were allowed to enjoy both coffee and tea. In earlier years he suggested that drinking black coffee would be best for our health. Then, after listening to the food police, he encouraged us all to use cream or dairy dust for our stomachs' sake. Later, upon hearing even more scientific data, he urged us to return to black coffee. Sadly, it was too late for me and I remain a corrupted cream user to this day.

This scenario was only a hint of what we have all been subjected. We have been led around by a host of dauntless researchers and scientists who's latest opinions are served up on the evening news. We are never really quite told who these experts are, but we may be sure that if they recommend cream in our coffee today, they will urge black coffee upon us tomorrow. And, these faceless scientific dictums comprise only a tiny burst of all that barrages our minds, thanks to the social media, printed media,

religious broadcasting and publishing in our day, and, of course mom.

Nowhere has this confusing effluence of data (uncorrelated bits and pieces of knowledge) left us in more trouble than in the spiritual world. Truth is no longer based on fact, but rather it is based on experience and opinion. We follow trends like the advancing and receding waves on a beach. It is not that we are a-theological. Rather, we are pan-theological. Our eclectic world views are pieced together with data from a panorama of sources, influenced most heavily by whatever speaker or Bible teacher is riding the crest of any given generational impulse. This reckless and wild abandon regarding truth may provide some exhilaration for the moment, but in the end it leaves us confused and empty.

Relearning what we knew all along

We could discuss why all this is happening, and this writer would be first in line to assert his opinion. We save that for another day, because we are committed to a higher goal. We are committed to helping stem the tide of ambivalence by offering you a sure and certain way to filter truth,

organize your thoughts, and, most importantly, enhance your walk with God. We are here to rescue ourselves from the shifting currents of data and opinion and to ground ourselves on the solid rock.

You may be bracing for a battery of clichés and generalities which are normally offered at this juncture. We all know that the answer is in the Bible. We all know that Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible. We are not interested in merging more data into your already overflowing data stream. We are not about that at all.

It's time to change the way we think, the way we process information, and, most importantly, the way we prioritize information. To do this we need no help from universities, business schools, or church growth movements.

Start with your first principle

Now, work with me for a minute. To begin this process of re-thinking we must start with what we call our first principle. All reasoning begins from a starting point, a first assumption. Our first principle is, of course, God. We do not start with the Bible. We start with God. We do not believe in God because the Bible teaches there is a God. God

revealed Himself to Adam, for example, before there was a Bible. We believe in the Bible because God reveals Himself in it, not vice versa. In fact, this is the singular distinguishing point between the Bible and all other so-called sacred writings. The Bible is God's self revelation. As we see God reveal Himself, His nature, and His character in the Bible, the Holy Spirit convinces us that this is truly an inspired book and that we worship a unique God unlike any other "gods" supposed by man.

The implications of this point are easily overlooked. The Bible is the way it is because of the God it reveals. The fundamental truths of the Bible are not placed there helter skelter. Rather, each of those biblical fundamentals descends directly from the person and character of God. When one mocks the biblical fundamentals, as certain "evangelical" pastors have done lately, he mocks the person and character of the God from whom they descend. We cannot reject the truth of God without rejecting the person of God because truth is merely a synonym for God's self revelation. Things are true because God is true. There is no truth outside of God. Jesus Christ is truth (John 14:6).

The point is that we begin reasoning from God. All right thinking is right thinking about God. All wrong thinking

is wrong thinking about God. Wrong thinking about God eventually leads to wrong behavior. Wrong behavior leads to wrong consequences. In the same way, right thinking about God leads to right behavior and right consequences. Few would dispute this point, but fewer make the effort to follow through. They fail to begin with the self-revelation of God when shaping their world views.

It's important to carry this a step further. We want to take a closer look at God. We want to observe Him.

So, how would you describe God?

So, what is God like and what are these starting points for all other spiritual discussion and learning? Grab your microphone and play "Man on the Street." Approach ten people with the same question: "Who is God and what is God like?" Odds are that they will bounce back with a response which will fit into one of two categories. Many will announce that He is a God of love. Atheists will generally see Him as a God of wrath, and a perpetrator of genocide, along with the other monotheistic gods.

Similarly, most evangelists and apologists (defenders of the faith) will rightfully devote significant effort to explaining

these two traits of God and reconciling them at the cross of Christ, the place where God's love compelled His wrath to be satisfied through the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son. While we would never fault those evangelists and apologists, if we are to reason from God we must begin with a clearer understanding of who He is. This is what the average man on the street is missing.

While God has revealed numerous things about Himself in His Word, there are several important things we find stressed when He is the subject under consideration. When we do not begin with these truths in our witness we incorrectly assume our listeners have the proper foundation. For example, (as true as it is) it does not make sense to tell folks that they are sinners and are bound for hell if they have no concept of God. It makes no sense to tell them that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives, if they do not know who this God is. Most gospel tracts begin with an assumption of knowledge that modern readers have not grasped. A wise witness will observe and adjust his testimony and use of gospel materials accordingly. Now, consider some of these basic characteristics of God.

The ultimate “un” statement

To begin, God is unlike. We do not mean this in the same sense as comparing an orange with an apple. We mean He is not like oranges or apples. Apples and oranges are comparable in some ways. In the end, they are parts of the creation. God is not comparable to anything. He exists outside of His creation. He fills it, He permeates it, but He is not part of it in any sense. All false gods are connected in one way or another to the creation - even the false monotheistic gods that claim otherwise. “To whom will ye liken me..?” our God announces emphatically! (Isaiah 40:25). We do not hate idolatry simply because God forbids it. We hate it because each demon-inspired false god presumes upon or copies some trait of our living God and rob Him of His glory. Each idol, in some way, brings the living God down to its level. Interestingly, the word idol means copy.

You're one or the other

There are only two kinds of worshippers: Creator-based worshippers and creation-based worshippers. Creator-based worshippers worship a God who is unlike anything and exists outside of His creation. Creation-based worshippers worship false gods, including Satan, all of

which are a part of the creation.

Creation-based worshippers generally do not have a problem with ecumenism (a commitment to the general unification of all religion.) Pantheists and polytheists (those who believe that all is god and those who believe in multiple gods) don't have difficulty acknowledging each other. They don't even mind worshipping a great spirit in one form or another. However, they will all reject the idea that one God exists separate from the creation and has exclusive rights to receive worship (Isaiah 43:10-11; 45:11-12). They are ecumenical.

The God particle just isn't there

Common truisms declare that there is a little of the divine in all of us and that we may all find "God" in our own way. As such, we need to look within for spiritual strength. The idea that there is some particle of the divine in all of us is one of the first principles of creation-based worshippers. True followers of Christ acknowledge that we are made (to some extent) in God's image, but we are not little gods and will never become little gods. We will not progress through levels of enlightenment until we are exalted as little gods who can then exercise creative and (sometimes) procreative

powers. True believers in Christ know that we have been translated (moved) from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son at the very moment we receive Christ as our Savior (Colossians 1:13, 2 Corinthians 5:17). We become new creations in Christ, and share the nature of Christ, but we will never become little gods.

False Worship and False Community

There is no particle of the divine in any created thing, and created beings cannot connect mystically with each other on any level. There is no community. The concept of creation based spirituality is a counterfeit of the true biblical doctrine of the church. Folks who trust Christ are placed in what the Bible calls the body of Christ. We share a common unity, a common oneness as a result of our placement in Christ. Satan hates this wonderful union and seeks to diminish it through attacks from without and within. The doctrine of our unity in Christ is heavily stressed by our Lord and the apostles. The world cannot enjoy such a union and we should never nurse the illusion that they can by allowing false teachers to raid our spiritual treasure troves. We are not all the children of God by right of being a part of the creation (John 1:12, Galatians 3:26). There

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is no spiritual community, no spiritual reality, and no life outside of the body of Christ.

Don't be mystified

Believers should also take note that ours is a spiritual union, not a physical union (as in marriage) or a mystical union (as some groups mistakenly assert). Though our union in Christ is wonderful, there is no “mystic, sweet communion” as some would have. Our true spiritual union shares a common bond through our spiritual placing into Christ (Romans 6:1-10), common fellowship on this earth (Ephesians 3:9, Philippians 2:1) and a common cause based on our common identity in Christ (Ephesians. 2:13).

Sadly, the idea of mystical union entails far more. To be a mystic implies a non biblical epistemology, or system for knowing truth. Mystics can supposedly gain common knowledge and share common communication on a metaphysical (beyond the physical) level. Mystics think they can pray to saints, for example, because they suppose they are one with them. Mystics want to gain new knowledge, insight, and power from their spiritual disciplines. Some of these include sustained primal silence, vain repetitions and breath prayers, and other so called worship aids. These

false ideas regarding community derive from creation-based worship. They are simply not taught in the Bible. Mystics are not merely metaphysical (beyond the physical), they are “metabiblical.” They seek to go beyond the scriptures.

When we embrace the supposed wisdom which can be found in creation-based worship we can be guilty of implied endorsement. By quoting false teachers our endorsements make us appear to embrace truths we do not hold. These counterfeit systems are tragically depriving their needy subjects of the very stuff of life itself. True spiritual life, New Covenant life, flows from Christ alone. There is no spiritual reality or life apart from Christ. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6).

So What Have We Learned?

1. We have learned that God is our first principle and that we reason all things from God.
2. We have learned that God is unlike. To compare Him or associate Him with any other false god or form of false worship is idolatry.
3. We have learned there are only two kinds of worship-

pers, those who are godly worshippers and those who have a powerless form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). We may never mix counterfeit worship dynamics with true worship dynamics.

How Should This Change Me?

- I will start reasoning from the person of God as I seek to understand His truth, because all truth descends from God in an orderly fashion.
- When talking to others I will assume they do not have the knowledge of God until I determine otherwise. I will help them understand that God is unlike the creation and all false creation-based worshippers.
- I will work to understand the difference between true spiritual union in Christ and the false mystical unions which are being promoted today.
- I will reject false forms of worship and false worship aids which cannot produce or enhance true spiritual life.
- I will never pander to false religious truisms or handle the Word of God deceitfully for the sake of evangelism

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(2 Corinthians 4:1-2). This means I will not embrace or commend false spirituality or false teachers.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



2 The Unchanging God

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Malachi 3:6

Life's Most Profound Questions

Recently, a little girl announced that I would probably not be able to attend her graduation because I would be dead by then. While her mother chided her bluntness, and I assured her that I had every intention to prove her wrong, her mom and I both had to acknowledge and appreciate her willingness to face the issues of life head on - as only children can do. We can count on children to put us on the hot seat with the most profound questions. After they are

through asking “What is God like?” we are presented with the other inevitable question, “Where did God come from?”

We addressed the first question in our last chapter. He is unlike. God is completely separate from His creation. Our second answer is similar. God did not come from anywhere. He has no origin, no starting point, and no ending point. He has no mommy nor daddy. He simply is, and as such, calls Himself “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:13-14). Of course, we happily leave the task of explaining this to our ever resourceful, first line of defense: Mom.

One-time responses are rarely sufficient to help our little ones wrap their minds around such a grand idea. After all, the whole creation around us has a beginning and an end. We all come from somewhere. We cannot fully grasp the idea that God is not like us. However, it is important that we teach this truth to children as soon as they address the subject.

If God originated, evolved, or progressed in any way, He would be a part of the changing creation. Jesus Christ carries the creation forward. He alone is the principle of consistency. Search to the highest star or the smallest particle and you will find no constant within the creation

(Colossians 1:13-17, Hebrews 1:1-3). Scientists who reject the knowledge of God are consigned to an endless pursuit of what does not exist. Our aging creation with its ongoing cycles of life and death is on a march toward its own cremation (2 Peter 3:10-13). In the words of Henry F. Lyte's hymn:

*“Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”*

Because God is unchanging, truth is absolutely true

This unlike God is also unchanging. And that is the truth a child needs to know up front! He needs to hear this long before he can grasp its importance. In the collection of all the gods known to men, there simply is no god who is changeless. Keep in mind that there can be no absolutes, no certain truth if there is no unchanging God. Truth is not like water which can change its shape. It cannot be declared true today and false tomorrow at God's whim. God is truth and His Word is truthful. It is trustworthy. We do not trust God blindly, as the world suggests. We trust God because He is truthful and therefore, trustworthy. These

things could never be true of a changing god. Truth cannot change because God does not change.

Because our God is unchanging we can rely on His Word and His promises.

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: 11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; 12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Hebrews 1:10-12. See also Psalm 102:26-28, James 1:17, and Malachi 3:6.

Not to worry soccer moms (and dads)!

Let's extend this so that we can change the way we respond to unbelief. We want to align our responses with God's.

Give it up! There are just too many "isms" out there. Pantheism, panentheism, polytheism, atheism, and agnosticism have each spawned their legions of "mini-isms". While we do want to be knowledgeable regarding the false teachings we encounter personally, few of us, especially busy parents, can devote our discretionary time to knowing and understanding all of these "isms". It's not going to happen.

Frankly, it is neither wise nor necessary for all of us to be “ism” experts, but we can all know how to respond simply and biblically. Let’s boil it down to God’s two main talking points. Learn to reason with God from His point of view and you will be ready to give an answer (1 Peter. 3:15).

First, God persistently cites the evidence of the creation itself. When men reject the knowledge of God, they must, without exception, deny the witness that is in them personally and around them. In a coming paragraph we’ll list a few scriptures to help us learn to use this technique by holding God deniers accountable to the creation witness that is already within themselves (Romans 1:19). Though most God deniers are already deluded with layers of plausible myths (see 2 Peter 1:16), the fact is, there are no truly honest God deniers. There are no neutral seekers. A truth warrior will learn to leverage the presence of this built-in guilt that all unbelievers share in common.

Second, God persistently cites the evidence of His declarations, or His prophecy. Some say that prophecy is for foolish speculators and not at witnesses and evangelists. They want you to leave your sword behind. Conversely, when God approaches the false teacher, He loads His arsenal with prophetic truth. You see, the purpose of prophecy is to evi-

dence the fact that God is in control. He has determined or declared (operative word) what will be. He knows the end from the beginning. Further, He has left undeniable evidences of these declarations in both the geological record and in human history.

A little exercise does us all good! Why not interrupt your routine and do this for your next devotional time? Pour over the following verses and notice how God uses both of these evidences (creation and prophecy) in the same passages as His primary talking points with those who deny His truth. Find the verses which best fit you, underline them, and meditate on the arguments God is making.

First, go over Isaiah, 44-46 paying special attention to the setting. Notice that God is answering the same false ideas we encounter today. Take special note of Isaiah 44:6-8, 45:5-7, 11-12, 18-22 and 46:9-11. Highlight those verses which directly address creation and prophecy.

Now, go to the New Testament and read 2 Peter 3. Follow God's reasoning and get a firm grasp on how God uses the arguments of creation and prophecy.

These are just a few verses we can find that show how God

approaches unbelief. You do not have to prove these verses to use them. Don't be intimidated by the foolishness around you (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Remember, folks who argue against God are willingly ignorant. Be gentle, and let the Spirit use this guilt to convict them (2 Tim. 2:24). But we all have an even higher calling than just confronting these unbelievers.

It's time to fortify our own children with vitamins C & P

Satan hates the doctrines of Creationism and biblical Prophecy because they are the first line of weaponry in God's arsenal. A church which does not fortify Christ's sheep in these areas should be bypassed in favor of one which does. A high percentage of evangelicals have made disturbing concessions in these areas (usually in the name of evangelism). They have given ground in the very place where God expects us to take ground in the truth war.

This is not to suggest that we must become prophetic experts and master creation scientists. It is to argue that too many of us have fallen dangerously behind the curve in fortifying ourselves and our children against the wave of notions they are facing in a world which desperately needs to hear the unchanging truth of our unchanging God.

Parents, fortify your child now. This is your first priority. One conversation around the dinner table won't do it. You need a plan. Many wonderful resources are available for your child. Skip his daily vitamins if you must, but never skip God's vitamins C and P.

Extract of Beef

A dear aunt of mine was intimidated by the fact that she was to host a highly esteemed Christian author for dinner. She was just beginning to relax when he politely announced that he preferred extract of beef with his coffee. After a brief but frantic search for what she knew she would not find, he let her know that he was asking for milk or cream. That broke the ice, and a great time of fellowship ensued.

There is similar confusion in concerning the term the fundamentals. The fundamentals are nothing more than the extract of the beef of God's unchanging Word, the cream of Bible doctrine. They are rich, clear expressions of what God is saying.

Unbelievers and some evangelicals believe it is in vogue to construe all Christian fundamentalists as radical. One world

famous evangelical misses no opportunity to argue that we are close minded and driven by fear. He openly mocks our commitment to those rich biblical fundamentals we all love. These charges represent playground tactics, bullying words, by scoffers of 2 Peter 3:3 who do not believe God's Word. The fundamentals are direct derivatives of an unchanging Bible. They truly are non-negotiable because they are based on the right authority. They are non negotiable because we have an unchanging God whose truth is also unchanging. This being true, we will not place any one or any thing on an equal or higher authority than God, - not nature, not the church fathers, not our pastors or our parents, and not even our own reason.

So, What Have We Learned?

We have just begun reasoning our way forward from the very character of God Himself. Each chapter will add to this process.

1. We have learned that God is not only unlike, He is unchanging.
2. Because God is unchanging, truth can be absolute.
3. God is very defensive about these two facts concerning Himself.

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4. God employs two dominant evidences in His Word when confronting truth deniers: a. His authority and ownership are seen in the creation, and b. His control and determinism are seen in Bible prophecy.
5. God expects us to use these same approaches when we confront unbelief.

A Peek in the Family Medicine Cabinet

1. We will help our child reason from the character of God, beginning with his uniqueness and the fact that He is unchanging.
2. We will devote as much spiritual care and education to our children as we devote to medical care and education. We will fortify our family with vitamins C and P.
3. *We will develop a family plan to ground our children in biblical creationism. We will use the resources that are readily available in a regular and meaningful way before they are challenged so that our children can learn how to respond to scoffers.
4. We will ground our family in Bible prophecy. Children can learn prophecy when properly instructed.

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*Tip: In your family devotions, draw a long line on a sheet of paper (perhaps taped on a wall) which represents the time elapsing from Adam to the end of the Millennium. Help your children to add important prophesied events, one at a time, and support those events with scripture. Let this project extend as long as it is helpful. As your child grows, teach him the importance of Daniel and Revelation. Children love these books and, when properly guided through them, can handle the heavy topics they include. Don't shelter your children from the Bible; walk them through it. Ask your pastor for help and resources to do this, or contact us directly. We can help.

Don't forget!

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3 Our Up Close and Personal God

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23-24

Realizing the Facts

Recall that we are reasoning from the person of God. We are now talking about the third characteristic which separates our God from all false gods. We saw that He is unlike anything. Unlike all other comers our God created the

heavens and the earth, and He exists outside of it. We saw He is unchanging. Because He is not subject to change, His Word and His promises are sure. Now, we see that He is up close and personal. God alone claims to be self-revealing. He is intimate and personal.

Satan wants to paint a picture of a distant God who is both arbitrary and unapproachable. He wants to lay his own false gods alongside God in order to confuse the truth. Most of all, Satan wants us to perceive Him as a rather mean God who is so distant from us that we could never enjoy Him.

In reality, our God is very ordered in the way He reveals Himself to us and very passionate in His desire for us to connect with Him - on His terms. Once we see how definitive God is about His self-revelation, we will never again be confused as to when or how God speaks. We will not be “tossed about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), because we will be able to recognize exactly how God communicates with us.

Count them. There are three ways through which God reveals truth (or His word) to us. Because we worship an orderly (unchanging) God, these ways will never contradict

each other.

First, God reveals Himself through the creation itself, the creation which He spoke into being (Genesis 1). We have already covered this. 2 Peter 3:5-7, Romans 1:18-20, and scores and scores of passages throughout the Bible argue that God has provided a witness to Himself in the creation. If you have any doubt, just read through the Psalms!

Second, God revealed Himself through His written (inscribed) Word (2 Peter 1:19-21). Peter makes a surprising point here. He argues that the scriptures themselves are even more authoritative (sure) than Peter's own eye witness account of the transfiguration! The scriptures do not need any church or private interpreter in order to be understood. For those who simply read what it says, the Bible doesn't need human opinions. Sadly, those who have claimed the right to interpret the Bible have invariably made their own authority even higher than the Word of God! Wow!

God's Word was not only reliable when God spoke it verbally, but we can trust it in its written form. Of course, men can and do make mistakes when copying or translating the Bible, but the fact is we have many copies of the Bible available to us from so many centuries, which will enable

us to detect a mistake in a particular translation. God has done this to protect us. No group can claim possession of a sole manuscript or seek to alter it. God's written Word is reliable.

Third, God has actually revealed Himself in human flesh.

God became man:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Friends and enemies confess that there was never one who spoke and taught like Christ. (If you, dear reader, are new to His teachings, lay down this material right away, jump into the gospel of John, and prepare for the feast of your life!) Notice what the author of Hebrews says about Christ in this respect:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Hebrews 1:1-2

The writer is camping on two important facts we must not forget. First, God spoke unto the fathers by the prophets, but He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. In

other words, Jesus Christ is the living Word (John 1:14). Second, this is the One by whom God made the worlds - the ages and all that is in them (Colossians 1:16).

Don't miss the underlying truth here. This is an argument of correspondence. Whether God reveals Himself in the creation, in the written scriptures, or in the living person of Christ, it is the revelation of God, so it will correspond precisely. Have there been other comers and other false gods who claim to have their scriptures and even their messiahs? Yes, Satan has provided us with a long line of false scriptures, false Bibles, and false interpretive systems. They all have the same thing in common: They are self-contradictory.

When we read our Bibles we don't wait for some burning within to assure us that what we are reading is right. The devil can stimulate false religious impressions. Those false scriptures and false gods, when laid alongside the true Christ and the true scriptures, will soon be exposed for their own error and confusion.

Don't get buried in the detail! The point is this: God has revealed Himself. We may rightfully say He is a people person! He is personal! He is relational! He became man in

order to fellowship with us.

Relating These Facts

The beloved Fireside Poet Whittier wrote: Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, It might have been. With one glaring exception, Whittier's profound observation was correct. In reality, the saddest words ever written were uttered and penned by God Himself: And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (Genesis. 3:9).

These are the saddest words because they represent the precursor of the great human tragedy which would follow. All mankind would be separated from life-giving fellowship with God as a result of sin. These words are sad because they would one day lead to another horrific statement when the Father and Son were separated as a result of our sin: ...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew. 27:46). Just as fellowship with God is the ultimate privilege, so separation from God is the ultimate tragedy. To know God should be the ultimate pursuit of all men. To be separated from God in an existence devoid of His love,

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His blessing and His goodness comprises an inescapable eternal catastrophe. Human catastrophes are foretastes of the self-imposed catastrophe awaiting all who reject God's fellowship.

The Relationship Satan Rejected

When considering Satan's rebellious path we don't want to overlook the eclipsing offense. It was not simply that Satan was rejecting God's authority in favor of his own autonomy or even Satan's imagined ascent to a position higher than God. As heinous as those crimes were, they belied a deeper sinister motive. Satan was rejecting a relationship with God himself. He was rejecting all that comprised God's love, glory, and majesty.

The Relationship God Repaired

Admittedly, the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not (2 Corinthians 4:4). Thankfully, we have a God who will open blind eyes. In the person of Christ He will restore the fellowship Adam lost, enriching us with a living relationship that even Adam did not know. This reconciliation was made possible through the death of Christ who bore the penalty for our sins. Any reader who,

at this very moment, accepts the death of Christ on his behalf, and who believes God raised Him from the dead, can step instantaneously into this new living relationship. Our sins can be forgiven and our fellowship can be effected because Christ shed His own blood as a sacrifice, to pay the penalty for our sin. Read these scriptures yourself: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 1 Peter 1:18-20, Romans 3:23, 6:23, and 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8-9. Compare also John 1:12 with 1 John 5:11-12.

How the lost "relate" to God

We have a challenge for our readers who know Christ. Step out of your world and put yourself in the world of a typical unbeliever.

- He has probably not formed the same ideas about God as the Bible teaches.
- He has probably not grasped the truth that God is unlike anything in His creation (the point we discussed earlier in this book).
- He may never have had God's unchanging character explained, so he does not understand why His Word and His promises are absolutely reliable.

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- He has no reason to consider your God, because he has no foundational teaching from which to reason.
- Finally, he has very likely rejected or twisted any understanding he does have.

That is why the fact that God wants to have a relationship with man is so wonderful. Helping unbelievers understand our God is a powerful tool in drawing them to Him.

The relationally challenged

My wife and I live in the great State of Colorado. While we mean no offense to its residents, based on the mind-set of some, it could well be named the great Dysfunctional State of Colorado. Recently an elk roaming inside the city limits of Boulder, was illegally slain. The hue and cry over the death of the elk resounded nationwide. A vigil was held for the “majestic creature”. Amazing Grace was sung, and funds were raised to erect a bronze monument in its honor. These genuinely caring folks did not realize how skewed their priorities and affections have become. In this same state 15,000 to 20,000 human children (created in the image of our majestic God) are aborted annually and no bronze statue is erected on behalf of even one baby. It is not wrong

to feel sadness over the death of an animal. It is wrong not to feel it over the wanton destruction of innocents.

Our national slide toward creation worship is the direct result of our slide away from the knowledge of God. In many homes, relationships with pets last longer than relationships with marriage partners. Home, work, and educational relationships are increasingly dysfunctional, and attempts to remedy the emotional vacuum lead to even more dysfunctionality. No idyllic place in nature, no creature of God, and no fellow human being can replace the longing for a true, lasting relationship with our Creator. Try to bury this need as we may, it will simply resurface elsewhere.

"Relating" our relationship to the lost

An oft repeated piece of wisdom handed down to me by my late father-in-law sounded like heresy when I first heard it. He would say, "Jim, you can't win anyone to your Christ until you have won him to yourself." If not taken in context, this could be construed as heresy, but it is salient. It is the glory of Christ shining through us which opens the eyes of those who do not believe (2 Corinthians 4:1-6). We are the relational instruments God uses. If God were communicating facts only, books would have worked just fine. In the

gospel, God is communicating and offering Himself.

We do not recommend relational evangelism if it is an essentially content-less and superficial approach to witnessing. A faithful witness will also reject the disingenuous, buttery style of evangelism which buries the truth under so much syrup. Obedient servants will also avoid the kind of impersonal content-heavy evangelism which turns receiving Christ into an intellectual exercise.

How can we know when we have struck the right balance? The true gospel will focus on the person of Christ as much as the facts which surround His saving work. Additionally, our own abiding life in Christ is what reflects the life of Christ (John 15:1-10). It's all about choosing life over death. When others sense and see our living relationship with Christ, they are drawn toward the only One who can fulfill our needs, both now and in eternity.

"Relating" This to Myself

1. I have learned that, unlike all false gods, our God is a person. As such, He is intensely relational.
2. I have learned that, unlike all false gods, our God glories in His self-revelation or unveiling.

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3. I have learned that, unlike all false gods, our God has revealed Himself through the spoken Word in creation, through the written Word in the Bible, and through the living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ. These sources of the knowledge of God harmonize with each other and always agree.
4. I have learned that receiving Christ is not simply a cognitive decision. I am receiving a person who imparts His life unto me.

Therefore,

- I will relate to Christ personally in my daily walk. I will abide in Him and enjoy His presence. (John 15:4)
- I will not neglect the content of the gospel, but I will strive not to present the gospel academically. I will offer the person of Jesus Christ who gives new life to lost and dying souls. (John 1:12)

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



4 Point of Contact

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. Psalm 139:17-18

You Can't Hide!

I heard again yesterday, If you have nothing to hide, why should you care? The discussion followed the announcement of another governmental invasion of privacy. These invasions, both governmental and corporate, are generally in the name of safety and for our protection. We do have reason to care because the data collected has already been

abused consistently by governmental and corporate powers. We know where this is heading! Whether by video cameras (we saw one of those Google Streets camera cars yesterday), cell and text surveillance, credit card usage, or internet browsing our lives are an open book. And by the way, good luck trying to go “off the grid”!

In the spiritual realm the Bible reminds us that while the angels seek to understand our ways, our God watches us even more intently in our waking and sleeping. Whether at home or traveling to the distant points of the universe, we cannot escape this surveillance. This surveillance truly is for our benefit and safety and will not be abused.

False gods make no such a claim. Only the true God claims to be so intensely involved in every action of every creature (to the smallest sparrow) during every second of time. We are not talking about a Santa Claus god who only wants to make a list of the good and bad we’ve done. Nor are we talking about a universal karma which is forever seeking balance. We are talking about a God with intimate interest. He does it because He loves us and delights in us. Wow!

God not only peers into our lives, He pries! He is both a micro and a macro manager. He fashioned us before we

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were born (Psalm 139:14-16)! He intervenes in our daily activities (2 Chronicles 16:9), and He determines and declares the whole course of human history (Daniel 2:21)! Our God wants us to see, and hear, and rejoice in His ongoing involvement in our lives:

*O Give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;
Psalm 105:1-5*

This God is also delighted when we are intensely involved in His ways. He wants a reciprocal relationship.

- He wants me to remember and recite His works.
- He wants me to seek Him, His strength, and His face persistently (evermore)!
- He wants me to be constantly observing Him - His works, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth!
- This is true intimacy!

This intimacy is a two way street

Many people are not comfortable with such an up close and personal idea. They really don't want an intimate God, not really. They don't want that kind of fellowship, and certainly not that close scrutiny. They will tolerate a god who keeps score (hopefully finding them somewhere between good and bad). They are glad for a rescue dog type god who life-flights them out of tough circumstances. But there is no desire for an up close and personal God. As a result, attempts are made to fill their gnawing need for satisfaction with vain pursuits (Ecclesiastes 6:12).

Let's review some basics we should all know:

We must approach God on His terms, not ours. Cain's offering was not accepted (Genesis 4:4-5). God must be worshipped His way.

God will only be approached through His Son (John 14:6). That is the non-negotiable first principle of salvation (Romans 1:16-17). Our sins have separated us from a just God who cannot look upon them (Isaiah 59:2). Restoration of fellowship with God is provided through Christ and cannot be obtained any other way (Romans 5:12-19, 1 Timothy 2:5).

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We cannot contribute to this free salvation. (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 1:16, 5:15-18).

Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty for our sins. He died and was raised again on our behalf (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). The reader need look no further. God said so, believe it, and settle it! He will forgive your sins and make you a new creation in Christ, even as you read this, if you accept His gift. These are the unequivocal facts. End of story.

When we do understand that only God can fill the void in our hearts, we do desire cleansing from our sin, and we do crave intimacy with God, the urgent question arises: Just how do we go about experiencing God and communicating with Him on a daily basis? How do we nurture this intimacy? We may ask, "If God is everywhere, why can't I sense Him? Where is my point of contact?"

God's first principle of intimacy

When discussing the basics of fellowship with God we did not stress the first principle which lies behind those basics. There is a foundational truth related to fellowship. When we review the history of God's dealings with men one prin-

ciple towers above all others: God has always dealt with men on the basis of His promises. Whether we are speaking of God's dealings with Adam and Eve or at any point since, God has never altered His pattern. There is no way to approach God, to seek His blessing or fellowship, except on the basis of a promise. We may be acutely aware of the exact promise from which we are benefitting, but there is always a promise behind every single interaction between God and men.

Clarifying our thoughts on faith

First, the promise principle clarifies our understanding of faith.

Faith is perhaps, the most misunderstood word in the modern vocabulary. When talking about having faith, being people of faith, or losing their faith, folks rarely understand faith's true meaning. Faith is not some capacity which lives deep within us that we can draw upon in times of stress. No one has ever wished upon a star and had that wish granted by the universe or God. That kind of faith is creation-based. Our faith is Creator-based.

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*“Nothing before, nothing behind;
The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The Rock beneath.”*

The Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote those words from our perspective. Faith knows there is a Rock beneath so it takes no blind leaps, only calculated steps. These steps are based squarely on the promises of God. That kind of faith is substantive, evidential, and has stood the test of time. The inspiring train of faith walkers recorded in Hebrews 11 were men and women of God who acted upon what they knew to be true, not on what they saw. You and I do not look upon the things which are seen. We know that what we can see is temporal and only the things we cannot see are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Faith never reaches blindly, hoping something is there; it reaches out confidently with the full assurance that something is there. Here are the unequivocal facts of faith:

There is no such thing as free standing faith. It is not enough simply to believe!

Faith is not true faith unless it is based upon an object.

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We must rest on the promises of God to exercise biblical faith.

We can trust God's promises because He is unchanging. His promises are as sure as His character or person.

Unlike many of our religious counterparts, we should not be seen simplistically as people of faith. Rather, we are people of God who place our faith squarely on the clearly ordered promises of God. We are neither detached from reality nor shallow.

Second, the promises of God are orderly because God is orderly.

The promises of God are not sprinkled throughout the Bible like seasoning on a salad or candy sprinkles on a cupcake. They are provided in an orderly way which again, reflects the character of the God who reveals Himself through them. They are not like a box of candy that we can pick through and enjoy as we please. Promises are more like an intricately woven and beautiful fabric. They reveal the unchanging nature and character of our God.

Third, the promises of God are not invoked with our speech. This notion has leached its way into Christian

thought. The power is in God, not in the wording of a promise. Promises are not invoked. This is the difference between true prayer and false incantation.

From Satan's viewpoint the power lies in creation itself and therefore in people to greater or lesser extents. We can invoke this power by declaring, confessing or willing something to be true, just as Satan imagined in Isaiah 14:12-14. In Satan's fantasy, if one declares something to be true long enough it will become reality. Examples of this are seen in casting visions, spells, and curses. In satanic thinking, there is actual power in the words themselves.

In some circles it has become popular to visioneer, or to "lay hold of a desirable future by faith" and declare our specific intentions. It is assumed, for example, that by laying hold of and declaring our church's envisioned desire we may be assured of its future reality. That is not biblical faith. It is a subtle form of confession thinking which derives from creation-based thinking and is not found in the Bible. This practice exchanges God's promises with our vision of a desirable future.

When I turn the key in my car's ignition, I am not really exercising faith in my car. I am exercising faith in God be-

cause it is God who keeps the principles of physics moving forward. I benefit when I apply these principles correctly. Though the unbelieving man does not know it, he is enjoying the benefits of God's promise as he turns that key. The believer rightfully expects that the universe will be carried forth "by the word of His power," (Hebrews 1:3). The power is not in the car or the key. This analogy may seem like a stretch, but it addresses the point. Our faith is in God and that is why we trust His Word. It is the word of His power, not the power of His words. We do not exercise the most faith when we quote the most Bible verses. It is not at all a matter of our speech or our declarations. Faith has to do with resting, not quoting.

3 R's for applying the promise principle

Rethink! Before we take a look at God's tapestry of promises, we want to remember that the promise principle plays out in our daily life. We must be clear about what we communicate when we speak about claiming the promises of God. It is true that we can lay hold upon (appropriate) a truth in the sense that we now understand it and are applying it to our daily life. In reality we haven't really claimed or laid hold on anything. We have simply believed. When we

believe in a promise of God we do not need to grasp on to it at all. Rather, we rely on it. We trust it.

Relax! We do not want our minds or flesh to confuse us. We do not claim the principles of physics before we turn that ignition key. We simply rest in the fact that they are true. We act on what we know to be true. Salvation and faith are all about resting, not about claiming. God wants us to prove and test His promises by resting in them, not clutching them until our spiritual knuckles are white. It's that simple. Our natural mind rejects this difference. We believe effort must be extended in one way or another. It is no wonder that the author of Hebrews reminds us that we need to labor to enter into this rest! Such irony! Read Hebrews 4 and pay special attention to verses 9-11:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.
Hebrews 4:9-11

Remand! Remand the outcome to God's will and timing. We don't need immediate responses from God. I have not forgotten the exhilaration which came when my big brother ran alongside me as I learned to ride a bike for the first time. He released his grip, and suddenly, I was experiencing

the laws of physics on my own. Having been encouraged by the success of other riders, and assured by the presence of my brother, my time had come to step into a new world. I had not understood Newton's laws of motion, but they worked nonetheless. I learned to ride instantly. The gratification was immediate. The principles were applied. The result was immediately observable when the principles were applied.

We do not always see the promises of God being fulfilled the moment we rest in them. We do not need to conjure up more faith. This apparent delay is because God's promises are woven together into one great tapestry which blends with His purpose. For example, Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for (the) good to those who love God, those who are (the) called according to His purpose. In the end it is one good purpose. Losing a child is neither good in the immediate sense, nor willed by God in the immediate sense. Yet, in the end it is for the good and it will be seen to have been woven into God's perfect purpose. Unlike the instant gratification I received while riding my bike, the faith walker knows that God often defers his gratification. The Bible tells us that the faith walkers of history were well reported to have exercised their faith, but none-

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theless, did not obtain the promise.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:39-40

They did not receive full or immediate gratification. As the farmer waits for harvest, so we wait for the full benefits of God's promises (James 5:7). God is gracious and often encourages us with answers to prayer as we remind Him of His promises, but He does not always gratify us immediately.

My Personal Priorities

My intimate walk with God does not suggest that I will consciously sense His presence every minute. It is enough to know and rest in the fact that He is with me.

True faith is object based. My faith is based on the sure promises of God.

Because God is orderly, His promises are given to me in an orderly way.

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I will not claim the promises of God so much as I will rest in them. To claim or appropriate a promise is simply to rest in it.

Promises are not invoked by my speech. There is no intrinsic power in my words, for good or evil.

I will not command God because it is within the purview of His will and purpose to fulfill His promises according to His plan. He alone knows the end from the beginning.

I cannot lay hold of a desirable future by faith because such a practice is neither promise based nor warranted in the Bible. Instead, I will rest on Romans 8:28.

As Parents...

Gratification assured. As parents our desire is to adorn the doctrine of God by the parenting styles we model before our children. Perhaps you have noticed that children have a universally installed complement of Parental Control Mechanisms that they are adept at using, almost from birth. One PCM goes like this, "But Daddy, you promised!" And we all know a parental promise has been carved out of the same granite from which the commandments were burnished. Being true to our word is a Christian value because we

reflect a God who is true to His. Because we want to reflect the character of our heavenly Father, we want to keep those promises and maybe even a few extra that we didn't really know we were making. The promises we make to our children should be well considered, consistent, fair, and kept.

Gratification deferred. Parents who do not gratify on demand every desire of their children help them learn to rest in the long term promises of God.

When we plant seeds, water the soil, watch plants grow and bear fruit, we are actually learning a God-ordained example. Some of God's promises are fulfilled over time and according to God's consistent principles. From the Styrofoam cup brought home from school with a seed in it, to a flower pot on the sill, to a full family garden, we want to use each opportunity to engage our children in biblical faith talk.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

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5 Heavenly Highways

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. 2 Corinthians 1:20

Promises, Promises!

Biblical promises can be numbered in the thousands and extend from those made to individuals to ones made to every person and creature living on the planet. Some were valid for just a few years, some for centuries, and others remain intact until the end of time. The contents of these promises are as wide and varied as their number. Some are conditional promises (based upon stated requirements) and others are absolutely unconditional. Temporary or permanent, great or small, all of the promises in your Bible have

at least two things in common. They all reveal the character and ways of the God who made them. Not a single one ever failed or ever will fail.

Because God deals exclusively with men on the basis of His very real and workable promises, our adversary does not want us to understand how the promises of God are fulfilled through history. He may convince some that we can claim land, wealth, health, and goals which are not ours to claim. At the other extreme, he may convince some that they are not worthy to rest in any of God's promises, and that our lack of faith is why we are so barren. He would prefer us to remain ignorant or agnostic regarding how God's promises work.

The good news is that the abundance of promises in God's Word need not confuse nor discourage any Bible reader. Those who have misunderstood them are often found among the pick-and-choose crowd whose busy lives tempt them to let their "fingers do the walking" until they find some promise or phrase that strikes a cord with their current circumstances or emotional status. We understand their plight, but we desire more for them. The study of God's promises is very important, very rewarding, and very easy to grasp! We just need to adjust our thinking a bit

regarding promises. We will try to reinforce these truths in three short paragraphs.

God's promises are very important. God has always communicated with men on the basis of His promises. Any reader who would like more background should while scanning the following passages, look for a form of the word promise. See Galatians 3:14-29 and Romans 4 with special emphasis on verses 13-25. Take out a pencil and begin underlining the word promise in Hebrews 4:1, 6:12-17, 7:6, 8:6, 9:15, 10:23, 10:36, and Hebrews 11. Additionally, the next time you read your Bible through you might consider underlining all the places in which the promises and covenants of God are quoted. This is a good technique for the study of any truth in scripture. In technical terms, recurring words give meaning to context. The promise principle is pervasive throughout your Bible!

God's promises are very rewarding. They mark the difference between heaven and hell (John 1:12 or 3:36). They mark the difference between success and failure in our struggle with sin, (1 Corinthians 10:13). They are the source of true biblical power and authority as we carry out our God given ministries. The promises of God keep our focus on eternal realities (2 Corinthians 4:18).

God's promises are very easy to grasp! They are easy, that is, once we understand how God has laid them out. My wife and I travel thousands of miles annually as we carry out our ministry. We feel we know every prairie dog along the western Interstates by name. We get off the freeways whenever possible, opting to sacrifice a little road time to enjoy the beauties of Minnesota or the mountains of Colorado. God has blessed this writer with a reasonable sense of direction, a good memory of most places he has been, a wife who is as happy traveling as she is at home. We use our GPS units constantly and have even gone so far as to rely once or twice on that woman inside our cell phone who answers our questions correctly about one time in ten.

Even so, we're not about to give up our trusty road atlas. We use it because it gives us perspective. We can look at the national page spread, the state page, or the city inset and do so without swiping a single zoom gesture on our device. The Bible is our road map for life. It gives us a broad perspective and increasingly detailed local perspectives. Just as roads on our maps represent a promise of sorts, so the promises in God's word are similar to roads on your map. The interstates or freeways are reminiscent of the covenants of God. Depending on their stated purpose,

these highways often extend from one end of the Bible to the other. While we have between 60 and 70 interstate highways in our nation, there are far fewer “interstate” promises in the Bible. The important point: The other promises or highways in our Bible are each related in one way or another to one of these larger than life promises.

We have already hinted that these larger than life promises are called covenants. We will want to keep these points in mind for later reference. The covenants between God and man:

1. are initiated and recorded by God,
2. are specifically called covenants by God,
3. are made to men and their seed, and;
4. extend over long periods of time.

We may speak of covenants in a broad or generic sense. For example, we may suggest that God made a covenant with Adam and Eve in the garden, and again after Adam’s fall. In the general sense, we may call these the Adamic and Edenic covenants. In the strictest sense, however, these promises are not called covenants in the Bible.

Those promises which are strictly called covenants in our Bible include the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant (the Law), the Palestinian Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant (*See note at the end of this chapter.)

The Big Four

At the risk of appearing to be self-centered we venture to ask, how do these covenants relate directly to us? Why is it important for you and me to understand these? Really now, should I be considering the Abrahamic Covenant as I build my to-do list for today?

Without an understanding of these covenants:

1. One cannot properly understand and explain the doctrine of justification by faith.
2. One cannot know his place in history or understand what God is doing at any given moment.
3. One cannot fully understand how to pray and reason with God.

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4. One cannot fully understand grace and freedom from bondage!
5. Most importantly, one cannot fully understand the role of Jesus Christ in history and in his own life.

And these really are just starters! Too many Christians live their lives like ships adrift in the sea whose mariners are without compass or sextant and can do little more than pray for fair weather. The wise believer will learn the secret of the ancients. They will even learn to negotiate with God on the basis of His covenants! (Read Psalm 105 as an example.)

So, let's just consider the big four covenants in order to get a better handle on our "driving directions." The following summaries provide us with the larger map of the Bible. The fourth will follow in the next chapter.

The Noahic Covenant - God's landlord covenant

We call God's great Landlord covenant the Noahic Covenant. God made this covenant with Noah when he departed from the ark. You may read the whole story in Genesis 9:1-17. We can call this the Landlord covenant because it is between God and all earth dwellers, man or beast, saved

or unsaved. While there are some wonderful pictures of our salvation in this covenant, its main purpose is to set forth the fundamental rule of existence for all earth dwellers.

Whoever sheds a man's blood shall have his blood shed by man, (Genesis 9:6). This is an everlasting covenant and it will never be set aside. This is why capital punishment is biblical. This is why we do not shed the blood of innocent babies in the womb. Throughout history, the blood of the innocent has cried out from the land. God's basic Landlord covenant and it is tokenized by the rainbow. It is this writer's personal opinion that the judgment on earth dwellers for violating this covenant will be poured out on the earth during the coming seven year tribulation.

The Abrhamic Covenant - God's salvation covenant

The second of the big four covenants is called the Abrahamic Covenant. We may rightfully describe it as the salvation covenant. It was made to Abraham and his seed for all generations. While folks were saved before this covenant was put in place it nonetheless teaches the fundamental principle of salvation which has applied to all men for all time. The full content of this covenant is spread over Genesis 12:2-8, 15:18-21, 17:1-8 as well as a few other verses.

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Read Romans 4, taking special note of the first eight verses. The serious reader will want to read these passages right away.

To understand this covenant in its fullness, we need to read the entire life of Abraham. His life represents a great mortal conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. The short struggle may be summarized in those wonderful words, the just shall live by faith. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. While believing in God is important, believing God is more important. We are saved by grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ and the forgiveness and cleansing He provided through His death and resurrection. Resting in that truth we are saved. No works are involved. We believe God. We then become His masterpiece created unto good works (Ephesians 2:10).

This wonderful Abrahamic Covenant is in full effect today. Blessing (in salvation and our walk) comes from resting on the promises of God by faith. Upon first consideration, this seems so sensible we are tempted to wonder why all men simply do not believe God and rest on His promises. The apostle Paul explains why this goes against our natures. He uses the life of Abraham (and the struggle between Ishmael and Isaac) to make his point that the flesh despises the

doctrine of promise. The flesh wants to perform and strive for supremacy. The Spirit calls us to rest on the promises of God. The book of Galatians is essential to a full understanding of this truth. The Abrahamic Covenant is foundational to all succeeding covenants. Our salvation is the direct result of this covenant.

The Law of Moses - God's schoolmaster covenant

The Mosaic Covenant or the Law of Moses (the Law) is the most well known covenant in the Bible. It remains a foundation of Jewish practices to this day. Thanks to an abundance of Hollywood movies, even non-Bible readers generally associate the tablets of stone, written with the finger of God, with the famous Ten Commandments. The Old Covenant is far more involved than what was represented in those tablets. This covenant was given by God, ordained by angels, and administered by Moses through the Aaronic priesthood (Aaron was Moses' brother). It was given to the children of Israel. To better understand the provision of this covenant the Bible reader will want to start with Exodus 19. Scanning the chapters which follow will provide a fuller background.

Here are the some surprising points that newer Bible stu-

dents will discover:

This Law may be seen as an administration of the Abrahamic Covenant. However, unlike that covenant, its blessing was conditioned upon obedience. Not only were there blessings for obedience, there were cursings or consequences for disobedience, (Deuteronomy 29 and 30).

As noted, this Law was initiated by Christ, but ordained by angels (Galatians 3:19).

Its priesthood was mediated by Aaron.

The Old Covenant was a temporary covenant with a temporary purpose. The Bible pictures the Law as Israel's schoolmaster. In Bible times this title represented the servant who was responsible for bringing the child to the teacher. In the same way, this law forced Israel to consider Christ. The purpose of this law was to show men that they could not possibly please God with their efforts. They would always fail. As such, it closed men off from any hope that they could please God in themselves and forced them to consider Christ. Read Galatians 3 one more time, especially the last half of the chapter.

The struggle between the flesh and Spirit is brought into

full visibility, by this Law. Men cannot let loose of the idea that they can do something to earn salvation. The idea of a simple gospel received by faith is more than the flesh can accept. It can't possibly be that easy! the flesh cries out.

We were blessed as children to enjoy the benefits of a small cottage on a lake. When we needed to build a retaining wall around the yard, we dug up old railroad ties from a nearby abandoned railroad. As we loosened the ties and pulled them away, we often discovered copperhead snakes lurking beneath. As boys who relished the task of dispatching these vipers, we were quite taken by the fact that the snakes would writhe for some time after their heads had been relocated. It reinforced our childhood conviction that no snake really dies until after the sun sets.

Though the law has been done away with (2 Corinthians 3:7), the writhing flesh remains. There are folks who would repeatedly place us under the dictates of this law. They take great pleasure in keeping it and think that in so doing they are gaining or maintaining their salvation. Yet, the Bible tells us that if anyone could keep the whole Law and yet offend in only one point, he would be guilty of all and under all the cursings of the Law (James 2:10). Now the Lord Jesus used the Law skillfully in order to show men their

need of salvation, but He never taught anyone that they could keep the Law in order to be saved. He used the Law as a tool to show men their failure (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

Be very afraid when you hear someone say, If the Law was good and perfect then, it must be good and perfect now, and God expects us to obey it! Run quickly to Romans 7, read it carefully, and learn how the Law stimulates the sin principle which dwells within any man. The Law accomplished God's perfect purpose of showing us our sin, but keeping the Law can neither save a man nor keep him saved. Only Christ can do that.

There is another lurking danger regarding the Law. There are so many who say they know Christ who really do not because they have chosen Him superficially, much like one would choose a ball team. To counteract this, some sincere folks have propagated a popular doctrine which suggests that, while we are saved by grace through faith, we must pre-qualify in order to be saved. We must count the cost, make Christ the Lord of every area of our lives, and even agonize in order to be saved. These suggestions are a result of misunderstanding what our Lord was teaching in the gospels. An unsaved person is incapable of these things. Those who impose these requirements have not let us

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know just how much we should agonize, strive, and repent in order to be saved. This is another means for the flesh to assert itself in pride: I'm so glad I repented enough to be saved! Or at least, I hope I have!

We want to grow from what we know before we examine our fourth of the big four covenants, the New Covenant.

Things I Plan to Remember

1. God has always dealt with men on the basis of His promises.
2. God's promises are important, rewarding, and easy to grasp!
3. God's covenants are the key to understanding my place in time:

The Noahic Covenant is God's everlasting covenant with all flesh. God hates the shedding of innocent blood.

The everlasting Abrahamic Covenant provides the foundation for the doctrine of justification by faith.

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The temporary Mosaic Covenant was put in place to show us that we cannot please God on our own.

Things I Plan to Do

- I will practice learning how to rest on God's promises, not my flesh.
- I will begin each day on the basis of my standing in Christ, not my failure from the day before (Ephesians 1:4-6).
- I will adorn the doctrine of God by keeping my own word and promises (2 Corinthians 1:17-20).
- I will model God's promise making and promise keeping ways as I seek to raise my children (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- I will teach my children both the promises of God and His commands, as soon as they are able to grasp them. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

For Additional Study

1 Timothy 1:7-11 helps us understand how we may use the Old Testament in our teaching without confusing this

issue. We are not to use the Law in order to obtain or maintain our salvation. This does not mean that we should not obey God's commands. Nor, does it mean we cannot use the Law in order to show the unrighteous how sinful they are. Learning the Ten Commandments, for example, and teaching them to our children, help us to understand God's holy demands. Using the Ten Commandments as a means of salvation or for the purpose of measuring our personal holiness will end in disaster.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

*Special Note: Though it is not essential to our discussion at this time, it will help the reader to remember that two of these covenants (the Palestinian and Davidic) are extensions of the Abrahamic Covenant. They are more like north/south interstates instead of the usual east/west. They are ethnic extensions. This is because the Abrahamic Covenant was a very broad covenant made with Abraham and his seed. It covers many nations. One of those nations, Israel is unique. These two refinements on the Abrahamic Covenant clarify God's special relationship with that nation alone. That is why we say they are unique to the Abrahamic Covenant.



6 Arriving at Our Destination

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. Hebrews 12:22

Scaling Mount Zion

Some native Coloradans suggest that one is not a true citizen until he or she has scaled at least one of the famous fourteeners. For the courageous among us, there are over 50 of these 14,000+ foot summits standing tall to challenge all comers. The faint among us need not despair. We can drive to the summit of Mount Evans, walk a few feet, and stake our claim to fame, minus the coronary.

There is a mountain which makes the fourteeners, the Tetons, and all earthly mountains appear as mere clumps of dirt. The Bible calls it Mount Zion. It is both real and symbolic, just like its antithesis, Mt. Sinai. The latter was associated with the giving of the Law of Moses. It was a place of trembling, fear, and ultimate defeat. Mt. Zion is a place of great fellowship, rejoicing, and ultimate victory.

In order to understand the events surrounding the giving of the Law of Moses read the chapters which describe this event (Exodus 19:9-25, 20:18-21, and chapter 34). Re-live the awesome terror the Israelites experienced as they encountered the Shekinah glory. When we get to the New Testament we learn what God was teaching all of us on that day. Paul expounds the truths we learn from the literal stories of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael. More detailed discussion may be found in Galatians 4 where Paul admonished those who were romanticizing the purpose and place of the old Law, the Old Covenant in Galatians 4:19-31. Pay close attention to verses 24-28 so that we can apply these truths.

We are building on the argument made in the previous chapter. One is either a child of flesh or a child of promise, an Ishmael or an Isaac. He cannot be both. If we embrace

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the Old Covenant, we connect with those who believe we can help God with a solution of our own. Children of faith identify with Isaac, the child of promise, who arrives later. He represents those who rest solely on the promise of God, no matter how unbelievable it may seem.

Now You See It...

We turn our focus to the mountains Paul discussed, their covenants, and their respective cities. The Old Covenant was associated directly with Mt. Sinai:

But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. -Galatians 4:23,24

We have two mountains, Sinai and Zion, each associated with a covenant. There can be no misunderstanding. We do not want to be anywhere near that first mountain or its covenant. It could neither save nor enable believers to obey. Though it was important to God's plan, its only power was to condemn. We need a better covenant and a better mountain or we risk condemnation.

We turn to the book of Hebrews, a highly evangelistic New Testament book directed particularly at the Jewish people who were struggling with this matter of the Old Covenant. The author provides some exhilarating words of encouragement for those who have walked away from the Old Covenant and, at the same time, admonitions for those who have not left the Law. The verses in Hebrews 12:18-24 are critical to our thinking, so we have included them directly. Please read them carefully:

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. Hebrews 12:18-24.

The following chart contains just a few key truths we want to keep in mind about this last of the big four covenants.

Based on this passage alone, we see that in contrast to the Old Covenant and its mountain that were associated with terror, the New Covenant is:

1. **SUPERIOR** The New Covenant and its mountain are associated with blessing;
2. **ENACTED** This New Covenant is *already* in place and is being *mediated* by our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Its *first phase* is well underway. More about this later.)
3. **SUFFICIENT** This covenant is based on the *blood of sprinkling*. (Note: While Abel's shed blood cried out for vengeance, Christ's blood satisfied God's wrath);
4. **SACRIFICIAL** As an aside, this blood was sprinkled on our behalf. It was not that it sprinkled on the ground at the cross, it was actually sprinkled in a priestly act by our Mediator; and,
5. **EFFECTIVE** This New Covenant, though *initiated* at the cross, forms the basis of fellowship for *all* of God's people for *all* time. This Mt. Zion and the city of the living God is not just for Jews. The terms *general assembly* and *church* are not just speaking of the church which is His body. They refer to all of God's people for all time. The kingdom referred to in 12:28 is not simply the millennial kingdom, it is a reference to God's grand rule over all of history.

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We are all participants in this New Covenant, and there has never been nor ever will be a saved person in heaven who was saved by any other means than by the blood of this New Covenant!

As brethren in Christ we should welcome a healthy discussion as to how our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, is administering this covenant, but there should be no room for difference on the fact that it is already in place! The Lord Jesus initiated it (1 Corinthians 11:25), Paul defended its superiority in 2 Corinthians 3:6, and Paul elevated it in his thorough treatment we have been referring to in Galatians 4. Now you see it...

Now You Don't...?

Are we preaching to the choir? Maybe, the choir needs a rehearsal on this theme. A shocking number of sincere believers do not recognize the significance of this marvelous New Covenant.

We're going to beg the reader to stretch some little grey cells for a few paragraphs in order to set the pattern for the rest of our study.

My wife and I have lived under the shadows of mountains

for a large part of our adult ministry. We make no apology for our love affair with the mountains. Just recently, we saw the Grand Tetons from their eastern and western slopes.

Imagine someone coming along and trying to make the Grand Tetons disappear. Illusionists could fool us into thinking such a mountain could disappear. In reality, rather than moving the mountain they would move their observers on a slowly rotating platform. With the added ingredients of lights, curtains, and showmanship they could challenge even the most astute observer. Here is the application:

During the last thirty years or so, many godly teachers have been operating under the illusion that there is no New Covenant, not yet anyway. They tell us that the New Covenant is not in place because it was made with Israel (see Jeremiah 31:31-34) and not with the church. They then add a layer to their reasoning and deduce that we must be under a new covenant kind of ministry. (We intend no disrespect when we say that they include a little hocus pocus with their Greek analysis of 2 Corinthians 4:1 to produce this rabbit.) This thinking, in turn has convinced many of us that this covenant is not really in place. We are not under some kind of mystery covenant.

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The truth is that because the New Covenant was first introduced to Israel does not mean that we cannot share in its blessing. We must be careful not to judge our brethren who are struggling with the role of this New Covenant or New Testament. However, good intentions can lead us to extremes. Like germaphobes, sincere literal interpreters can become so obsessed with separating God's program for Israel from God's program for the body of Christ, that we can throw out our proverbial baby with the bath water. In order to sanitize our theology and protect us all from confusing the church with Israel (or from thinking that the millennial kingdom is already underway), some have scoured the New Covenant right out of the church age! We are far safer to simply take God at His Word. Okay, relax the grey cells.

Really Now?

Some may be saying, Yesterday I barely knew there was a New Covenant, and now you're arguing for it like my life depends on it! I don't think so!

Be assured that one can be saved and have a fruitful Christian walk regardless of his views on the New Covenant. The New Covenant is in place and functioning whether we know it or not. We just don't want God's people to miss

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out on the great blessing which comes with understanding this covenant. Understanding how this covenant works will protect you from a wide range of doctrinal errors and provide you with a new perspective on your identity in Christ. It will give you new and tangible authority in your ministry and witness, and it will give you a new grasp on where you fit in the march of time. Understanding the New Covenant is worth our effort.

The New Covenant is about life. It's about enrichment! One can stay alive for a long time eating little more than pancakes. Alternately, one can live a rich life eating more nutritious foods. The New Covenant is about spiritual nutrition. One does not have to understand medical science to understand a little about vitamins and nutrients. Nor does one have to go to Bible school in order to understand the sweet and pure truths of God's Word.

Are We There Yet?...Yes!

Before we begin exploring the mysteries and delights of the New Covenant, we need to make a point from the same scriptures we just read. From God's perspective we have already arrived at our mountain. Hebrews 12:22 says:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

This writer believes the author intended two things. First, he is bringing the unbelieving Hebrew to the foot of this great mountain, and effectively saying, here you are! Now is the time to appropriate this truth! He is warning them that they must not profane this great covenant by rejecting it and reverting to the earthly Mosaic covenant. To ignore the gospel is both obscene and profane in God's eyes and it will bring the most definitive judgment of God on those who do it.

Second, the careful reader who reads the whole context of these chapters sees another purpose. We are learning that, if we have come to Christ, we are already worshipping at this mountain! As believers we can take advantage of this wonderful, heavenly position which is already ours in Christ. Though our physical bodies remain temporarily on earth, our covenantal journey is complete! We are part of God's great family in heaven and on earth. We may be assured that we are already a part of one great city, one great country and one great family of God. Hebrews 12 is

not a travel brochure, it is a reality. From God's eyes we are already there!

We are already there because Christ is there! We are already there because we are in Christ! (Romans 8:1-3, Ephesians 1:3, and especially Ephesians 2:6). Our in-Christ position changes our whole world view. Our creation based friends generally believe that they are on a journey of progression. They are seeking enlightenment, fulfillment, and possibly even heaven. You will remember that Satan himself asserted this doctrine of progression. "I will be like the most high...I will ascend."

So, when your friends talk to you about their "journey" they may mean quite another thing. You must not portray yourself as on such a journey because you have already arrived at your destination. They are seeking. You have found the truth.

A Tough Issue...

We want to finish by tackling an issue which has confused many converts to Christ down through the years.

A real truth asserted: There is a real mountain in heaven, Mt. Zion. There is a real city, the Heavenly Jerusalem. There are

real angels. There are real believers from all ages including the general assembly and church of the first-born (though their bodies have not yet been resurrected.) There is a real temple (Revelation 4 and 5) There is a real place where the blood of Christ has really been sprinkled. These are all very real things and you are already there!

Because this is true we want to reason our way back from our heavenly position to our present circumstance! Remember, the things which are eternal are the only real and lasting things there are.

A false conclusion rejected: As real as heaven is, we cannot and may not pray to those who have gone before us to heaven, even though, in a real sense we are one with them. There is not a single verse in the Bible which even hints that we can communicate with them in either direction. But why?

Logic seems to suggest that if we are truly one in Christ and part of the same family of God, there should be some kind of fellowship between earth and heaven. It is as though our author is showing us all that is ours in Christ and expecting us to revel in these things, and yet all the while God is depriving us from a first hand experience with

them. This could seem like a paradox. It is not.

The Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, is the answer to this question. He alone is the link between heaven and earth. He is the one mediator between heaven and earth (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). This is the miracle of the New Covenant! Our Mediator does not simply stand before the Father on our behalf. He is our life link, our live 24/7 connection with heaven.

We do not pray to or communicate with our friends, our mothers, or even Jesus' mother. There is no merit in this practice because it diverts us from the number one blessing the New Covenant provides: a direct and immediate connection with Christ! This practice would rob our great High Priest of the rights, privileges and glory which belong only to Him as our mediator!

This gives rise to a final question. If Christ is my one and only mediator why then, would I ask you to pray for me? After all, you are not my mediator We pray with and for each other not just because we are commanded to, but because we are carrying on our earthly tasks as priests. Jesus Christ is our High Priest, but we are all priests, carrying on our priestly duties on earth. We have our own priestly sacrifices

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and duties (Hebrews 13:15-16). As coworkers with Christ, we work together as one body in His temple. Neither heavenly saints nor angels are carrying out these duties from heaven.

My Priorities

1. I want to remember that I have come to one of two mountains, identify with one of two cities, and serve under the administration of one of two covenants.
2. I will make every effort to reason my way from my glorious position in heaven to my present circumstance.
3. Now that I know I personally am an enabled minister and steward of the New Covenant, I want to explore all the privileges and duties which God has included in this high calling.
4. Because I am a new creation in Christ and He is central to this New Covenant I need no other links or connections with heaven. He is my mediator!

My Parenting

- I want my children to live in a promise based environ-

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ment which will cultivate a love for the promises of God in them.

- I will remind my children daily of God's promises, as surely as the Old Testament saint reminded his children of the requirements of the Law.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

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7 All Glitz, No Glory

..a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Corinthians 4:17b

We have a special request for our readers. This chapter is a little beefier than most. It is important to take the time to read the following scriptures, hopefully at one sitting, before continuing. Please read, at least 2 Corinthians 3:1 through 4:6. Thank you for making this special effort!

All That...and More!

We have learned that the New Covenant is real and very much in effect at this moment. We want to make this covenant practical in our daily ministry.

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Many Bible teachers simply associate the New Covenant with the gospel. At first this seems innocent enough, but this casual approach can lead to some disappointing results.

To say that the New Covenant and the gospel are one and the same is like saying the Ten Commandments and the Law are one and the same. They are, but they are not. In the same way that those tablets were administered by a full and complete priestly system, so too is the New Covenant.

We have not only been given a covenant, we have been charged with its priestly ministration (2 Corinthians 3:6-18).

When we miss this point we miss the rich priestly character of this covenant. In fact, we miss the foundation for a great deal of temple truth! Just wait until you see what God says! We do not want to miss our calling to enjoy and steward these rich mysteries. We want to assume all of the rights and privileges associated with this covenant.

A Costly Prescription

The most important thing to underscore about this New Covenant ministration is how vastly superior it is to its old counterpart. And therein lies our current tragedy. Because

of our shallow New Covenant knowledge we have begun prescribing old legalistic solutions again.

Evangelical Christianity is in a sorry state, with a large contingency of stony ground believers (Matthew 13), who are most likely not saved. This malady is pandemic! Many of God's people think the prescription for this dilemma may be found by placing more stress on the law, particularly as they see it taught in the gospels. In the minds of some, the stunning diamond of grace cannot be valued apart from the black backdrop of the warnings and dictum of the old Law.

Their prescription? **We must count the cost before being saved, agonize in order to be saved, and persevere in order to be sure we did get saved!** Friend, that is like prescribing leeches to purify blood. We want to consider a biblical solution for this shallow spiritual bankruptcy that is destroying us.

Instead of decrying our dead condition, we want to restore the place of the New Covenant in our lives and ministries! Once God's people have a taste of its true glory, its power and impact on everyday life, the idea of reimposing any part of that Old Covenant will seem like choosing roller skates in preference to a Lamborghini. It's that unthink-

able.

Nor are we offering something new. We are pleading for a return to the truth taught in the passage right under our noses - 2 Corinthians 3 and 4! We are handing the reader a golden key. Use it wisely!

Double Trouble!

When boiling down the practical benefits of the New Covenant, the twin words identity, and sufficiency apply. We'll begin with Paul's radical claim in verse six as he develops this very useful truth. Take a glance at the verse:

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. 2 Corinthians 3:6

Stop blaming your parents! Identity and sufficiency or the lack thereof, are the twin nemeses of every human being on the planet. While we do not want to belittle the serious struggles some have in this area, we are all confronted with a horrific lack of inward confidence. Even when we have been recognized for great accomplishments, inwardly we know the truth about ourselves. Some of us remedy this lack of inner confidence by over excelling in areas where

we have reasonable confidence. Others enjoy the misery of their inadequacies and thrive on finding poor souls who can be corralled into commiserating with them. Still others bury themselves in the escapist world of excesses in pleasure or work to distract themselves from the gnawing reality of their true smallness and emptiness. Of course, we can all seek relief by blaming our parents for childhood angst! The list of remedies is long but none of them cure.

Our personal sufficiency is in Christ alone. We understand when nonbelievers try to work out these antidotes for their gnawing inadequacy. It's one reason we work to show them Christ. **In Christ we find both our identity and our sufficiency.** If you have come to Christ recently and have yet to discover your identity in Christ and His sufficiency, you are in for some very satisfying discoveries. Please do seek out a godly teacher to point you to the scriptures that will ground you in your full, complete in-Christ position! Start by asking your pastor for guidance, if possible. Even your facial expressions will change once you make this discovery personal!

Our ministry sufficiency is also in Christ alone. This chapter focuses on our sufficiency in our New Covenant ministry. A great many Christians live with an ongoing sense

of guilt and the feeling that they are not contributing to eternal things in a significant way.

Please scan verse six one more time in its context. When Paul wrote these words he was speaking both of his own apostolic ministry and of the ministries of Christ's own, everywhere! **We are all priests, and we are all (not just the ordained) able ministers or administrators of this covenant.**

To borrow a phrase from the Old Testament writers, this is marvelous in our eyes!

God has enabled me as a minister of this New Covenant!

It reminds me of the popular quote from the late sixties, "Yesterday, I couldn't spell secretary, and today I am one!" Are you kidding? Me, an able minister of this covenant? That's crazy talk! It may sound crazy, but it's still God talk, so there's no need here to list your inadequacies along with Gideon while mourning your incompetence. God says you are an able minister (or deacon) of this covenant. That settles it.

When we speak of being able it means that we are both enabled and qualified. For example, this writer has been qualified to drive cars and buses, to teach college students, to operate amateur radio equipment and to use and carry

weapons. In each case he was able to perform a series of tasks in a manner which qualified him.

God's mindset is opposite from ours! He says effectively: You have already been qualified, now go do it! He does not suggest that we minister irresponsibly, like the proverbial bull in the china shop. He is arguing that we each are fully authorized and enabled to administer this New Covenant! Does God require in service training along the way? To be certain! But, whether we feel like it or not, we have all been authorized and enabled. God never intended the ministry to be reserved for a select group of folks who got the call to become priests, or pastors, or TV evangelists. We all got the call the day we were saved. We are all, male and female, priests and stewards of the mysteries of God, though our gifts and callings may vary. We have all entered the priesthood!

A peek over the backyard fence. There are folks based in Salt Lake City who see themselves as priests of the Melchizedekan priesthood. Should you get into a discussion, they are likely to ask you where you get your authority. Though well meaning, their priesthood is counterfeit. It is based on Another Covenant, as seen by the title of their main revelation. It is not based on the everlasting New

Covenant. Our hearts go out to these folks who have been tragically misled by one man's counterfeit revelation.

That, however, is not the reason we bring these folks front and center. What comes to mind is the fact that these misled souls have a better handle on the subject of authority than many of God's people! They know that their authority to minister descends directly from their perceived priesthood which, in turn, descends from their perceived covenant! **Many believers do not even know they have priestly authority, and they most certainly do not know it is connected to their covenant!**

In the space of a few verses Paul shows us how this God given authority is truly empowering. We can and may tap this tangible power associated with the New Covenant! For now, please note that this power should not be equated with the Kingdom authority embraced by some. This only confuses believers as to how God works through His temple, the church, in the here and now. Before Paul shows this to us he wants to be sure that we see the landscape.

God always affirms His covenants through unmistakable means. We already visited Mt. Sinai and had the hair stand up on the back of our necks when God affirmed this

covenant with His Shekinah glory. The affirmation of that covenant was so dramatic that few Israelites doubted that God had put it in place. That marvelous glory remained associated with the Old Covenant, its ark, and its temple through the days of Ezekiel. God had made His point in a most electrifying way.

That's a hard act to follow. Anyone who would come up with a New Covenant had quite a challenge on his hands! Could he produce such a magnificent covenant burnished in stone? Could he exceed this demonstration of Shekinah glory? The answer would seem to be no. That would have been the logical answer until Christ came.

In a most astounding way, Paul shows his readers the absolute superiority of the New Covenant which was witnessed initially at Pentecost. Follow this stunning argument in 2 Corinthians 3.

In verse 3 we see that the New Covenant is superior by virtue of the vessel that transmits it. It is written on the fleshly tablets of our heart, not the rigid, externally produced, tablets of stone. Our sufficiency can now be of God (vs. 5)!

Its greater scope. The New Covenant is superior in the

scope of its usefulness. The letter of the Old Covenant represented a death sentence for those who thought they could keep it. The Holy Spirit, not the flesh, gives us all eternal life! As glorious as the giving of the Old Covenant was, the New Covenant is superior in that it is far more glorious!

Its greater longevity. The New Covenant is superior because of its longevity. The glory of the Old Covenant was a fading glory that was to be done away. It was to be abolished (verses 8-12). The New Covenant is more glorious because it endures forever. God had intentionally obscured this fact (symbolically with Moses' veil) until the appropriate time.

Its greater utility. The Shekinah glory was restricted by location, limited by its mobility. It was restricted to the Covenant itself and the face of the one who beheld it. Under the New Covenant the Spirit of the living God dwells within us making us God's temple! The Shekinah glory burns within and literally metamorphosing us into the image of Christ as we behold Him! **The glory once confined to a local temple may now be found in Christ's temple, the universal church! It burns within each of us (vs. 17 and 18)!**

We have placed the above information in chart form on the following page using some contemporary terms.

Here's a "Product Comparison "Chart

<i>Best Choice</i>	<i>Old Covenant Hardware</i>	<i>New Covenant Software</i>	<i>Supporting docs.</i>
NEW COVENANT	Tablets of stone Rigid, inflexible	Tablet of heart. Soft, flexible	2 Cor. 3:3-5
NEW COVENANT	Does not enable Kills	Enables, ministers, empowers	2 Cor. 3:5-6
NEW COVENANT	Temporary To be done away.	Remains to this day	2 Cor. 3:8-11
NEW COVENANT	Glorious	Exceedingly glorious	2 Cor. 3:8-18
NEW COVENANT	Location: Temple only	Location: Mobile, among all the body	2 Cor. 3:18

To walk away from New Covenant enablement is worse than having that Lamborghini in your garage while opting to skate. The idea of carrying on this ministry using fleshly techniques instead of tapping into this power is absolutely insane, if not obscene! And yet, this is exactly what is happening! We have gone about carrying out the Lord's work using fleshly means and techniques. In fact, there have been few periods in history where we have been so reliant on the flesh as now. And it is all so foolish, so childish.

The world says, Smooth us and soothe us. The New Covenant calls upon us to speak with great plainness (boldness and clarity) of speech. The world says, Charm us, entertain us, dazzle and amaze us with your plans and your dreams, because in your professionalism and showmanship we will nurse our own aspirations.

We comply, though somewhere in our hearts we know that we have departed from the ways of the spiritually empowered leaders of the past. We know that none of our forefathers (Calvinists, Arminians, or In-Betweeners) would approve of this deviance. We are not condemning ministry styles; we are highlighting a subtle change that has substituted our reliance on man's methods for God's methods. Fleshly motivated professionalism appeals to our old natures. Sadly, too many want it this way.

And so the glitz has replaced the glory and a lost world remains blinded as our culture steamrolls its way into hell. Is this Ichabod? Has the glory departed forever? Should we pray up a good revival and stave off collapse for a few more years! Certainly none would forbid such prayer. We do have a miracle working God!

However, we need to look closely at the long term solution.

There is a way out! Both the enablement and the authority of this superior covenant burn as brightly as ever. The power associated with this covenant does not have to be called down from heaven (though God may answer prayer at His pleasure). This is because neither the Shekinah glory nor the Holy Spirit has left God's temple. The authority is nearer than we think, and the power is available to all, not just prophets or priests. This glory is inherent, but the Bible is clear regarding how it is to be effected in our lives.

Hold on to the big picture. God's great design is to manifest His glory through weak human vessels! Continue into 2 Corinthians 4, and read each of the verses as we refer to them!

1. In verses 1 and 2 we have the reminder that the New Covenant does not prosper with fleshly or flawed methods.
2. In verses 3 and 4 we find that it is desperately needed. Only this glory-authenticated gospel can open the eyes that have been blinded by Satan.
3. In verse 5 we learn the first of two keys for sharing this New Covenant glory and all of its power. This covenant is about Christ. In fact, in some respects, we may say that

Christ Himself is the New Covenant. We are carrying out the work and role of the servant Christ. That is our persona (Matt. 12:17-20)!

4. In verse 7 we find the second of two keys for sharing and radiating this New Covenant message with authority. This treasure is in earthen vessels for a reason. It is in the dying of our flesh and death to our flesh that this glory becomes visible. It never showcases man or the foolish glory of human flesh, not even showcasing in the name of Christ. See Christ's example in Hebrews 2:9.

When I read that this treasure of the Shekinah glory is in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7), my mind takes me to Gideon, who gave us our first great lesson about showcasing God's power. The breaking of the clay vessels preceded the routing of the enemy (Judges 7:16-22). The lesson was learned repeatedly by God's people. When human flesh is glorified God is not.

As ordinary believers we may enjoy the power and authority of the New Covenant ministry in our lives. It is available in direct proportion to our willingness to speak its message boldly, to decry fleshly techniques, and to opt for the typically obscure servant's path of suffering and sacrifice as

we live and breathe the centrality of Jesus Christ. Because this New Covenant contains its own power plant we can be powerful in a powerless world (Revelation 3:14-22)!

Pondering New Covenant Principles

1. I will remember that the New Covenant is the basis for a whole new way of life, a priestly ministry.
2. I will not rely on legalistic (returning to the Law) or worldly (relying on the flesh) solutions for today's problems.
3. I will not give in or give up because the whole world around me has sunken into spiritual lethargy. I will allow the Holy Spirit to shine through me by,
 - Beholding the face of Christ and enjoying an intimate walk with Him (2 Corinthians. 3:18).
 - By adopting the attitude of the obedient servant Christ, who did the will of His Father (Philippians 2:5,6).
 - Choosing the path of the suffering servant so that Christ, and not my flesh, is glorified. (Revelation 3:14-22).

Family Planning God's Way

We can avoid letting parenting surprise us on a daily basis by setting simple but prayerful goals for the development of our young ones.

As we teach our children the stories of Jesus we will stress not only what He said, but how He ministered. We will show that He was always about doing His Father's will and that He was willing to sacrifice everything for His Father.

Telling our children what is right and what is wrong represents the first step in their understanding. Helping children understand why things are right or wrong is even more important.

Both parents and children can find ways to be obedient servants as the Lord Jesus was.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



8 Check Your ID

“...a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” 2 Corinthians. 4:17b

An Overview!

We have been methodically extending our world view, beginning with God Himself. We have observed these truths that build upon each other in order:

- In all things, we reason from the person and character of God.
- God communicates His Word clearly and communicates with men on the basis of His promises.

- The main promises in the Bible are called covenants and all of the rest of God's promises descend from them.

We are now living under what the Bible calls the New Covenant.

Our New Covenant - Our Identity

Like them or hate them, fundamental changes are being imposed at genetic levels in our food supply. New concerns about GMOs are being expressed almost daily. The person who receives Christ undergoes good changes far greater than mere genetic alterations. We now offer four fundamental facts concerning our New Covenant which alter our identity!

FACT: Jesus Christ IS the New Covenant

The Bible offers more than one promised reference to the New Covenant including Jeremiah 31:31-34 and similar verses. In reality, we would be hard pressed to find a full, written statement of this New Covenant anywhere - and for good reason. Notice what Jeremiah says:

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But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:33-34

This covenant resides in the heart. Its major effect will be to cause men to know the LORD, from the least to the greatest. Jesus Christ, Himself, dwells in us (Colossians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:10).

In a most wonderful Old Testament prophecy, the Father speaks to His faithful servant Christ. The phrase we are stressing is underlined:

I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; Isaiah 42:6

Jesus is the covenant of the people. Please understand that Christ has not written the Torah or a living version of the Old Covenant in our hearts. Jesus Christ in His absolute

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perfection abides in our hearts as believers. Thus, we are living epistles (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Notice how this alters our spiritual genetics. If Christ did not abide literally and directly in believers the body of Christ could not exist. The body of Christ is real; it is not metaphorical imagery. It is the real result of Christ being placed in us. This is another reason why we cannot glibly say that today's church is the Israel of old. The Israel of old was never a part of His body. He did not indwell them. Jews may now come to Christ the same way Gentiles do, and together we become one body - Christ's body (Galatians 6:12-16).

Because Christ is the New Covenant and dwells within me it will change the way I represent myself to everyone. I want to reflect the glory of this Christ who dwells within.

FACT: Jesus Christ IS, Himself, our Sacrifice

We cannot separate the body and blood of Christ from His person. It is not just that He gave His flesh and blood as a sacrifice. He is the sacrifice. Isaiah 53:10 tells us that His soul is the offering (literally: holocaust or burnt offering) for our sin! This truth helps us see why the blood of Christ is so important in God's eyes. This covenant could not have

been put in place without blood. Hebrews 9 argues that the Old Covenant was effected by the sacrificial blood of animals which could not take away sin. In contrast, the New Covenant was effected by Christ's blood as He taught:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Matthew 26:26-28.

When we partake of the Lord's table we are reminded of the One whose own soul was made an offering for our sin. This is evidenced by the giving of His flesh and blood. Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us, once and for all.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

One fact remains clear. There was one sacrifice and one offering. We do not want to fall into an error here. Many argue that Israel had to offer a Passover lamb every year in order to have her sins forgiven. Therefore, they believe Christ must be re-sacrificed at every communion table or Eucharist. While this may sound logical, it is not biblical, and this is why: The Passover lamb never took away any-

one's sin, not even one speck of sin. It simply relieved the Israelites of the consciousness of guilt. It had to be repeated as a reminder that another sacrifice was yet to come as the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world.

The Old Covenant Passover lamb could not and did not take away sin. It was not a means of grace or forgiveness. Neither can celebrating the what some call the Eucharist take away your sin. Our Lord's table serves a wonderful purpose, but it is not a means of grace or forgiveness.

Again, notice how this alters our spiritual genetics. Because Jesus Christ is the Sacrifice which effects the New Covenant, His once-for-all offering is all we need for the forgiveness of sin. Otherwise, He would have been required to suffer often (Hebrews 9:25-26). **We stand forgiven once-for-all. Because of this great standing, we may come to the Lord for daily cleansing.** The elements of the Lord's table cannot forgive our sin anymore than the blood of bulls, goats, lambs, or any other animal. The Lord's Table is a table of thanksgiving and a reminder of our great Sacrifice. This Sacrifice changes who we are before God!

FACT: Jesus Christ IS, Himself, our Peace!

In Ephesians 2:14-18 we can see who Jesus Christ is, what He did, why He did it, and what this ultimately means.

Who is He? “He is our peace,” (verse 14). He literally is our peace. It is not so much that He made peace as it is that He is peace. This calls for some dynamic declarations!

Dynamic Declaration # 1: Because of this we have peace with God (Ephesians 2:1-10):

Make no mistake. We did not find our way to God. God graced us. He granted grace to us. It is not simply that we were God’s enemies; God was our enemy. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air and were in bondage to our own lusts. While we may not have declared ourselves as God’s enemies, we were in every sense. When we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

Dynamic Declaration # 2: Because of this we have peace with ourselves.

The Bible boldly declares that we may also enjoy the peace of God, though few understand this. When we were dead in sins Christ raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places with Him. That is the declaration of Ephesians 2:6.

He did this as a testimony of His grace (verse 7) but He was also demonstrating the dynamics of this grace. Grace is more than a theological term. It operates within us producing good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10). We must not leave grace at the cross.

Perhaps you remember the exhilaration when you first knew your sins were forgiven and that you were at perfect peace with God! Perhaps, you started attending a church where the bar was raised almost on a weekly basis. Sunday after Sunday new duties and expectations were layered upon you until you came to the unspoken apprehension that you could never please God. You failed at your devotions, you struggled with your temper, you mismanaged your finances, you didn't give enough to the Lord's work, and you were downright lazy at times.

Notice the irony. The same church which led you to the joy of forgiveness in experiencing saving grace, had imposed a works-based mind-set on you so depressing that you actually felt you were in bondage. You did not have peace with God, so you did not have peace with yourself. The harder you tried to resist sin the more you seemed to fail. What was wrong with that picture?

This is often the result when we leave the doctrine and dynamics of salvation at the cross. Paul speaks of the foolishness of those who begin in the Spirit and then try to perfect themselves through the flesh (Galatians 3:1-5).

Does grace produce good works? Yes. Do works secure grace,? Never! The grace which reaches is the grace which teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-13). It is the grace which produces good works. However, it is not the grace that impeaches! Until we grasp this truth that the grace of God flows as freely in our lives today as the day in which we were saved, we will never enjoy the thrill of victory over sin and the joy of fruitful service for Christ.

We were once told about a woman who was unhappily married. Try as she would she could not please her demanding husband. As time passed, he died. A while later she remarried. Years later, while working in the attic she found the old list of demands her first husband had made on her, demands she could never meet. To her surprise she discovered that she had been keeping all those demands perfectly with her new husband. And so it is with grace. Our love relationship with Christ through grace produces a changed walk.

How do you view God as you pray? Are you afraid of Him or are you at peace with Him? Can you freely discuss your temptations and failures? Do you genuinely feel that He will not work with you as you are in order to transform you into the image of Christ? Until there is peace with God there can be no peace with yourself! And until one has peace with himself, he cannot have peace with others..

Dynamic Declaration # 3: Because of this we have peace among ourselves (Ephesians 2:14-18)

This is the peace which both guards and rules the heart (Philippians 4:7, Colossians 3:15). This peace goes far beyond a political truce. It's important that we see this in a practical light.

A number of years ago, while working bi-vocationally, we planted a church in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood. One of my coworkers was a dear black African American who supported and encouraged our endeavor. When we invited her to visit our new fellowship she respectfully confided that she could not do so because in order to visit us she would have to drive through a white neighborhood and that terrified her! Until that very moment, I had naively assumed that only whites feared going

through black neighborhoods. No one should entertain fear for his safety based on the color of one's skin, but the fact that such fears remain is evidence that there are still walls that need to be broken down. However, a beautiful truth remained. Though our ethnicity and cultures varied, as believers, we celebrated our oneness in Christ. The barrier had been removed.

Technically, the Bible contains no Greek word for race. Rather, the Bible recognizes families, tribes, tongues, and nations, who will one day praise Him in joyful unity (Revelation 5:8,9).

The antagonism between the Jew and Gentile families of the earth is no neighborhood issue. It's not about our skin. It's about our bloodlines, and there is only one ultimate remedy. The change must be made where the problem originates. Any other treatment will be superficial.

Jesus Christ abolished this enmity (Ephesians 2:15) which has existed, literally, from the time of Abraham. He reconciled us to each other by reconciling us both to God. We are stunned when we see just how He did it. When a Jew is placed in Christ He is one with Christ. When a Gentile is placed in Christ, he too is one. If $A=C$ and $B=C$, then $A=B$.

Notice what this means in the end as we now arrive at the heart of Paul's argument in Ephesians 2:

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Ephesians 2:18

This is the bedrock. We are talking about access. Notice that the entire trinity is mentioned in this verse. The persons of the Godhead have always had equal access to each other! Now that we are in Christ we too, have equal access (through the Spirit) to the Father! Now that is elevation! To even suggest that one member of the trinity would conceive another member of the trinity as inferior is ludicrous. In the same way, because we have all been elevated into Christ and share this marvelous access, consider how insane it is to see ourselves superior to Jews, or for that matter, any kindred or tongue! We are not equal to the members of the trinity, but in Christ we do have equal access in the same way the persons of the trinity have access to each other! Wow!

Once again, notice how this alters our spiritual genetics. Because we may now enjoy this access through our Priest we may come boldly (not glibly) before the throne of grace and

obtain mercy (Hebrews 4:14-16). We simply cannot participate in the world's puerile ways of approaching God. Neither candles, beads, sacred chapels, nor prayer labyrinths will facilitate our approach. Children of a certain sovereign queen may need to make an appointment, but we are already in the presence of our King. Consider the fourth and final New Covenant fact which changes our self perception.

FACT: Jesus Christ IS, Himself, our Cornerstone

We have yet another truth about Christ that we want to get off the page and into our thinking:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And 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 groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Let's work with three H's here. First, let's talk about our **great household**. As God's temple, we are all fellow citizens with the saints and we are all of God's household. That is our heritage! This pastor has never truly been comfortable identifying himself completely with any group, mostly

because brand loyalty has done much to hinder the unity which is ours in Christ. Notice we did not say doctrinal loyalty. There is never room for compromising doctrine. Furthermore, it is no sin to have special fellowship among those who best share our values. Denominational and associational loyalty is quite another matter.

This is particularly true when we go to great ends to defend our historical heritage or lineage which descends from “great” fathers of the church. Inevitably, this misplaced loyalty has led God’s people down some exclusive paths.

There is one heritage, which we can all celebrate, and that is the one which began with the apostles and prophets themselves. We all share this rich, common bond.

Now consider the second H. While we all share this common heritage, there is one Man among us who is unique. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Head. He is the Cornerstone. Cornerstones played important roles in ancient building practices. These foundational stones were generally among the largest stones in a building, and often served as the common point from which the rest of the building was measured and took form. As one more stone in the building, a cornerstone is equal with all the others, but as the cornerstone, it is far superior to all the others.

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So is Christ. Our Saviour has condescended to become one of us and He is not ashamed to call us brethren (Hebrews 2:11). We need no other mediator because He is one of us and one with us. We do not need apostles, fellow saints, or Mary. We are all on equal footing in God's temple.

However, we are not on an equal footing with Christ. Neither is He ashamed to be called our God! (Hebrews 11:16, John 14:2, and Revelation 21:2). Perhaps one of the greatest sins of our generation can be seen in the way we have humanized Christ at the expense of His deity and dignity. We have lost that sense of awesome reverence when His name is spoken, and we profane Him with our mundane speech. This stone which the builders rejected is our Lord, Master, and our King. Isaiah 28:16, and 17 remind us that justice and righteousness will be this Cornerstone's measuring line. He is the standard from which all other measurements are taken.

The final H relates to the word habitation. As a result of being part of this marvelous temple, we are the habitation of the living God through His Spirit. Recall the things we have already learned. This is about Christ taking up residence. We learned earlier in the chapter that Christ dwells in us. Our desire is that we may share that in our daily experi-

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ence as well (Ephesians 3:17). Believers have called this dwelling, abiding, habitation, the abiding life, the Christ life, and other meaningful names. The sheer ecstasy of the New Covenant lies in the fact that we may experience in our walk the promises we claim by faith! **Christ lives in me!**
This is what My New Covenant Life is about!

We notice one more time how this alters our spiritual genetics. **It is not enough that we enjoy the New Covenant sufficiency and enablement we studied earlier. This covenant gives us a new vocational identity, a high and holy calling. We are here for the elect's (Christ's temples) sake, that they may obtain salvation and be edified for the work of the ministry. This high and noble calling will motivate us to endure all things (2 Timothy 2:10) and pay any price.**

A month rarely passes when someone does not die while participating in an extreme sport, and the truisms always gush in the aftermath. He died doing what he loved to do! This was his destiny. This is why he was put on earth! Don't you believe it. You, however, have an identity. You know why you are on planet earth, you know your destiny, and you need not fill the void within with foolish exploits. A bumper sticker says, Now that I have given up all hope, I feel better. A better philosophy reads, Now that I have

found my true identity and role in life, I am fulfilled in Christ! **You will never be satisfied until you have begun building on His temple!**

MY NEW IDENTITY BEGINS HERE

BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST IS...	I AM...	THEREFORE, I WILL...
Himself, the New Covenant...	... in Christ, Christ is in me and I am part of His body. This is my true identity.	...practice the presence of Christ by abiding in Him daily, enjoying His fellowship, and sensing His direction in all things. (John 15:1-11)
Himself, our Sacrifice...	...a participant in His death and resurrection and forever forgiven. This is true forgiveness.	...present my body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. (Romans 12:1-2)
Himself, our Peace...	... with Him in the presence of the Father and one with my brethren. This is true fellowship.	...appropriate the peace of God, embrace my unity with my brethren, and, as much as is in me, seek to live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)
Himself, our Cornerstone...	...both part of His temple, and a living priest. This is true ministry.	...embrace my priestly role and learn my priestly duties as I seek to build Christ's temple. (1 Corinthians 3:9-20)

Shaping My Child's Self Confidence

1. While children learn first by rote, and then conceptually, they are far more capable of grasping principles than we expect. Even if we feel our child is not ready for these concepts, using the terms now will prepare them for growth. Christ is my promise, Christ is my sacrifice (He didn't just make a sacrifice), Christ is my peace, and Christ is my Cornerstone.

Resolved: By God's grace I will not only teach my child what Jesus did, I will teach him who He is.

2. Cementing your child's knowledge of who he is in Christ is the first (and most fruitful) step in helping your child face the teen years. Teenage adjustments are essentially identity adjustments. The more secure one is in his relationship with Christ, the more smoothly these adjustments will go.

Resolved: By God's grace I will help my child to understand His full acceptance in Christ, and teach him to accept others in the same way.

3. We all, not just children, need to sense ability and accomplishment. There is no better way to train a child than to help him understand his priestly responsibilities in Christ and his duty to minister to others. Helping him find suitable and practical ways to serve and minister will build his sense of purpose and his self confidence.

Resolved: By God's grace, I will help my child see that he was placed here to serve, not simply to be served, and that he will never be happier than when he is ministering to others as God intended.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

My New Covenant Life



9 Unlocking Your Inner Self

“ But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” Galatians 6:14

(Get a head start now by reading 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.)

Looking in All the Wrong Places

The worship instinct is present in everyone and there are certain conditions which stimulate Pavlovian-like worship responses in young and old alike. Starry skies, beautiful scenery, a cathedral choir, a Gregorian chant, and even quiet meditation can evoke this instinct. Such worship may be true, or false depending on the direction it takes. The

believer considers the heavens and worships the living God (Psalm 19). The unbeliever looks at the same stars and is compelled to worship them and the unseen beings they represent (Deuteronomy 4:19). Something in him compels him to connect and harmonize with nature.

Worship is either Creator-based or creation-based. It is directional.

Whether found within an indigenous people group, an isolated cult like Eckankar, or most world religions, creation based worshipers share a common misconception. They assume that by emptying ourselves through one worship technique or another, we can discover who we really are and tap into our inner powers. Creation-based worship glorifies man in the end. While feigning humility and even asceticism, advocates of this kind of worship often exude a spiritual elitism, a holy persona, and a condescending understanding of those who have not yet arrived at their level of enlightenment.

Creator-based worshipers, on the other hand, experience an entirely different dynamic at work. Because God has expanded our understanding of how this plays out under the New Covenant we will simply call this the New Covenant

dynamic. Frankly, it is not very appealing to our fleshly instincts, but once understood, it is life changing. Rather than a magic circle, labyrinth, or sweat lodge, discover the biblical dynamics which will change you inside and out!

We'll develop an understanding of what God is saying by asking and answering a series of burning questions which build on each other.

Why is the Shekinah glory important to me personally? We return to 2 Corinthians 3 where we had immersed ourselves in the discussion of this glory. The Shekinah glory of God affirmed God's presence and the validity of His Old Covenant and now affirms the New Covenant. God authenticates and certifies His Word through it. This is the glory which affirms the validity of our priestly ministries.

Does this glory still affirm the Law? The Shekinah glory is no longer associated with the Old Covenant in any way. Trying to live under the Old and New Covenants at the same time is like trying to pull a cart with two mules, one living and one dead. We are now dead to the law (Galatians 2:19). There is no glory associated with it, none.

Where is the Shekinah glory today? It is in God's temple

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where it affirms both His presence and His covenant. You and I who know Christ are His habitation, His temple. He dwells within us. This glory is manifest in us very much in the same way it was manifested on Moses' face. It manifests Christ to us and changes us into His image as we behold Him.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18

This is no truism. Time spent with Christ changes the life and empowers the walk. We are not being glib when we pray that Christ will be seen in us. It is our heart's righteous obsession. We want to reflect Christ in our lives so that others will be drawn to Him.

The Authentic New Covenant Ministry

There is a lot being said today about authenticity. We are pleased when we encounter people who desire to be genuinely authentic (though many ignorantly associate authen-

ticity with transparency and end up using this as an excuse to “let it all hang out”). **It is more important than ever to identify biblically authentic ministries.** Two burning questions should be present in the mind of every serious Bible lover.

First, how do I recognize inauthentic ministries? The average believer wants to embrace spiritual leaders of any stripe. In the same chapter which warns us about being judgmental, the Lord Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15-20). He does not condone our foolish acceptance of every teacher and evangelist who dons a robe or who buys a little air time to hawk (to merchandise, 2 Peter 2:3) spiritual wares. These angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) must be discerned by their fruit.

How may I have an authentic New Covenant ministry? Is my ministry truly a New Covenant ministry or have I imprinted my ministry style from those around me? How, exactly, can we recognize valid New Covenant ministries?

Paul continues his discussion of the New Covenant providing our answers. **We have identified seven important principles which, when viewed together, provide a wonderful**

description of an authentic New Covenant ministry.

1. An authentic New Covenant ministry will be Spirit dominated, not flesh driven. This is the core idea Paul has been asserting from the very beginning of this chapter. This covenant is ministered by the Holy Spirit. See 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, 8, 17 and 18, and notice also that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty (verse 17). The Holy Spirit is the key identifier of this covenant, exactly as promised in Ezekiel 36:26-27. This Spirit administers His gifts and enables and empowers all of Christ's servants (all flesh, both Jew and Gentile, Acts 2:17). Everything about this Spirit bears His trademark and His fragrance, as it were. This is how we know that many ministries claiming to be Spirit driven are not! They glorify human flesh. Their dog and pony shows are not becoming to, or characteristic of, this Spirit.

Paul extends this thinking in chapter 4, verse 1:

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 Corinthians 4:1

The flesh faints. The flesh postures and promises much in the beginning, but it always ends in fruitless failure. Because we have this kind of ministry (a Spirit driven ministry) we are not constrained by the limits of our flesh.

2. An authentic New Covenant ministry will be transparent, not postured. Paul announces:

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 2 Corinthians 4:1-2.

This Spirit controlled ministry does not need filters, additives, clever spins, infusion of human reason, redefinitions, or word-smithing. It does not need to be throttled, diffused, concentrated or reconstituted. It just needs to be spoken.

I asked the chaplain of a local city police department how his message was received among the rank and file officers. His answer was surprising. He told me he had an open door and a warm welcome and was not expected to compromise his message in any way. He said it had to do with the culture of the police department. Officers are so tired of hearing excuses and spins, that they welcome folks who are open, clear, and forthright, even when they do not share their opinions.

Sadly, we have immersed our culture in so many humanly retrofitted versions of the gospel that few listeners can discern what it is really about. Essentially, the world hears the innocuous declaration “God doesn’t like your sin, but in the end He will forgive you anyway.”

When Paul was discussing the New Covenant a few verses back he said “Seeing then, that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech,” (2 Corinthians 3:12). The word plainness in this verse not only means clear, it means outspoken, direct, and blunt.

How many filters do you run the gospel through so that it will properly fit the context of the listener? In so doing, have you watered it down? We need to return to the school of the apostles who proclaimed truth boldly.

3. An authentic New Covenant ministry will focus on the contest between light and darkness, not on logic and argument.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

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The New Covenant discussion in 2 Corinthians has focused on spiritual light and darkness, veiling and unveiling. This is not to say that we do not reason with the natural mind. Both Christ and the apostles reasoned and even debated with their listeners. It is to say that the battle is not won or lost on logical grounds. The battle relates to our receptivity of the light God gives us. It is a spiritual struggle between light and darkness. It has been this way from the very day when God commanded the light to shine out of darkness. Men who reject the gospel reject the light of the gospel. Men who obey the light God has given them are blessed with even more light. Those who have time will want to follow all that the Lord Jesus had to say about light and darkness (Matthew 6:22, 23).

The New Covenant minister holds himself and others accountable to the light God has given. Folks do not perish because they do not understand the gospel. They perish because they have chosen to reject the light they do have. There are no neutral seekers. All are guilty before God for rejecting truth which has already been manifested (Romans 1). This requires a supernatural solution. If the god of this world has blinded the eyes of the lost, it will be the God of heaven alone who will open their eyes. It is one thing

to be able to give a reason and an answer to every man for the hope which lies within us. It is quite another to present our gospel in cold, intellectual, and factual terms. The New Covenant minister does not hold the listener's feet to the fire as much as he holds his face to the light. It is about accountability to the truth.

4. **An authentic New Covenant ministry will be Christ centered, not self centered.**

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5

The scriptures are not about the gospel. They are not about the church. They are not about community. The scriptures are about Jesus Christ. In the volume of the book, it is written of me, He said. Luke 24:44-48 relates how Christ took the apostles through the Word of God, teaching them the things concerning Himself.

Of course, we believe in and teach the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). But that is not our core message. We teach and preach Christ. He is the message. He is the core. We are not splitting hairs here. We do not offer a plan of salvation (though we can certainly explain what is required to be saved) we offer the Person of salvation and explain how

men may be reconciled to Christ.

When we become gospel focused instead of being Christ focused we end up preaching a utilitarian Christ who is essentially good for one thing, for saving us. Sadly, some groups share responsibility for this narrow view we have of Christ. They depict a bleeding, suffering Christ. When their followers desire intercession, however, they rush to His mother, as though we need her to convince Him to act on our behalf. In their view, she is more understanding and approachable, very much like our moms weighing in on our behalf with dad. This One who lives in us and works in us moment by moment does not need His mother to remind Him of our plight.

When we continually present Christ only in terms of His wonderful salvation it's like bringing in a kicker on the fourth down. We're all glad for kickers, but that's pretty much all they do. Our Lord is the kicker, the quarterback, the linebacker, the captain, the manager, and, the team owner. He is the Alpha and Omega, the primeval creator of all things, the victor over all principalities and power, the fullness of all in all, and in all things He wants and demands the preeminence in all things. (Colossians 1:12-19).

Notice also that when we say, We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord... we remember another truth. It truly is NOT about the human vessel. We often do not share Christ because of our own human weakness. We feel so unworthy and so unequipped. It is as though we really think Christ needs our talents and our skills. Frankly, as we will see in a few verses, He would rather not have them take precedence. He wants the vessel out of the way so that the Holy Spirit can do His work. This eliminates a lot of our excuses for not serving Christ. It's not about us.

5. **An authentic New Covenant ministry will embrace servanthood, not professionalism.** Take another peek at the same verse:

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5

Of course, one cannot present Christ without presenting himself. We are not invisible when we give out the gospel. If I were to encounter a homeless person who is selling multi-million dollar real estate it would give me pause. This is because I expect some correspondence between the vendor and the product he represents.

Although the gospel is not about us, the way we present

ourselves is important to Christ. We have already learned that cleverness, wit, and showmanship will not become Christ. If I am to complement the message of Christ I must adopt the same posture Christ has adopted. It is the posture of the servant.

When the Old Testament described the coming Messiah it gave us specific things to look for. At the top of that list, we learn that (in this age) He strikes the posture of the servant (Isaiah 42:1-7). A servant is not one who bakes pies to hand out indiscriminately on the street. A servant makes his master's will his own will. The key to fruitful New Covenant ministry is found in the lowliest of all human activities. When we assume the role of servants of Christ there will always be an open door to present Christ. If there are no open doors for witness in our lives it can usually be related to the fact that we have forgotten our servant roles!

We must not fail to follow through with the grand case Paul has been building. Follow Paul's progress:

- Paul has said that the Shekinah glory affirms our New Covenant. We capitalize the word Shekinah in this case because it is the glory which represents the presence of our God.

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- We have learned that the god of this world would blind unbelievers to this glory and light which affirms the gospel.
 - We know what our response should be in this contest between light and darkness. We know the Shekinah glory affirms our ministry when we renounce fleshly tactics, assume the posture of His servant, and present Christ in His fullness.
 - If we would have an authentic New Covenant ministry, we want to add another requirement, one that provides the greatest challenge of them all.
6. An authentic New Covenant ministry will welcome suffering, not safety.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

We have only included verses 7-10, so you will want to follow on down through the rest of the chapter as time allows.

The difficult truth is this. It is not enough to represent Christ as a servant. We must adopt His posture as the suffering servant, gladly opting for the sorrow and humility associated with our Lord and His gospel. This treasure is in earthen vessels that the glory may truly go to Christ. Where there is no suffering for Christ now, there is no glory to follow. For a further study of suffering and glory and how they relate, you would enjoy reading 1 and 2 Peter, among other passages.

If we were to ask a typical believer, Are you willing to suffer for Christ? the answer would likely be positive. Generally speaking, we would all accept that onus though we would certainly plead for grace! Now, we might label that passive suffering. But there is another kind of suffering we need to understand.

We will let our prophetic experts speak to the question of whether or not we are in the Laodicean period of church history, (I believe we are). Regardless of our view, we all know that the description of the Laodicean believers in their letter, found in Revelation 3:14-22, is a picture perfect

sketch of our era. We are lukewarm and our works are neither hot nor cold. Our external prosperity has masked our internal poverty and blindness. We find the antidote to our malady, given to us directly by our Lord:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. Revelation 3:18

When we are counseled to buy gold tried in the fire, we are talking about another kind of suffering and refining. We are talking about proactive suffering. The sacrificial servanthood which brings glory to Christ also remedies our lethargy!

A word of caution: Creation based systems all have their ascetic practices. They emulate deeds which punish and mutilate the flesh for the imagined sake of freeing us from it. In reality, this is demonic and no more helpful than the Chinese finger trap. Keep in mind that Satan will gladly strip man of the dignity which is his by right of being created in God's image. This self flagellating wisdom is never taught by God.

We speak of a different kind of suffering. We may freely opt to make up that which still remains in the suffering of Christ (Colossians 1:24). We may share in the role of our servant Christ in carrying out His task of being a light to the nations. We may opt to suffer and serve for the sake of His own. Now, that is authentic servanthood!

7. An authentic New Covenant ministry will be farsighted, not nearsighted.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

When NASA scientists devised a way to put man on the moon they built a large planning room with a long planning board built into one wall. The left end represented earth and the right end, the moon. As they constructed their plan they did not reason from earth toward the moon. They started with the moon and reasoned their way back to earth. This, in turn, helped them to prioritize the steps in their process.

The effective servant of Christ will never be able to properly prioritize his steps if he simply reasons toward eternity. His priorities will be skewed. He must reason backwards from eternity.

Everything we can see and feel is temporal and hardly worth investing in except to maintain our temporal existence. Afflictions become light afflictions in light of eternity. In the words of Jim Elliot, a beloved martyr for Christ, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Questions for Authenticating My Ministry

___ Is my ministry Spirit dominated and not flesh driven?

___ Am I transparent or do I misrepresent myself or my message?

___ Do I gladly engage in the proclamation of light over darkness?

___ Have I focused both my life and message on the person of Christ?

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___ Will I prefer servanthood to professionalism? Do I need recognition?

___ Will I prefer suffering to safety and buy gold tried in the fire? What sacrificial step toward servanthood can I make now?

___ When planning and counting the cost of my ministry do I reason backward from eternity?

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



10

Polishing Your Résumé

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:5

About Those Muscle Memories...

Twin brothers have built-in sparring mates, and my brother and I took full advantage. We were not beneath sneak attacks from behind, but we specialized in direct head-on running challenges. As a result, we developed very instinctive “muscle memory”. One day while walking in the neighborhood I was approached at full speed, head-on, by the little sister of my friend. Before I had time to think, the

right knee went up and made full on contact on her chest, knocking her down and pushing the breath right out of her. It was classic, but it was disastrous. All she wanted was a hug, but it was too late, my knee jerk muscle memory had taken control and I endured the shame of having hurt a little girl.

Muscle memory is the result of habitually responding the same way to the same stimulus. Properly disciplined, it usually serves us well because it works in advance of our thinking processes. There are some parallels worth noting in the spiritual world as well. As New Covenant believers we need to be so familiar with how God expects us to see ourselves, that we will automatically do those things which please God.

A small example may be seen in the godly man who instinctively looks away from someone's careless immodesty because he has made it his habit to do so. We might say he has developed a spiritual muscle response. However, we want to paint with a much broader brush.

Three Inter-Connecting Truths

The way we see ourselves conditions our daily, if not hourly

responses to life. Just as in the physical realm, when we habitually discipline ourselves to see ourselves as God does, it produces a different kind of response to life. It may be enough for the brand new believer to see himself as absolutely forgiven and secure in Christ. That represents the first look in the mirror for all believers. But, if we would be truly fruitful for Christ we will want to take a closer look at how God wants us to see ourselves on a daily basis.

The first truth: To understand my role I must understand who Jesus Christ is vocationally. He has some auspicious titles. He is a prophet, priest, and king.

His ministry is being carried out in two phases. First as the servant Christ He is the suffering Savior who is carrying out His task as a light to the nations. That is what He does.

He will later return as our reigning King. He is presently charged with being a light to the nations (the gentiles), and later He will also bring justice to all the earth through Israel. That is what He will do in the future.

In both His present and future ministries the Bible portrays Him as our prophet, our High Priest, and our King who has yet to be coronated and seated on David's throne.

The second truth: I must understand who I am vocationally. Our identity changed completely on the day we came to Christ. He was placed in each of us and we were placed in Him (Col. 1:27). As a result, the image in our mirrors has changed.

Follow this progression:

Our placement. We have been placed in Christ for a reason. Being a part of the church which is His body is all about our partnership. For example, Paul sobers us up by asking us why we would make our bodies members of a harlot when we are members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). This placement into His body involves Him with what we do, and it involves us fully with what He is doing.

Our participation. He is carrying out His own charges given to Him by His Father through us, His body. We are participating in this. In the business world we call this “taking ownership.”

Or partnership. As full partners in ministry with Him we are literally workers-together with Him in this task! This is what biblical fellowship (Gr. koinonea) is about. With our Lord, we are focused on a specific task in the here and now.

We minister together as a light to the nations. We are not setting up His kingdom. After this, the Bible says, He will return to set up His kingdom (Acts. 13:47; 15:16).

Our preparation. Finally, our Lord has equipped us for our participation in this task. He has endowed us with His Spirit, spiritual gifts, pastors and teachers to guide us, and, of course, the scriptures.

Our priesthood. It is especially urgent that we begin thinking of ourselves in terms of our vocation as priests. Our Lord did not bestow this title as a beautiful tack-on to help elevate our self esteem. It is our functional title, our vocational title, and it is the highest title which can be given to a son of God. It's possible that you looked in the mirror this morning and thought of yourself as a priest, but it is not probable. That may not be our usual spiritual muscle response. And therein lies the problem.

The enemy of our souls does not want to see us exercising our high calling as priests. He wants to intimidate us by making us think this priesthood belongs only to a select group of priests or clergy.

Many of those who have followed in the traditions of Augustine have erred tragically at this point. Augustine taught that the church replaces Israel in God's program. Because ethnic Israel was disobedient, the church supposedly inherited Israel's promises. When Christians see themselves as "spiritual Israel" and as the inheritors of Israel's promises, they mistakenly change their attitude toward the priesthood as well.

We might say that Israel saw the priesthood in three different perspectives. They saw the high priests, the ministerial priests, and the whole nation as a kingdom of priests. Those who see the church as replacing Israel tend to see the Lord Jesus Christ as our High Priest, their clergy as ministerial and even sacrificial priests, and the people as a kingdom of priests. This, in turn, leads to a whole boat load of errors. We begin seeing the Lord's table, for example, as sacramental, and we establish a non-existent priestly order (ordained clergy) to administer those sacraments. Soon we imagine these sacraments to be a means of saving grace. Pouring our new wine into this old wineskin destroys both, and it always destroys the doctrine of grace.

Do you see the irony? When we rob Israel of the promises God has made to her, we also rob ourselves. The Lord Jesus

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Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (not Aaron or Levi) and we are a part of His household and His priestly order. Our priesthood has only two tiers. We have a High Priest, and kingly priests. The sacramental priesthood is no longer necessary because the sacrifice has been made once and for all (Hebrews. 10:14). We are working priests, vocational priests, fully vested with priestly responsibilities and authority. This is no figurehead position (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation. 1:5-6, 5:10, 20:4-6)

The third truth: I must learn how my priestly vocation plays out on a daily basis on the work site: God's temple!

My Work Place

Our priestly job description begins with our vocational workplace, the temple. Temples are the domains of priests. The Bible tells us, for instance, that our King Priest will build His own millennial temple and rule on His throne directly from that temple (Zechariah 6:13).

Our High Priest is presently building another temple, one built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We each make up one of the living stones (1 Peter 2:4-10). The Bible teaches that the church which is Christ's body is

also His temple. He dwells within His church as a whole and within each of us as living temple stones. And, be very sure that those who would defile this temple (the individual stones, or the temple as a whole) will be destroyed by God. Because our Lord Jesus Christ is carrying out His own priestly duties through us, He is very serious about this temple and how we build upon it.

My Building Standards

As members of Christ's body we share in this temple building task of Christ, and we will be accountable for the materials we used and how we built upon this wonderful edifice. When we talk about the judgment seat of Christ, it may come as a surprise to some believers that we are judged particularly with respect to how we built upon his temple! Keep your Bible open to 1 Corinthians 3. In the first eight verses we see the emphasis being placed on God's husbandry. In verse nine, Paul shifts to temple building:

I must build upon the right Foundation!

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the founda-

tion, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:9-11.

As participants or fellowshippers in Christ we are fellow laborers and builders of God's building (His temple). The instructions and the blueprints are all there, and the foundation has been laid. Make no mistake, we are all builders on this One who is our foundation and our cornerstone, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Paul assumes we understand that. When our ministry, in any way, detracts from Christ, we are in serious trouble.

I must build with the right materials. It is not enough simply to acknowledge Christ as the Cornerstone. Most churches in our culture would be quick to affirm that desire. Paul places most of his focus on how we build. Every tool and material we choose is vital. In this respect, a great number of churches are failing.

Our son and daughter-in-law are enjoying the dubious privilege of having all the outside walls of their home replaced, a massive re-construction project. Along with scores of homes in their neighborhood, the foundation was fine, but those who built upon it failed. They used both

the wrong materials and the wrong technique. It was a multi-million dollar error.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
- 1 Cor. 3:11-13.

The materials we observe in Paul's analogy can be placed in two categories, the durables (gold, silver, and precious stones) and the disposables (wood, hay, and stubble.)

Unlike most European nations, the people of Norway have very few architectural artifacts. This is because wood was their material of choice. Wood burns. Wood is easier to secure and easier to use, and we see the results of wood construction in a matter of days.

Fast growth is rarely a sign of God's blessing. Temple building, done properly, is a slow and tedious process. Do not be intimidated by quickly growing churches. Durable materials include the rich deep truths of God's Word. Faithful builders are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) and do not kowtow to the shifting sands of emotionally driven ministries that vacillate with the weather. Truth

grounds us.

I must build with the right Inspector in mind. We will not be judged on how well our construction compares with other builders. We will all appear before this judgment seat. Sadly, for some of us, the issue will not even relate to materials we used because we did no temple building at all. Some never even realize we have a priestly vocation. They thought all along, that this was the reason we pay our pastors!

My Daily Priestly Walk.

It is not enough to learn that I am building on Christ's temple, and that I must build according to His standards. We tend to under estimate the importance of our priestly duties because we are not careful enough to notice biblical terminology. Every profession has its own jargon. When Paul describes our daily duties as believers, he almost always seeds this discussion with priestly terms, temple terms. He uses words like offering, present, acceptable, and a number of other phrases which would be commonly understood by early believers who had a temple background. While most Bible translations respect these terms, we often miss their importance when reading our Bibles.

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So, let's point out some of these terms as they relate to our daily priestly duties.

My Sacrificial Offerings

As a priest, my own body is an offering. Our High Priest has already provided His own body and blood with one offering (Hebrews 10:14, 9:23-26). Therefore, the Lord's table is a memorial, not a sacrifice or emulation, as some may call it.

However, there are multiple offerings which we are called upon to make as we share our Lord's priestly ministry. The vivid example of Romans 12:1-2 comes quickly to mind:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:1,2

This passage, saturated with temple terms such as present, sacrifice, acceptable, reasonable service (liturgy or worship), urges us to do the same thing our Lord did. This One who presented His own body and made His Father's will

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His will (Hebrews 10:5-7) is the one who invites us to do the same.

Earlier in our study we began to explore this privilege we have to share in the ongoing sufferings of Christ. This priestly privilege is ours because we participate in Christ and His ministry.

As a priest, I may pour out myself as a drink offering for others.

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me. -Philippians 2:17-18

A little caution is in order. The context of this verse tells us about Paul's desire to have the Word of God prosper in these believers so that he would not have run in vain.

As a priest, I may give of my substance to forward the Lord's servants and His work.

But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. - Philippians 4:18

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Each time we give to forward the cause of Christ, our Lord sees it as a sweet smelling, well pleasing, and acceptable sacrifice! We do not give out of mere duty. We do not merely give in order to gain interest on our investment. Our giving is the result of the priestly ministry we share in Christ! According to Romans 15:25-28 our gifts shared with poor and suffering saints are also priestly offerings.

As a priest I can continually offer up the sacrifices of praise to my God.

*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.
- Hebrews 13:15*

This fruit of our lips may be in the form of both words and song, but it is especially an offering of praise! At the expense of sounding superficial, days filled with praise seldom result in nights filled with tears. We never enjoy the presence of God more than when we are glorying in Him. We do not praise God merely for our benefit, but there are few priestly acts which do more to heal our own souls than offering up the fruit of our lips in praise and adoration.

As a priest, I may share in offering up others unto God!

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. - Romans 15:16

The above verse is excerpted from Paul's full discussion regarding this priestly ministry of ours toward the Gentiles. Again, this ministry is through word and deed as we bring them to Christ!

The point is that there is a price to pay. There are no professional New Covenant priests. They do not print their business cards in the hope that sheep who are in need will find their way to them. They do not hide behind their books and administrative duties. Instead, they have invisible radar devices mounted on the top of their heads and are continually scanning for opportunities to give themselves in ministry. They do not fill out time cards, defend their 40 hour work weeks, build electric fences around their days off, or campaign for accruing vacation time. Those privileges are reserved for professional priests who already have their reward. Though all of the above benefits may be badly needed, they do not even think in those terms. They live on a different plane. Their joy is in their sacrifice. Their sacri-

fice is seldom noticed and rarely appreciated by the rank and file (2 Cor. 4:10-12).

My Intercessory Duties

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 1 Tim. 2:1-5

It has been said that true priests talk to God about men and talk to men about God. We have only one High Priest and only one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) who intercedes for us. No earthly priest should usurp this authority from Him. However, we share in our Lord's ministry of intercession in various ways. Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and the giving of thanks for all men, are included in a wide scope of prayer activities which fall under our priestly duties.

As New Covenant priests we have immediate (not presumptuous) access directly to the Father's throne, and we are admonished to come boldly, with the full assurance that is ours, thanks to the cleansing of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 10:19-22). The point is, we come

as priests continually, not once a year! See Leviticus 16 for a little background on Old Testament priests if you need to brush up.

Our God intends that our prayer be both abundant and spontaneous. We can be guilty of construing our image of prayer as a tedious discipline. Of course, the regular practice of disciplined prayer is important. Yet, there are no special blessings reserved for the spiritual ascetics who can recount the hours they spend in daily prayer. The New Covenant priest does not fill his schedule with extensive prayer times as much as he fills his day with continual prayer, which wafts up before the throne of God like sweet incense.

My Discipling Duties

By now we are clear in our understanding that biblical discipleship always occurs with an edifying purpose in mind. In this respect, Paul provided a wonderful example for us when he sacrificed his own rights and privileges in order to edify others (1 Cor. 10:23). Sacrifice should always be for the purpose of edification, never to coddle or enable others in their laziness or lack of discipline. The Greek word for edification relates to building a house or household. It is

part of this whole temple theme. Temples are edifices. We sacrifice in order to edify or build on Christ's temple, His body.

Take a glance at the broad landscape. Covenants are made to men and their seed. When they extend over time they are administered through a priesthood. This New Covenant is administered by Christ who is of the order of Melchizedek. When we fully understand that our Great Priest is administering His priestly household through the priesthood of His own body, we are astounded and amazed.

We hear our share of discussion regarding the qualifications of elders, and it is important to obey the scriptures regarding the selection of our leaders. Many church constitutions devote multiple pages to help clarify this discussion. As important as the offices of pastor teacher, elder, and even deacon are, those offices take a distant second place to this high office ascribed to every believer who knows Christ.

Our church constitutions rarely devote more than passing references to this important office we share in Christ. The role of the pastor/elder is to edify the saint for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). He does this through his own example in ministry and sound doctrine. At the

same time, our Lord intended that the brunt of His priestly ministry be carried out by the rank and file believer. We do a great harm by not helping every believer realize his full calling to its full potential! Perhaps, if we concentrated more on the personal priesthood of every believer, we wouldn't need to include so many constitutional pages on the qualifications of elders.

Assuming My Priestly Duties

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has a vocational identity as prophet, priest, and king. Presently, He is carrying out His priestly ministry through His body, the church.
2. Because I have been placed in Christ I too share His priestly ministry. That is my vocation.
3. As a priestly temple builder I must build on Christ's body using the kind of materials which endure, knowing that I will one day be accountable for my workmanship.
4. More importantly, when I build carelessly I do great damage to His body.

This is who I am! This is my vocation! This is how I see myself!

My New Covenant Life

As a priest I will offer up my own body as an offering, I will pour myself out as a drink offering, I will give of my substance as a love offering, offer the fruit of my lips as a praise offering. I will seek to win the lost to Christ and engage in intercessory prayer.

As a Family Priest...

I will both minister to my family and teach my family how to minister as priests of Christ.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



11

Wise Up

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant... Philippians 2:5-7a

The Right Imprint...

Most of us can recall the image of some young bird who has imprinted on the wrong mother figure. Seasoned Christians have also seen new believers who have imprinted on spiritual leaders or favored organizations, often at the expense of their true occupation with Christ.

My New Covenant Life

This book has been about imprinting on Christ. We want to learn Christ and adopt His mind. To do this we began building our foundation on the character of God and then moved on to the Person of Christ, especially as He is manifested in the New Covenant.

As we learn to see ourselves in Christ we begin gaining a new identity, a new image of ourselves and our purpose and place in God's program. This is true biblical imprinting. This is what sharing the mind of Christ means. God intended that earthly leaders be models and examples of this practice! (1 Corinthians 11:1)

We learned earlier that our Servant Christ has been charged with being a light to the nations and that because we are in Him we share in His task, sending out the gospel light to the ends of the earth. Additionally, because we have been placed in Christ we have become working priests, fully equipped so that Christ can carry out His priestly ministry in and through us. This is who we are. This is what we do. This is what it means to let the mind of the Servant Christ dwell in us.

This Little Menorah of Mine!

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him... Isaiah 11:2

We have learned from the Old Testament that we will know Messiah by His relationship to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit saturated the person and ministry of Christ while He was on earth, and His ministry was the earmark of the early church. This same Spirit now continues to dwell in and work through Christ's church just as Jesus prophesied (John 14:26).

Now, step briefly into Isaiah 11:1-2 so that we can learn more of this Spirit-driven Christ.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; Isaiah 11:1-2

God's Wisdom and Old Testament Prophecy

When time allows, you will want to enjoy this whole millennial chapter, but we will limit our focus to one phrase in

Isaiah 11:2. The ancient Jews associated this verse with the menorah. The lampstand included three arms which were connected to a center post. There were seven light sources, one at the top of the post, and then three sets of two. It was not uncommon to overlay this verse on that image. The single bowl at the top represented this sevenfold Spirit of Jehovah. It was descriptive of the whole image. The first couplet was wisdom and understanding, the second set was counsel and might, and the third set was knowledge and fear of the Lord. Together they paint a rich and bright image of our Lord. Each of these corresponding couplets merits its own study. This composite image of our Branch is a magnificent portrait of our Spirit-led Savior.

God's Wisdom as it Relates to the Servant

The Spirit of Jehovah will shine through the life of His servant who emulates Him. It will be seen in his wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and knowledge and fear of the Lord. This is how we manifest the life of Christ. Notice that this servant Savior of ours is the wisdom of God. Absorbing ourselves in the knowledge of Christ really endows us with wisdom.

God's Wisdom as it Relates to Daily Life

Let's wise up about wisdom. There is more than one kind of wisdom! When we speak of the wisdom of God in this passage we are not speaking so much of the practical, day to day wisdom we find in that wonderful book of Proverbs. Certainly, the wisdom of God was in Solomon (1 Kings 3:28), but this is the practical wisdom which begins with the knowledge of God and extends toward our daily living. It is presented mostly from our perspective as men. When we talk about our Lord being filled with the wisdom of God, we are speaking of a wisdom about which King Solomon knew very little. We are speaking of wisdom from the perspective of God and His works, a wisdom which was essentially hidden until it was revealed in Christ.

God's Wisdom as it Relates to His Divine Plan

There is a unique wisdom of God which relates especially to the person and plan of God. It can be seen in creation and the outworking of history (His story). This wisdom is most evident in the Person of His Son, and wherever we find it is discussed, we find the Holy Spirit in the same context.

The Spirit of God reveals God's wisdom to us through God's creation, the outworking of His program, His written Word, and especially through His Son. Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. Our Lord uses the Spirit of God to open our blind eyes and understanding and illuminate the wisdom of Christ. These are not the dried ink stains on old parchment; these truths play out dynamically in our daily experience. We are either increasing in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ, or we are diminishing.

God's Wisdom as it Relates to our Personal Ministries

1 Corinthians includes some wonderful discussion concerning this wisdom and how it countermands the world's wisdom. It reminds us that we are in Christ Jesus who is made wisdom unto us. (1 Corinthians 1:20-24, 30). Because our faith stands in this wisdom of God and not in the wisdom of men we do not approach men with "excellency of speech", or any other fleshly communication tactic (1 Corinthians 2:1, see also 2 Corinthians 1:12).

Paul passionately sought to have us understand this unique wisdom. In Ephesians 1:15-23 we see how earnestly Paul offers his prayer regarding this spirit of wisdom and reve-

lation he wants us to enjoy. Notice that God is the source of this spirit of wisdom and revelation which is found in Christ (1:17-23).

Not all believers have this wisdom or Paul would not be praying so fervently for them to receive it (1:17).

Notice what this wisdom does (1:18-21). It opens the eyes of our understanding and enlightens us concerning all that we possess as saints and all that God is doing on a grand scale!

Oh, and please notice! Those whose eyes are enlightened are also enabled to take on their respective duties as members of His body (22-23).

This prayerful desire of Paul to see us immersed in God's wisdom and caught up with God's plan is also seen in Philippians 1:8-11 and Colossians 1:9-14. Another sample of this great wisdom is found in Romans 11 where the unique intertwining roles of Israel and the Gentiles are revealed. Paul breathlessly declares:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past

finding out! Romans 11:33.

Initial Fact: Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the wisdom of God, especially as it relates to God's will, His plan, and His program.

Corresponding Fact: Our Lord desires that our eyes as believers are enlightened as to God's wisdom and will in carrying out His plan for the ages in both our prayers and ministries.

Consider some of our prayer styles when we talk to God about His wisdom and His will:

Adolescent Wisdom. Consider how adolescent our prayers for God's will often appear. Some prayers rarely go beyond something like Lord, if it is your will, please... That kind of prayer is okay. In fact James teaches us that we are responsible to think in those very terms (James 4:13-15). That is one way we pray for God's will.

Behavioral Wisdom. At other times we pray for God's wisdom that we might do His will. We desire to align our behavior with God's desires. Again, James commands us to do that very thing (James 1:5-7). This reflects growth in our wisdom.

These are both very practical prayers and we are not surprised they are modeled in the book of James - the New Testament wisdom book.

Comprehensive Wisdom. There is a third type of prayer. Our Lord taught us to pray for the Father's will (Matthew 6:10), and Paul prayed that our wisdom would increase in the knowledge of His will (Colossians 1:9). These instructions were from a heavenly perspective. They were teaching us to pray from God's perspective!

The person who is immersed in the knowledge and plan of God will be filled with God's wisdom in a way that will impact his personal direction in life. He will know how to choose his own path more wisely because he understands what God is doing. He understands God's priorities.

We can become somewhat selfish and self centered when our prayers rarely extend beyond our needs (for our loved ones, for their health and safety, for the safety of our nation, etc.). They are need-driven prayers and our Father surely wants to answer such prayers. However, when our prayers begin and end on that plane they may show that our hearts are not really attached to His wisdom and His will.

For example, consider our prayer for Christ's return. I might be tempted to pray more fervently for the rapture when facing root canals and tax bills. After all, why waste all that pain and energy! That would be an adolescent prayer. That is not really why I long for the rapture. I long for the rapture because I want my heavenly Father to honor His promise to His Son! I want my Savior to receive what is rightfully His. I want to see Him glorified. That is an adult prayer. That puts my root canal and taxes into perspective. Further, I love learning Bible prophecy because I love to learn what my Saviour is doing! I do not study it with adolescent curiosity.

So, we have learned that the servant of Christ who has been placed in the Person of Christ will want to share in the wisdom of Christ and will want to learn the plan and program of Christ.

...Now, Light the Way!

The true disciple of Christ, the one who would know the mind of the Servant Christ and the will and wisdom of God, has also been charged with one more priestly duty which was not included in our previous study. There is more than the matter of enjoying the spirit of wisdom and

understanding.

The Temple Building Background of 1 Corinthians 1-3

Because we spent time earlier in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians we know that Paul is speaking specifically about our New Covenant temple building ministry. We know that our construction will be inspected by Christ alone, and not others. We do not judge each other's work.

Our Priestly Temple Duties Continue in Chapter 4

Paul is by no means through with temple talk or ministry talk. There is a double truth to showcase as we enter chapter 4, a truth which many Bible teachers overlook. We find this truth in verses 1 and 2.

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

We must settle something up front when talking about ministry. We must say that Paul was speaking only of himself and the other apostles, or we must agree that Paul meant this for us all. We must choose to follow Augustine with his host of clerics or choose to follow Christ. There

is no middle position. Make no mistake, these two verses apply to every believer priest who serves in the household administration of Christ's New Covenant.

Please avoid Rome's error here. God has given apostles and prophets to lay the foundation (Ephesians 4:11) but He did not perpetuate their offices. God has given pastors, not clergy, to perfect the ministry of the saints. Evangelists, pastor-teachers /elders, and deacons to some extent, have been given to us with authority to feed, lead, protect, and to serve us. They are given to help us assume our priestly duties. They are not our priests.

Having made that point, we now learn that there are two aspects of servanthood found in this verse, not one.

Servant Aspect #1: Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ... When we peek at this word minister we can transliterate it under rower. The under rower (galley rower) was the lowest form of slave. Such rowers had no rights or privileges except to row. Because they all shared the same fate, they also enjoyed a great common camaraderie. There was no pecking order. They shared a common occupation and a common fate. We have too many servant peacocks. We see far too much branding of ministries and

self-promoting glossies. We are all equal in our respective ministries.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:26-28.

When we start down the slippery slope of leader adulation we end up robbing the cross of Christ of its effect (1 Corinthians 1:10-17). We have bred a generation of flocking groupies who are known by the icons they follow. Now see that the heart of our present argument lies with the second description found in this verse:

Servant Aspect # 2: ...and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Here is the paradox. Not only is the servant of Christ a common galley rower of the lowest order of slaves he also shares the title of the most exalted servant in history. He is a steward. The steward was no ordinary slave. He often managed most of his master's affairs. It included managing the children, the finances, the family business, and anything else his master designated. Such household stewards were often more educated and articulate than their owners. With that high position came an equally high degree of

responsibility. It was required that this steward-slave would be faithful in all things.

Many believers associate stewardship with managing their assets and donating their finances to the Lord's work at home and abroad. Any other stewardship issues are left with their leaders.

This attitude is a travesty of the true intent of scripture. Please notice what you and I are accountable to steward. The Bible is very clear on this point. We are accountable to steward the mysteries of God. That is the role of the New Covenant priest. He is the keeper and administrator of God's truths.

Wrong Conclusions Can Lead to Wrong Solutions

Some suggest that modern churches bear much similarity to a group of sheep and goats. The sheep are to be fleeced, herded, milked for their money, and above all, to be the scapegoats for the overall failure of the church to evangelize. The goats represent teachers who lead the mindless flock in whatever way the chief leader thinks they should go.

Some suggest the need to redistribute the balance of power with, a revolution, or an evolution to a new form of government. Quite possibly, they say, we need a fresh crop of leaders to chart a new path to transition our churches into a vibrant non-hierarchical and relevant community.

Proposed remedies such as these generally end in failure. At best, they distract us with only a momentary blush of success. Our solutions fail because we have not addressed the real issue.

We simply must return the New Covenant priest to his position as the keeper and administrator of God's truths. Such a New Covenant style of ministry enables every believer as a priest. A New Covenant church seeks to involve every believer, leading and nudging him or her forward into a ministry which employs that believer's gifts. It is a ministry where pastors and leaders devote themselves to edifying us for the work of the ministry in a practical, tangible way. Without that focus we are doomed to endless treadmills of rising and falling churches.

If I am to be a steward of the mysteries of God, I must be able to locate those mysteries and understand them! Before initiating a full blown revolution in my church I might

consider learning just exactly what these mysteries are that I am supposed to be stewarding! These biblical mysteries are not mysterious in any way. They are the unique truths which remained un-revealed until the New Covenant was placed in effect. They especially represent the dynamics of this age, though some extend beyond it.

Everyone Loves a Good Mystery!

- Begin by learning a short list of those very mysteries which God's Word makes us accountable to know, understand, and propagate. Some of these mysteries include:
- The mysteries associated with the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven. Matthew 13
- The mystery of Israel's present blindness. Romans 11
- The mystery of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15
- The mystery of the church as the body of Christ. Ephesians 3, and 4
- The mystery of the church in her role as the Bride of Christ. Ephesians 5

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- The mystery of the indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit. Galatians 2 and Colossians 1
- The mystery of the rapture of the church. 1 Thessalonians 4
- The mystery of iniquity. 2 Thessalonians 2
- The prophetic mysteries of Babylon. Rev. 16-18.

Steps for Growing My Stewardship

- As a steward of the mysteries of God, I will become conversant with these mysteries. I will become a true student of God's Word.
- As a steward of the mysteries of God, I will learn these well enough to be able to discuss them with others.
- As a steward of the mysteries of God, I will protect these very mysteries from those who would corrupt them.
- As a steward of the mysteries of God, I will carry out

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my New Covenant priestly ministry with the awareness that I have been called upon to be faithful in this task.

- I will vacate my role as a pew pedestrian and begin seeking and praying for avenues to be an effective servant priest, a galley rower and a steward. I will seek the guidance of my pastor and spiritual leaders as they move me forward in my knowledge of the Word and in the use of my spiritual gifts.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



12

Family Business

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” 1 John 3:1

Family Bonds...

There were times during the years of my presidency at a Bible institute when I would step down off the chapel platform and, upon a three-legged stool, sit directly among the students. They always knew that this meant a family talk was in order. Family talks were usually informal and often dealt with difficult issues. Family talks were exclusively for

our school family.

On a far more significant scale, our biological families comprise a mix of our greatest human treasures and our greatest tragedies. Our sweetest memories of love and most painful memories of sorrow stem from these roots. The power of familial influences is evidenced by the struggles of those who grow up in fragmented families. Their struggles teach them much about God's grace and forgiveness, but they always leave scars. Family is everything...

Well...almost! The Bible teaches us that our spiritual bonds in Christ exceed even our earthly family bonds (Luke 14:26). Earthly family relationships are merely shadows of spiritual family relationships. Whether we are proud of our earthly roots or embarrassed, our heavenly family grounds us in our true identities, providing the safety and stability we need to carry on.

Two Childhood Milestones

Those who have the privilege of being born on Christmas day enjoy the privilege of celebrating two events on the same day, the birth of Christ, and their own birth. Those who know Christ, actually celebrate not one, but two

events related to their spiritual birth.

Happy Birthday!

From the human perspective, the day you came to Christ represents your spiritual birthday. It was the day of your second birth.

When we look under the hood of our salvation we discover that it is the result of our having been baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit. According to Romans 6:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 we died, were buried, and raised again with Christ! We became identified with all that Jesus Christ has done the day we were placed in Christ and became a new creation in Him.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17

When Christians speak of new life in Christ they are speaking of regeneration. We become new creations in Christ as a result of what Christ did at the cross on our behalf. We are placed in Christ and He in us. Some can point to the very second they knew and enjoyed this new life. For others,

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it took a little time before they realized how changed they were.

Evidences of this new life include a new love for the Lord and His Word, a desire to be with God's people, and a great desire to obey the Lord. We develop a new sensitivity to sin and we miss our good times of fellowship when we walk away from the Lord. While we have a lot of growing to do, we know that the Bible teaches these are all evidences of the new life which will begin appearing in us. The person who does not find these things happening in his life needs to make a careful evaluation (2 Corinthians 13:5). No one had to assure me I was born, but someone did teach me how to grow. The same applies spiritually. If you are not sure of your salvation or are not being helped in your growth, by all means contact us. We will help you find a Bible loving pastor or teacher. Please take this as a serious offer with no strings attached.

Your second milestone event may be buried a little deeper, but it is equally important:

Happy Adoption Day!

The importance of the biblical doctrine of adoption is often

missed by those who do not consider Romans 8 and Galatians 3 and 4 carefully. Even literal interpreters of the Bible sometimes miss this precious truth. In a very broad sense, some may say that we have been adopted into God's family from Satan's family, but that is not the main truth the Bible teaches concerning adoption. After all, if you have been born into God's family, how can you be adopted into it at the same time?

In the great majority of cases, the biblical concept of adoption speaks to an entirely different principle. Our New Covenant adoption relates to the practice of son-placing. In fact, that is exactly what the original word means. Adoption does not relate to family-placing, but our placement as sons in God's family. This adoption is all about sonship. As a believer you received your New Birth Certificate and your Adoption Certificate on the very same day!

Because we are painting with a wide brush we will only highlight some of the precious truths the Bible teaches on this subject. The serious Bible student will want to read and re-read Romans 8:14-39, keeping in mind that adoption is its overall theme. After that read Galatians 3:19-4:7 a few times.

My adoption signifies a new relationship in the family.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Romans 8:14-16

Before we learn from the three important words in this passage we need to unlearn or subtract two common errors that may have crept into our thinking.

Subtract this: These verses are not teaching us that the Christian who is out of God's will is no longer a son of God. Paul is contrasting the New Covenant believer with the Old Covenant believer. Every New Covenant believer is "led forth" by the Holy Spirit who oversees both our discipline in disobedience, and fruitfulness in obedient ministry. All believers evidence this Spirit.

Subtract this: Secondly, these verses are not teaching us that there are two classes of Christians: children who are not led by the Spirit, and sons who are. All believers are both children and sons. These positions are benefits of our salvation.

How can a believer who is born into God's family be adopted at the same time? We will discover that the Bible is not as careless in its use of metaphors as some interpreters are.

Three things to add. Scan verses 14 -16 again and notice the three operative words, sons, adoption, and children. We'll look at these three words in the following order: children, sons, and adoption.

Add this: The Greek word for children is teknion. It is generally used in the New Testament with reference to our birth into the family of God. It is the term which deals with our relationship as those who have been born of God, and therefore are a new creation in Christ.

Add this: The Greek word for son is huioi. It is used in the New Testament with reference to our position. It is a term of position of rank, privilege, and responsibility. This is the word which is always used in combination with the word adoption.

Add this: The Greek word for adoption is huiothesia. It is a compound word using huioi, meaning son, and tithemi, meaning to set, or put in place. An adopted person is one who has been put in place as a son. By the way ladies, be-

cause there are no gender differences relating to our position in Christ (Galatians 3:28), you are sons too. This may not be politically correct, but it is biblically correct!

Now we'll color our image with a bit of background: In Roman times it was common for the children of a household to be placed under the tutelage of a slave known as a pedagogue. He was responsible for the protection, guidance, and education of the child until he became fully grown. A Roman child may have been raised right along with other slave children. He had no special privileges, no special authority, no unusual recognition other than the fact that he was a child, a teknon of his father. As he matured the day came when his father took him down to the forum (the equivalent of our courthouse) and publicly adopted his son. This official act was an act of recognition. This child was now a full heir with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of an adult member of the home.

This is the exact point Paul is making in Galatians 4:1-7:

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of

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the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, 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. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Galatians 4:1-7

This is good...

Fact: God sent His Son to redeem those who were under the Mosaic law. **Fact:** We have received the adoption of sons. **Fact:** Because we are sons, God sent forth His Spirit into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. **Fact:** We are no longer servants (treated like the other slaves under the tutelage of Moses' law). **Fact:** We are now sons and heirs.

...and it gets even better!

This is why Galatians 3:25 says the law was our schoolmaster - our teacher/slave, given to bring us to Christ. God's people were children under the Mosaic law. We are now sons in Christ! You see, because we have been placed in the body of Christ, God sees us in His Son and He sees us as sons! Not just as children! This truth should put us on the edge of our chairs with excitement!

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Have you ever wondered about those words Abba, Father? Abba is a baby-talk word. It is the word for daddy which babies and little children used. Yes, we are still God's little children in God's eyes in the sense of enjoying His tender care and doting over us. Father is the adult word which adult sons use in reference to their fathers. He is not only the God of our fathers, He is God our father!

This involves more than being freed from the Old Covenant and placed under the New Covenant.

My adoption showcases God's prenatal love for me.

Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world and predestinated unto the adoption of children! We were no theological accident. God had you and me in mind from the very beginning. This would be a good time to read Psalm 139 and bask in the doting, prenatal love God had for us!

My adoption secures new family privileges!

Adoption defines our family relationship with each member of the trinity! Romans 8:16-25 gives us the broad picture. Verses 16 and 17 immerse us in the discussion:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. Romans 8:16-17

While it is a wonderful thing to be named in a will, the biblical concept of being an heir goes far beyond that. A study of the Bible's use of words such as son, sons, seed, heirs, inheritance, lots, and portions will enrich the prayerful student. As the light of these truths begin to dawn on our souls we find ourselves strangely drawn away from the world's simplistic relationships.

I toured the temple of an American cult just prior to its dedication. The entire tour appealed to our primal desires to extend our present family relationships into the next life, assuring us that their religion was the only one to offer this. However, our enriched family status as fully vested sons of God, joint heirs with Christ, and fellow members of the greatest family the creation has ever seen far exceeds this view.

My adoption charges me with new responsibilities.

Being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ our inheri-

tance includes the family assets, the family mission, and the family obligations.

In the place where we would least likely want to read it, Paul reminds us that we not only share in the glories of Christ, we also share in His sufferings. Paul even goes a step further. He reminds us that the whole creation shares in this suffering, awaiting the consummation or the redemption of all things. Believers, however, share this suffering in a most unique way because we are partners with Christ as He carries out the family mission. This is a high and noble task.

The Holy Spirit participates directly in our adoption! Romans 8:26 explains:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Romans 8:26

What you and I must accept by faith, the Holy Spirit knows by fact. He knows our hearts and He knows the mind and plan of God. The idea that He intercedes for us and does so passionately, goes beyond our ability to grasp. Our infirmi-

ty (not infirmities) is the natural human weakness which comes because we are in our bodies.

During a hospital stay I discovered that the medications I was taking hindered my ability to concentrate and to pray. I did not chastise myself. That was a limitation of my human flesh. Nor do we need to be satisfied with those limitations. The Holy Spirit compensates and shares in these struggles. Most believers are aware that they are least able to pray at the very times they need to pray the most. Our adoption insures the Holy Spirit's participation in our prayers at such a time.

While the Son and the Spirit share in the privileges and duties of our adoption, the Heavenly Father is key to this discussion. He is the One who initiated adoption as a part of His purpose. When considering adoption, the word most likely to come to my mind is participation. We are co-participants with Christ and the Spirit in ministry. True biblical ministry is simply the act of participating actively in God's purpose. This is who we are. This is what we do.

My adoption commits me to all of God's purposes.

Our New Covenant adoption fuses our life and ministry

with Christ's as brethren and joint heirs in the working out of God's purpose. This means we share all aspects of our Lord's ministry.

We are also heirs with Christ in His God-purposed suffering. Why does the whole creation groan and travail (as in bringing to birth) together? The unbeliever is happy to accuse God of mismanagement. The believer knows better!

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28

Our struggles are for a purpose, God's exquisite purpose. That purpose includes conforming us into the image of His Son. That purpose is not for our immediate good. That purpose is for the good, the ultimate good which will consummate in God's time.

My mother passed away when I was four years old and, with one exception, my father never spoke directly to me about her. That one exception was when we walked together through the door of a building where this same verse was posted overhead. He said, That was your mother's favorite verse.

When we believers experience such inexplicable sorrow that our words no longer aid us and our emotions serve only to betray us, these words still stand true. All things do work together literally, for the good to those who are the called, according to His purpose.

This explanation for the way things are, this absolute assurance that God is in every circumstance, is the property of the adopted believer. And, while our Father does not let us in on all the details of His plan, we have a rock solid assurance that our Daddy-Father will not place more upon us than we can endure.

Adoption is not merely about confidence that God is in our trials. Adoption is not merely about our Father's acceptance of us. It is also about our willingness to accept our position in the family. This goes beyond having a plate at the table. This means we share a stake in the family business.

At the appointed time, the Roman father would legally declare his child to be his son. From the moment when the Roman father brought his son home from the courthouse, the family atmosphere changed. This is reflected in the modern Jewish bar mitzvah. The ceremony which a thirteen year old boy goes through moves him into this

position of sonship. It is an implicit recognition of his manhood, and his acceptance as a full contributor to the home and to Jewish society. Yes, he needs to mature some more, and he will need discipline and guidance along the way, but he is now seen as an equal participant. He is a contributor and an owner in both the blessings and the struggles of the family.

As an aside, Christian parents make a horrendous mistake when they fail to adopt their own children at the appropriate time. Christians who impose the Deuteronomy model (Deuteronomy 6:3-9) for parenting young children, while ignoring the New Covenant adoption model as children mature into their teens, usually suffer sad consequences.

I remember when my parents shifted to this adoption model. Instead of telling me what to do they began asking me what I would do, how I would fix this, why I would do such and such a thing. The spirit which once said, when you earn this privilege we will give it to you, was gone. It was now assumed that I had been trusted with the privilege and I would be worthy of it. Frankly, my flesh preferred the first model, but my spirit soon flourished under the adoption model.

God wants to treat each of us in much the same way. He wants us to see ourselves as adult members of the family who share in all of the liabilities and the blessings of the family enterprise. He wants us to have all the privileges and freedoms of adulthood and He wants to trust us with them.

As each of our children began stretching their wings, making their own decisions and disciplining their lives, we reduced our admonitions to just a handful. As they walked out the door of our home we simply said, Remember you represent the name of Christ, and you represent the Steel family name. In doing so, we imposed the most severe bondage upon them that any parent can place. It was the bondage of love. They never disappointed us.

It's time to take ownership of the family business! Until we understand God's purpose for us in adoption, it will always be "Dad's business" and not ours. We will find it difficult to know and do His will. When we are driven by the Father's purpose and our family mission statement we know exactly how to conduct ourselves.

Too much has been said about simply being purpose driven. We have no problem with folks who want to be purpose driven as long as that purpose has a name and

description. New converts need to hear the words Welcome to the family! They need to be welcomed into the family business!

Learning the Family Business

The act of adoption or “son placing” was the result of my having been baptized or placed into Christ. The day I was saved I became a new creation in Christ. On that very _____ I was adopted.

First, as a new creation in Christ I am a _____ of God. Secondly, as an adopted believer I have been elevated to the status of _____ in God’s family.

As a fully placed son I am a living _____ of God, a joint-_____ with Christ, and fellow _____ with my brethren in Christ.

As a fully placed son I will proudly bear my family name and will not shame my Heavenly Father or His family.

As a fully placed son I will gladly align myself fully and completely with my Father’s _____.

My New Covenant Life

As a fully placed son I will gladly assume and embrace the _____ of Christ.

Sharing the Family Business

We will practice adoption. At the appropriate time, and with God's leading we will change our overall mindset about our children, endowing them with the respect, privileges, and responsibilities which characterize adult behavior. While not ignoring necessary discipline, we will solicit and value their contributions and assume adult behavior on their part.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

My New Covenant Life



13

Back to the Future

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. Revelation 1:3

The View is Totally Worth the Hike!

We once knew a very sweet teenage gal who was hired to work at a taco stand. One day when we stopped by the drive up window to order food, she gave it to us as a gift. But there was a problem. Through an apparent misunderstanding she thought she could give her employee food allotment to someone else. As a result, she lost her job.

My New Covenant Life

We are encountering pastors and spiritual leaders who, in the name of generosity and love, are giving away what is not theirs, especially when it relates to Bible prophecy. They have swept the whole discussion under the platitudinous rug of “In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity,” implying that prophecy is nonessential.

We appreciate the intent of that quotation from an early bishop, and we dislike striving about words to no profit (2 Timothy 2:14). However, Bible truth cannot be divided into essential and nonessential categories. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4) All scripture is given by inspiration of God and all scripture is profitable for a wide variety of purposes! (2 Timothy. 3:16) All wrong thinking is ultimately wrong thinking about God. All wrong thinking leads ultimately to wrong consequences, however minor an issue may appear to be.

There is no nonessential Bible truth. It is especially important to remember this when we study Bible prophecy. All prophetic truth is essential truth or God wouldn't have wasted His breath.

Prophetic backpacking is an essential experience for the fruitful New Covenant believer! When we take the time to

climb a few peaks we are struck with the awesome beauty we see and we gain a whole new perspective on life! Best of all, we gain a new view of Christ. We can all take this hike!

Totally Awesome Prophetic Truths!

For the sheer joy of poking some generational fun, we chuckle when we order scrambled eggs and the waiter says, Awesome choice! There was nothing awesome about that mundane choice! The idea behind the word awesome actually has to do with instilling worshipful fear. Biblically, the word is used only to describe God, His wonderful works, or His Word! God alone is awesome! Okaaaay. You can still call my egg order awesome as long as you understand this.

Personally, I am more comfortable with the expressions of my own generation. We preferred a little hippie or valley talk. We preferred the phrase totally awesome! We now offer three totally awesome facts about Bible prophecy! They are awesome because they change our minds about Bible prophecy. Prophecy serves an awesome purpose, is about an awesome Person, and it produces awesome results!

Prophecy Serves a Totally Awesome Purpose

A wise Christian observes that the more precious something is in God's eyes, the more Satan will attack it. Satan hates God's Word completely, and he especially hates Bible prophecy and wants us to be confused about it. We are not ignorant of his ways. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

- Satan wants us to think prophecy is difficult when it is really quite basic.
- Satan wants us to think prophecy is divisive when God really intends it to unify us.
- Satan wants us to think prophecy is unimportant in comparison to evangelism and ministry. It is actually one of our most powerful evangelistic tools.

When God takes on the creation based worshippers directly, He lays down a very powerful argument. He says:

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Isaiah 46:9-10 [Emphasis mine.]

See also Isaiah 44:6-7, and for that matter, read chapters 44 through 47. Our Lord makes a very strong point in these and many other passages. God not only knows the future, He purposes or determines it! He alone claims this.

A faithful New Covenant steward of God's mysteries will make a special point to learn some of the major prophetic themes of the Bible because he knows prophecy is this awesome witnessing tool!

Personal views on global warming and climate change notwithstanding, many rightfully ask if coming prophetic events have begun to cast their shadows upon us. Even the world seems to wonder. We hear more about disasters of "biblical proportions" and references to the apocalypse than ever before. When men and women ask what is happening, the equipped Christian will be able to respond with some sound prophetic answers. We restate for emphasis, when taught properly, prophecy is an awesome evangelistic tool.

A careful look at biblical prophecy will show that God has provided it primarily to affirm His resolve, His determined purpose, and His ability to finish what He said He will do. Every time the Bible reader encounters the words that it might be fulfilled, he is receiving another signal from the

Holy Spirit that God is in control and He is right on task!

Prophecy Reveals a Totally Awesome Person!

Satan hates Bible prophecy because it is about Jesus Christ. To quote our Lord ...In the volume of the book, it is written of me. (Psalm 40:7, Hebrews 10:7)

Idle speculation devalues prophecy. It is not intended to satisfy our curiosity. Prophecy has been given to us so that we may know the mind and will of God as He carries all things forward to their consummation through His Son! Prophecy enriches our view of Jesus Christ. We understand that an immature believer might study Bible prophecy simply to know how the world will end. The mature believer studies it because he wants to see and know Christ better from His birth to His glorification! We offer a couple of brief glances at prophecy to make our point.

A Backward Look at Christ in Prophecy

Consider the prophecies which were fulfilled at the birth of Christ. When time allows, open your Bible and take careful note of the events surrounding each of the following passages in Matthew: Matthew 1:22, 2:14-15,17,23; 3:15, 4:14, 5:17,18; 8:17. Each centers around a fulfilled proph-

ecy. In each case, however, we notice that there is more to the word fulfilled than we might think. We are no longer talking about prophecies which simply came true; we are talking about fruition. The word fulfilled can indicate that something has come true, but this remarkable word (pleroo in the Greek) can also speak to a much deeper, richer idea. It speaks to the fulfillment or consummation of a much larger picture, a theme. Just as the rose blossom brings the bud to fruition, Bible prophecy fills out and consummates grand biblical truths. Take Matthew 2:14-15 as a single example from the previous list of references:

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Matthew 2:14-15.

When we turn back to that prophecy in Hosea 11:1 we find a deeper, latent meaning. Israel, God's servant son, was called out of Egypt. Messiah, who is in the Jewish mind, the composite reflection of Israel. He comes as the Servant Son and fulfills what Jacob, the failed servant son did not accomplish. We are not dealing with a simple fact of history being fulfilled in Matthew 2, we are dealing with a whole

rich theme. This is only one of a dozen or so themes which underlie the fulfilled prophecies here in the early chapters of Matthew. Whole books have been written on these themes!

The point is salient. The person who does not love prophecy has not matured to loving Christ in all of His fullness! Methinks we hear someone retort, Well, of course, we love fulfilled prophecy; we just think unfulfilled prophecy is a waste of time! Once one understands that prophecy is truly about Jesus Christ, he wants to know and understand it all. So, let's make our point with a forward look.

A Forward Look at Christ in Prophecy

Please take a few minutes to read the 21 verses found between Revelation 4:1 and 5:10. In this scene (which corresponds to Daniel 7:9-14) we find a unique prophetic picture of our precious Lord. He is the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah seen taking the seven sealed scroll from the hand of the Father; and subsequently, breaking those seals which initiate the events of the Day of the Lord. All of heaven and the redeemed of all ages break out in the kind of ecstasy that has never been experienced heretofore in creation's history. All hell, on the other hand, will break

loose on earth.

Don't miss the irony. The saints enjoy their greatest ecstasy at the very time the earth dwellers begin to experience their greatest agony. What a contrast! What a contradiction! We are not simply seeing the consummation of redemption and the defeat of the one who has plagued us from the days of the Garden. Oh no! We are seeing our precious Lord and Savior, the One who has been used and abused for millennia, the One who gave His life, the obedient Servant who has been a light to the nations, finally receiving the justice, honor, and the glory which is due to Him alone! We are seeing the Father fulfill His promise to His Son!

We love prophecy because we love Christ! The aforementioned passages are a tiny hint of our rich treasure trove of prophetic truth which illuminates Christ.

Prophecy Produces Totally Awesome Results!

Biblical prophecy biblically ministered is very fruitful. The observant Bible student will notice how the apostles integrated past and future (backward and forward looking) prophetic passages into their evangelistic proclamations. True evangelists do not shy away from prophecy, they em-

brace it and they know its usefulness. Prophecy enables us to become far more effective in our witness and ministry for Christ.

Wonderful things happen when we study prophecy first and foremost in terms of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we love Him, we gain a new hunger to learn exactly what He is doing and how we fit into His plan.

Biblical prophecy exposes charlatans for who they really are. Event-centered prophetic speakers are rarely Christ centered. They do not develop Christ in their preaching, they develop their novel views. When one taps into a prophetic theme in his Bible study he will soon be rewarded by finding Christ. Be theme-centered, never event-centered in your prophetic pursuits!

We gain a sense for where we are in the march of time. Prophecy fills us with a sense of clarity and urgency. It enhances every aspect of the ministry of the servant of Christ and drives him forward with renewed vision and passion.

Satan Wants to Hinder our Pursuit of Prophecy

Satan wants us to view prophecy as a fool's pursuit.

If prophecy were personified as a woman we could say foolish men have profaned her, cheapened her, and even sought to leverage her for profit. They have perverted her true message with their personal nuances and creative scenarios, acts for which they will pay dearly. (Revelation 22:18-19) They have besmirched her reputation to the point that serious believers will sometimes shy away from her. And yet, she is holy and pure, and serves only one real purpose. She points us all toward Christ while offering a blessing to all who heed her message. (Revelation 1:3) A street-wise believer will not be fooled by Satan's tactics.

Satan wants us to view prophecy as a mine field for cultists.

Satan has always hated prophecy with a special passion and he will seek to pervert it. God's Word consistently warns us about this. Matthew 24 is one of the most important prophetic passages in the Bible relating to the coming tribulation. Three times our Lord warns, Take heed that no man deceive you, ...false prophets shall arise and deceive many, and, ...if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Verses 4,5, and 24) Prophetic warnings occur in other New Testament passages as well. Paul speaks emphatically concerning the coming Day of the Lord:

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by

spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; - 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3.

Though Paul continues in the passage with explicit ways to recognize this coming day, folks believe we are already in the Day of the Lord. The point is, God does not want you to be confused about prophecy. Satan does.

Virtually every false religious system on the face of the planet has a prophetic basis (an eschatology). Pseudo Christian cults conduct much of their “evangelism” through tangled, non substantive prophetic arguments. They come to your door two-by-two with their prophetic teasers, or sponsor their community wide media enriched campaigns promising to tell you how the world will end. You may be sure that in 98% of the cases, they are false teachers. False prophecy is a killing field scattered with the graves of those destroyed with false gospels. Brand new believers in Christ need to rely heavily on their pastors until they can get a firm grasp on biblical prophecy.

Many doctrinal errors within true Christianity are due to false prophetic assumptions! The modern error of replace-

ment theology (seeing the church as the real Israel) is one example. Finally,

Satan wants us to view prophecy as a playground for the theologically rich and famous!

Have you watched a pharmaceutical commercial lately? Listening to all the preceding warnings about the use and abuse of Bible prophecy can leave us as cold as hearing one of those commercials! Why take this stuff if it is going to destroy us anyway? Why go anywhere near prophecy? Maybe it would be better to get along without it! At best, we should consult our theological physicians before taking any prophetic prescriptions.

When we reach this point of nominalism we have arrived exactly at the point where Satan wants us. He wants us to defer our authority, our rights and privileges to know and understand God's Word for ourselves. He wants to intimidate us into neutrality.

We have actually been convinced that prophecy belongs in the special domain of studious pastors, great Bible scholars, and missionaries to the Jews! Yet, the whole argument of this book has been that the New Covenant frees us from

that kind of thinking. The precious New Covenant under which we live is the same covenant which imbues us with the same ability to learn and understand God's Word as our pastors have. What Moses once desired has now become a reality!

And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them! Numbers 11:29

Your High Mountain Backpacking Guide

When the Spirit of God begins wooing us to a serious study of Bible prophecy we quickly discover that this trip is open to everyone of all skill levels. No experts are required. All that one needs is a heart that beats for the plan and program of Jesus Christ! Listed below are a few quick tips.

Choosing Your Gear

Be sure to bring proper clothing that you can wear in layers. This includes teachability, humility, and a commitment to a regular discipline. Above all, you need good boots because you will find yourself walking throughout God's

Word as you compare scripture with scripture time and again! Always look up cross references!

Basic Skills

Stay on the proven trail even if a shortcut looks appealing. Interpret God's Word literally at all times. The Bible lets us know clearly when it is using a figure of speech or a metaphor. Do not be tempted to add your creativity or imagination to your prophetic studies. Just take the Bible literally! Virtually all prophetic errors exist because folks depart from the simple literal interpretation trail. Literal interpreters all end up at the same destination.

Watch for trail markers! If your path is not leading you directly to the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to backtrack quickly. Jesus Christ is central to all prophetic studies.

Observe basic safety precautions paying close attention to potential lightning and predators. If you alone have discovered a new truth, run for cover, as lightning will soon strike. Be aware of your surroundings because predators prefer to hunt from certain favored verses. You can always recognize this behavior because they take these passages out of their immediate context. Read the whole passage

under consideration and you will be just fine.

Navigation

Of course, you will want to keep your compass handy. Your Bible should always be your first guide. Rely on your instrument, not your instincts, and let the Bible interpret itself. It always does! While other prophetic books can be helpful, they should never become more important than your compass.

Not sure you're reading the compass correctly? Watch for the mountain tops, the great landmarks of Bible prophecy. Become especially familiar with the outline of these three peaks:

- Focus on the Day of the Lord passages in your Bible. This rich study begins in Old Testament pre-fillments and consummates in chapters 4-19 of Revelation.
- Focus on Daniel's Seventieth Week by mastering Daniel 9:20-27. Understand how this sets up the coming tribulation period so there will be no confusion as to what God is doing and why.

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- Focus on Matthew 24, learning, how it relates to Revelation 4-19.

Granted, these truly are mountain peaks of prophecy and they are not mastered by reading a one-evening book.

Learning to recognize the basic facts about these passages will help protect the new student of Bible prophecy and move him a long way toward his destination.

Plan Your Hike Now

Get off the couch, get into shape, and get onto the trail. It is not enough to be in favor of Bible prophecy. It's time to gear up and get into it now!

Choose Your Trail Companions Wisely

Of course, you can hike on your own. Your Bible alone is adequate and in the final analysis you can survive on your own. However, God has given us godly teachers and friends and they are most helpful when studying prophecy. Choose wise and godly teachers whose lives are pure and who love the Word of God supremely. Like you, they should insist on interpreting the Bible literally.

A Personal Note from a Long Time Hiker

If you are not now attending a fundamental, Bible teaching church where God's word is being consistently taught you need to find one. Above all, you need the guidance and fellowship that only godly pastors and leaders can provide. Make this your first priority.

Can't find a pastor to help you? Contact us directly at Breadcrumbs Ministries (www.BreadcrumbsMinistries.com) and we'll give you guidance in choosing a church. If necessary, we can help you take the right beginning steps in your study of prophecy and see to it that you're on the right trail. We can provide you with a list of guidelines for interpreting the Bible, and we can point you to all kinds of good messages, charts, and articles.

We are especially interested in helping folks who have not been able to connect with sound, Bible teaching, Christ honoring churches. We love Christ's sheep.

Practical Ways to Make This Work

I will change my attitude toward Bible prophecy:

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I will love Bible prophecy because it shows me what God is doing.

I will love Bible prophecy because it reveals who Christ is and what He is doing.

I will love Bible prophecy because it exposes Satan for who he is and what he is doing.

I will love Bible prophecy because it broadens my world view and helps me find my place in history.

I will seek to learn Bible prophecy:

I will understand prophecy in its every day, common sense, literal meaning.

I will extend my knowledge of the key prophetic passages such as Daniel 9, Matthew 24 and Revelation 4 and 5.

I will defend those prophecies which are most under attack today, such as the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, the coming Day of the Lord, and Christ's coming Kingdom.

I will depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance and welcome good suggestions and pastoral input from godly, proven teachers.

I will seek to use Bible prophecy more effectively in my witness!

I will master a few key verses and passages so that I can use them effectively to show inquiring friends who Christ is and what He is doing.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.



14

Ending at the Beginning

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. - Mark 4:20

A Final Backward Glance

We may not fully understand where we are heading when we do not take the time to see where we have been. This final chapter offers a broad overview of where we have traveled in this study and the truths we have gleaned along the way. Each chapter built on a preceding truth. We began with God Himself, and ended by understanding who we

are and what our true purpose is.

Chapter 1. Beginning at the Beginning

Chapter one taught us our First Principle. Beginning with God we explained that He alone is the “Un” God! This One who exists outside of the creation is unlike anything in His creation. There are only two kinds of worshippers, Creator-based or creation-based worshippers. Everyone is in one group or the other. They cannot be blended.

Chapter 2. The Unchanging God

In chapter two we began reasoning our way forward from the character of God. We learned that, unlike His creation, He alone is unchanging. This is why truth is absolute. The creation based worshipper must always conclude that truth is relative because, try as he may, he cannot base his reasoning on a single unchanging thing.

God is very defensive about the fact that He is both unlike His creation and unchanging. In the Bible, He proves these facts in two major ways. He demonstrates His authority and His ownership of the creation. He demonstrates His control of history with Bible prophecy. It makes sense that we would use these same approaches when confronting unbe-

lief.

Chapter 3. Our Up Close and Personal God

Chapter three taught us that, unlike all false gods, our God is intensely relational. He has revealed Himself in order to have a relationship with us. He has revealed Himself through the spoken Word in creation, through the written Word in the Bible, and through the Living Word, His Son. God alone is our source of knowledge, and these three sources of knowledge never disagree. Because of this we may know God personally as He imparts His life unto us.

Chapter 4. Point of Contact

Chapter four showed us God's principles of intimacy. We learned that He deals with men solely on the basis of the promises in His Word. There are no exceptions. Faith is nothing more or less than resting on the promise(s) of God. We do not invoke promises with our speech or command God. We simply appropriate what He says is true and act on it.

Chapter 5. Heavenly Highways

In chapter five we learned that the major promises of God

are called covenants. We see how they were extended to men and their seed over long periods of time. We learned to recognize the four major promises, or covenants, of God which run through His Word like highways, and how these promises have governed the course of history.

Chapter 6. Arriving at Our Destination

Chapter six brought us to the major Bible promise or covenant which relates specifically to us. We learned the tantamount place God gives the New Covenant in the Bible. It is our special covenant.

Chapter 7. All Glitz, No Glory

Chapter seven undertook the task of unfolding the wonderful truths which surround the New Covenant. We paid special attention to the superior features of this New Covenant while contrasting it to the Old Covenant which preceded it.

Chapter 8. Check Your ID

Chapter eight revealed the underlying reason this New Covenant is superior. It is about Jesus Christ exclusively. He is the New Covenant. He is the sacrifice associated with it. He is our peace, and He is our Cornerstone. Once absorbed

into our thinking, these four truths shift our entire world view and give us a new confidence.

Chapter 9. The Unlocking Your Inner Self

Chapter nine enhanced our discernment. It would stand to reason that something as powerful as our New Covenant ministry would be falsely replicated by Satan. In this chapter we provided seven evidences of a true New Covenant ministry. In this way we can authenticate our own ministries.

Chapter 10. Your Resume

Chapter ten led us into a deeper examination of who we are and how we express ourselves under this New Covenant. It addressed the subject of vocations. First we learned who Jesus Christ is vocationally. We then learned how instinctive it should be for us to see ourselves in our own vocation. Finally, we learned how our vocation plays out on a daily basis. This chapter is a handbook which provides Christ's servants with their daily job description.

Chapter 11. Wise Up

Chapter eleven guided us into the private truths of the New

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Covenant. It taught us to distinguish between true and false wisdom and how to identify and steward the mysteries of God. It included a fervent plea for God's people to restore the office and ministry of the New Covenant priest.

Chapter 12. Family Business

Chapter twelve taught us more truth about our family ties. It contrasted the biblical doctrine of adoption with our general view and showed us how it elevates us in the family of God. We began to explore the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of biblical sonship. In adoption we learn to take ownership of the household business as fully placed sons.

Chapter 13. Back to the Future

Our final chapter is about Bible prophecy. We learned why Satan hates prophecy and has worked so hard to pervert it. We learned that biblical prophecy is a wonderful ministry tool, and that we need not be intimidated by it. Knowledge of Bible prophecy equips the believer with another powerful means to carry out his priestly ministry.

An Important Suggestion

I once read a modern treatment of philosophy which concluded with a unique declaration. It was determined that men have come full circle one more time in our study of philosophy, and have completed the cycle with the same ambivalence and depression that earlier philosophers experienced.

The writer said that this leaves us with one of two choices: We can either commit suicide, or we can begin this desperate pursuit of truth one more time.

He had missed the reality that man's wisdom, taken to its end, must always end in depression. The wisdom of God, on the other hand, will always nourish and prosper a man in any age, even ours.

We do not need new thinkers, new ideas, or new devices to snatch us from the vortex of our downward spiral. We simply need to return to the all sufficient New Covenant truths of God's Word.

We urge you to take a pen in hand and return to the last page of each chapter. There, find one suggested idea for

making the truths of God and His New Covenant more relevant to your daily existence. In so doing, you will not merely stave off spiritual suicide, you will find a full and enriched New Covenant life and ministry, a ministry which some suggested we cannot have in this day of spiritual lethargy. Rest in the promises of God's Word and prove these naysayers wrong!

This is Not Good Bye!

Please keep in mind that this book has been published as a ministry, not as a revenue source. This means that we stand ready to interact with and minister to any reader who wishes to discuss any of the truths presented in this book. We may also be able to point you to additional resources or provide spiritual counsel on a limited level. Our goal and purpose is to help folks grow in grace and in their personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't forget!

We have a special "For Your Family" insert for this study in Chapter 15.

Feel free to contact us via any of our Breadcrumbs Ministries websites.



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For Your Family

A Reminder

For Your Family is designed to supplement each chapter with ideas to help the reader make these truths practical for children.

After concluding each chapter, consider turning to the suggestion in this chapter which corresponds to it.

Because we have limited these to one suggestion per chapter, the reader will notice that not all ideas apply to all age groups. Even so, they are easily modified, and our prayer is that they will stimulate parents to develop their own styles for family devotions.

Chapter 1: Beginning at the Beginning

Truth: God is unlike anything

Memory Verse: Isaiah 43:11

I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

Family Discussion Question:

You tell your friend that you are a Christian and you fellowship with God by reading His Word and praying. Your friend says, “I am a Christian, too. When I need guidance, I pray to the saints and they help me. Sometimes God guides me when I chant my prayers over and over again.” How would you respond to this friend?

Family Activity:

Which one is unlike?

Materials:

(3 sets of 3 things that are categorically alike, and 1 thing that is completely different)

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Suggestion:

3 fruits

1 shoe

3 writing implements (pen, pencil, crayon, marker ...)

1 sock

3 flowers

1 cracker

Look at the first set. Ask your children to sort the items that are alike. Ask them how they are alike. Ask them about the item that doesn't belong. "Why doesn't the shoe belong in the fruit group?" Discuss how the shoe is totally different than the fruits. Continue with the next two sets. End this activity by discussing that God is unlike anything, much like the shoe, sock and cracker were unlike the other items in their group.

Chapter 2: The Unchanging God

Isaiah 43:10-11

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

Truth: God is unchanging

Memory Verse: Malachi 3:6

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Family Discussion Question:

You hear on the radio that a church group is telling people that you can believe the Bible and also believe in evolution. Why is this idea wrong? Find some scripture to show that God constantly reminds us that He is the Creator. If truth is absolutely true, what has to be true about how people came into existence?

Family Activity:

Science: Does the rock change?

Materials:

6 cups

vinegar

milk

water

3 sugar cubes

3 rocks

Fill 2 cups halfway with water, 2 cups halfway with milk, and 2 cups halfway with vinegar. Ask your kids what they think will happen if you put a sugar cube in the water.

What about a rock? Ask the same questions about the cups with milk and vinegar. Then, place a sugar cube in one cup of water, one cup of vinegar, and one cup of milk. Place a rock in the remaining cups of water, milk, and vinegar. Observe the cups over time. Are the sugar cubes changing? What about the rocks? After the sugar cubes have dissolved, talk about how they changed when they were placed in the liquids. Then, look at the rocks? Talk about how the rocks didn't change at all. Then, talk about how

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the rocks are a reminder of how God never changes.

For more information about how we can absolutely trust all of the truths in the Bible, especially the creation account in Genesis, visit: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/>

Chapter 3: Our Up-Close and Personal God

Truth: God is up-close and personal

Memory Verse: Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD

Family Discussion Question:

Many people today believe they are being very open-minded and tolerant by making statements like, “What’s good for you, is good for you, and what’s good for me is good for me. I don’t need a relationship with God to feel good about myself.” How could you lovingly respond to this? Why is a relationship with God so different and necessary?

Family Activity:

Find a place in your house for your family to share prayer requests. Pray for these requests as a family during your family devotional time.

Here are some simple ideas for this project:

1. Make a prayer request notebook. Have a special place in the house with a notebook dedicated to prayer needs. The family can write prayer requests in it throughout the week. Having prayer requests recorded in this way makes it easy to record the ways God answers the prayers. It provides a tangible reminder of how God is working in your family.
2. Record prayer requests on a bathroom mirror or sliding glass door. You can use a dry erase marker for this. Having prayer requests boldly displayed helps remind everyone to be in prayer for one another.
3. Make a great wall of prayer. See how this mom took one wall and dedicated it to sharing prayer requests by using chalk board paint and empty picture frames.

<http://www.playingsublimely.com/2013/05/the-great-wall-of-prayer/>

Chapter 4: Point of Contact

Truth: God communicates with us based on His promises. It is in this Truth that we come to Him in prayer and rest.

Memory Verse: Hebrews 4:9-11

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Family Discussion Question:

How is wishing upon a star, or when we blow out our birthday candles, different from praying to God and asking Him for something we desire?

Family Activity:

Keep your Eye on Christ's Promises

Materials:

A target (either a bulls eye, or something to aim at and knock over)

Something to throw at the target (darts, a ball, a paper wad ...)

A blindfold

A sticky note that says, “Christ’s Promises”

Set up your target. Have family members take turns aiming at the target while blindfolded. They are aiming “blindly.” Next, set up the target with the sticky note on it. Have family members take turns aiming at the target without the blindfold. Talk about how much closer we get to the target when we keep our eyes on Christ’s promises. If we focus on the promises of God, we will come to Him and prayer and rest on those promises. We don’t need to blindly pray or wish because God has recorded His promises in the Bible.

Chapter 5: Heavenly Highways

Truth: God's promises are important, very rewarding, and easy to grasp.

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:18

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Family Discussion Question:

What does it mean to rest in the promises of God? Can you give an example of one of God's promises, and how you can rest in it? What does resting on the promises of God not look like?

Family Activity:

Read Genesis 9:1-17 with your family. This is the Noahic covenant. Talk about how God always keeps his promises. Make a rainbow craft and display it somewhere to remind your family that God keeps his promises and you can rest in His promises.

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Rainbow Craft Ideas: Do a web image search for “rainbow crafts” to get ideas for this project.

Chapter 6: Arriving at Our Destination

Truth: Because of who we are in Christ, we have already obtained the victories promised by the New Covenant. We are worshipping at Mt. Zion. We should live our lives embracing this position, rather than reverting back to the Old Covenant and worshipping at Mt. Sinai; which is associated with trembling, fear, and ultimate defeat.

Memory Verse: Hebrews 12:22

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Family Discussion Question:

You hear a Sunday school teacher say, “God gave us the 10 commandments because He wants us to keep them, so we should work hard to obey them.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Family Activity:

We’re Already There

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Materials:

Doll, action figure, or stuffed animal

Toy vehicle

A very steep “mountain” This can be made with a board or a book as a ramp, or can be an actual hill, but it needs to have a place to rest at the top of it

Discuss Mt. Zion with your children. It is a real mountain in heaven. This mountain represents great fellowship, rejoicing and victory in Christ. Mt. Zion is representative of where we want to be, in heaven. Seat the doll, action figure, or stuffed animal at the top of the mountain. Explain that we’re going to pretend this mountain is Mt. Zion. “(Insert toy’s name) wants to rest on top of Mt. Zion. I want you to take him / her there with this vehicle.”

Explain the rules:

1. You can push your vehicle as hard as you want.
2. You may not touch (toy’s name). Your child will quickly see that this is a pointless activity. The toy is already resting at the top of the mountain.

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No matter how hard they try, they cannot use the vehicle to take the toy to the top, because the toy is already at the top. Now explain that the vehicle is representative of our works. No matter how hard we try to work to get to Mt. Zion, it's pointless. If we have trusted in Jesus as our Savior, and accepted His free gift of salvation, we are in Christ. We can rest in that, and don't need to work hard to get to heaven, because we are already there.

Ch. 7: All Glitz, No Glory!

Truth: The New Covenant is far superior to the Old Covenant in all aspects.

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 3:6

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life

Family Discussion Question:

Why doesn't it make sense to follow the Old Testament law if you are a Christian?

Family Activity:

Old Shoes

Materials:

A pair of shoes your child has long outgrown. If those are not available, look at a baby picture with your child as a baby and discuss the shoes they are wearing in the picture.

Say, "These shoes used to fit you." Discuss why they don't wear the shoes anymore. Ask, "What would happen if you

wore these shoes today? (if you have the shoes, invite your child to try to put them on and walk around). They should see that their feet would hurt, they would have a hard time walking, they'd look silly, they might fall down ... Then, discuss the shoes they wear today. "These shoes are far superior to your old shoes. They fit you, you can run in them, they don't hurt your feet ... " Just like the shoes you wear now are way better for you than the shoes you used to wear, the New Covenant is so much better than the Old Covenant. You may wish to provide a few examples of Old Testament rules we no longer follow. The Old Covenant served its purpose by showing us our need for a Savior, but now that He came and established the New Covenant, it doesn't make sense to go back to the Old Covenant ways.

Chapter 8: Check Your ID!

Truth: Our identity is found in Who Christ is.

Memory Verse: Isaiah 42:6

I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

Family Discussion Question:

Colossians 1:27 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 say that Christ is in us, and we are in Him. How can this truth comfort you and encourage you? How does it give you peace? Review Ephesians 2:14-18 and 4:19-22 to help guide your discussion.

Family Activity:

Talk about the ways God has blessed your family. Discuss the blessings we receive as believers knowing that we have an abiding relationship with Christ. This should give us great joy that we should share with others. Discuss ways you can share this joy and the hope we have in Christ by serving others.

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Find a way to serve others as a family. As you are serving, pray that the Lord would open opportunities to share the gospel with those you are serving. Give them a reason for the Hope within you. (1 Peter 3:15) Here are a few starters:

Visit a nursing home

Collect clothing for the homeless

Help serve meals at a soup kitchen

Make cards and care packages for soldiers abroad

Give toys to foster children

Chapter 9: Unlocking Your "Inner Self"

Truth: We can serve the Lord in New Covenant ministry if we are willing to follow the Spirit's leading and speak the truth about Christ and eternity without worry of the earthly cost.

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us

Family Ministry Assessment:

Talk as a family about the ministries you serve in, or desire to serve in. Then, ask the following questions about your ministries to determine if your ministries are authentic, New Covenant ministries. If you find an area where your ministry does not fit, pray about what God would have you do to change that. Be open to His answer. Is God calling you to change the way you do your ministry? Is He calling you to move on to another ministry? Is He pruning one ministry out of your lives so that you can give more to another ministry?

- Is my ministry Spirit dominated and not flesh driven?

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- Am I transparent or do I misrepresent myself or my message?
- Do I gladly engage in the proclamation of light over darkness?
- Have I focused both my life and my message on the person of Christ?
- Will I prefer servanthood to professionalism? Do I need recognition?
- Will I prefer suffering to safety, and buy gold tried in the fire? What sacrificial step toward servanthood can I make now?
- When planning and counting the cost of my ministry do I reason backward from eternity?

Chapter 10: Polishing Your Resume

Truth: We are vocational priests charged with carrying out priestly duties on a daily basis.

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 2:9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

Family Discussion Question:

A fellow believer tells you that they don't disciple anyone because they weren't given that spiritual gift. They say, "That's what we have pastors, elders, and deacons for." How would you respond to this?

Family Activity:

Me in the Mirror

Materials:

- A large mirror (like a bathroom mirror or closet mirror)

- Dry erase markers or washable markers

Talk a little about muscle memory and how we want to begin to see ourselves in our proper priestly position. Have each family member look in the mirror and challenge them to see themselves as priests. To make it fun, have everyone “decorate” their reflection the way they imagine a priest looking. Next, step back and admire your drawings. Say, “When we look in the mirror, we need to practice seeing a priest looking back at us.” Extend this activity further by writing the kinds of duties we have as priests around the mirror. Use the examples in this book, and make them personal. For example, write, “My own body is an offering.” Under that heading write some practical examples of how your family can carry out this priestly duty

Chapter 11: Wise Up!

Truth: All believers are called to be stewards of the mysteries of God. In order to be wise and faithful stewards of these mysteries, we need to study the Bible to learn and understand them.

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

Family Discussion Question:

Discuss the various prayer requests your family has at this time. Pray as a family for those things on your list. After you pray, evaluate your prayers to determine if some of your prayers were more “adolescent” than “adult.” Talk about how you can mature your prayer life by learning to understand God’s plan, and praying for His will to be done in all things. Take heed that this activity doesn’t become a rote, “God if it’s your will, please ...” prayer, but rather use it to highlight areas where your family may need more Bible study.

Family Activity:

A New Game

Materials:

- Any deck of family game cards
- Paper and markers

Take out your deck of cards and tell your family that you are so excited about this new game you've heard about. The game is called, Stewards of the Mysteries. Show your family the cards. Give them vague descriptions of the game, but be very enthusiastic. Say things like, "This game is so great! You use this deck of cards! Look, at the kinds of cards we have in this deck! Each player gets cards, and takes turns! It's so fun when it's your turn to play the cards!"

Next, tell your family that you think you should invite all the neighbors to come over and play the game. Say, "Let's tell them about the game and make invitations for all of our neighbors to come play with us. I know they'll love the game." Give everyone markers and paper, and instruct them to get to work.

By this time, there should be quite a bit of confusion among your family members. Once a bit of confusion and frustration is created, talk to your family about why they are frustrated or questioning your idea. The problem is they don't actually know how to play the game. How can they invite others to play the game, if they've never really played the game? How can they be effective in persuading others to come play the game, if they don't really know the rules?

Now, make the spiritual connection. We will have a hard time inviting others to know Jesus, if we don't really know what we're talking about. We can't be effective stewards of the mysteries of God, if we don't spend time in our Bible. This is why we need to study. We know God wants us to share His Word with others. If we want to be good stewards, we need to learn God's Word so we can share it with others.

Chapter 12: Family Business

Truth: As believers, we are adopted as sons of God, and should act accordingly.

Memory Verse: Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Family Discussion Question:

How was life different for a Roman child before and after his adoption as a son of his father? Discuss what his life was like before adoption. What things were changed for him after his father adopted him? What should our lives look like after we've been adopted as sons of God?

Family Activity:

Pizza Night

Materials:

- A takeout menu from your local pizza parlor. (Make sure

it has prices on it)

- A budgeted amount of money to buy dinner for your family from this venue

Show your family the menu and tell them that you will be ordering dinner from this restaurant.

Tell them how much money you have allotted to spend on dinner. Then, let them know that you would like everyone to help decide what to order.

__ You must discuss pizza toppings.

__ What type of crust will you order?

__ How many pizzas should you order?

__ Does everyone want dessert?

__ Can you order pizza that everyone likes and still have enough money left over for dessert?

After the family has decided what to order, the order has been placed, and everyone is enjoying the meal, ask if they would have enjoyed the pizza as much if they didn't help with all those choices. Would they appreciate the dinner as

much? They would have missed out on the fun of anticipating their order coming to the house, and they wouldn't have been active participants in the Pizza Night. They would all be mere consumers.

Use this experience to discuss how rich and engaging our lives will be if we act as adopted sons of God. Life is much more exciting when we get involved with what God is doing and help Him carry on His work.

By studying the Bible and learning about God's plan for us while we are here on earth, and what He has planned for the future, we can begin to actively participate in the body of Christ as heirs of the promises found in God's Word. This is what the New Covenant life is all about.

Chapter 13: Backpacking to the Future

Truth: There is no non-essential Bible truth. This is especially important when studying Bible prophecy.

Memory Verse: Isaiah 49:9-10

They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

Family Discussion Question:

Many people say, “Bible prophecy is way too confusing. It’s a waste of time to study it. Besides, it’s not really important anyway.” How can you respond to this wrong thinking?

Family Activity:

Read the Map

Materials:

A treasure that your children will really enjoy (candy, a small toy, money ...)

A “map” to lead them directly to the treasure The map

should be a document that looks difficult to read, but with a proper understanding of how to read it, it should be very simple. For example, use the letters for the statement, “It’s in my pocket” as the first letters of each line. The rest of the words on each line can be nonsense.

Make false clues that lead nowhere. Examples of false clues: “It’s under the kitchen sink.” “It’s behind the couch.” “It will come to the door at 5:00.”

Hide your treasure in a place that will be impossible to find without the map. We suggest hiding it in your pocket.

Explain to the family that you have hidden a treasure.

They have some choices for how to look for the treasure:

They can just run around looking for it.

Another option is they can draw a clue out of the bowl.

Tell them the clues are short and may possibly lead them immediately to the treasure. (In truth, the clues should lead them nowhere near the treasure.)

Their other choice is to read this document (the map) very carefully.

Ask them how they would like to go about finding the treasure. If they all choose to read the document, hand it to them and let them try. If no one figures it out, suggest they try a clue. After they have tried one clue unsuccessfully, suggest another, and another, until they are pretty frustrated. They may even declare, “I don’t think there is a treasure.” You want them to experience looking for the treasure with false clues, and trying to read the difficult map without knowing how to. This will help with the discussion that follows.

At the end, tell them the “key” to reading the map, and allow them to locate and enjoy the treasure. Follow this activity with a discussion about Bible prophecy. The false clues were like the many false prophets that try to lead people astray. They tell people they have a “new revelation from God” or they have “secret knowledge of when the Lord will return.” These false prophets do not lead people closer to Christ. In fact, they lead them totally off track. The perceived difficulty of the map was how some people perceive reading the Bible. It looks hard, and will take time. The truth is, it does take time to read the Bible. But, if you understand some simple things about how to read scripture for its plain, literal meaning, it always leads you

to treasures of truths about Jesus. Bible prophecy is worth taking the time to study because we are rewarded with a deeper understanding of what the Lord is doing right now, and what we have to look forward to in the future.

Chapter 14: Ending at the Beginning

Review, Celebrate, and Make a Plan

Make a “My New Covenant Life” review jar. Write each of the memory verses and discussion questions on slips of paper. Put them in the jar, and pull one out from time to time to review what you learned in this study. As you grow in your knowledge of God’s Word, and your understanding of your role in this New Covenant life, you will find that your answers to the discussion questions may change. Review the activities you did during this study. Talk about which activities were the most meaningful, and why. As you review these things, celebrate what you’ve learned. Next, talk about areas where you need further study. Make a family plan for how you will continue to study God’s Word together.