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Victory in Jesus ... Being a Child of God

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VICTORY IN JESUS



Being a Child of God

*“If you remain in my word, you are truly
my disciples, and you shall know the
truth, and the truth shall set you free.”*

James B. Joseph

Victory In Jesus: Being A Child Of God

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Dedication

Victory In Jesus. . . Being a Child of God is dedicated to God's Kingdom Work on Earth. It is dedicated to the Father, the Son, the Spirit of Truth, and to all who are striving to walk in our Father's will. Let us strongly resist being conformed to the ways of this world and allow God to transform us into His righteous children proving His good, acceptable, and complete will.

Foreword

Do you occasionally take time out of your busy days to find a quiet place and reflect on God's goodness? He has created us to be in a mutually agreed upon loving relationship with Him. God interacts with us continually wooing us into fellowship with Him. He encourages us to respond to His great love for us. As we grow and learn how to love God, we also learn how to love one another. When we accept God's son, Jesus Christ, as lord and savior, eventually all of our developmental pains will be replaced with joy unspeakable. Although we face difficult times as we learn to live out the Christian life, we have comfort in knowing that God has promised to be our teacher, guide, and sustainer. He will never leave nor forsake us. It is our privilege and God's desire to make us whole as we become more like Him. God will complete His work in us as we leave this life to live with Him throughout eternity.

Because of Satan's continual attacks against all humanity over centuries, our vision has become partially obscured. We no longer see clearly the intimate relationship that God wants with us. Yet, God is persistent. He touches each of our lives in whatever way that is most advantages for us. My prayer is that this book will encourage and lift you

to new heights in your walk with God. It is specifically designed to arm the reader with truths that will give you strength to carry out His plan for your life.

As God touched my life, I desired to understand His purpose for creating me and wanting me to become part of His family. I began to study first-century Mediterranean thought. Knowing that God wants us to have fellowship with Him and each other, I researched the first-century world's understanding of the *unity* that Jesus prayed for us to have in John 17 and found answers in the original Greek text. Looking for the very essence of the meaning of this unity, my vision grew as I studied God's desire for *unity* among Believers. Through God's desire for our unity, Jesus Christ has made an otherwise impossible unity possible by sharing His glory with us. Through His sharing, we are able to have the same unity with Him and the Father that He has with the Father.

Now, it is my desire to share my conclusions with you so that you too may be blessed by a more complete picture of how wonderfully awesome God is and how much He loves His children. Along with this in-depth look at God's desired unity with us comes a succinct biblical overview that will help put everything in proper perspective. It is my prayer that these truths will encourage and energize you to study and apply abundantly the Scriptures to your

life. As your understanding of your place in God's family grows, you will find yourself more available to do those things that are pleasing to Him. Enjoy obtaining something more precious than gold as you study the truths that lie within this little book.

May we all see God more clearly!

Statements

“James Joseph has demonstrated Christ-like love and compassion in his service to our community. I particularly appreciate his concern for racial unity and his efforts to bring Christians from different denominations and ethnic backgrounds together to serve our community,” David Beaty – Associate Pastor, Reynolda Presbyterian Church (EPC)

“James Joseph is a man of considerable intellect, boundless compassion, and living faith in Jesus Christ. His book reflects not only his good mind but also his personal commitment to a unity among Christ's followers that is refreshing and encouraging. Readers of his book will be well rewarded for their efforts as he shares his vision with them of a community of faith and hope among Christians of all races and all confessions,” Fred L. Horton, Jr. – J.T. Albritton Professor, Wake Forest University

Statements Continued

“One may well take a giant step in spiritual understanding and growth by reading/studying *Victory In Jesus*. The insights set forth in James Joseph’s book are worthy of one’s time and mental energy,” Cecil R. Cave, Jr. – Pastor, Mineral Springs Baptist Church (Southern Baptist)
& Bible Teacher on Radio WSJS

“I have every confidence that people who will read and follow *Victory In Jesus* will turn a corner in their life. That turning will lead them on a successful journey toward living a victorious life in Christ,” James C. Hash – Senior Pastor, St. Peter’s World Outreach Center

“The *bottom line* made simple . . . possibly the best reference guide ever for Christians,” Carlos M. Iruela – Parishioner, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church

“I am touched by the sincerity and convictions with which James Joseph expressed his faith in his book *Victory In Jesus*. His work helps us understand how the Gospel is, at once, simple and yet utterly profound. My prayer is that it will be a blessing to those who read it,” George P. Robinson – Senior Minister, Centenary United Methodist Church

Statements Continued

“You will be stimulated and blessed by the reading of this book. It is a fresh call for practical unity in the Body. Here is a work that proclaims great Biblical truths on unity and provides practical helps for churches and individuals on working together for the cause of Christ,” Mark Corts – Senior Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church (Southern Baptist)

“*Victory In Jesus: Being a Child of God* offers great insight into the nature of the Church. You will find this work very useful as a Bible Study guide especially for community groups seeking guidance as they plan interdenominational ministries,” G. Thomas Shelton – Pastor, Friedburg Moravian Church.

“In this book, James gives a dynamic challenge to every Christian to sojourn and carry out the Great Commission. You must read it; I did and enjoyed it. In addition, this book lays out in practical terms the needed insight and motivation for every Christian leader in the twenty-first century,” Larry A. Boyd – Pastor, New Covenant Church (Full Gospel/ Non-Denominational)

Statements Continued

“Through his careful study of the Scriptures, James Joseph has produced a book that can be helpful for people who are seeking to know God’s will for living in unity with God and neighbor,” Robert S. Roller – Pastor, Fraternity Church of the Brethren

“This work gives a compact Biblical, fundamental interpretation for any who seek to identify with Christ and His kingdom. It can further serve as a foundation to build social, economic, political, and religious harmony both in the community of Believers and those without,” Douglas E. Summers – Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church

“Here is a book that challenges us, from a Biblical and theological perspective, to be the united Body of Christ showing our communities the reality of the risen Christ,” Bob Neff – Pastor, Cornerstone Community Church (Association of Evangelical Congregations)

“*Victory In Jesus* by James Joseph is a rich and rewarding book. Readers will be inspired,” L.R. Crawford – Pastor, Messiah Missionary Baptist

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Introduction

Transformation Brings Peace

Be not conformed to this Age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind proving what is the good, acceptable, and complete will of God [Romans 12:2].¹

All of us have felt God touch and stir our innermost thoughts at various times as He encouraged us to slow down and think about our very existence and His will for our lives. He has awakened some of us in the middle of the night, arrested our thoughts on the way to work, or heightened our senses as we quietly read His Word. During these precious spiritual awakening moments, He has forced us to look beyond ourselves and the immediate future to consider all

¹ For all New Testament Scripture quotations within this work, I have translated Greek text from the United Bible Societies' 3d ed. (Nestle 26) into English.

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existence, eternity, and how we individually are to fit into the total scheme of things. Most of us feel uncomfortable during these special times because God forces us to face the reality of His desire for our lives. He tells us continually that He loves us and desires to mold us into caring individuals who will join Him as He ministers to all. During these special times of stirring, He forces each of us to look beyond the immediate and consider the long range consequences of our actions encouraging us to learn to trust and follow Him so that He can transform us into His morally righteous children. Where we are today in our relationship with God is not as important as where we will be tomorrow. Wherever we are in our relationship with God, He wants to continue the transformation process so that ultimately we can live with Him in perfect unity obtaining completed inner peace.

When you allow God to speak to your heart, He draws you close and encourages you to join Him in His Great Work as He ministers to all drawing as many as will listen into His eternal close-knit holy family. But, when you allow your own selfishness, exaggerated self-worth (pride), or someone else other than God to guide your life, an emptiness overshadows you that cannot be filled

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through any type of general busyness, good works, or entertainment. Although staying busy may temporarily drown out God's voice and block His message of love,² it is no substitute for a meaningful relationship with the Creator, which brings true inner peace.

As we carry out the will of God, He places eternal peace in our hearts through Jesus Christ.³ Jesus Christ came into our world at His appointed time to provide all Humanity forgiveness, purification, and reconciliation through the Cross, and Christ's followers are those who hear and accept this message of love.⁴ When we turn from our own ways to God's ways and accept His lordship, He immediately starts transforming us into the likeness of Christ replacing our emptiness, shame, and fear with inner peace. This peace

² Psalm 46:10a.

³ Sin and Judgement: John 16:7-11; Rom 1:18-20. Eternal Peace: John 14:27; Rom 5:1-2; 8:1-6, 15; Phil 4:4-7.

⁴ Hearing God: John 8:47a. God's Love: John 3:16-17; 10:10b; 1:12.

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comes only through making peace with the One who created us for fellowship and good works.⁵ Through submission to God's will, God's love and resulting hierarchy of order enables us to live in peace and harmony with Him and all others who also submit to His lordship.

Submitting to the Creator's authority is difficult at first because we have to learn to put our own interests on an equal footing with all others and allow God to direct us. He will put us on His path of concern and equality for all. With God's help, we can be developed beyond our initial child-like selfish nature. Although we are born into this world with a child-like nature that wants immediate satisfaction and disregards the cost of our actions to others, God has a perfect plan of development for each of us. If we allow God to develop us to be like Jesus, we will not live out our physical life as if there were no future and end up separated from God for eternity. We will learn to listen to God through the Holy Spirit and trust and obey God because of

⁵ Fellowship: 1 John 1:3; Col 1:16; John 1:11; Rev 3:20-21. Good Works: Eph 2:10; Phil 2:13; 1 Cor 3:9; Titus 2:14.

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His great ongoing unbiased love for all.⁶ If we truly want everlasting peace and harmony, we will learn to accept God's will above our own knowing that His ways will bring good to us and all who listen. When we make a conscious effort to submit to our Heavenly Father, we immediately obtain **victory** over this world and death.⁷ Upon genuine repentance, submission, and commitment, God has promised that He will complete us into the image of Jesus Christ free from sin.⁸

Godly Fellowship

When speaking of solitary individuals, "one" is a lonely number and that reality applies to God as well as Humanity. In spite of the many forms of life created at the Beginning, God said that it was not good for Adam to be without a suitable

⁶ Listening To God: John 16:7-15; Rom 8:14; Matt 7:21-23. God's Love For All: John 3:16-17; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

⁷ Eph 1:13-14; 1 Cor 15:54-57.

⁸ Phil 1:6; Rom 8:28-30; 1 John 3:1-3.

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mate, and therefore, He made Adam a partner whom he could relate to and share his life.⁹ Similarly, we see our Heavenly Father working with His beloved Son creating a people who could provide suitable companionship for Him. A people whom the Father and Son can relate to and share their lives;¹⁰ a people who could join them in their good works. They are asking all people to join them in a mature relationship that provides great joy and peace; this relationship is Godly fellowship, and Godly fellowship produces good works.¹¹

During our time on Earth, God lives closely with **all** people and as loving parents, He watches over His children carefully.¹² Yet, He cannot fully share His life with us until we mature. Similarly as

⁹ Gen 2:18.

¹⁰ Matt 12:49-50; Col 1:16; 1 Cor 1:9; Rom 8:29b; 1 John 1:3; Rev 3:20-21; 21:3.

¹¹ Fellowship: Col 1:16; John 1:11; 1 John 1:3; Rev 3:20-21. Good Works: Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 3:9; Titus 2:14.

¹² Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 16:7-13.

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adults, we cannot live on the same level of intimacy with our young children as we can with some of our adult children and mature close friends. To make a close, mature, and eternal relationship possible, our Heavenly Father is at work in a special way developing those who listen.¹³ He develops us daily encouraging us to join Him in His good works, and He waits for the time that He will bring us Home to be in Heaven with Him for eternity. In a similar manner, we work with our children as they are developing waiting for the day that we may obtain a close mature relationship with them as adults. There is one major difference between God's development for us and our development for our children: God promises all who accept His love through submission of our will to His that He will **totally transform** our character to be like Christ's yet keeping our individualism intact.¹⁴

Free-will plays a strong role in God's desire for fellowship with us. Although God strongly encourages all people to learn to live equally with Him and each other in perfect fellowship, He does

¹³ Eph 1:13-14.

¹⁴ Rom 8:28-30; 1 John 3:1-3.

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not force anyone to do so. God gives all people the ability to accept or reject His love and authority. But, beware, free-will does not give us a license to do whatever we want without eventually paying tremendous consequences for our actions against God or man. If we do not allow God to develop us into good social beings, He separates us from Himself and His obedient children for eternity. If we do not listen to God and then join Him in His Great Work, **the Creation . . . to the Cross . . . to the Consummation** and beyond in the **New Heaven** with its perfect fellowship,¹⁵ we will not have eternal fellowship in God's family.¹⁶

Free-will is essential in God's plan for an equal, mature, and multi-person relationship with all who listen. Give-and-take relationships based upon **equality** require free-will. Until we learn to truly love God and each other as Jesus loves us,¹⁷ our selfishness will continue to hurt others

¹⁵ Eph 2:10; James 1:22; 2:20, 26;
Titus 1:16.

¹⁶ Matt 7:17-23; 12:49-50; John 14:21, 23.

¹⁷ John 13:34; 15:9, 12.

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producing heart-felt pain for all. We must learn to love each other with the same love and compassion that the Father and Jesus have for us. Their incredible love for us compelled Jesus to follow our Heavenly Father's will and go to the Cross making a way for all to live with them in peace forever. Jesus has demonstrated His love for us and commands us to exceed a prior commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹⁸ Now, we must allow God to teach us to love each other as He loves us; our love for each other cannot be based on how we feel about ourselves or anyone else.

Although there is much pain associated with our earthly stages of development, there is a much greater joy associated with our godly transformation

¹⁸ Jesus declares the sum total of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 22:37-40) and teaches us at various times in His Word to exceed the Law and the Prophets. Regarding the way that we feel about and treat each other, He has given us one new commandment that teaches us to exceed loving our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matt 22:39): we are to strive to love each other as He loves us (John 13:34; 15:12).

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as we become complete “in Christ.”¹⁹ As part of the Creation, He gave us some of His own personal qualities that can be developed as we listen to Him.²⁰ As we submit to His will, He develops us into living beings who are growing in grace and truth.²¹ We all fail as we walk with God, yet we have peace knowing that God is not looking at the immediate. He is looking down the road into eternity. As God put the Creation into motion, He looked into the future and said that the Creation with its free-will, sin, tribulation, and its ultimate victory was “good-exceedingly.”²²

Knowing that all of us would go through some stages of rebellion, our Heavenly Father has provided **all** people a path, a way of life, leading to

¹⁹ Luke 15:7, 10, 24, 32; Rom 8:18-23.

²⁰ Gen 1:26-27.

²¹ 1 John 3:1-3; John 1:14; Exod 33:18-19; 34:6.

²² Gen 1:31; translated directly from Hebrew (Masoretic) text.

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maturity and peace.²³ This one and only path leading to joy and peace is through His son, Jesus Christ,²⁴ and this son is the same one who helped Him with the entire Creation.²⁵

God knew that we would disobey Him as we began developing. Therefore, prior to the creation, He made plans to send Jesus Christ to the Cross to pay for our disobedience.²⁶ In addition, He gave Jesus the responsibility of guiding us home to be with Them forever. As we follow Jesus, our Heavenly Father gives us a continual fresh start from our sins. Therefore, we must stop being a slave to our past wrongdoing. He encourages us to start anew moment-by-moment and join Him as He encourages as many as will listen to join His eternal family, which is the overall goal of the Creation—creating God’s free-will close-knit holy

²³ John 3:16-17; 1 Tim 2:1-6.

²⁴ John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:3-5.

²⁵ John 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-3.

²⁶ Matt 1:21; 2 Tim 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:19-20; Rev 13:8.

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eternal family.²⁷ If we follow Jesus, we will eventually be completely perfected and united with our Heavenly Father and all who learn to love and obey Him forever in a place that He has designed for us prior to implementing the Creation.²⁸

We can not learn to have this full-time relationship with our Heavenly Father exclusively through head knowledge, our parents, friends, or positions within our local churches. Although many of us attend a local church regularly and contribute something to God's work through the giving of our time and resources, God is asking everyone to join Him in something much more fulfilling than being a spectator or lukewarm part-timer. God is asking all of us to join Him in a **full-time** personal relationship that is so powerful that it will transform the very nature of our lives and those around us for eternity. But take note, we must **each** decide to accept or reject His full-time eternal plan for our lives.

²⁷ Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 2:14.

²⁸ Complete Transformation: Rom 8:29.
Eternal Home: Matt 25:34; Rev 21:1-7.

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Working with God

Beware, Satan is at work in our busy world trying to destroy as many lives as possible. There are many people who are being distracted by him, and therefore, they are not listening to God. Many of the distractions are temporarily pleasing to us. Individuals who are being distracted from God can keep us so preoccupied through work or entertainment that we do not take any real time to listen to the Creator. In addition, when we decide to listen for a few moments and then discuss God with them, we may come away discouraged because they do not know God personally; they know only *about* Him. If we ask and follow their advice as we seek to follow God's will, we will be tossed about as the waves on a rough sea.²⁹ When our Father speaks to you, do not let Satan come and steal away the gold that He gives you.³⁰ Read God's Word, the Bible, daily and let Him speak to your heart confirming in you that He is real, is awesome, loves

²⁹ Eph 4:14.

³⁰ Matt 13:19; 2 Cor 11:13-15; Col 2:8-10;
1 John 2:27.

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you, and wants to guide your life.³¹ Jesus continually listens to the Father³² and guides all who listen with Him on the one and only path to eternal joy and peace; He strongly warns all of us about going off and doing any work on our own.³³

Our Heavenly Father gives us the authority, power, and position in His family to join Him as He ministers to all.³⁴ All of us are to be about our Father's business moment-by-moment as we follow Jesus.³⁵ You are very precious to God and He has good things stored up for you. As we listen to God, He teaches us to work together with Him in our communities and around the world proclaiming His

³¹ Eph 1:13-14; 1 John 2:27; John 16:13.

³² John 5:19, 30; 8:29.

³³ Matt 7:21-23; John 15:5.

³⁴ Acts 1:8; Eph 1:19; 3:14-20; Phil 4:13;
2 Tim 1:7.

³⁵ Jesus: Luke 2:49; John 5:19, 30. Us: Matt 7:21; John 17:18; Eph 1:18-23; John 15:5;
1 Cor 3:9.

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grace through our actions and words. This book will supply you with the conceptual tools needed to understand Scriptures more fully. Your daily walk with God and fellow Believers will be filled with greater joy and peace because of your enhanced understanding of God's desire to see as many as possible out of their own free-will enter into His eternal holy family.

Note: Before proceeding, you need to understand the basic relationship between several individuals and how they will be declared throughout this book. Following are several descriptive terms used to declare one of three individuals whom we will be studying: God, Creator, Father, and Heavenly Father; Jesus Christ, Son, and Eldest Brother; and Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Truth. Scripturally, the term "God" refers normally to three individuals, the "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit," working together in perfect unity *or* solely to the Father because of His supreme authority and power over all including Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.³⁶ Although the Father, Son,

³⁶ Jesus: John 20:17; 5:19, 30; 12:49-50; 14:28; 1 Cor 11:3; 15:28. The Holy Spirit: John 16:13.

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and Holy Spirit work together in perfect unity under the eternal leadership of the Father, there are many circumstances in which one of them has a predominate role. Their predominate roles are normally emphasized by specifically referring to the appropriate individual for that particular circumstance remembering that they are always working **together** in perfect unity. In no circumstance, can you leave one of them out of the picture and see it clearly.

Chapter 1

The Meaning of Life

If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free [John 8:31-32].

If we continue to take time to study and act on God's Word, Jesus Christ will teach us to know and act on truth so that we may be freed from our individual bondage/desire to sin. Our desire to sin is caused primarily by our selfishness, lack of Godly knowledge, and direct disobedience and rebellion against God.³⁷ Our Heavenly Father has appointed Jesus Christ to free all who listen so that we may eventually live together in perfect fellowship with no more sorrows.³⁸ If we continually read and act on God's Word, we learn

³⁷ John 18:37; 2 Tim 4:3-4; 1 Peter 1:13-14; 2 Peter 1:4; Jude 14-18.

³⁸ Rev 21:3-4.

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to hear God as He speaks to each of us during our life on Earth. Our Heavenly Father promises all who listen that He will work with us and complete our transformation after this portion of our eternal life. Our character will be eventually totally transformed to be like Jesus'.³⁹

After God created the universe and our immediate world according to types, He created us in His own image according to His own likeness for eternal fellowship.⁴⁰ God wants a mature intimate relationship with us, and although He has created everyone for eternal fellowship and good works with Him, He does not force anyone to join Him. Over time, he teaches and perfects all who learn to trust and obey Him because of His great love for us.

Because of our initial immaturity, He deliberately starts our eternal life with a physically and spiritually limited capacity to slow us down and give us a chance to choose between an eternal life of **good** (based on learning to love through

³⁹ Phil 1:6; Rom 8:28-30; 1 John 3:1-3;
2 Cor 5:21.

⁴⁰ Gen 1:26-27.

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submission to His will) or **evil** (based on maintaining a self-centered life through an ongoing disobedience to His will). Our limited physical capacity stops us from destroying ourselves and everyone around us immediately although there is plenty of destruction and hurt in the process. You wouldn't give a three year old a five-thousand pound automobile to drive, would you? If we allow God to mature us, we are given much greater ability and corresponding power after death,⁴¹ and through God's righteous work, we will indeed become complete morally righteous like Jesus with our individuality intact.⁴²

Born To Die Once

Just as it is determined (appointed) for men to die once, but after this judgment . . . [Hebrews 9:27].

All people live the physical portion of their eternal life only one time, and all of us will be

⁴¹ 1 John 3:1-3; Rev 3:20-21.

⁴² Rom 1:16-17.

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judged for our actions during this time period of our life. There is no reincarnation allowing us a second chance to accept God's love and righteousness. Everyone will be judged for their personal response to God's love and righteousness as they interact with the needs of others.

From the moment that we are physically conceived, we have eternal existence. Then, God begins developing those of us who listen throughout this physical stage of our eternal life until He says, "It is finished." Through Scriptures, we know that a time is coming when God will manifest to all Creation those individuals who have learned to truly love Him with His righteous ways.⁴³ In Scripture, God's revelation of those who do and do not love Him is called by several names including His call, choice, election, or judgment. We can not bring character witnesses before God for the Judgement. He has perfect knowledge of our inner motives and exposes the truth of our individual love and righteousness or lack of it to all Creation. God is solely responsible to expose our true character to

⁴³ Rom 8:18-19, 28-30; 1 Cor 2:9; James 1:12; 2:5; 1 Peter 1:2-5.

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all. If we consider how much He loves all people and how fair He is to all, everyone should learn to return His love.

Our selfishness causes us to favor ourselves over others during our initial development. In addition, our selfishness and corresponding disobedience to God distorts reality. Our disobedience against God's will has even distorted our collective sense of right and wrong throughout the different levels of our societies. Much of our twentieth-century Western Civilization has turned its back on God's social order and desire for our lives. Collectively, we have come to an extreme position against God to include condoning the killing of our children (abortion) and casting aside God's family values. Just to state for the record a couple of the issues, we have begun to sanction same-sex marriages and have come to accept the daily exploitation of our children and women through various forms of media including advertisements and pornographic materials. Jesus makes us vividly aware that the ability to know good and to do good comes only from our Heavenly

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Father.⁴⁴ He is good and all good comes from Him. Therefore, we need the Creator to help us evaluate our motives for everything that we do. Anytime that we consciously or subconsciously place ourselves, our families, or other organizations above others, we no longer see the world as God intended. His actions and words tell us that He created all of us equal and wants everyone to spend eternity with Him.⁴⁵

We should be mourning for those who are hurting just as an individual laments for a lost loved one.⁴⁶ This pain should compel us to act. We cannot be complete nor at peace without the help of Jesus Christ. We must learn to love God and turn to

⁴⁴ Matt 19:17; Luke 18:19; John 20:17.

⁴⁵ God: 2 Samuel 14:14; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17. God's Desire For Humanity: Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 16:19; 2 Chron 19:7; James 2:1, 9.

⁴⁶ Matt 5:4. God is longsuffering: Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Rom 2:4; 1 Tim 1:16; 2 Peter 3:9, 15.

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Him for proper development and guidance.⁴⁷ Jesus Christ was sent by the Father specifically for one purpose: to save us from the Evil One and ourselves.⁴⁸ God exposes our self-centeredness and corresponding disobedience so that we might know ourselves and turn to Him for proper development. He will help us become whole so that we can live in peace with Him and each other. Jesus was not sent to condemn us for our actions against God and each other, but instead, He was sent by the Father to save us.⁴⁹ As we allow God to develop us, it becomes easier . . . and easier . . . and easier to ask Him for forgiveness of our wrongdoing. It becomes easier each time that we come to Him in our imperfection confessing our wrongdoing and seeking help to do better the next time.

From the time that Adam and Eve initially disobeyed God, disobedience has separated all of us

⁴⁷ Isaiah 29:13; Psalm 51.

⁴⁸ James 1:14-15; John 3:16-17, 10:10; Matt 1:21 (John 1:10-11); 18:11; Luke 9:56.

⁴⁹ John 3:17; Rom 8:1.

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from **perfect**-fellowship with God and each other.⁵⁰ When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and then hid from Him, God sent them from His presence because **they** could no longer live in His presence of pure love and righteousness. Their sin produced shame and fear causing both of them to hide themselves from God (live in the dark).⁵¹ Disobedience to God had changed their ability to live in perfect unity with a loving righteous Father, and therefore, they died spiritually (separation from God). Although this initial disobedience and loss of perfect fellowship causes all of us much pain, our Heavenly Father knew what He was doing before He initiated His perfect Plan, which began with the Creation; He initiated a great plan to demonstrate His love and righteousness and encourages all people to join Him out of “free-will” to live in harmony and peace for ever. We must choose between an eternal life style of good or evil. Through the predetermined Cross, Jesus Christ ultimately brings all who listen into a perfect love

⁵⁰ Rom 3:23.

⁵¹ Gen 3:8; John 3:19-21.

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relationship with God.⁵² If we are willing to learn to trust and obey God because of His great love for and fairness toward us, He promises to help us become mature and immediately starts to live in close unity with us;⁵³ We become reconciled immediately to God, and God begins our moral transformation process promising us that there is coming a day, the Consummation, when we will be with Him and our character will be fully transformed to be like Christ's.⁵⁴ We will no longer be ashamed nor afraid due to our wrongdoing because Jesus has removed our sins by taking them as His own as He died for us at Calvary on the Cross;⁵⁵ through Jesus Christ, those of us who

⁵² God's Foreknowledge and Plan: Matt 25:34; Eph 1:4; Col 1:12-20; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Rev 13:8. God's Salvation: John 3:16-17; Heb 2:9-17; 9:12-15; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Col 2:13-14.

⁵³ Eph 1:13-14; John 14.

⁵⁴ Phil 1:6; Rom 8:28-29; 1 John 3:1-3.

⁵⁵ Gal 3:13-14; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; Col 2:13-14.

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submit our will to our Heavenly Father's can approach His throne with joy and boldness.⁵⁶

At the moment that an individual truly decides to follow Jesus Christ from the heart for eternity,⁵⁷ they are born from above and fully reconciled into our Heavenly Father's family.⁵⁸ With immediate reconciliation comes less . . . and less . . . and less . . . disobedience over time. We start our individual accelerated process of maturing under Christ's guidance. God increases our love for Him and **all** people, and our growing love for others calls us into **action**. Disobedience to God **always** arises out of selfishness (placing our needs and desires above the needs and desires of others) or pride (placing too much value on ourselves), and therefore, we struggle with God's authority over us including His chosen leadership for us. Jesus wants

⁵⁶ Rom 5:1-5; Phil 1:20; 1 John 2:28.

⁵⁷ Rom 10:9-10.

⁵⁸ Born From Above: John 3:3-5; Eph 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:22-23. Being God's Children: John 17:20-23; Eph 1:4-5, 13-14; Rom 8:14-17.

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us to allow Him to teach us to put aside our selfishness and pride and, “go and sin no more.”⁵⁹

Scripture tells us that those who accept God’s love and righteousness are born of God and do not sin continually . . . continually . . . continually.⁶⁰ The Greek language that our New Testament Scripture was written in is easier to understand regarding the continual action of sin. It conveys the thought that we are *not* to be *continually . . . continually* sinning. Continual sinning makes us want to hide ourselves and our actions from our Heavenly Father. How do we stop our continual sinning? We must truly trust God alone and allow Him to teach us to love Him and one another.

Through God’s perfecting of our love, we will sin less and less over time. Remember, God created us for a mature, perfect fellowship with Him and each other. Jesus tells us that all of the Law and the Prophets can be summed through two

⁵⁹ 2 Tim 4:3-4; 1 Peter 1:13-14; 2 Peter 1:4; Jude 14-18. “Go and Sin No More” John 8:11, 5:14.

⁶⁰ 1 John 3:9.

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commandments: love God to the best of our ability, and love each other.⁶¹ God tells us in many ways including through the Law and the Prophets that His desire is fulfilled when we truly love each other. In addition, He tells us that we do not love Him,⁶² if we do not love each other.⁶³ Let us strive to follow Jesus' one new commandment, which is to love each other as He loves us.⁶⁴ Thinking about the good that God has done for us should bring forth a desire in us to act on what we have learned, and we should "go and sin no more!"

But beware, our development will not come easily. In addition to the existence of a righteous-loving Creator and a multitude of loving individuals, there is a deceitful-selfish individual with many selfish followers. He is in direct defiance of God and is called Satan, the Great Deceiver. Satan exalted himself above God and all

⁶¹ Matt 22:37-40.

⁶² Gal 5:13-14.

⁶³ 1 John 4:20.

⁶⁴ John 13:34; 15:12-13.

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others before the Creation and has been trying continually to take over God's position of authority. He is self-centered and uses every kind of deception possible in his war against our Father and us.⁶⁵ In his war to overpower God, this self-appointed dictator has been using deception and our own selfishness to tempt us to turn from our Heavenly Father and His ways.⁶⁶ Satan uses our own selfishness and pride to deceive, distract, and disable us from doing the good work that our Father wants us to do. In addition, Satan uses our self-centeredness to divide us into the smallest possible groups. If he could make us think that we are islands unto ourselves, he would do so. This is exactly opposite God's desire for us to learn to work together and love everyone equally; God's Word reminds us that we are united through Jesus Christ and individually make up the whole.⁶⁷ Jesus has warned us that Satan comes only to steal, kill, and destroy and lets us know that an abundant

⁶⁵ 1 John 3:8; Eph 6:10-12; Rev 12:7-17.

⁶⁶ John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:13-15; James 1:13-15.

⁶⁷ Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 12;
Eph 4:4-7, 13-16.

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fulfilling life comes from our Heavenly Father alone.⁶⁸

From God's Word, we come to realize that we have only this short time period presently called "life" to accept God's love and righteousness. During this short time period of our eternal life, God does everything possible except taking away our free-will to begin developing all people into mature loving social individuals. If we do not listen to our loving Heavenly Father, we face painful consequences.

After Death

Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way that is leading into destruction is broad, and those who are leading themselves through it (the wide gate) are many-- because the gate is narrow and the way that leads into the Life has been made narrow (difficult); indeed those who are discovering it (the narrow gate) are few [Matt. 7:13-14].

⁶⁸ John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:6-9.

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Our Heavenly Father gives us free-will and asks us to **seek** Him for cleansing from the past and development for the future.⁶⁹ In demonstrating His incredible love for us through the Cross, He has given us proof of His sincere desire for full, mature fellowship with us. Because of His righteous nature and great love for us, we should subordinate our will to His and allow Him to develop us. He warns everyone that there are only two paths in reality. If we follow the broad path, which is the sum of all paths other than Jesus, with many other people, we will ultimately lose the eternal joy and peace that God has in store for us. This path to destruction is wide and easy to follow especially if we have friends traveling it. Doing wrong with friends does not seem as bad to us as doing wrong alone. Therefore, be careful about the friends whom you pick and what you do with friends.

This wide path leading to destruction is laden with selfish individuals. Although the wide path leading to destruction has its momentary spurts of pleasure, a person pays a terrible price by losing

⁶⁹ Seek & Find: Matt 6:33; 7:7-8, 14; Luke 11:9-10.

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his/her place in Heaven and in lost opportunities to join in God's good work for all. This type of continual . . . continual . . . continual . . . self-centered, selfish action hurts everyone and causes tension between us and our Heavenly Father who places good within us. If we truly love God, we must allow Him to teach us to love Him with all of our being as He teaches us to love each other as Jesus loves us.⁷⁰ Jesus Christ teaches us that **all** goodness, which is derived from God's love, comes from God alone; God is the source of love and

⁷⁰ Jesus has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets for us (2 Cor 5:21), and now He teaches us to exceed the Law's minimal regulations through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we study New Testament Scripture, we see Jesus consistently teaching us the intent of the Law and the Prophets so that we may exceed the earlier regulations that controlled people's lives until the appointed time in which Jesus was to shed light on God's desire and plan for our eternal way of life. Now, we must learn to exceed loving our neighbors as ourselves and learn to love each other as Jesus' loves us (John 13:34; 15:12-13; 1 John 4:20-21).

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love's corresponding goodness for all including Jesus' goodness.⁷¹

Those who truly seek God and His will for their lives will find the narrow path to eternal life through Jesus. Jesus is the path to eternal life with God; He is the **only** Way to the Father,⁷² and all other so-called "paths to God" are part of the Broad Path of Destruction.

We will never have inner peace while we are so blatantly violating the very reason that God created us, which was to have a pure-caring relationship with Him and each other. If we continue to ignore God's love and authority living only for ourselves, our own families, or any other group(s), our hearts will eventually become so hardened that **we will separate ourselves** from God for eternity.⁷³ Although our Heavenly Father

⁷¹ Luke 18:18-19; 1 John 4:8,10,16,19.

⁷² John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:3-5.

⁷³ Against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men: Rom 1:18-24-28-32; John 8:12-19-24-28-44-47. All people disobey God on some level, and

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desires and encourages each of us to love Him and one another, He will not force any of us to do so. Because He desires a *free-willed* multi-personal relationship with all, He does not force anyone to join Him and all others who listen to Him just as a loving spouse would not force or coerce their mate to stay with them. God warns us that living in selfishness and its corresponding disobedience does not allow us to be developed so that we may spend eternity with Him.⁷⁴ We must learn to listen to God, or our separation will become so complete that we will feel extreme emotional pain that is hard to comprehend. Scripture says that this pain causes “wailing and gnashing of teeth.”⁷⁵

therefore, no one can be reconciled to God through the Law without Christ: Rom 3:20-23. Hardened Hearts: Matt 13:13-15.

⁷⁴ The prodigal son needed something to happen in his life to show him the difference between Godly love and selfishness (love of self: Luke 15).

⁷⁵ Matt 13:41-50; 25:41-46, Rev 19:20; 20:11-15. Observe that in another account, Matt 8:12, God’s disobedient children will be cast into darkness, and yet we know that a physical fire

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Although the Father suffered great agony over His Son's rejection and death, both knew that they were making **the right way possible** for us to be with them forever. We know that this is true through Nature and the confirming consistent work of the Holy Spirit in everyone's lives.⁷⁶ Their combined demonstration of genuine love and persistent encouragement should draw us to them. As we allow God to direct our lives, He cleanses us from our sins and draws us into His good works. With this in mind, let us grasp anew the meaning of Rom 8:28-30. Our Heavenly Father is telling us that if we learn to love Him because of His great love for us, He will help us to mature to Jesus' pure level of grace and righteousness; we are *called* (chosen because of our responding love),⁷⁷ *justified* (all sins are removed because by Jesus taking them upon Himself and giving us His righteousness in

produces light. We are not to take the fire of hell literally; instead, God gives us a glimpse of the pain that eternal separation creates when our hardened hearts do not allow us to live with Him.

⁷⁶ Rom 1:20-22; John 16:7-11.

⁷⁷ Rom 8:28; James 1:12.

return),⁷⁸ and *glorified* (given full-sonship and moral character matching Jesus' sonship and character).⁷⁹ As we learn to obey Jesus, we begin to stand upon our Father's promises. As we walk with God, we start to develop a trust for His perfect plan of unity and corresponding peace and begin looking forward to the day that we will be in Heaven with Him.⁸⁰ As we join God in His Great Work and allow Him to continually develop us, we come to realize that we will not reach perfection during this part of our life, but we trust God to complete our transformation as He continually softens our hearts and we become more and more compassionate toward others over time. We take great comfort in knowing that we will truly obtain perfection after death,⁸¹ and we know that from that time on, there will be no more pain and sorrow.⁸² In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at our full reconciliation so that we may confidently **join** our Father as He asks us to join Him in ministering to our hurting world.

⁷⁸ Rom 5:1; Gal 3:13-14; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; Col 2:13-14.

⁷⁹ John 17:23,26; Rom 8:14-17; 8:30; 1 John 3:1-3.

⁸⁰ Matt 25:34-40; 2 Peter 3:13.

⁸¹ Phil 1:6; Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3.

⁸² Rev 21:1-7.

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I do not ask only for these (my immediate disciples), but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all of them may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, that they also may be in us [John 17:20-21a].

When Jesus prayed that all people of all time who believe (trust) in Him may be “one,” united with God and each other, He illuminates the meaning of eternal life and salvation declared in John 3:16-17. Jesus is praying for all who learn to trust and obey Him out of love to be united in the same special way to the Father as He is united to the Father.

Because of God’s unconditional love for us, we can learn to trust and obey Him. When we examine one of our best known scriptures regarding God’s love for us, John 3:16-17, we see that eternal life is provided for all who *believe*

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(*trust*) in Jesus. The original Greek word *pistis* normally translates as “faith or belief,” but is also has a basic meaning of “trust.” This Greek root is used in verses such as John 3:16 (believe) and Eph 2:8 (faith) in which God declares our salvation through our trust in Jesus.⁸³ This asserts that our salvation and transformation come through Christ when we make a conscious decision to trust Him.⁸⁴ As we learn to return God’s love through interaction with Him and others, we gain experience in trusting God,⁸⁵ and it is ultimately through our growing trust that we come to know how and why we exist.⁸⁶ Biblical faith (trust) is not blind faith; we learn to trust God by entering into His work and experiencing His love in action.

As we continue to walk with God, He helps develop our trust in Him. We learn to reciprocate His love by obeying Him. Thus, our trust in God

⁸³ In addition, see Rom 1:15-16-32.

⁸⁴ Rom 3:22-28; 10:9-13.

⁸⁵ Rom 10:10; Gal 5:6.

⁸⁶ Heb 11:1-3.

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develops as we see and experience His faithfulness to help all people become whole. The apostle John uses the term “Believer” as an individual who has come to know Jesus as *both* savior and lord. The Believer trusts and obeys Him out of love.⁸⁷ God puts the two words “trust” and “obedience” together because they work hand-in-hand as shown in one of John the Baptist’s statements,

The one who is believing in (trusting) the Son has eternal life, but the one who is not obeying the Son will not see (eternal) life, but the judgement of God remains upon him [John 3:36].

This verse clearly indicates that those who trust Jesus also obey Him. Jesus tells us that those who obey Him do it out of love.⁸⁸ Those who love the Father, love the One whom He sent to save us.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Regarding obedience, examine John 14: 21, 23; Gal 5:6.

⁸⁸ John 14:15, 21, 23-24.

⁸⁹ Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 8:42; 12:44.

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If we truly love Jesus, we will learn to trust and obey Him.⁹⁰

We do not naturally obey someone just because we trust them. Although we may know that an individual is honest and will do everything that they promise, that does not in and of itself obligate nor encourage us to obey them. Trustworthiness without love is not worthy of obedience. We learn to trust God's motives for all of our actions as we learn how much He loves us; He is righteous and loves us so much that He sent Jesus to the Cross for us. As we reflect on John 3, we begin to realize that in order to be born from above and start our journey homeward to be with God in Heaven, we must allow Jesus to lead us. From the moment that we decide to allow Jesus to be both our savior and lord forever, we are born from above, born of the Spirit; we become God's reconciled children forever.⁹¹ The Holy Spirit dwells within us helping us to

⁹⁰ John 14:15, 21, 23-24; Gal 5:6.

⁹¹ Born From Above: John 3:3-5; Eph 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:22-23. Being God's Children: Eph 1:4-5, 13-14; Rom 8:14-17.

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communicate with God in close fellowship for eternity as Jesus leads us in good works.⁹²

Our trust can only be developed as we interact with God. God does not want us to trust Him just because He is God, someone mightier than ourselves. Although God is strong enough to force everyone to do as He wishes, He does not force His will upon us because of the **high** value that He places on our “free-will.” God wants us to love Him from the heart.⁹³ God loved us first, and God is Love.⁹⁴ God’s expresses His love through His actions. God’s actions are full of grace and righteousness toward all. God wants both our trust and obedience to come from the heart as we grow in our love for Him and each other. Our trust and obedience will grow if we interact with God daily and join in His ministry to all. With this improved understanding of the meaning and significance of

⁹² Holy Spirit: John 14:16-17; 16:13. Good Works: Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 2:14.

⁹³ Rom 10:10.

⁹⁴ 1 John 4:10, 16, 19.

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the words “trust” and “obey,” we can now appreciate why John the Baptist used these words interchangeably.⁹⁵ Through our love for God, they become part of our character. Trust and obedience become an integral part of the child of God who is going Home.

Key Scripture

And I have given to them the glory that you have given to me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be made complete (perfected) into one . . . [John 17:22-23].

What is this unity that Jesus desires for all who learn to trust and obey Him? Jesus shares His glory with all who learn to love the Father and Him so that we may be united in the same way to the Father, Him, the Holy Spirit, and each other as He is united to the Father. ***This Scriptural passage unlocks the door to our understanding of all other***

⁹⁵ John 3:36.

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Scripture and gives us tremendous insight into our identity through Jesus Christ.

Through His prayer, we see Jesus asking that His disciples be protected under His Father's name thereby making them part of His eternal family. Jesus asked the Father to protect those whom He had given Him,

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given to me, in order that they may be one just as we are [John 17:11b].

In addition to this request, Jesus states for all Believers,

I have given them the glory that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one [John 17:22],

Jesus' first request (17:11b) asks the Father to be the protector of His disciples by putting them under the same umbrella that He is under, the Father's name, His household. He is asking the Father to bring all Believers into His family as brothers and sisters. His request to "keep them in your name" placed all of His disciples into the

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Father's household. As we look at John 17:22, we see Jesus sharing His glory and thereby allowing us to come into His Father's household with the same unity (closeness) that He already has with the Father. Jesus has provided a way for us to be fully reconciled as His brothers and sisters. This glory that Jesus is sharing with all Believers stems from His relationship with the Father and His resulting character; Jesus is like His father, the Creator, who is full of grace and truth.⁹⁶ It is Jesus' loving character, His glory, that attracts us more than a multicolored spectrum radiating from a diamond in bright sunlight. Let us develop this idea.

Many fail to understand the importance of Jesus sharing His glory with all Believers. Jesus' glory is derived from His relationship with the Father and His resulting nature. Jesus was the only son, and therefore, He possessed honor and greatness, which is part of His glory, because of His unique relationship to the Creator. Yet, the part of His glory that attracts us the greatest is His nature, which is full of grace and truth like His father's.

⁹⁶ Exod 33:18-19; 34:6; Psalm 138:2; John 1:14.

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And now, glorify me, Father, with your glory that I already possessed before the world existed with you [John 17:5].

When Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him with the glory that He already possessed before they created the world, He is equating His own glory with the Father's glory; He says "your glory." Jesus' family position and character are derived directly from His Father.⁹⁷ The Father is very important to us because of His righteous and loving character. His glory (that which makes Him attractive) is not derived primarily from His power but from His unselfish loving nature, which is shown in His two greatest character traits, grace and truthfulness.⁹⁸ His grace and truthfulness originate from His unbiased love for all. He is compassionate and patient toward His stubborn and disobedient children. He tempers His justice with love as He works to change our character to be like His.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Luke 18:19; John 20:17.

⁹⁸ Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7.

⁹⁹ Rom 2:4; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:9.

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We can see this as we contemplate John's description of Jesus' glory,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt with us, and we observed His glory, glory as of an only son from a father, full of grace and truth [John 1:14].

The very nature of Jesus' glory is easy to miss if we think only in terms of power. Jesus' glory is like His Father's glory, it is full of grace and truth.¹⁰⁰ A major clue to the specific meaning of Jesus' glory is that He is sharing it with all Believers of all ages and that its quality enables our perfect unity. Gifts such as power, healing, proclamation, and prophecy would not in themselves help us form a perfect union and are not shared equally with all Believers. The glory that Jesus is sharing with us enables us to live in perfect unity with God and each other just as Jesus already lives in perfect unity with our Heavenly Father. Therefore, when Jesus said,

¹⁰⁰ Exod 33:18-19; 34:6-7; Psalm 138:2.

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I have given them the glory that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one [John 17:22],

we come to realize that He gave up His *exclusive* position as the Father's only son as He shares His sonship and character with us. Jesus is sharing His sonship and His Father's grace and truth with us. We recognize that the very essence of Jesus' glory, which He shares with all Believers,¹⁰¹ is derived from who He and His Father are.¹⁰² Jesus is sharing His character and position as the *only* son of the Creator with us. Imagine how this would have sounded to the people of the first-century as they considered how much more important it would be to be the son of the Creator in comparison to say, "the only son of the Roman Emperor?" Knowing that Jesus was willing to share His only sonship with us should motivate us to joyfully join our Father in His Great Work, His ministry to all people. As we join God for eternity as intimate members of His family,

¹⁰¹ John 17:20-23; Rom 8:17; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3.

¹⁰² Consider again Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6; Psalm 138:2; and John 1:14, which is quoted above.

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we experience great joy, and God teaches us to become full of grace and truth.

God's Unity Exists through Jesus Christ Alone

There is neither Jew nor Greek;
there is neither slave nor freeman;
there is neither male nor female;
because all of you are one
through Christ Jesus [Gal 3:28].

The relationship that exists between the Father and every Believer is that of a loving Father and an obedient, **only** son. An only son has it all, favor, inheritance, and power second only to his father. God does not have favorites among His children. Our heavenly Father treats all of His obedient children equally as if each of us were His only son; **God does not have favorites**. God has created each of us uniquely different emotionally and physically including such attributes as eye, hair, and skin color. He has created us all different, yet He wants us to work together in great unity. God's unbiased love encourages us to love all people

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equally.¹⁰³ To fully grasp this unbiased father-son relationship between our Father and each of us, we take special note that the original relationship is between our Father and His **first** son. In Jesus' prayer, He says that those who love and obey Him will be loved just as the Father loves Him.¹⁰⁴ This unbiased relationship brings great joy to all obedient disciples.¹⁰⁵ In this give-and-take relationship, it gives the Father great pleasure to fulfill the welfare and desires of His Son. There is great joy and glory associated with being an obedient son of the Father. Their relationship is based on that of a loving father and an **only** son who is obedient to his father.¹⁰⁶ Because of this great relationship between the Father and Jesus,

¹⁰³ God: 2 Samuel 14:14; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17. God's Desire For Humanity: Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 16:19; 2 Chron 19:7; James 2:1, 9.

¹⁰⁴ John 17:23, 26.

¹⁰⁵ John 17:13.

¹⁰⁶ John 5:19, 30 (seeking or striving to continually do the Father's will); 14:31; 15:15.

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Jesus is the heir to all that the Father has.¹⁰⁷ And yet in spite of what Jesus personally possessed at the beginning of the Creation, He graciously shares His inheritance with all Believers of all ages.¹⁰⁸ Those who learn to trust and obey God will have this same close father-son relationship.¹⁰⁹ Our Father love each of us as if we were His **only** son.

The moment that we accept Jesus Christ as our savior and lord, we begin to realize our Father only Son relationship. Once we are born from above, it is a done deal; even in our present state of sin, we become our Father's obedient children who will eventually be completely transformed into Christ's likeness. God tells us that when we have been born of the Spirit, He places part of Himself in us, His Seed.¹¹⁰ When we allow God to be part of us, we cannot continually . . . continually . . .

¹⁰⁷ Col 1:16; John 16:15.

¹⁰⁸ John 17:22.

¹⁰⁹ John 1:11-12; 12:36; 14:6, 21-24.

¹¹⁰ Eph 1:13-14; Rom 8:14.

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continually sin.¹¹¹ Similarly in the physical realm, we know that our children receive part of our character through our seeds (husband and wife) that are joined at their conception. The Holy Spirit is the seed of the Father.

As soon as the Holy Spirit unites with us, we begin doing our Father's will, and everyone begins to see God in us. Where Jesus is, the Father is.¹¹² The Unity between the Father and the Son is so close that if you know one of them, you have

¹¹¹ 1 John 3 & 4 (3:9).

¹¹² Jesus rebukes the Jewish leaders for not believing that the Father sent Him after He had performed many miracles of love giving proof that He was working with and being empowered by the One who sent Him. Then, Jesus told them that when they crucified Him, they would know that He was not doing anything on His own authority, but instead He only spoke as the Father instructed Him; the Father would raise Him from the dead and give Him the ultimate Victory over Satan and His evil followers. His Father was always with Him and pleased with His actions, because He was always doing His Father's will (John 8:28-29).

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seen both.¹¹³ Where Believers are, Jesus and the Father are.¹¹⁴ Jesus introduces us to a third individual who is united perfectly to the Father and Him, the Spirit of Truth. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father; if the Spirit of Truth lives in you, the Father and Jesus live in you.¹¹⁵ The world continues to hear the Gospel from the Father and the Son through Jesus' obedient followers who are assisted by the Spirit of Truth dwelling in them.¹¹⁶ The Father and the Son working together in perfect unity have sent the Spirit of Truth (Holy Spirit) to comfort and guide all Believers, as the Father sent the Holy Spirit to help Jesus during His earthly ministry.¹¹⁷ When Jesus asked the Father to give His disciples a comforter to replace His

¹¹³ John 14:7-11.

¹¹⁴ John 14:23.

¹¹⁵ John 14:16-26.

¹¹⁶ Luke 10:16; John 13:20; 17:18.

¹¹⁷ John 1:32-34; Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22.

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physical presence,¹¹⁸ He was making this special Father-Son relationship immediately possible for every Believer through the Holy Spirit.

Fully Reconciled

Now, that we understand more fully that Jesus is sharing His unique sonship and character with all Believers, let us reexamine a passage from Scripture that paints a vivid picture of God's love. Remember the "Prodical Son" account given to us in Luke 15? The younger son left home with his share of the family's wealth and went off into a foreign land. He selfishly spent it all on himself and superficial friends. Eventually, he realized that those who were righteous and truly loved him were at home and not in the foreign land that he had entered. When he realized how good his father was and how selfish most people were, he wanted to go home. He knew that he had wronged and hurt his father deeply. Because of His disobedience to his father's will, he hoped that his father would at least let him become one of his servants for the rest of his

¹¹⁸ John 17:17; 14:16-17.

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life; then he could live in the presence of a loving, righteous man and at the very least receive his daily physical requirements. When he went home out of his own “free-will,” what did his father do? His father did not receive him as a servant; he told everyone that his son who had died was alive again, his son who had been lost was now found.¹¹⁹ His father did not hold his son’s past sins against him; there was **no** condemnation. With the son’s **change of heart**, his father cleared the records of all past wrong. Praise God! That story applies to us.¹²⁰

Many of us are still trying to go Home as servants because God has opened our eyes to our own sin. We feel that we must be eternally punished for what we have done wrong. But, praise God! Our Heavenly Father has made a Way for us to come Home justified fully and glorified like our Reconciler, our Eldest Brother. He therefore encourages us to hurry home out of our own “free-will.” The Gospel is a message that brings such good news that many of us are afraid that it cannot possibly be true. But, it is true, and it is never too

¹¹⁹ Luke 15:24.

¹²⁰ John 3:17; Rom 8:1.

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late to receive Jesus Christ as our savior and lord. When we make a conscious heart-felt acknowledgment to receive Jesus Christ as savior and lord, we are immediately reconciled to God as His sons with the same inheritance as Jesus. We are not reconciled as the Creator's servants.¹²¹

When Jesus agreed to share His glory with us so that we all could be "one" with the Father, Him, the Holy Spirit, and one another, He was not guiding us Home to be servants! We are coming home as **fully reconciled and transformed sons** of our Heavenly Father. The Father has made a way for us to come Home through Jesus Christ reconciled as the lost son did in the "lost-son" account. When we accept God's Way home, we are fully reconciled to our Heavenly Family even more fully than the "lost-son" was reconciled to his earthly family. To make our reconciliation complete our Heavenly Father promised that He will complete our transformation prior to our meeting our eldest brother, Jesus Christ, face-to-face.¹²²

¹²¹ Gal 4:7.

¹²² Phil 1:6; Rom 8:28-30; 1 John 3:1-3.

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Are you getting a little nervous because God is calling us into an equal family relationship with Him? It sounded like heresy to Israel's religious leaders in the first-century when Jesus told them that He was God's son, because by proclaiming to be His Heavenly Father's son, He was proclaiming to be a member of God's immediate family and therefore had made Himself equal to the Father.¹²³ The religious leaders considered our Heavenly Father a father in name only.¹²⁴ They knew that Jesus was saying that God was his literal father. Later the same religious leaders said that Caesar was their only king.¹²⁵ Jesus is literally God's son and that does make Him equal in stature not authority to God the Father. Those who follow Jesus also become literal sons of God and they become equal to the Father in stature as a family member but not in authority. There will be a day when we meet our Creator face-to-face and begin a full mature relationship with Him and all individuals who follow Jesus Christ.

¹²³ John 5:18; 10:35a.

¹²⁴ John 8:41.

¹²⁵ John 19:15c.

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Does it look like the deeper we dig, the more we have taken away from God's glory by our up-and-coming mature and intimate relationship with Him? The deeper we look, the more we realize how gracious our Heavenly Father is in making us an equal family member with Jesus and Himself. Knowing that we are far from perfect makes it very difficult to accept this pure love-relationship with Him that is based on equality within the family. God's perfect relationship with us will leave **nothing** to separate us from His love.¹²⁶ Most of us are intimidated easily and would

¹²⁶ Now, Jesus gives us great Rev through the New Testament enlightened by the Holy Spirit; see Rom 8:38-39. Earlier, God had given partial Rev through Isaiah. He portrayed Himself as our Father (63:16; 64:8), our Husband (54:5; 62:5), and our Redeemer. God's glory (Exodus 33:18-19; 34: 5-7) will be seen upon Israel (God's obedient children: Isaiah 60:2). His word declares that anyone who will walk in His Way shall be given a place in His House with a name (relational position) better than that of earthly sons and daughters (56:4-6). God has prepared something great for those of us who wait upon Him (64:4).

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have a hard time even communicating with some national figure much less with the Creator. Yet it is true, God is calling all who listen to Him into a pure, mature relationship in which He will teach us to consider Him and others as equal family members; we will be able to stand before our Heavenly Father in confidence because of the sin removal completed through Jesus's atoning death on our behalf.¹²⁷

If we become whole and complete like God, surely we will lose our awe and reverence for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **NO, ABSOLUTELY NOT!** Jesus tells us that He has made a way for us to come Home as fully reconciled and transformed brothers and sisters to be like Him;¹²⁸ He said that He wants us to be "one" with the Father and Him just as He is "one" with the Father.¹²⁹ When we fully understand that the Creation and the Cross are part of God's great plan

¹²⁷ Rom 5:1-5; 1 John 2:28.

¹²⁸ Consider Phil 3:20-21 & 1 John 3:2 in regards to John 17:20-23.

¹²⁹ John 17:20-23.

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of fellowship based on equality and “free-will,” we will eternally praise and love the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will have gone through God’s purging process to come out righteous and holy. We will become like Jesus. After we accept Jesus Christ as our savior *and* lord, God promises each of us a final perfect transformation; we will not sin after going Home. We will never turn on God as Satan and one third of the angels did, because Jesus’ is sharing His moral nature, which is full of grace and truth, with us in addition to His inheritance and excellent name.¹³⁰ Jesus has a proven track record¹³¹ with His ongoing full, mature relationship with our Father that gives us great expectations that we can also live without anything separating us from a pure, full-time, and caring relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Everyone needs to consider carefully the wonderful gift of love and life that God offers through Christ Jesus. God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, has *fully* and *eternally* perfected and

¹³⁰ Heb 1.

¹³¹ Jesus died for us following our Father’s will: Matt 26:39; Mark 14:34-36; Luke 22:42.

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reconciled all of His followers and all who were trusting God prior to His earthly ministry to the Father and one another.¹³² Those who learn to trust God, which includes following His Sent Son, will be completely transformed into God's righteous image. **Yes!** *God's reconciled children are equal with Him in family membership status*, but equality in membership **does not mean** equality in authority, responsibility, ability, nor power.

If we do not learn to trust and obey God because of His great love for us, we remain the children of disobedience, the Devil's children.¹³³ In the next chapter we will examine Jesus Christ's identity and eternal lordship more fully.¹³⁴ The better that we understand Jesus' love for us and His qualifications for being our savior and lord, the easier it will be to submit to His authority. Jesus loves us deeply as our Father loves us.¹³⁵ If we

¹³² Heb 10:4-14.

¹³³ John 8:34-47; 2 Cor 6:16-18.

¹³⁴ Heb 13:8; Eph 1:19-21.

¹³⁵ John 3:16-17; 15:9; 17:23, 26.

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allow God to awaken us enough to see past our self-centered imposed worlds and see how awesome He is in everything, we have a much better chance of willingly and lovingly submitting to His authority.

Chapter 3

Jesus Is Lord!

You (Jesus' disciples) are proclaiming me, 'The Teacher and The Lord,' and you are speaking correctly, for I am [John 13:13].

Now, let the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, help us realize more fully who is encouraging, instructing, and leading those who listen.¹³⁶ This great teacher and leader is the Son of the living God.¹³⁷ He is working in perfect unity with the Father and Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us reality so that we may mature and become free from bondage caused by our own selfishness. Jesus Christ is **not** just another good man; Jesus Christ is **not** just another great prophet; Jesus Christ **is** the son of the Living God who worked in close unity with His

¹³⁶ John 14:23, "...We will come..." 26; 16:7-14.

¹³⁷ Matt 16:16. According to Jesus, no one is to be proclaimed "leader" except Him (Matt 23:10).

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father putting together the total Creation including the heavens, Earth, and humanity.¹³⁸ Jesus is the power who is literally holding the Creation together.¹³⁹ The Father has appointed Jesus Christ, our Eldest Brother, to lead us for eternity.¹⁴⁰

Jesus' Farewell Discourse and Prayer

Jesus' farewell discourse and prayer is different in one very important aspect from all other leadership farewells recorded in God's Word. In His farewell discourse, Jesus never relinquishes His authority to a successor. After completing His last supper with them, Jesus speaks to His disciples before going to the Cross. He knows that He is responsible to continue teaching and leading all who are willing to trust and obey Him. John gives us this account of Jesus' commandments and exhortations to His disciples and His requests to the

¹³⁸ Matt 16:13-17; John 1:3,10; Eph 2:10; Col 1:12-22; Heb 1:2.

¹³⁹ Col 1:17.

¹⁴⁰ Eph 1:19-21.

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Father for His disciples of all ages in John 13-17. Let us begin looking at Jesus' **continued** lordship by examining His farewell discourse and prayer comparing it to other Biblical farewell discourses.

The practice of commandment, exhortation, and prayer for one's loved ones at the point of death is a well-attested practice. Being responsible for the lives of their loved ones, the authority figure passes on his most valuable thoughts and concerns for those who will follow him. Before a final prayer or blessing, the last set of instructions and exhortations normally includes confirmation of the next authority figure, the one who is going to assume responsibility for the guidance and care of the family or nation. Examples from the Bible include: Isaac's blessing of Jacob;¹⁴¹ Israel's (Jacob's) commandments and blessings to his sons and their families who made up the original families known as the nation of Israel;¹⁴² Moses' exhortations, commandments, and prayer for the

¹⁴¹ Gen 27:2, 27-30.

¹⁴² Gen 48-49.

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blessing of each tribe of Israel.¹⁴³ In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus engaging in the same action. In His farewell discourse, Jesus gives His disciples one new commandment, “Love one another just as I have loved you.”¹⁴⁴ He also exhorts and encourages, “Let not your heart be troubled,¹⁴⁵ for we (Jesus and the Father) will come to you through another Comforter, the Spirit of Truth.”¹⁴⁶

The one **major** difference between Jesus’ farewell discourse and prayer and all of the other Biblical farewells is that Jesus never relinquishes His authority as the highest leader of the Church to another individual. Although the dying leaders normally appointed new leaders to take their place, Jesus deliberately did not appoint a new leader, because He expected to become the *risen* Lord in just three days. And He knew that after His

¹⁴³ Deut 1-4, 32; 5-31; and Deut 33 respectively.

¹⁴⁴ John 13:34; 15:12, 17.

¹⁴⁵ John 14:1.

¹⁴⁶ John 14:16-17; in addition, see John 14:6, 18, 20, 26-27.

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ascension, He would continue to teach and lead His people through the Spirit of Truth. Jesus said,

I shall not leave you orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while, and the world will no longer observe me, but you (pl) will observe me; because I am alive, indeed you shall live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you . . . 26 But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, He will teach you all things, and He shall remind you (about) all that I spoke to you. I am leaving peace for you; I am giving you my peace; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled nor afraid [John 14:18-27].

Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God

Our eldest brother **is** the Son of the living God.¹⁴⁷ He is working in perfect unity with the Father. Yes, Jesus Christ is **not** just another good

¹⁴⁷ Matt 16:16.

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man nor is He just another great prophet; Jesus Christ **is** the son of the Living God who helped His father with our creation.¹⁴⁸ We can learn a lot about our savior and His great qualifications to lead us through Paul's letter to the Col. Look at what God teaches us through Paul:

Jesus Christ is the ***Beloved Son*** of the Father who has redeemed us from our sins (1:13-14); Jesus is loved very much by the Father. Jesus is the ***Image of God***, and God cannot be seen with human eyes,¹⁴⁹ yet we can see the Father's nature by observing Jesus.¹⁵⁰ He is the ***Firstborn*** having the rights of the firstborn over every creature (1:15), yet He shares His rights with every Believer.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Matt 16:13-17; John 1:3,10; Eph 2:10; Heb 1:2.

¹⁴⁹ John 14:7 (We can see the Father through Jesus Christ); 1 John 4:12, 20: No one on Earth has seen the Father except Christ.

¹⁵⁰ John 12:45; 14:9.

¹⁵¹ John 1:14 . . . 17:5 . . . 17:22.

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Jesus is the *Master Craftsman*,¹⁵² creating all things seen and unseen in Heaven and on Earth. We were created through Jesus for fellowship with Jesus (1:16).¹⁵³ Jesus is the Word,¹⁵⁴ the Origin, the Source, from which the Creation came.¹⁵⁵ Jesus was before all,¹⁵⁶ *the Eldest*, and it is *through Him* that all things continue. Literally, Jesus has set the Creation together and is continuing to hold it together (1:17).

Jesus is the *Head* of the Body, the Church (1:18),¹⁵⁷ and sits at the right hand of the Father in

¹⁵² John 1:10; Eph 2:10, “For we are His (God’s) workmanship, having been created in/through Christ Jesus for good works. . .; Heb 1:2.

¹⁵³ 1 John 1:3.

¹⁵⁴ John 1:3, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Rev 3:14.

¹⁵⁶ John 1:1.

¹⁵⁷ Eph 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23; Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12 discuss the Body.

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power forever.¹⁵⁸ Jesus is the beginning of resurrected life, the *Firstborn from the Dead*. Because Jesus is the oldest son, the first, and continues to obey our Father faithfully, He has the greatest eternal responsibility and corresponding authority over all matters (1:18).¹⁵⁹

Jesus is the *Sinless Reconciler*, reconciling us and *those in Heaven* to the Father through the Cross (1:19-20).¹⁶⁰ Prior to the Creation, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ agreed together to make an atonement for our disobedience.¹⁶¹

The Father sent Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for all people, and then He raised Jesus from the dead and set Him over all powers and authorities in Heaven and on Earth forever. Today, this same Jesus delivers all who will come to trust

¹⁵⁸ Eph 1:20-21.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Peter 3:22.

¹⁶⁰ Eph 1:7-10; Corinthians 5:17-21; Heb 9:22.

¹⁶¹ Matt 25:34; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 1:19-20; Rev 13:8.

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and obey Him from the power of the Evil One.¹⁶²

Jesus **is** the Son of the one true living God.¹⁶³ During Jesus' earthly ministry, many Jewish leaders **ignored** His identity and **rejected** His authority **because of their hardened hearts toward God.**¹⁶⁴ Their hearts had become hardened as they took matters into their own hands and stopped listening to God. They would not give up control over their fellow man, which they had wrongfully taken from God.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, Jesus removed all of their responsibility and corresponding authority including what He had

¹⁶² John 10:10.

¹⁶³ Matt 16:16 (the Christ, the Son of the Living God); Mark 8:29 (the Christ); John 6:69 (the Holy One of God).

¹⁶⁴ Jesus proclaims His identity through His words and actions: John 5:17, 19; 17:1. His Rejection: Matt 26:63; Mark 14:61; Luke 22:70; John 5:18; 19:7. Hardened Hearts: Matt 13:13-15.

¹⁶⁵ Matt 21:33-39.

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originally given them.¹⁶⁶ Throughout time since Jesus' earthly ministry, many have continued to **ignore** His identity and **reject** His authority because of hardened hearts. Those who hear and receive Jesus Christ hear and receive the Father; those who hear and receive Jesus' disciples hear and receive Jesus.¹⁶⁷ The Father has and is speaking to all who listen through Jesus, and presently Jesus is speaking to all who listen through the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and His Body, the Church.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ John 8:31-47; Matt 21:43 (Kingdom taken from religious authorities); John 3:35; 5:22-23 (honor the Son), 30 (Jesus' seeks the Father's will); 17:2; Eph 1:21.

¹⁶⁷ Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37b; Luke 9:48b; John 12:44; Gal 4:14.

¹⁶⁸ Jesus teaches us the Father's will (Heb 1:2; John 8:28, 47; 17:8). During this age, the Church is the Light to the World: Eph 3:10. In addition to the Father & Son being with us now through the Holy Spirit, we have God's written Word and the same Holy Spirit who originally helped the writers write it helping us to understand it. We are to allow God to speak through us to the World-- Evangelism:

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God's Word Guarantees Peace and Joy

Come to me all who are laboring and are burdened, and I will give you relief. Take up my yoke upon yourselves and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find relief for your souls. For my yoke is merciful and my burden is light (easy to bear) [Matthew 11:28-30].¹⁶⁹

Because God truly cares for us, He asks us to give Him our anxieties, trading our heavy burdens for lighter loads. There is peace and joy for every individual who allows the Creator to guide his or her life.¹⁷⁰ God teaches all who learn to love Him that there is something much greater than self, a pure non-selfish interrelationship with God *and* other obedient members of His family. Jesus leads

Matt 10:20 & Mark 13:11; Christian Defense: Matt 10:20 & Mark 13:11.

¹⁶⁹ Luke 4:18-21; Isaiah 61:1-2.

¹⁷⁰ John 17:13, 23; Rom 5:1-5.

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us through a learning experience that transforms our life forever. He teaches us to love all people, and we learn to live as family members of God ministering to all.

Families are social units that should provide proper development and support. The family's primary role is to provide each new member of society, the child, with its core training in social skills and moral behavior. This training becomes part of that member's very being, their "self." The family continues to provide support for its members throughout all phases of life.

A biblical family structure on Earth is similar to God's eternal family structure. A husband is to love his wife as Jesus loves the Church. Therefore, a husband should learn to love his wife to the point of being willing to lay down his life to save her. A husband must learn to consider his wife's welfare as important as his own. A husband is never a dictator just as Jesus is not a dictator. Men must allow "free-will" to work within their families just as God allows "free-will" to influence all humanity. In response to her husband's love, a wife is to submit to the authority of her husband and help him in every way possible.

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The husband is the head of his wife as Jesus is the head of the Church.¹⁷¹ Jesus put his love for us into action; He died for us and continues to lead us! Although women are to submit to the authority of their husbands, they are not inferior to men in any way. God tells us clearly that all men and women of all nationalities and walks of life are equal to each other through Christ.¹⁷² Christ has made us **free** and an **equal family member** through the Cross.

The family of God is continually developed and directed through Jesus Christ by our Heavenly Father. Of course, there are rules for members of God's family just as there are rules in any social or business organization. There cannot be peace in any organization without some form of order including levels of authority. We cannot have completeness individually or corporately with its accompanying joy without allowing God to prepare us for our proper places in His family. If we listen to God, He will prepare us to take our individual positions within His family. As we become people

¹⁷¹ Col 1:18; Eph 5:22-29; 1 Peter 3:1-8.

¹⁷² Matt 22:28-30; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Peter 3:7.

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of grace and righteousness, God gives us more and more responsibility to help in His ministry to all. When we learn to listen to God, we begin a relationship with Him and others that provides both internal and eternal peace.¹⁷³

We **are** children of God and have been called into a fantastic relationship that makes us equal family members with Jesus. We **are** loved by the Father as Jesus is loved, and we are coheirs with Him in everything.¹⁷⁴ Yet, we are clearly not equal with Jesus in responsibilities or authority: Jesus **is** our lord forever.

As we learn to trust and obey God, Jesus shares some of His responsibility and authority with us.¹⁷⁵ We learn to work with Him in many ways ministering to people in our communities and all over the world. God does not call all people into full-time ministry, but He does ask all people to join

¹⁷³ Love: John 3:16-17; 1 John 4:20; Peace: Rom 5:1-5; Phil 4:4-7.

¹⁷⁴ Rom 8:14-17; 1 Peter 3:7; Rev 21:7.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 2:9; Acts 1:8; Rev 3:21.

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Him in a full-time relationship. He gives us the resources, talent, and frame of mind to carry out the good works that He established from the beginning of the Creation for us.¹⁷⁶ Whatever good work God has established for you, feel assured that He has also provided abundantly the empowerment, resources, talent, and frame of mind needed for you to complete the work.¹⁷⁷ But beware! Under the lordship of Satan, many of his followers in this world are working to divide God's people into ever smaller and smaller groups. Satan knows the importance of "dividing and conquering," and he knows that we are God's weakest link when we do not listen to Jesus.

Repentance

Being a child of God starts with a spiritual awakening that leads to repentance and corresponding commitment. Satan does his best to keep all people busy, confused, and focused on themselves. God continually works in peoples'

¹⁷⁶ Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14. Our good works include exposing and correcting wrongdoing (1 Cor 6:1-5).

¹⁷⁷ Acts 1:8; Eph 1:19; 3:14-20; Phil 4:13.

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minds and hearts to bring them to a place where they recognize the reality of His love and the destructive nature of self-centeredness (spiritual awakening).¹⁷⁸ For some, God is able to reach them during some of their quieter moments; for others God has to set up or allow trials in order to produce spiritual awakenings through a crises.¹⁷⁹ In all cases, God does not want any to be eternally separated from Him; He patiently works with everyone wanting all to come to the point of repentance (turning from self to Him) so that they will turn to Him for salvation and an eternal place in His family.¹⁸⁰ ***But beware!*** Jesus was clear, many stay on the wide road of self-centeredness that leads to eternal shame and suffering and only a few turn off onto the narrow way of life that leads to repentance and corresponding commitment, which results in spiritual birth into God's eternal close-knit holy

¹⁷⁸ Rom 1:18–2:16.

¹⁷⁹ One example is the account of the self-centered son (Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11–32) who through a major crisis finally came to understand reality; he came to himself, his senses (Luke 15:17).

¹⁸⁰ 2 Peter 3:9.

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family.¹⁸¹ Not only does Jesus stand at the door of everyone's life asking to be part of it, He asks us to seek and follow Him.¹⁸²

John the Baptist started his ministry declaring that everyone needed to "repent." Jesus started His earthly ministry telling all to "repent." The Early Church proclaimed the need to "repent."¹⁸³ Without repentance, turning from self to God, one remains in a fallen self-centered state of existence.

Within biblical meaning, "repentance" indicates a change of heart, a change of one's life and life style, a turning from self and sin to God and His righteous way of life. **Repentance triggers action.** Repentance brings about a true commitment to stop living for self and start living for God. In reality, God knows everyone's heart and true repentance brings about conversion, being

¹⁸¹ Matt 7:13–14.

¹⁸² Jesus: Rev 3:20; Us: Matt 7:7–8.

¹⁸³ John: Matt 3:2; Jesus: Matt 4:17; the Early Church: Acts 2:38.

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spiritually born into God’s holy family, which is the work of God and God alone.¹⁸⁴ ***Repentance with its corresponding commitment to submit to God’s lordship and follow Jesus is a necessary part of being born into God’s eternal holy family!***

In Acts 26:19–20, Luke speaks of repentance being part of the process of “turning to” God. He recalled Paul telling King Agrippa that he, Paul, had been obedient to God’s revelation to him, and therefore, he was proclaiming the Good News to many including the Gentiles telling them “to repent and turn to the (one true) God” *doing works* worthy of repentance.

Commitment

If we would be honest with one another, most of us would admit that we want things our way and want everything to be as easy as possible. Scripture is clear that God is longsuffering and has been working hard on humanity’s behalf from the very beginning. The Son of God, Jesus Christ,

¹⁸⁴ John 1:12–13.

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working with His Father died both physically and spiritually in order to provide a way for good to triumph eternally. Through Jesus' spiritual death, His separation from the Father for the first time in eternity due to our sin being placed in Him, those who were trusting God would never experience spiritual death even for one second.¹⁸⁵ Jesus provided a way to undo wrong, which gives those who submit to God a righteousness like His own.¹⁸⁶

All who listen to God are commissioned by Him to represent Him as they become engaged in the spiritual battles going on all over the world for the eternal placement of each person.¹⁸⁷ God's children are not to sit on the sidelines. In fact, ***Jesus said that nobody is able to be one of His followers unless he or she is willing to deny self, pick up his or her cross daily, and follow Him*** into whatever

¹⁸⁵ John 11:25–26; Heb 2:9.

¹⁸⁶ Gal 3:13–14; 2 Cor 5:21; cf. Acts 2:27, 31; Col 2:13–14; 1 Peter 2:24.

¹⁸⁷ Matt 5:13–10; 1 Peter 5:6–10; cf. John 15:1–2; 2 Cor 5:17–19; Eph 6:10–18.

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battles He leads.¹⁸⁸ ***Nowhere in Scripture does God teach that someone can come to Him, pick up a pass to Heaven, ignore the battles going on around them, die physically, and have Jesus escort his or her spirit into Heaven.***

So ***why*** do so many people today make some sort of profession of faith and never experience the new creation “in Christ”?¹⁸⁹ In reality, ***without a genuine commitment to follow Jesus Christ, there will be no spiritual birth into God’s family nor corresponding new creation.***

Satan has sold the world one of His biggest lies since the beginning of the Creation. Many believe that salvation is nothing more than obtaining a pass into heaven to be used when one dies. This lie causes people to think that they have to wait until they get to Heaven for anything to be better. ***What a lie!*** Sanctification, being molded and

¹⁸⁸ Luke 9:23; 14:26–27.

¹⁸⁹ 2 Cor 5:17.

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shaped by God, and good works starts immediately *for all who truly start following Jesus.*¹⁹⁰

As you consider God's Word, consider the fact that within a short time after God finished the initial part of the Creation, Satan lied to Eve telling her that she would not die if she ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹⁹¹ God had already emphatically said that if man ate from that tree, he would surely die. She and Adam both ate, and mankind died. Humanity and the entire Creation were corrupted, and accordingly, humanity was removed from God's presence. Satan has been lying about the reality of death ever since working to keep people separated from God.

This new lie, which is being propagated by many proclaiming that everyone can pick up a pass or gift box leading into heaven by confessing their sins and claiming Jesus as their savior *without following Him as lord*, is hindering many from considering a genuine commitment to follow Jesus Christ. It is only through a turning from self and following Jesus (repentance with corresponding

¹⁹⁰ Rom 6:22; cf. Eph 2:10; Phil 2:13.

¹⁹¹ Gen 3:1–6.

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commitment) that one is saved from judgment as a sinner and spiritually born into God's family.

Spiritual renewal comes only from God according to His will and His rules.¹⁹² Through spiritual birth into God's family comes the removal of sin and growth in God's righteousness. God's Word is clear, *if individuals do not make true commitments to follow Jesus, they cannot be His disciples.*¹⁹³ Without making a true commitment to follow Jesus, there is no spiritual birth into God's eternal holy family. Heaven is only open to God's children and His faithful angels and other heavenly beings.¹⁹⁴

In addition to lose of eternal life, Satan's deceptions are causing many to live out unfulfilled lives instead living within God's family. Without spiritual rebirth, one lives without a personal relationship with God and misses out on a life filled with godly love, joy, and inner peace. It is only through repentance and corresponding commitment

¹⁹² John 1:13; 2 Peter 3:9.

¹⁹³ Luke 14:26–27.

¹⁹⁴ Rev 21:7–8, 27.

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that one starts to experience the great joy of being part of God's family and working together with God to bring others into His eternal family.

Jesus' followers are being transformed,¹⁹⁵ and they are learning to love others as God loves all.¹⁹⁶ When they die physically, *they do not need a pass* into Heaven from anyone including church leaders because they are God's children. Heaven belongs to God *and* all of His children.¹⁹⁷ Jesus will meet them as they leave their physical bodies and escort them into the presence of their eternal Father.¹⁹⁸

Beware, God will not be mocked!¹⁹⁹ Each one of us will end up being judged according to our decisions and actions during this short mortal

¹⁹⁵ 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 5:22–23.

¹⁹⁶ 1 John 3:14; 4:16–19.

¹⁹⁷ John 14:1–3; 17:24; 20:17; Rom 8:17.

¹⁹⁸ John 14:3; 1 John 3:1–2; Rev 21:3.

¹⁹⁹ Gal 6:7; cf. Luke 8:17; 16:15.

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portion of our eternal life.²⁰⁰ Those who listen to God and learn to follow Christ and His teachings become part of His intimate family.²⁰¹ ***Those who do not will perish.*** They will be separated from God, His immediate family, and all of His Holy Heavenly Host for eternity.²⁰²

Jesus teaches us that loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind along with loving our neighbors as ourselves fulfills the intent of the Law (God's instruction for living),²⁰³ which stands throughout the Church Age. In fact, Jesus says that He came to fulfill the Law and that nothing of the Law will be removed right up to the time of the

²⁰⁰ Rom 2:11–16; 1 Peter 1:17. Compare the idea of life versus death as taught by God through Moses in Deut 28:12, 9, 15, and Moses' plea for Israel to “choose life” as shown in Deut 30:15–20.

²⁰¹ Ps 90:12; John 14:21, 23.

²⁰² 2 Peter 3:7–10.

²⁰³ Matt 22:37–40.

final Consummation of the Creation.²⁰⁴ Paul taught the Christians of Rome the same thing when he told them that Jesus was the *telos* of the Law, which means that Jesus is the “fulfillment” of God’s law leading all who are trusting God into righteousness.²⁰⁵

When one listens to God and starts to follow Him based on a developing love for Him, trust in God grows through *experiencing* His trustworthiness.²⁰⁶ All who commit to following God and His way of life are born spiritually into His family and start experiencing a fuller life here-and-now as they *obediently follow Jesus* denying self and picking up their individual crosses daily.²⁰⁷

If you have never truly repented and made a corresponding commitment to follow Jesus’ leading, now is a great time to do so. Make that commitment now. Tell God that you are starting to understand your self-centered sinful life without Christ and want to turn from it to Him; you want to faithfully follow Jesus. God knows you and is

²⁰⁴ Matt 5:17–19.

²⁰⁵ Rom 10:4.

²⁰⁶ Gal 5:6.

²⁰⁷ Luke 9:23; 14:26–27; cf. Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34–35.

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waiting to receive you into His eternal family. Let us all faithfully obey God as we learn to work more effectively under Jesus' leadership. In the next chapter, we shall look at "Sojourning and the Great Commission."

Chapter 4

Sojourning & The Great Commission

Jesus spoke and said, “All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore, while sojourning (traveling through this life) make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you. And behold! I am with you (pl) every day until the completion of the Age [Matthew 28:18-20].”

Until this age of “grace” is completed, Jesus commands us to make disciples from **all** nations of the world. We are to proclaim daily the Gospel Message that has the power to make all people whole as we live out our lives. We are to teach God’s Word baptizing those who accept God’s love in the name of all three who are working together in perfect unity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are drawing all who receive Them into Their perfect unity for eternity. As we continue in God’s Word,

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we are set free from the bondage of sin, which we impose upon ourselves through our selfishness. We have all been ensnared in the past by a multitude of sins such as desire for control, temporary pleasures, material security, or something else, which stopped us from doing God's bidding. But through God's grace, Jesus helps us identify and turn from our sins so that we may follow our Father's will. Through Jesus Christ, we can walk on a new path, a path that leads us Home to be with God for eternity.²⁰⁸ We come to understand that our permanent place of residence is not on Earth; it is in Heaven.²⁰⁹ Trusting the Creator, we expect Him to guide us Home fully conformed into Christ's likeness.²¹⁰

God gives us a world view of ministry because He loves and ministers to all people.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Rom 6:1-14; 8:14-30.

²⁰⁹ John 14:1-4; Phil 3:20; Titus 2:11-14; Rev 21:1-8.

²¹⁰ Trust: Eph 1:13-14; Heb 11. Transformation: Phil 1:6; Rom 12:2; 8:28-30; 1 John 3:1-3.

²¹¹ John 3:16-17; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

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Many living in our communities are not part of our individual daily contacts; therefore, it is very easy to isolate ourselves from them and ignore their needs and struggles. It is even easier to ignore people who live halfway around the world. Yet, God calls all of us to minister in some way over time to as many as possible. Although God does not ask everyone to change their vocations into full-time ministries, He does ask everyone to help. Knowing that the Gospel Message can make people whole encourages us to proclaim the truth of God's great love through our actions and words. We need to ask God daily for encouragement and strength to carry out His will so that we may join Him in His world-wide ministry.²¹²

Doing God's work starts at home. Literally, joining God in His world-wide ministry starts by helping our individual families, then our local church families, then our communities, and finally the entire world. As we send help around the world, we should always remember that our ministry starts at home. Wherever God has us sojourning, we should take every opportunity to

²¹² Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 3:9; Eph 2:10.

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show His love daily through our **actions** and **words**. As we live out our lives and watch for opportunities to minister to those around us, we must keep ourselves accessible to God and His leading. Our families, churches, and local communities are our **daily** mission field.

We are to work together with no schisms within the Church.²¹³ Nothing should separate us from the love of God and each other. Nothing, not denominationalism, racism, age, socioeconomical backgrounds, nor politics should ever cause divisions within the Church. Jesus removed the Wall, the Law, that divided Abraham's descendants and those who strictly followed the Law from the rest of the world through the Cross.²¹⁴ The Law was fulfilled through Grace enabling all people to be fully reconciled to God.²¹⁵ Through Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled His promise to all people enabling

²¹³ Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 12; Eph 4:4-7, 13-16.

²¹⁴ Eph 2:12-16; Gal 3:26-29.

²¹⁵ Matt 5:17; 22:37-40; John 1:16-17; Rom 3:20-28, 31; 7:4-6; 8:1-4.

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everyone to be blessed through Abraham.²¹⁶ When Jesus carried out His mission by coming to us on our human level proclaiming God's great love and righteousness, He fulfilled the Law for us through His sinlessness and the Cross; He made God's perfect unity possible for all who receive Him.²¹⁷ Jesus has made the Father's perfect plan of reconciliation possible and is revealing it to all people through the Church today.²¹⁸ This plan of Grace had been hidden from all including Satan and his evil coworkers from the beginning of the Creation.²¹⁹ **All** who freely receive the Father's Sent Son including His leadership role are fully reconciled to our Heavenly Father for eternity. As we sojourn on Earth, let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and not on the distractions caused by Satan and those who are following him on Earth.

²¹⁶ Gen 12:1-3.

²¹⁷ See Chapter 2.

²¹⁸ Eph 3:9-11.

²¹⁹ Col 1:26-28.

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Sojourning

. . . And the land shall not ever be sold
 because the land belongs to me, (and)
 because you are temporary dwellers and
 sojourners with me; . . . [Leviticus 25:23].²²⁰

For our place of citizenship exists in [the]
 heavens out of which we are awaiting a
 savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . . [Phil 3:20].

. . . all things have been given to us through
 His divine ability, things (leading) toward
 life and godliness, which have been given
 through the conscious effort of the One who
 called us into His personal glory and
 goodness through which the priceless and
 great promises have been given to us in
 order that through these (promises) you (pl)
 may become partners of a godly nature
 escaping from the decay of corruption

²²⁰ Translated directly from the Masoretic Hebrew Text, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 3rd. ed. (Germany: Alle Rechte vorbehalten, 1987).

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(existing) in the world through lust (individual desires based on immediate self-satisfaction without regard to God's long-range desire for our lives or how our actions may hurt others) . . . [2 Peter 1:3-4].

We **are** just traveling through. We are sojourning with God as we do the Great Work that He has established for His Son and us from the beginning of the Creation.²²¹ When we accept God's love through Jesus Christ, we become fully reconciled children beginning our role as His priests.²²² As priests we are to proclaim Truth and act as mediators between God and man. We are not to settle down and become satisfied using our blessings from God solely for ourselves and our families. We have come to recognize that our physical life is only a short fraction of our eternal life, and that we have been called to be co-laborers with God.²²³

²²¹ Eph 2:10; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 2:14.

²²² Exod 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10.

²²³ 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 5:17-6:1.

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We have been fully reconciled to God with all the emotional and legal rights of direct descendants of the Creator. We have an **eternal** Home with God awaiting us, and we know that in a short time the trials and challenges of this age shall be over.²²⁴ How can it possibly be better? It is better because God has called us into His work. **We are not just spectators watching a performance from the sidelines!** We are full-time co-laborers with the Creator as He ministers to all humanity spiritually (relational) and physically. He grows us spiritually as we learn to listen to Him and join Him in His ministry.²²⁵ As we work with God, He grows our heart to match His; the Father continues to transform us to be like Jesus as we work under Jesus' authority ministering to all people. Our individual work varies according to our God-given abilities and God's corresponding position for us in His total ministry for all. Our work involves everything from praying to physically ministering around the world. All of God's work provides great

²²⁴ Phil 3:20; Titus 2:11-14; Rev 21:1-7.

²²⁵ Matt 7:21; John 5:19 & 15:5; John 16:13 & Rom 8:14; 1 Cor 3:9.

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blessings to us and to others as He directs us to help the lost and saved.

Walking With Others in The Church

As we allow God to grow us into effective, loving co-laborers with Him and other Believers, we must evaluate our relationship with other Believers. We should ask God to illuminate His will and way for us. Scripture proclaims that God is Light and,

If we are walking (living) in the Light as He (God) is in the Light, we have koinonia (close fellowship) with each other and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin [1 John 1:7].

This scriptural passage clearly tells us that if we do not have close fellowship with other Believers, we are not walking with God. In reality, we should feel close to all Believers. God helps us through the Holy Spirit to learn to love each other to the point that our love overrides our fear of each

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other and the unknown.²²⁶ Satan loves to use fear to isolate us from each other. As members of God's family, we must learn to love each other as family and friends. Denominational, racial, generational, socioeconomical, and political walls have all been constructed through Satan's prompting as humanity has struggled against God's will. Therefore, we must come to know in our hearts that there are other Believers outside our own local church families who have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior and lord just as we have; the Holy Spirit dwells within them in the same close fellowship as He does with each of us. We must allow Jesus to teach us more fully about our "oneness," which is possible through Him. Let God help us break down the barriers that our societies perpetuate through Satan's prompting. There must be no schisms (divisions) among us.²²⁷

We must allow God to empower us to carry out our assigned ministries. Through Jesus Christ, the Father supplies the authority, resources, talent,

²²⁶ 1 John 4:18; John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; 1 John 1:7; 4:10-11, 18-20.

²²⁷ Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 12; Eph 4.

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and frame of mind to all Believers that enables us to work together helping all.²²⁸ It is the Holy Spirit, who works in each of us²²⁹ making the unity complete that the Father desires and for which Jesus prayed.²³⁰ **May God help us!** Through Christ, we can learn to work together. We are justified only through our trust in His Sent Son; we are not justified by doing **any** works including those commanded by the Law or desired by God's will.²³¹ Therefore, let us joyfully do our assigned works, not out of fear but out of a great love in our hearts for God and all people.²³²

²²⁸ John 17:18, 21, 23; Acts 1:8; Eph 1:19; 3:14-20; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 1:7; Rev 3:21.

²²⁹ Rom 8:14; Eph 1:13; 1 Cor 2:13; 2 Tim 1:14.

²³⁰ John 3:16-17; 17:20-23; 1 Cor 12:12-26; Eph 4:1-3.

²³¹ John 16:33; Rom 5:1-2, 8:1-2; Eph 2:8-9; 2 Tim 1:9.

²³² God's ministry always brings great joy; Luke 10:17; Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; 20:24; Rom 5:1-5; Heb 12:2.

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God asks each of us to help others on an individual, family, local-church, and community-wide level as part of our **daily** life. Although God is not asking all of us to go into full-time ministry, He is asking all of us to be involved as He leads. As we listen to God, we proclaim the Gospel Message through our actions and words. God helps us minister (serve others) individually and collectively through the leadership of Jesus Christ and those whom He has appointed to be our overseers. If we follow Jesus, we will be a great **witness** and **work** to all people.²³³ As we follow Jesus, we will have closer and closer fellowship with God and each other.

God's Leadership and Our Local Communities

As we examine the organizational structure of the Church in the New Testament looking for guidance for our current ministries, we note that many evangelized cities had a council of elders appointed by Jesus; these councils were initially

²³³ Matt 28:18-20; Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 3:9; Titus 2:14.

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set-up through His apostles. The apostles also provided initial encouragement and guidance to the cities' councils. The church (Believers) of Jerusalem gave the final rulings on doctrinal issues that came up before the Church. We note that God did not specify any specific form of worship in the New Testament for individual assemblies. In addition, we observe great cooperation among first-century Believers. Christ's followers proclaimed God's grace through their *actions* and *words* bringing many of their time to repentance and salvation.²³⁴ Through Jesus' leadership, they turned their world upside-down reconciling many to our Heavenly Father.

After Jesus' ascension, He continued to guide the Church through the Holy Spirit. Each community acted as a living organism helping others. In the earliest stages of Church growth, we observed the apostle Peter acting as a spokesman in Jerusalem. Later, Peter was forced to flee for his life,²³⁵ and it appears that the apostle James was

²³⁴ Matt 9:13; Acts 2:38-41; 4:4; etc.

²³⁵ Acts 12:1-17.

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given the role of spokesman.²³⁶ As the Church grew, we note an important trend: Jesus continually expanded the leadership of the Church to accommodate its growth²³⁷ with the church at Jerusalem establishing

²³⁶ Gal 1:18-19; Gal 2:1-10. When Paul went up to Jerusalem 17 years after his Christian conversion, he lists three existing pillars of the Christian community, the apostles James, Peter, and John. Paul lists James first, which indicates that James was the main spokesman at that time. Secondly, in Acts after Peter had fled for his life, we see both Peter and James leading a discussion about Church doctrine with members of the church at Jerusalem. At this time, James appears to be the main spokesman as he wraps up the discussion and recommends a statement for the church at Antioch. These accounts lead me to think that James had become the spokesman after Peter left Jerusalem although Peter was still alive.

²³⁷ The first expansion to leadership is recorded in Acts 6-7. We should note that those who were chosen to serve were empowered by God just as the existing leadership.

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Church doctrine until God's Word was put into an inspired agreed-upon written form.²³⁸

As we evaluate the early Church's growth, we take special note that Jesus remained the leader. We observe Jesus working through Paul and Barnabas appointing elders on their second pass through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Syria.²³⁹ When Paul traveled to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey, he stopped in Meletus and summoned the elders of the assembly (Called-Out Individuals/Believers) of Ephesus and reminded them that the *Holy Spirit* had appointed them as overseers.²⁴⁰ We learn through these accounts that elders (presbyters) of a city-church council were the

²³⁸ Final formation of God's Word was completed over the first couple centuries as the Church struggled against false teachings. God established the Bible in response to Satan's attacks of deception against the Church and its proclamation of truth.

²³⁹ Acts 14:21-23.

²⁴⁰ Acts 20:17, 28.

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same as overseers (episcopates/ bishops) and pastors.

There are six basic terms used throughout the New Testament showing four levels of organization. The six terms and four levels of organization are: Lord; apostles; councils of elders consisting of overseers/elders/pastors; and deacons. Let us look at each level of leadership so that we may more fully understand the way that our lord Jesus Christ organized the Church to work in our individual communities and around the world. The first level is straightforward: Jesus remains the lord.

**** Lord ** Jesus is Lord!**²⁴¹

**** Apostles **** The general meaning of the term, apostle, refers to one who is sent and officially represents the sender. Going back into the Greek root, this term shows an idea of not just being sent, but also being equipped (prepared) to function correctly as an official representative.²⁴² We

²⁴¹ See Chapter 3.

²⁴² See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* rev. Jones and McKenzie (London, New York, &

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observe that this term was used in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters to designate a group of Jesus' disciples who were responsible for evangelizing cities and establishing the corresponding councils of elders.

The New Testament shows us that the first level of leadership directly under Jesus consisted of the apostles whom Jesus personally appointed.²⁴³ Through Paul's letters, we note that Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and Apollos were apostles in addition to Jesus' closest disciples (students).²⁴⁴ As we read

Toronto; Oxford University Press, 1990), 220, 1637, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, reprint 1979), 99.

²⁴³ Gal 1. Paul is a good example of Jesus appointing His own apostles. Paul states emphatically that he was appointed by Jesus Christ, not by man.

²⁴⁴ Gal 1:1, 19; 1 Thess 2:1, 6; Acts 18:24; 19:10; 1 Cor 1:1, 12-13; 3:4-22; 4:6,9; 9:1-2; 15:9;

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Paul's letters, we come to realize that beyond the apostle's responsibility to evangelize specified areas, he was also responsible for establishing and guiding the councils of elders.²⁴⁵ We know from the book of Acts that through the guidance of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas appointed overseers to look after the Believers of

16:12; 2 Cor 1:1; Titus 1:1; 3:13; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2:7; 2 Tim 1:1; 1:11.

²⁴⁵ Paul states in his second letter to the Corinthians that in addition to his ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, he is responsible to oversee the churches (2 Cor 11:28), "apart from other matters, my daily attention is with the concern of all the churches."

Through the book of Acts, we observe Paul heading to Jerusalem and not having time to visit the Ephesian church. Therefore, Paul sends a message to the elders of Ephesus asking them to meet him at Miletus so that he can instruct and exhort them. He tells them of his concerns and prays for them (Acts 20:17, 31-32). All of Paul's letters are proof of his concern for the churches and his resulting interactions with them as they grow through God's leading.

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the various cities where they had already ministered.²⁴⁶ In addition, we have an account where Paul asked one of his co-workers, Titus, to appoint overseers for all of the cities of Crete where they had ministered.²⁴⁷

**** City-Councils **** Many cities/communities had an assembly of elders who were helped by deacons to oversee and coordinate the day-to-day ministry of local Christians. Several of Paul's letters were addressed to these individual councils of elders who were guiding their respective cities.²⁴⁸ The term "pastor" is derived from a Greek term that means generally "shepherds," one who looks after livestock. In Scriptures, we observe Paul using this term only one time representing a church leader. In its contextual setting, the term "pastor" represented an overseer.²⁴⁹ Paul consistently used the terms

²⁴⁶ Acts 14:21-23.

²⁴⁷ Titus 1:5.

²⁴⁸ Rom; 1 & 2 Cor; Gal (churches-cities of Galatia); Eph; Phil; Col; 1 & 2 Thess.

²⁴⁹ Eph 4:11.

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“episcopates/overseers/bishops” and “presbyters/elders” interchangeably to represent those who were guiding the ministry of Christians within their respective communities. In a letter to Titus, Paul uses the terms “elder” and “overseer” interchangeably confirming their interchangeable usage throughout the New Testament Church.²⁵⁰

The elder’s primary responsibility was to take care of and encourage godly growth and ministry among the Christians of their respective cities. In a letter from Peter, we observe Peter, a fellow elder and an appointed apostle of Jesus Christ, encouraging the elders of various communities to take care of the sheep just as Jesus had personally encouraged him,²⁵¹

Therefore, I, a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ and a partaker of (His) glory that is about to be revealed, exhort (encourage) the elders among you; take care of the flock of God among you-- not under compulsion but willingly

²⁵⁰ Titus 1:5-7.

²⁵¹ 1 Peter 1:1; John 21:15-17.

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according to God, and not with greed but with eagerness, and not as individuals having authority over those who are placed in your care but by being examples of the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you (pl) shall obtain (His) unfading crown of glory [1 Peter 5:1-4].

Through this Scripture, we observe another apostle, Peter, fulfilling his responsibility to oversee and encourage elders who were responsible for guiding the Christians within their respective communities. With the elders' responsibility to guide the Christians within their respective communities, came empowerment from God,

Whoever is sick among you, let him summon the elders (presbyters) of the church (Believers) and let them pray concerning him having anointed [him] with olive oil in the name of the Lord [James 5:14].

**** Deacons **** If it is true that pastors, elders, and overseers really represented the same level of leadership, what about the deacons that Paul mentions in his letter to the Ephesians? Although

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the term “pastor” was used only one time representing a local Church leadership role, we find an abundance of usage of the term “deacon.” Let us look at some people who were called “deacons” by either their title or by the performance of their duties; both come from the same Greek root.

From the standpoint of serving those around us, all who serve are deacons. The following are deacons according to Scripture: Jesus Christ;²⁵² the Apostles;²⁵³ Paul;²⁵⁴ Barnabas;²⁵⁵ Mark,²⁵⁶

²⁵² Rom 15:8.

²⁵³ Acts 6:1-2,4.

²⁵⁴ Acts 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 15:31; 2 Cor 6:3-4; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23-5; 1 Tim 1:12; Eph 3:7.

²⁵⁵ Acts 12:25.

²⁵⁶ 2 Tim 4:11.

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Timothy;²⁵⁷ Apollos;²⁵⁸ Archippus;²⁵⁹ Epaphras;²⁶⁰ Erastus;²⁶¹ Onesimus (the slave);²⁶² Phoebe (a sister in Christ);²⁶³ Stephanas (entire household);²⁶⁴ and Tychicus.²⁶⁵ Then stepping outside the Church, we observe Paul telling the church of Rome that all

²⁵⁷ 1 Tim 4:6.

²⁵⁸ 1 Cor 3:5.

²⁵⁹ Col 4:17.

²⁶⁰ Col 1:7.

²⁶¹ Acts 19:22.

²⁶² Phlm 1:13.

²⁶³ Rom 16:1.

²⁶⁴ 1 Cor 16:15.

²⁶⁵ Eph 6:21; Col 4:17.

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civil rulers are also God's deacons.²⁶⁶ Even Satan has deacons (servants/ministers).²⁶⁷

We observe from Scripture that the term "deacon" was normally used to refer to those who render service. Jesus Christ serves humanity. All of us who accept Jesus Christ as our savior and lord serve humanity with Christ. All Believers are automatically deacons.

Yet, there is a special group of deacons discussed in Paul's first letter to Timothy. These deacons helped with the day-to-day administration of the church for each city. They were not required to preach the Gospel, teach, nor have the same level of administrative capabilities as the apostles or the elders who served on each of the city-councils.

Although we do not have an abundance of information on the official duties of those holding the office of deacon, we have the basic moral requirements and one management requirement for a deacon; he is to be faithful, blameless, and able to

²⁶⁶ Rom 13:4.

²⁶⁷ 2 Cor 11:15.

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at least manage his own household well. He was not required to teach, nor was he required to possess the same social skills as the overseers. The official duties of the office of deacon were not defined in the New Testament. Therefore, from Paul's letter to Timothy, we can assume that their office was set up primarily to serve the overseers in whatever capacity that they were willing and capable.²⁶⁸

Twenty-First Century Councils-of-Elders

The offices of "deacon," "overseer," and "apostle" were to be filled by men. Paul instructed Timothy that women were not to have authority over men nor were they to teach.²⁶⁹ Although God appoints men to lead in the home and assemblies, there are exceptions to this norm. We see God appointing judges during one period of Israel's rebellious stages,²⁷⁰ including Deborah, a

²⁶⁸ 1 Tim 3.

²⁶⁹ I Tim 2:11-12.

²⁷⁰ Judges 2:16, 18.

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prophetess.²⁷¹ In addition, although Paul states that women are not to teach, we see God making an exception by using Aquila and his wife Priscilla to teach a notable preacher, Apollos, more fully in the Word. Therefore, as we study the specific requirements for the office of overseer and deacon, observing through its grammar and context that the requirements were for men, we understand that God makes exceptions to the norm as He sees fit.

Although Paul said that women are not to have authority over men, he praises women for serving. In one example, Paul praises Phoebe in his letter to the Rom. He speaks highly of Phoebe and her services that she had rendered to him and others.²⁷² Here, Paul is writing a recommendation for a fellow Saint who has served well, a woman.

Throughout the New Testament, we observe Jesus appointing elders through His apostles and then helping them develop so that they could lead

²⁷¹ Judges 4 & 5.

²⁷² Rom 16:1-2.

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their respective communities.²⁷³ We observe four levels of organization: 1) Jesus Christ was the active leader of the Church setting Church Doctrine initially through the Believers at Jerusalem; 2) through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's guidance, the apostles were responsible for evangelizing and firmly establishing a council of elders for each community;²⁷⁴ 3) the councils of elders were responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of their respective communities; and 4) the deacons were to assist the elders.

Today, Jesus Christ continues to guide us through the Holy Spirit and uses the written Word

²⁷³ A good example of Paul's ministry as an overseer to the overseers is shown as he encourages the Corinthians to complete a promise they had made regarding sending some of their resources to help their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9).

²⁷⁴ Peter's letters increase our knowledge of cooperation among the apostles; we observe Peter exhorting some of the churches that Paul had worked with, and canonizing Paul's letters (2 Peter 3:15-16).

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of God instead of His first disciples to establish Church doctrine. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the authors of Scripture helps us interpret correctly the Scriptures.²⁷⁵ Jesus Christ set up the “council-of-elders” as the fundamental form of leadership for the collective ministry of all Believers within their respective communities; He has not given us a new commandment to change this form of leadership, nor has He changed the importance of community-wide ministries. He wants to guide us as we minister on community-wide levels around the world. When a community does not have a council of elders working together, it suffers from a lack of strong Christian cooperation. Without Church leadership working together in our respective communities, Jesus is not exalted nor proclaimed as clearly nor effectively as God desires.²⁷⁶ We know that Jesus desires all of us to put some of our time in community-wide ministry. Knowing our **identity** and overall **mission** through Christ helps us to accept our good

²⁷⁵ 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 John 2:27; Paul’s letters are valued on the same level as Old Testament Scriptures: 2 Peter 3:16.

²⁷⁶ John 13:34-35; 17:21, 23; 1 John 1:7.

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work from the Father as Jesus leads us in our individual, family, local-church, community-wide, and worldwide ministries.²⁷⁷ God's love, which is continually demonstrated through His ongoing good work for us, compels us to learn to work together part of the time, and to serve each other all of the time.

When we come together to minister more effectively on community-wide levels, we will have to learn to put aside some of our denominational differences. If we do not allow Satan to tempt us into using our diversities to build walls between us, Jesus will use our diversities to strengthen our collective ministries to the point that we will be a great witness as we join God in His appointed good works.²⁷⁸ We are created with individual differences that can be united under Christ to give the Church great ministering power. Our denominational differences represent a rich tapestry of Christian struggle and development that can be united for ministry through Jesus Christ into

²⁷⁷ 1 Cor 3:9; Eph 1:4-6; 2:10; Titus 2:14.

²⁷⁸ No Divisions: 1 Cor 1:10-13; 12:25-26; Eph 2:13-15; 4:1-6.

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something good and powerful enhancing and highlighting the rich tapestry for all to see. Coming from our different denominational, racial, socioeconomic, and generational backgrounds, we can bring great strength to our collective ministries as we allow Christ to lead us. We can still maintain our different organizational histories, structures, and forms of worship as we **boldly** work together in our communities proclaiming total healing through Jesus Christ. As we work together under Jesus' direction, our joint-efforts will proclaim God's love clearly to all people. Through Jesus Christ, effective joint ministries will transform our hurting communities into communities of love and hope.

Through deception, Satan will try to divide us, and he can only do so if we are not like minded through Jesus Christ.²⁷⁹ Being like-minded starts as we place our desires under our Heavenly Father's guidance. As we submit to our Father's appointed leader for us, Jesus Christ, we begin to have a firm foundation under us from which to work. Without Jesus Christ's continued leadership, we will not be able to minister collectively in our communities.

²⁷⁹ Rom 12:2; 15:5-7; 1 Cor 2:16.

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To follow Jesus' leadership, we must all believe two basic Christian truths, or we will be standing collectively on a bad foundation and will not be able to withstand Satan's attacks against our collective actions: 1) everyone working together under Jesus' authority must trust Jesus to be truly the **only** Way, Truth, and Life,²⁸⁰ and 2) we must trust God and believe that He has given us a Book of Life to establish truth (reality). We must trust God that He has given us salvation through Christ alone and that all of His Word is divinely inspired, and therefore, it is reliable for study, doctrine, and correction.²⁸¹ We do not have to agree on every point, but we must agree on Jesus' identity and the reliability of the Bible on which we stand.

In reality, it takes considerably more effort to work cooperatively with others on an equal footing, but the effort is worth it. The joy and effectiveness of community-wide ministries led by our Lord will transform us and all whom we come in contact with. Jesus desires to direct our paths and show us how to form councils of elders

²⁸⁰ John 14:6.

²⁸¹ 2 Tim 3:16-17.

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consisting of all cooperative church leaders within our respective communities. Everyone should feel comfortable that they are not entering into an agreement that will trap them into doing activities against their local churches' will or beliefs. Therefore the council can never have absolute power; all of us must allow Jesus to continue to direct us individually and collectively. No matter how large or small a church is, each church must be able to have an active voice in the decision making process and enter into collective ministries and activities as it feels led by God. No church should be looked-down-on because it chooses not to participate in some or even all of the collective community-wide activities. By allowing every orthodox Christian church to have an equal voice in discussing, promoting, and participating in community-wide ministries, it allows a true sense of equality among churches, and it allows the larger churches to serve the needs of smaller churches and their neighborhood ministries. Those who are more capable should be willing to serve those who are less able. Remember that the ultimate goal is to join God as He ministers to the needs of our communities and each of us.

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Through this continuous open door council-of-elders approach, churches can express their desires equally and then decide from their own “free-will” how they wish to participate. This continuous open-door policy allows churches to join in those activities that they feel led by the Lord to join and pass on those activities that they do not. There should be no hard feelings among the total group of elders or individual Church leaders regarding any church’s decision about participation.

Throughout Scripture, we observe the importance of community-wide ministries. When we allow Jesus Christ to empower us so that we can serve our communities collectively, we will have the greatest ability to meet the needs of all people. In reality, each of our communities functions as a living organism similar to our local church families, individual families, and our personal lives. If we allow God to guide us through the Bible and His personal leadership, He will teach all of us to minister on all levels including the highly effective community-wide level. God’s obedient children are to love and help their neighbors; the people of our own communities are truly our closest neighbors. What God teaches and demonstrates to us about leadership and family should compel *all* of us to

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minister collectively to our communities. If we are responsive to Jesus Christ, which includes obediently following the full council of God's Word, the Bible, and following His leadership, the churches of our communities will become a great *witness* and *work* bringing great honor to God as people see us joining Him in His Great Work.

A Great Witness

Jesus commanded it, and His early disciples did it. They worked together so well proclaiming God's Grace that they turned their world upside down. Throughout the New Testament, we note Jesus' disciples expressing their unity (oneness) through their common fellowship and ministry. Initially, Believers waited together for empowerment from God through the Holy Spirit,²⁸² after being empowered, they ministered together with one heart and mind providing a great witness,

All Believers were together and had all things common, and their possessions and

²⁸² Acts 1:14.

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property they were selling and dividing these things to each one according to whatever he or she had need; and throughout each day they were together of one mind in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, receiving (eating) food with great joy and humility of heart praising God and having grace for all people. And the Lord was placing those who were being saved throughout each day together [Acts 2:44-47].

They did not sell **all** their possessions, **nor** was it mandatory to sell any of their possessions to be part of the Church.²⁸³ In reality, first-century Believers (those trusting God) still had personal property including homes.²⁸⁴

We observe that as Believers were filled with the Holy Spirit (born from above, born of the Spirit), they were more willing *to share* their possessions with others. A proper relationship with

²⁸³ Acts 5:4.

²⁸⁴ Property & Control of Resources: Acts 5:4.
 Owning Personal Houses: Acts 12:12.

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God, which is built on love, taught Believers to be genuinely concerned for people who were not part of their immediate biological family. Jesus gives all Believers one heart and mind so that we can be “one” with God and each other as He and the Father are “one.”²⁸⁵ We note that the Church was ministering with great grace as Believers sold their excess and gave it to those in need. If we wish to live in God’s will today, we must do likewise. We must learn to have genuine concern for everyone; God will teach us to help those who are not part of our immediate biological family both spiritually (relational) and physically.

Our greatest witness will come as we come to realize who we are in Christ and begin to act together as the reconciled children of God that we are. Unity and corresponding peace will not come to the world except through Jesus Christ.²⁸⁶ In order that we may work together effectively to help people spiritually and physically, we must learn to share God’s love for the lost. We must come to understand deeply that separation from God *is* the

²⁸⁵ John 17:11.

²⁸⁶ Gal 3:26-28.

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worst thing that can happen to anyone. God loves all people including His enemies and created all people to be with Him for eternity.²⁸⁷ Scripture teaches us that all people are God's descendants and exist through Him,

And He (God) made out of one nation (one people, one blood) each nation of people to dwell upon the face of the Earth, having determined the designated times and the boundaries of their dwelling; to seek God, you may be sure, that if you feel for Him and find [Him], He surely is not far from each one of us. For we live, move, and exist in Him even as some of the poets according to you (pl) have said; For of God we are even offspring (*descendants*) [Acts 17:26-28].

We know that all people, saved and unsaved, are God's descendants,²⁸⁸ and we know that our Heavenly Father loves everyone. He loves all

²⁸⁷ Love: John 3:16-17; 1 John 3:16; 4:16. God's Love of His Enemies: Matt 5:43-48.

²⁸⁸ Gen 1:26-27; Acts 17:22-29; Eph 3:14-15.

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people so much that He sent Jesus Christ to die on the Cross to take on and remove everyone's sins. Jesus Christ who never sinned took on all of our sins from all generations from the beginning of the Creation to the end, and those who accept God's love and leadership become righteous through Christ.²⁸⁹

Our Heavenly Father has provided an opportunity for full transformation and reconciliation for all of His children; those who receive Jesus as their lord and savior are reconciled immediately unto God through Jesus' atoning death on the Cross.²⁹⁰ We must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit²⁹¹ as we learn to grow in our love toward all including those whom we consider our enemies.²⁹² If we allow God to teach us to love

²⁸⁹ 2 Cor 5:21.

²⁹⁰ Rom 3:23-25; 4:25-5:21; 2 Cor 5:18.

²⁹¹ Acts 13:39; 15:10-11; Rom 8:12-15; Eph 2:8-9.

²⁹² Luke 10:36; Rom 13:8b-10; Matt 5:43-48. Enemy: children of disobedience: Rom 8:6-7;

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Him and each other, we will collectively proclaim the Gospel through our ongoing *actions* and *words*,²⁹³ our collective ministries within our local communities will provide the greatest witness.²⁹⁴

A Great Work

If we do not feel the pain of those in need, we are not walking with God. Through God, we can feel the pain of others,²⁹⁵ and through this pain, ***God calls us into action.***²⁹⁶ We are called to minister to our hurting brothers and sisters both lost and saved.²⁹⁷ Jesus tells us that if we take care of those in need, it is the same as taking care of

Eph 2:1-3; James 4:1-4.

²⁹³ 2 Cor 5:17-20; Rom 10:15.

²⁹⁴ John 17:23.

²⁹⁵ Isaiah 63:9; Matt 5:3-12; 1 Cor 12:26.

²⁹⁶ Matt 25:31-46.

²⁹⁷ Luke 10:29-37.

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Him.²⁹⁸ As we help our fellow brothers and sisters who are in need, we are blessing them **and** our eldest brother, Jesus Christ. As we receive and work with those in need beginning with our children who are esteemed least by many, we are also receiving and working with Jesus.²⁹⁹ **Think about it!** If we help those in need especially those who are or eventually will be in the immediate family of God, we are also helping Jesus. Our Heavenly Father tells us that His obedient children will be ministering to others both spiritually and physically.³⁰⁰

As we allow Jesus to lead us, He will teach us to do **God's good works**; He will teach us to **make disciples** of all people who listen to God, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them **all** things that He has taught us. **There is no greater work!** Do you know people who are hurting others? Take them to Jesus; He can teach them to care. Do you know

²⁹⁸ Matt 25:40, 45.

²⁹⁹ Mark 9:37; Luke 9:46-48.

³⁰⁰ James 2:14-26.

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people who have just given up on life? Take them to Jesus; He can restore and strengthen them. Do you know people who look out only for themselves and their families? Take them to Jesus; He can teach them to love as He loves. Do you have any personal needs that need special attention? Take them to Jesus; He loves you and will help you.

It sounds **so** simple and in reality it is fairly straightforward: a personal obedient relationship with Jesus Christ is the answer to all of our problems. The overarching battle going on around us is Satan's actions and deceptions all aimed to destroy us by separating us from God and each other. His battle cry is, "divide and conquer." Therefore, there is nothing more important than proclaiming the truth about God's love for all. God wants us to acknowledge and experience His love by working **together** to unite all who listen through Jesus Christ.

God wants all people to come Home forever. Knowing this, we must never let our selfishness or the busyness of this World obscure our individual and collective ministries with God. We should be introducing as many as possible to Jesus, Secondly, we live in a world in which many need basic

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essentials such as food, clothing, housing, and medical treatment. Through the barrage and necessity of taking care of the world's physical needs, we can easily lose sight of our most important ministry: helping others to know how much God loves them in order that they may listen to Him, receive His love and righteousness, and join Him in a personal relationship. We must encourage all to seek reconciliation with our Heavenly Father. Although it is very important to help people overcome their physical needs if they wish to do so, we must never let their physical needs outweigh the importance of everyone's need for salvation from an eternal life of suffering and shame in Hell. God would like to see all come to the place of repentance submitting to His lordship so that He can develop within each a righteous loving relationship. Without spiritual healing, there will never be inner peace and joy that surpasses this world's understanding.

Our individual, local church, and community-wide ministries will never be simple nor easy as people fight against God and others. As Christ's followers, let us learn to work with other like-minded followers of Christ to minister to our communities. We should expect much pain in the

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process. There is an intense battle going on that is producing many casualties. No matter what we do, many will never allow Jesus Christ to become their lord.³⁰¹ Many are following the Broad Path of Destruction with friends who are accompanying them and easing their conscience. They will not submit to anyone's authority including the Creator's. They continually reject God's perfect plan of eternal fellowship as they struggle with their own selfishness and pride.

Let us ask God to guide us in doing ***His greatest work***, saving souls, on individual, family, local-church, community-wide, and worldwide levels. Under God's guidance, our collective ministries on community and world-wide levels will produce many good works bringing great honor to God as all people observe His Great Work going on in and through us. *Let us work together to provide the greatest witness and work that our communities and world have ever seen* remembering that Jesus told us that as we minister together in close unity, the world will know that *the Father sent Him*.³⁰² Let

³⁰¹ Matt 7:13.

³⁰² John 17:23.

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us rejoice as we join God in this great work because, in reality, we are helping save those whom we are learning to love; this brings us our greatest joy.³⁰³

³⁰³ John 15:1-11; 17:13; cf. Heb 12:2.

Conclusion:

Doing Our Father's Business

Our Eldest Brother and Lord came to us in the form of a babe. He shared part of His life with us on Earth teaching us through His **actions and words**. One of His last actions on Earth was to go to the Cross to remove our sins. And shortly after the agony of the Cross came the sweet **Victory** proclaimed by God through the Resurrection.³⁰⁴ Within three days of our Lord's death, our Heavenly Father raised Jesus Christ from the grave proclaiming Him as the one and only path to eternal fellowship with Him. Those who seek God and His will for their lives will find this path to great joy and peace. Through Jesus' **victory over death** and His ongoing leadership, God has made a way for all people to mature and join Him forever. The consummation of our up-and-coming great relationship with God has been made possible

³⁰⁴ Eph 1:19-23; 1 Cor 15:1-4, 20-28, 45, 54-57; 2 Tim 1:9-10.

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through Jesus' love for us, and His obedience to our Father's leading.³⁰⁵ Jesus' obedience to our Heavenly Father led Him to the Cross for us.³⁰⁶ As part of God's plan for a "free-willed" eternal relationship with us, each of us must live out our one and only physical life and decide whether we will accept or reject His love and righteousness for eternity. There is no reincarnation giving us two or more chances to choose God's love and righteous ways over our own selfishness and pride.

Jesus tells us that if we continue in His Word, we are truly His disciples (ever-learning students) and we will come to know reality, which will set us free from the bondage of our selfish desires and pride.³⁰⁷ Through God's Word and His continual caring interaction in our lives, we can learn to trust and obey Him because of His great love for us and His ability to carry out His designs and promises. If we strive to walk with God daily, He will teach us and demonstrate to us that He truly

³⁰⁵ John 15:9.

³⁰⁶ Matt 26:39; Mark 14:34-36; Luke 22:42.

³⁰⁷ John 8:31-32; 14:16-17; 16:13.

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loves us and that He is trustworthy of our faithfulness to Him. God has earned our love and respect through the Creation and the Cross with both events directing our attention toward His desired eternal fellowship with all. What God has done for us out of love should motivate us to join Him in His daily ministry to all. ***Whether we are at home, work, church, or play, God should be shaping what we do and say.***

As we begin to understand how precious we are to God, let us stop being tossed about as the waves on a rough sea.³⁰⁸ All Christians should act on the fact that God has brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light.³⁰⁹ Right now, we are the obedient children of the Most High.³¹⁰ We must stop allowing Satan to deceive us through our own

³⁰⁸ Eph 4:10-15.

³⁰⁹ 1 Peter 2:9; Eph 4:22-29.

³¹⁰ 1 John 3:2.

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selfish desires;³¹¹ instead, let us allow God to lead us into His good works through the Holy Spirit.³¹²

Let us rejoice in the life and peace that our Heavenly Father has given us through Jesus Christ.³¹³ We know that eventually in the not-to-distant future, we will become perfectly transformed into the likeness of Christ with all the rights of Christ.³¹⁴ Our Heavenly Father **promises** that our sinful nature will be completely transformed to match His and Jesus' loving and righteous nature.³¹⁵ Our future home is in the New Heaven with our Heavenly Father removing all tears and sorrows.³¹⁶ ***Knowing our identity within***

³¹¹ John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:6-9; James 1:13-15.

³¹² John 8:14-17; Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14.

³¹³ Rom 5:1-5.

³¹⁴ Phil 1:6; Rom 8:14-17, 28-30; 1 John 3:1-3; compare to the intent of the Creation (Gen 1:26-27).

³¹⁵ Exod 33:18-19; 34:6; John 1:14.

³¹⁶ Phil 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11; Rev 21:1-7.

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God's family and knowing that we will be with God living in love, joy, and peace forever should give us the confidence needed to go forward each day ministering to those who need our help now.

Therefore, let us stop being afraid of the future, and let us allow God to teach us to practice grace so that we may bless many.³¹⁷ Let us follow our savior and lord, Jesus Christ, in wisdom and power as we praise continually our Heavenly Father for His great love and corresponding plan of eternal fellowship for all who listen.

Are you demonstrating the Victory that occurs when an individual obediently accepts God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ? God transforms and empowers us so that we may join Him in His Great Work that He prepared for us before He implemented the Creation. Our Heavenly Father calls us to be co-laborers with Him in His Great Work of ***rescuing the lost***.³¹⁸ Although the Father and Jesus maintain final authority, they share

³¹⁷ Matt 6:31-34; Luke 12:29-34.

³¹⁸ John 17:23, 26; Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 3:9; Titus 2:14.

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some of their responsibility and corresponding authority with all who listen.³¹⁹ Therefore, let each of us carry his or her individual cross that our Father has assigned,³²⁰ and let us continually communicate with Him asking for His will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.³²¹ As God works with us moment-by-moment, He teaches us through His own **actions** and **words** that the real blessings of life come from helping others.

We know from God's Word that we are not saved by the good works that He has set aside for us, but instead, we join Him joyfully in His Great Work because He is changing **our hearts to care for others** as He transforms us to be like Christ.³²² Through Jesus, we can learn truly to care about each other, and therefore, we can turn from the

³¹⁹ John 17:18; Acts 1:8; Eph 1:19; 3:14-20; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 1:7; Rev 3:21.

³²⁰ Luke 9:23; Matt 16:24.

³²¹ Matt 6:10; Luke 11:2.

³²² Rom 8:28-30; James 1:22; 2:20, 26; Titus 1:16; Matt 7:16-21.

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Wide Path of Destruction and help others do likewise.

Through our willing submission and interaction with God, He will teach us to trust Him freeing us to joyfully give out of our Father's abundance to those in need– we are His managing His resources as we live out this part of eternity. Our godly unity and true love for each other will show the World that our Heavenly Father *sent* Jesus Christ into our world to save all.³²³ If we allow God's love to be grown in us, we will joyfully join God in building His family out of all who are willing to submit to such a great Father and King.³²⁴

Now, let me ask **you** a very important question. Have you turned from self to God and are personally striving to join God in His Great Work? Are you working individually and collectively with other Christians to proclaim the Gospel through your actions as well as your words? God's greatest witness and work occurs when His children work

³²³ John 13:34-35; 17:23.

³²⁴ Matt 7:16-21; Titus 1:16; James 1:22-25; 2:20; Col 3:1-17.

together to witness and minister to our communities and the world.³²⁵ As we allow our Lord Jesus Christ to guide us in individual, local church, community, and world-wide service, He will help us work together with other like-minded Believers who are obedient to the whole council of His written Word as well as the leadership of the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus' leadership, we can provide a Great Witness and Work. As we make individual decisions to unite and work collectively at various times under the lordship of Jesus Christ, Jesus will teach us to work as "one."³²⁶ Let Jesus guide us as we establish strong individual, local church, community, and world-wide ministries. Through Jesus Christ, we can learn to minister ***individually*** and ***collectively*** resolving many problems. Accepting God's love, righteousness, and His sent son, Jesus Christ, is the eternal solution to all problems. Whether we are doing a normal daily task or something special, we should always follow God's will for our lives.

Now, as **you** finish this book, consider making a commitment to God to open your heart more fully to His will for your life. If you have not

³²⁵ Gal 3:28.

³²⁶ Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 12; Eph 4.

done so already, commit to reading His Word daily and try your best to follow Jesus. Be led by the Spirit, learn through the Spirit, and obey God out of love.³²⁷ If you commit to a full-time relationship with God, *expect* Him to transform you into someone good as He teaches you to do the good works that He set aside for you prior to physically creating the universe. God's love working in you will give you eternal peace that passes all understanding and good works that will be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.³²⁸ **You will bless many** as you join God and His other obedient children doing His great work, saving the lost. I look forward to meeting you in the future as we join God for eternity.

Thank God for Jesus!

³²⁷ Rom 8:14; 1 John 2:27; John 14:21, 23.

³²⁸ Phil 4:7; Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14; Gal 5:22-23.

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