

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A Heartfelt Christianity



Christianity was never based on a common doctrine written in books or law or tradition; nor was it ever intended to be the gift of scholarly minds to share; nor even in a common language to be understood. In His profound wisdom, God wrote it in indelible verse in the only place where it could be the property of a common faith by us all. He has written it on our hearts.

*“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I
— put within you: Ezekiel 36:26.” —*

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The spiritual man in each believer's heart - Lightfoot

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ISBN: 978-1-105-61797-3

Cover design by John King, with AI assistance (ChatGPT, OpenAI)

The following list of English translations might help to identify the limited use of them in this work. [<https://solarmythology.com/translations/bibles.htm>]

- AMP Amplified Bible 2015
- AMPC Amplified Bible Classic Edition 1965
- ASV American Standard Version 1901
- BBE Bible in Basic English 1965
- CEB Common English Bible, 2011
- CEV Contemporary English Version 1995 (NT - 1991)
- CSB Christian Standard Bible 2016
- CWB Clear Word Bible 1992
- ERV Easy to Read 2015
- ESV English Standard Version 2003
- ICB NCV International Children's Bible, New Century Version 1986 (NT - 1978)
- JPB J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English 1958 (Revised 1972)
- KJ21 Twenty-First Century King James Version 1994 (NT - 1992)
- KJV AV King James Version (also known as Authorized Version) 1611
- MLB NBV Modern Language Bible also known as New Berkley Version 1959 (NT - 1945; NT revised 1969)
- NASB New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971 (NT - 1963; Revised 1996)
- NET New English Translation 2005
- NIrV New International Reader's Version (NIrV) 1996
- NIV New International Version 1978 (NT - 1973)
- NKJV New King James Version 1982
- NLT New Living Translation 1996
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version 1990
- TEV Good News Bible also known as Today's English Version 1974 (NT - 1966; Revised 1993)
- YLT Young's Literal Translation 1862 (Revised 1887, 1898)
- WIL Williams New Testament in the Language of the People 1937; Reprinted 2000 as Millennium edition.

To all who love Jesus

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Preface

This book is all about the “New Heart” we receive upon salvation in Christ. Do we need a book like this?

Perhaps, we should ask why the Hebrew word for “heart” appears in the Old Testament Text over 850 times in nearly all Old Testament books except 3: Amos, Micah, and Habakkuk. Fewer than 10 references are about the physical organ. In the New Testament the Greek word for “heart” appears over 155 times. It appears over 50 times in Paul and 45 times in Luke’s writings.

The Biblical term for righteous, justice, in both Testaments totals 755 times. God’s Word refers to the heart in a spiritual sense more times than righteousness. The word “grace” which we know is central to Christian truth appears 156 times equal in appearance with our word “heart.”

Theologians highlight the centrality of the new heart in salvation because without it the gospel reduces to moralism, ignoring humanity’s spiritual deadness. Without a new heart, holiness has to be understood academically as an absolute morality we can only debate but never live out. The Mosaic Covenant’s focus on law is mere literary history without a new heart to write it on and give it meaning. Without a new heart Abraham’s progeny, Moses’ promised land, and David’s kingdom cannot exist because the “old’ heart Jeremiah told us is incurably ill and these covenants will die with it without a new heart to fulfill them. A new heart is essential for understanding redemptive history and God’s unchanging faithfulness.

Preface

The reasons behind God giving us a new covenant in Christ [Ezekiel 36:26] are highly important—arguably indispensable—as it encapsulates God's redemptive plan: from diagnosing the problem [hardened hearts] to providing the solution through Christ and the Spirit [new hearts].

We live in the time of an artificial intelligence that is capturing the minds and hearts of the masses. It is all seeming so natural that many cannot see the line between human and machine. It is becoming an “Alternative Inspiration” to the message of Scripture. A.I. is not replacing mankind. A.I. is replacing God! This has become a cautionary tale of the importance of cultivating Christian fellowship, of studying the Word of God with a view to practicing its wisdom, of listening to the heart after God that He has put deep within our souls that beats in rhythm with His own and of marching to that beat.

What we are saying is that without the new heart, there can be no heaven. That would be the ultimate tragedy.

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“O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.” - Psalm 36:10

A study of *the heart* rightly calls for poetic license to even begin to discern its importance in Scripture. Francis Godet in his commentary on Corinthians called the heart, “that deep and rich soil of feeling into which the will and mind strike their roots.” [Godet, 420] This is another—and perhaps the primary—reason we must trust God in matters of the heart because He alone knows the heart. Every Biblical word from holiness, piety, love, godliness, goodness to hate, jealousy, fear is interpreted by the heart and assigned nuance and purpose. Depending on the spiritual condition of that heart and its relationship with God, every word in real life can have a different meaning. In America, for example, both sides of a divided country are passionate about defending “democracy,” but it is obvious each side must mean something different by the term.

The difficulty is apparent: the very words we use to engage the heart have been defined by that heart. The heart is the instrument by which life is ultimately interpreted. Take, for example, a child abused by a male guardian and the child comes to adulthood and is told that God is their “father.” What does that word mean to them now? Conversely, a Christian can read in Scripture that God hated Esau and see only grace in that statement!

The task of communicating “Truth” [God’s truth] to people is gargantuan and requires on a believer’s part an infinite patience, the ability to quietly take abuse and ridicule, and an honest introspection continually “examining” their own heart to

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be sure they haven't lost their "first" love—to use a Biblical phrase. But there is no art or science that we can use to explain God to the heart of others. God must do that. Our opportunity in evangelism is the privilege to introduce the Savior to them. He must "take it from there." The Biblical word "evangelize" means to share this truth. We don't save anyone!

I was once told that God's love is a hard love and I could not reconcile that with how my heart was interpreting this idea. Maybe His love is hard and I don't understand the word "hard." But the ability to comprehend, or perceive or know with any degree of confidence or certainty is not a function of the brain but of the heart.

Though this may sound like a change in subject, a true knowledge of God—knowing Him—is why God gave us faith. God speaks to the heart and faith affirms and accepts His voice and Word as true. Here is where faith begins its great work of bringing us to a full and perfect knowledge of all God wants us to know about Himself and His salvation. Paul wrote in Romans 1:17 "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." And that righteousness is revealed to the heart. It is the heart where knowledge is treasured. Proverbs 2:2 Solomon admonishes his son to "incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;"

How someone understands happiness, for example, depends on the condition of their heart. Postmodern thought puts a premium on personal happiness where in earlier times, we, boomers, spoke more of duty and responsibility. The "rub" is that no term is more dependent on heart for meaning and significance than *happiness*. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes turned this word on its head, defining it in terms no self-respecting postmodern thinker would ever have done. In the believer's understanding, happiness is a "by-product" [dare we say, "consequence"] of following Christ and serving others [giving not getting]. Happiness for believers is not the goal. It is the blessing that comes following Christ.

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Much of God's Word is abstract Truth—words that have no real meaning until they are personalized through experience. That's the heart's job. This simple fact is profound in application. The heart tends to personalize everything and perceive of truth in terms of one's own experiences. This is as it must be because God's truth must be lived to be understood. Often believers tend to think of God as doing to others as He has done to them. They often define what is spiritual in such personal terms. This does not mean we have our own truth—God forbid. What this means is that each one must hear from God and each heart must learn for themselves in communion with the Lord, who alone can explain and instruct.

The reasoning of the heart is not based at all on logic as a science but on experience and how the past is understood in the present. Much of what I think to be reasonable may be, in fact, in conflict with what I profess because I don't know my own heart that well and how it assigns feelings to memories.

Jesus' parable of the sower describes in an elemental way four conditions into which the seed of God's salvation through our witness is "sown in their hearts" [Mark 4:15]. It is significant that Paul would see himself or Apollos as God's instrument only to sow and water that seed. God alone can give it life to germinate and grow. "Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" [1 Corinthians 3:7].

To call the heart the seat of understanding and will is not only a biblical motif, it is the best language to explain what should be centric in Christian theology. A hard heart lacks understanding. A "fleshly one" according to Ezekiel 36:26 has understanding. In Proverbs 24:30 Solomon speaks of "the vineyard of the man void of understanding;" The Hebrew literally reads: "lacking heart" indicating that the heart is the instrument of understanding in Scripture. A great portion of the wisdom of Scripture is locked away in this Biblical description of "the heart."

Perhaps, soteriology might be summed up in a few verses that all Christians can attest to. These verses speak of "the

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condition of the heart” The “Fall” of Adam is clearly recorded in Genesis 6:9: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his *heart* was only evil continually.” The heart is the seat of imagination and thought. The writer to the Hebrews agreed: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the *heart*.” [Hebrews 4:12].

According to Jeremiah 17:9 the *heart* of man is deceitful [manipulative, crafty, and deceitfully self-serving and] wicked [incurably ill] and no amount of therapy can change this, as Jeremiah attested, “who can know it [the heart].” The answer: Only God can. He has been called the “Heart-knower” in Acts 1:24 and 15:8. Only God can ... “for he knows the secrets of the heart.” [Psalm 44:21]. Paul said the same in Romans 3:11 “There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God.”

So God must replace it! Ezekiel 36:26 gives us this detail of the New Covenant in Christ: “A new *heart* also will I give you” Jeremiah 31:33-34 affirms that with this heart comes understanding. “I will ... write [my law] in their *hearts*; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor ... saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me”

We needed, as believers who trust God, new hearts that were alive and sensitive to God’s desires and approval. It is this “organ” whereby one can know God. The heart is also identified in Scripture as the “spirit” of a man or woman by which spiritual truth is discernible or knowable [Ezekiel 36:26]. Thus, salvation is spoken of as receiving a new heart and brought alive [1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:1, 5] by Christ, the last Adam, a quickening [life-giving] spirit [1 Corinthians 15:45]. Paul wrote “... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” [2 Corinthians 3:3].

In this work, we want to take a closer look at the theological implications of discussing doctrine in terms of or in relation to “the heart.” There is an added bonus here. Treating

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the heart as the vertex or the historical point from which Christian views diverged, we might, if we are serious about its importance in theological thought, find our way back to that beginning when believers were all “in one accord” [Acts 2:1]. What motivates us above all is the Savior’s prayer [John 17:21] to put forth that final heartfelt thrust of the sickle in a united effort in a harvest of souls.

We may read Romans 12:1 this way. The King James English reads, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...” which can be read, “I urge you, look upon the Savior’s heart, His compassion for His creation, for fallen mankind ... it will change you! You will find giving your life to His cause the only reasonable thing to do...”. And when it is the only thing, when every believer’s mind is transformed to cherish God’s will and see in it their *raison d’être*, their “reason for being,” the Church will be united. This is the heart of the matter.

We Need A New Heart

In Deuteronomy 30:10 we read “turn [return, repent] unto the Lord thy God with all thine *heart*, and with all thy *soul*.” “My soul” is another way of saying, “me, myself.” In Psalm 139:14 David professed, “I am ... wonderfully made: ... and that *my soul* knows right well.” [I know right well]. The same can be said of the “heart.”

The “heart” in Scripture is where all perceptions, imagined and real, are processed into experience and knowledge. Everything we think, feel, imagine, and intend to do, filters through this “spiritual” organ—not the brain! Your “heart” [not the physical organ] is the communication hub of the soul and spirit, where dreams are first lived out, plans are equipped with passion, resolutions are birthed, mere thoughts are given intention, experiences are interpreted, circumstances are weighted in importance. The heart is the center for understanding: weighing, evaluating, assigning some reality, to what is heard, from God or man. This is more than comprehension. It is acting on what is understood making it

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forevermore part of one's interpretation of life, itself. Should not God have a say in what kind of heart we have and if the old one is not capable of loving Him because of sin, should we not ask for a new one!

Soul

Often in the Old Testament, the soul is used to represent desires because—to be exegetically blunt—the spirit after Adam's sin was not “alive unto God” [Romans 6:11]. The distinction between soul and spirit in the Old Testament is one of *quantity* [intensity].

In Judges 18:25 in the King James Version, for example, we read about “angry fellows.” The actual words say these men were “bitter in their *soul*.” C. F. Keil in his commentary calls this a “savage disposition.” Here is the story: 600 men from the tribe of Dan were determined to have an idol owned by Micah [not the prophet] which he kept in his home for worship. These men were determined to establish a more central religious tradition within their borders. So, bitter here means “angry [the New Living Translation reads: short-tempered].

Compare this to a bitterness of *spirit* or crippling emotional grief in Genesis 26:35 that Isaac and Rebekah lived with when their eldest son married “outside the faith.” Rebekah's grief far exceeded the emotion the Danites were experiencing. The Old Testament makes this clear by saying it was in her spirit while the lesser emotion of anger was in the souls of these 600 men. [I know: we don't talk this way. But they did.]

The “soul” speaks occasionally of “mental acts” [BDB, 661] which is language used also to describe the *heart* in the Old Testament. Proverbs 8:5 speaks of an understanding heart. Some scholars ascribe more feeling than reasoning to the soul and more reasoning than feeling to the heart. In Deuteronomy 4:29 Moses admonished, “If you seek the LORD your God, you will find him, if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

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Spirit

The spirit in the Old Testament is the seat of vivid emotions, deep feelings, a “spirited” reaction to life. Within the heart it is transformed into moral character because of free-will. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that the Word of God can distinguish between soul and spirit [Hebrews 4:12] and can consequently discern between the thoughts and intents of the heart. Actually, a better translation would be to flip “thoughts and intents” to read “intents and thoughts” which not only better represents the meanings of the original but now corresponds better to “soul and spirit.” The soul more appropriately is said to contain the thoughts, “mind” or “mindset” [1 Peter 4:1]. The idea of strong emotions with intention better describes the spirit of a man [Matthew 9:4; also in the KJV of Acts 17:29 “device”].

“The Word of God exercises its judicial functions as well in the realm of thought, purpose, and resolution, [the soul] as in that of affection, inclination and passion [the spirit].” [Lange, Hebrews, XI, 94].

What an animal does defines what the animal is. A dog barks because it’s a dog; a cat meows because it is a cat. But this is not true of man. We sometimes do things out of character. This is why humans are capable of remorse and contrition—unlike animals that if they have any regret, it is in the form of attrition or the regret that they were caught. A conscience and self-consciousness are strictly human traits.

I have done things before that upon reflection, I thought they was so unlike me, and I wasn’t sure why I did them. In fact, some reasons came to light years later after much study and self reflection in the Word of God before I came up with a satisfactory understanding of what I did that was so wrong and I was able to accept self forgiveness. All of this is an example of the Word of God being enable to discern between my mind and my feelings, what I understood was right for me and the reckless reaction to some situation that didn’t represent that right.

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Heart

The spirit and heart are almost indistinguishable because of the “fall” of Adam. We needed “new” hearts and revived spirits: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walks after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord GOD.” [Ezekiel 11:19-21].

The heart can be viewed as the area of our “being,” the factory, where actions are made while the soul and spirit provide the resources, the mind and emotions [Deuteronomy 30:14; Luke 6:45]. None of this is intended as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting Scripture. Our purpose here is to emphasize the importance of having a heart for God and how this impacts our Christian walk.

It must be obvious that this is an analogy only designed to help us interpret Scripture not provide psychological or scientific insight into human behavior. But what we are wanting to do is put a serious Biblical focus or attention on the biblical use of the “heart” in our relationship with the Lord.

The Old Testament language cannot draw out clear distinctions but we will see this distinction in the New.

What This Book is NOT about

Meantime, here is what what we are *not* saying:

- We are not saying that we should “follow our hearts” which is not a biblical idea. This mantra in effect means “do what feels good” and we are describing the opposite. We want Jesus to lead as we follow Him. God’s truth must be heartfelt and not just mentally assented to. The old Gospel chorus we sung as children goes: “Into my heart, into my heart, Come into my heart, Lord Jesus;

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Come in today, come in to stay, Come into my heart, Lord Jesus." If one says, "I had a mind to say it " even in English we recognize the difference between this and in saying "but I didn't have the heart." The mind can think thoughts often times only imagined while the heart either gives them life or buries them—acts on them or discards them. We are not saying: feelings over doctrine. Following Christ has a cross to bear, burdens to carry. These are not emotionalism; this is God's love in the heart and an impassioned commitment to God's Word.

- We are not confusing a "gut" feeling with the voice of God or the peace of God. Believers know there are clear distinctions here.
- We are not saying that everyone must interpret or understand God's Word, God's Truth, in their own way or in terms of their own experience or lifestyle. It is the opposite: we must in prayer and study of the Word discover God's perspective or interpretation of our experience. The Message of Scripture transcends all human culture and all personal interests. We follow God's Word absolutely, uncompromisingly, and unquestioningly. We do not have our "own truth." By understanding the heart as the seat of spiritual understanding, we mean only, that this Divine Truth, the unchanging Word of God, has become not just an academic study but a part of who we are. We need to live it with a wholehearted spontaneity that makes the Word of God in our lives and experiences as natural as breathing.
- We are not saying that an in depth study of God's Word academically is unwarranted or unnecessary. Christianity has been "dumbed-down" by a pulpit ministry that left out the harder parts of Christian truth and put the lighter aspects of that truth to song. Church should not be about good feelings but about equipping the saints for ministry. Church is not about blessings but about fellowship and a mutual support. Church is a 'We'

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in the battle against evil. This book does not support a seeker-friendly mandate or approach to ministry. We are going into spiritual battle in prayer and we need to be prepared not with pep-talks but with a boot camp regiment that encourages us to stay in the battle against evil and sin until the end. This cannot happen unless our hearts also our in the fight. Many believers, probably, know nothing about taking up their cross to follow the Savior or the weapons of our spiritual warfare or the cherished lessons of a Job ... or even what evil and sin are! But the head cannot care without the heart entering the fray. Even in a natural sense we tend to understand persons better when we care about them. True spiritual knowledge is heartfelt. True spiritual knowledge is experienced. Through faith we affirm God's Truth and own it not just in our minds but in our hearts, not just as an understandable idea to believe but as a reasonable way to live.

- We are not calling faith an entitlement [you get what you believe for or a positive thought]; faith is not opinion, and far more than mental assent to doctrine. Faith is a trust in the person of Jesus Christ. Faith is an affirming knowledge of God's Word that recognizes His voice amidst a thousand others. "Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone," that is, saving faith is a livable faith, a public witness to the power of the Gospel.
- In short: The Bible never proposed a tension between God and us [this idea is transactional] but a covenant relationship, a cooperative work: The yoke is for 2, Our Lord and us [Matthew 11:29].
 - Transactional relationships are exchanges, reciprocal, conditional; I give so that you might give me; I give to get], what each party gets in return like a business deal.
 - By contrast, covenantal relationships are unconditional, relationship defining, and a

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personal long-term commitment, trust, and mutual like a marriage.

A Loving Heart

“Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:” - Deuteronomy 6:5-6

Reading the 28th chapter of 1 Chronicles, one gets the strong impression that building the Temple was more David’s vision than his son’s, Solomon’s. In verse 2 we read David confessed, “I *had* in mine *heart* to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD.” David, having collected the supplies necessary to build, in verse 19 he testified, “All this ... the LORD made me *understand* in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this *pattern*.”

This was his instruction to Solomon [verse 9], “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a *perfect heart* and with a willing mind: for *the LORD searches all hearts*, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”

All spiritual knowledge is treasured in the believer’s heart not his or her head. When the Lord speaks to us—when Scripture is read or God uses another person or a circumstance to enlighten us—such knowledge is affirmed by the faith God has put in our hearts. Our lives are a parable that has personal meaning to us as the Lord guides us through life. David was not an architect nor a contractor nor a builder. We knew him as a king and a warrior. This would not prevent or limit God from giving him the pattern for the new temple because his heart was after God’s [Acts 13:22].

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A Closer Look

When Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, the Bible says in Genesis 48:14 "guiding his hands wittingly" he put his right hand on the younger Ephraim. "Guiding" is the Hebrew word meaning to "cross" his hands coming from a word to plate the hair or interweave and it is the same spelling [a homonym] of the root word used by David in 1 Chronicles 28 saying "The Lord *made me understand*." This sounds like a long way around to interpret the word "understanding" but it gives us added insight into how the Ancients thought. They took a word that meant to weave the hair and used it descriptively of Jacob crisscrossing his hands. Then, they said, this is exactly how one gets understanding weaving together their experiences and perceptions.

Understanding here means insightful, skilled. We might say "prudent." It takes "heart." In Exodus 31:6 in order to build the Tabernacle according to the pattern God gave Moses, God said, "In the heart of every wise-hearted one I have given wisdom, and they have made all that which I have commanded thee."

Perhaps, the etymology of this word never intended to develop along this reasoning but here is a word that expresses the heart with such clarity as to suggest one cannot be skillful in anything unless it is in their heart to do so. Few people sit down to the piano, unless they are a savant, and start playing without the learned skill to do so. It is no accident of choice. In referring to the architecture of the Temple and its utensils, David said God gave him the *pattern* as God had Moses.

The word heart itself in this text [and elsewhere] is an intensified word. [There is also the common term, both having the same meaning: "heart"] The simpler form for "heart" often refers to feelings, emotions, appetites: sorrow, vexation, and fear on one side and courage and joy on the other. Both forms according to the Hebrew dictionary reference the "inner man," one's conscience, inclination, will, purpose, desire, reflection,

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mind, thoughts, resolve, imagination. determination, moral character, affections.

The heart is sometimes used for “the soul” or “self” not because these words don’t bear a different significance in Scripture. The heart is an advance on the soul, which primarily speaks of being alive, Even animals have a “soul” [Proverbs 12:10] but the Bible never talks about their hearts being ill and in need of a transplant.

One way to understand the difference is to think of the soul as the life you are and live and the heart as its interpreter as to whether this is good or evil. The preacher testified in Ecclesiastes 1:16 “I [his soul] communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

In Psalm 4:4 David advised, “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah [meditate of this]. Charles Spurgeon interpreted, “Oh, that men would take the advice of this verse and commune with their own hearts. ... Go to the bed and think upon thy ways. Ask console of thy pillow, and let the quiet of the night instruct thee! Throw not away thy soul [your life] for nought!” [Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, I, 39].

Another way would be to see your soul as the total person you are. At salvation to make you a new person in Christ [John 3:3] God only had to give you a new heart. Your new heart represents the new you [2 Corinthians 5:17].

In Deuteronomy 4:39 Moses urged Israel to “Know therefore this day, and *consider it in thine heart*, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.” The original actually uses a Hebrew idiom, very picturesque, “put or place it in your heart!” Some sources suggest that the intensified form puts it “deeper” until it is not an instruction or command anymore but a very part of who we are, how we reason, how we live.

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When God instructed the prophet Haggai to have the exiles “consider their ways” in Haggai 1:5, he instructed the prophet to “get it into their hearts [in English we use a much weaker form “get it into your head!.”] It was time to leave Babylon and return home to Jerusalem! In Hosea 2:14 the Lord at the time of Israel’s restoration will “speak comfortably unto her.” [God will speak to her heart.] Here, the tone is kindlier.

There is no more powerful and emphatic word than “heart.” As Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” [Matthew 6:21]. In Luke 6:45 Jesus taught, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” [See Proverbs 23:33].

So what are we to make of Deuteronomy 6:5-6, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be *in thine heart*.” This is the Biblical idea we are looking into in this work as descriptive of our salvation and relationship with Christ.

Old/New Nature

Modern studies of the Bible have put us some theological distance from the Biblical idea of “the heart” replacing it with the term “nature.” Do we, as Christians, have 2 natures? My studies—perhaps *prima facie*—are leaning toward concluding that “nature” is a term rooted in Greek philosophy. In the New Testament it represents traits a person is born with in distinction from learned or acquired abilities. The term eventually employed in the Old Testament for “nature” comes from a word meaning to impress the image of something on a surface, which contributes nothing to our understanding here.

Theologically, we have become accustomed to discussing our salvation or newness of life—not in terms of a new heart [as the Prophets foretold] but a new “nature.” St Augustine’s dogma of “original sin” could be said to have

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opened this conversation. He spoke of a corrupted nature, *natura vitata* and a renewed nature, *natura renovata* [De natura et gratia - *On Nature and Grace*]. In reformed theology the phrase “old nature” became standard.

The NIV reads “nature” instead of the word “flesh” without sound reason. In Romans 7:18, which reads, “I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” But the original read in its simplicity, “I see in me that is in my flesh no good; for, “to want to want to” is a part of me but to accomplish good ... no!” This is the cry of someone who recognizes the supreme benefit in God’s moral Law but who has discovered that their weakness is in following it. They are in need of grace, which is Paul’s contention. “Flesh” here is carnality which is the inborn inclination to selfishness which is predominately seeking personal benefit instead of caring about others.

The flesh is a natural condition and it is the means by which we can be tempted to sin. But does natural mean sinful? No! Our tongues love to wiggle out words which can be used to edify or hurt. The evil is not the tongue but its use.

Only the NLT, NIV. and in some verses the Living or Amplified Bible, translate the word “flesh” as “nature.” These versions also replace “man” or “self” with the word nature in: “The old man” in Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9 and “the new man” in Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10. We need to ask ourselves if this change is incidental to provide a varied reading only or if it impacts scriptural emphasis and meaning.

1. Paul’s primary interest was not in mortifying the flesh—our nature—but the *deeds* of the flesh [Romans 8:13]. Both here and in Colossians 3:5 it is *behavior* that is being addressed not nature. If our personal and selfish interests are kept within a biblical perspective [marriage instead of fornication, for example] the flesh is actually an ally not an enemy. On the final day of creation this was how God made us! The “flesh” speaks of our humanity and it is only considered evil in Gnostic teaching not Christian doctrine. The war between the

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flesh and the spirit is real because of carnal behavior which in a believer is a mark of spiritual infancy not a sinful nature. [1 Corinthians 3:1] Nowhere does Paul excuse sin, which we are in danger of concluding when speaking of an innate or natural condition still part of a believer [Romans 7:23-25]. Romans 6:17: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed *from the heart* that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

2. The term "nature" in the New Testament [it is not in the Old] is a *singular* noun. How can anyone have two? Jesus had two because of the incarnation. He identified as both human and divine, but to say that we are both human and divine is to suggest that the human side of us must be evil and—as we must conclude—the divine side [new nature] is god and not just godly. This reasoning is not Bible! The danger comes when we see our nature as evil and think sin is a part of us even "in Christ," a doctrine diametrically opposed to Apostolic teaching!
3. Thirdly, a person's "old nature" by implication tends to excuse bad behavior rather than subject it to God's will. Most evangelicals use the phrase "sinful" or "evil" nature to explain their spiritual failings—some of which are probably incorrectly defined as such. They may identify the "New" nature only in terms of this tension [guilt - a non-biblical word] within them and not in terms of their lifestyle or obedience to Christ.
4. Using the term "nature" can soften the exhortation to "put it in our hearts" or "mortify the deeds of the flesh" teaching some Christians that sinning is natural for a believer. It is as if salvation is reduced to a Sunday routine and a pendant worn about the neck because we recognize this tension but assume grace is only God's way of saving us regardless.

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5. Two natures has always engendered unnecessary debate among evangelicals putting them often at odds to one another in explicating such a concept.

Does this mean we cannot or should not use the 2 nature idea? No, not at all. Among evangelicals, this explanation is still required for some—not because it condones sin but merely explains it. But most believers need only understand that whatever the analogy or metaphor used, sin is sin and is not any longer natural for a believer. God has provided an escape for temptation which means we can subdue or control fleshly interests in God’s grace. How we describe this is best suited to our understanding more than some theological wording.

Christian scholars whom I respect such as Pastor Alistair Begg or the late Pastor Jimmy Swaggart, spoke of christian frailty in terms of an old and new nature. Others, whom I equally respect and enjoy listening to, like N.T. Wright, do not. The reason for raising the issue in this work is not to discredit it as an explanation for God’s truth but to caution believers against using it in argument and debate that can challenge, even disrupt, Christian unity. Putting the focus back on the believer’s *heart* is something we all can embrace. Perhaps, we speak too much of sin and not enough of Christ’s victorious death and resurrection over it.

Even the translators of the New International Version in 2011 saw reason to put back the word “flesh” where in an earlier edition, 1984, it was translated as a “sinful nature” [Romans 7:5; 8:3; Galatians 6:8]. They retained it only in Romans 7:18 and 25.

Bishop Lightfoot in his commentary on Romans described the *flesh* as “a mode of existence oriented away from God.” He did not go so far as describing this as “natural” for a believer, however. His commentary on Romans, Francis Godet, which recorded the comments of over a dozen other scholars from the 19th century, exegeted Romans 7 without reference to a “sinful nature.” He described the flesh as “the complacent care of his person in the form of pride or sensuality” [Godet, Romans, 285].

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The Spirit At War Against The Flesh

If a theory of 2 natures seems inadequate to explain the war the believer wages against his or her flesh, how might we explain it? How should we understand Paul in Romans 8:7? “The *carnal mind* is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” “Mind” here is not the faculty of the mind but the framework or mindset or disposition of the mind. A carnal mindset *is* selfish and fights against God’s interest.

Augustine saw sin as a habitual inclination [carnal mind] more than an identity [an old nature]. He wrote, “This does not mean that the man himself is sin, but that sin dwells in him as a disease in a body.” [Retractationes I.23]. This is in line with the Catholic understanding of Jesus’ crucifixion. Mankind needed to be “healed” not acquitted in the Reformed Theological sense.

Augustine equated sin with a strong sexual desire, but is sex sinful? Augustine felt that it should only be used for procreation. With many young men this is a demanding emotion; so, we can see where the theology took a right turn. Augustine used the word “inclination” [concupiscentia]. He pointed out in his “Confessions” [Book IX] that he fathered a son, Adeodatus, out of wedlock. I mention this not to disparage his teaching or his ministry but to show that often our theology has a more comfortable fit when we can understand it in terms of our own experience. No believer or religious person is exempt from this hermeneutic.

Sanctification

What about “sanctification”? In Catholic theology “Original sin” is forgiven in baptism as guilt or liability, but it is healed gradually as a disease. Like most protestant theologies this introduces a *progressive* [Catholic: gradual] sanctification. Paul never speaks of a gradual change to holiness—even though holiness and sanctification are the same Greek term. Yet one can

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imagine a believer's progress in Christ in the transformation of their mind in Romans 12:2 and being made into the Image of Christ in 2 Corinthians 3:18—both appear as aspects of a maturing believer.

But does this mean we have 2 natures or a fleshly inclination that is gradually over the believer's walk of faith disappearing—or to use the Catholic idea, healed?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church maintains “The baptized are called to grow in holiness through the gifts of the Spirit and the practice of the virtues.” [CCC, 1266]

The Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith says “They who are once justified, are, through the Spirit's sanctifying work, renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” [Chapter XIII: Of Sanctification in the WCF (1646/47)]

In both doctrines an inclination to sin is being gradually addressed by the Spirit's work in the believer which does *not* imply that early on, at least, in the life of a child of God, sin is not being dealt with by the Spirit. What the doctrine tries to explain is that the Spirit does not override free will; the believer must respond to conviction and spiritual maturity takes time. In his work *On Nature and Grace* Augustine taught the the Spirit works gradually to “heal” the wound caused by sin. [Logos Virtual Library, 26-27]

The language becomes garbled a bit when sin and weakness and inclination to sin and spiritual maturity are interchangeable terms though they represent different aspects of a believer's experience. But the goal theologically here is to explain the walk of faith not hinder it. It is to deal with sin not excuse it.

The Heart

Here's where our “new heart” comes in [Ezekiel 36"26]. What happens with the theology when our focus is off ourselves and put on Christ? What happens when all we want and cherish is a

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heart after His? What happens to the doctrine if the sinner's prayer is not save me but give me a love for you, Lord and the faith to know its real!

Romans 5-8 takes on a simpler meaning.

- Five is a discussion about Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience not in terms of what they did but why they did it. Adam wanted to usurp the right of deity in knowing good and evil. Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God and sought on the other hand to please God by fulfilling His plan on Calvary for His creation. It was a matter of heart.
 - Romans 5:5 is pivotal: "the love of God shed abroad in our *hearts* by the Spirit."
- Six raises the question of following a written law which the New Covenant provides now as a heartfelt script.
 - Roman 6:17 declares the role our heart plays. "But God be thanked, that you were the servant of sin, but you have obeyed from the *heart* that form of doctrine, which was delivered you."
- Seven denotes a struggle with sin that is a heart matter because it is all about temptation and inclination to sin. This is the inward cry "I want to want to."
 - Romans 7:22 I delight in God after the *inward man* [a Hebraic equivalent of the heart].
- In eight a heart in love with God speaks to a love relationship with Him as our Father and Christ as our brother. Remember: We are in *covenant* with God. Our relationship is *not* transactional!
 - Romans 8:15-16 "We have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

There is a multifold advantage in putting the emphasis on the new heart as a provision of our salvation in the New Covenant.

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1. We have returned to a Biblical motif which doesn't need to use analogies which are not part of Scripture. Original sin and 2 nature theories are logically derived not biblically exegeted.
2. Christianity can unite on the New Covenant provisions more readily because it is central to all Christian doctrine. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" [Jeremiah 31:33].
3. The new heart motif is simple. The average person need not learn atonement theory to understand it. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." [Mark 12:30].
4. As we will show: Many portions of scripture are easier to understand especially as it pertains to God's covenant faithfulness and grace. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" [Ezekiel 36:26].
5. The new heart explains faith and faithfulness because it goes to desire, purpose, and intent and not just actions. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:45].
6. A new heart provides the believer with a perspective on salvation which is more than intellectual or doctrinal.
 - Knowing you love the Lord and He loves you [1 John 3:16].
 - Experiencing an expanding interest in and knowledge of His Word as well as [2 Peter 1:2]
 - Owning an irrefutable belief in Jesus' death and resurrection [Romans 10:9-10].
7. Scriptural admonitions make more sense if the appeal is [speaks] to the heart. Jesus' commandments that seem to be unfair or confusing suddenly make sense when the

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heart is addressed, because a heart after God's is open to following the Savior [John 14:1].

God's Word is affirming of our salvation and our relationship with Christ. Truth is heart-knowledge based in revelation and not academic studies [Matthew 16:17; 1 Corinthians 11:23]. The truth has been "put into our hearts."

Conviction is the prick of the heart that is felt because the heart is alive and sensitive to it: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" [Acts 2:37]. Luther translated: "It went through their heart" describing conviction. And the Psalmist explained "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." [Psalm 34:18]. Salvation is all about the heart's response to the Gospel.

So coming full circle to our key verse for this chapter, Deuteronomy 6:5-6: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." In the Old Testament context it makes perfect sense: When God has our hearts, He us *us* [our souls] and all our strengths and abilities—what Paul called a "living sacrifice" in Romans 12:1.

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“With the heart man believes unto righteousness” - Romans 10:10

We are not attacking Christian doctrine; but we do recognize that where the Bible does not supply answers to our questions, at times, we search for them in logical conclusions, classical interpretations, and verbal nuance. What sounds philosophically reasonable often isn't by the Apostle Paul's standard. He affirmed, “Our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” [1 Corinthians 2:5]

We also must speak in story form using metaphors and parables to describe our salvation because faith is to be experienced not argued. Debating with atheists might be fun but it amounts to an attempt at dismantling their atheism rather than presenting a positive witness to the power of the Gospel. Revelation 12:11 teaches that our victory rests in Christ's death and our witness, not our rhetoric.

In its simplicity the Gospel sounds moronic to non-believers. There is no intellectual argument that will suffice to persuade the skeptic or the atheist. In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul reminds us “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery” And in verse 10 “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit:” In verse 14 he concluded, “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him.” The Gospel will make no sense to us unless or until it is written on our hearts, until it is affirmed by the faith God gave us.

Dorothy Sayers, the mystery writer and devout to her faith in Christ, perhaps, says it best: “It (is) a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no

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offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His Person can be so presented as to offend nobody. Nobody need be too much surprised or disconcerted at finding that a determined preaching of Christian dogma may sometimes result in a few angry letters of protest or a difference of opinion on the parish council. At the risk of appearing quite insolently obvious, I shall say that if the Church is to make any impression on the modern mind She will have to preach Christ and the Cross." [Sayers, *Creed Or Chaos*. 8ff]

But—and this is “the” point of this book—God reveals His truth to the open heart. [Acts 16:14]. N. T. Wright once wrote in his work on the Apostle Paul, “Paul found that when he told his story, when he proclaimed that this Jesus was indeed the world’s true Lord, people (to their great surprise, no doubt) found this announcement making itself at home in their minds and *hearts*, generating the belief that it was true, and transforming their lives with a strange new presence and power.” [italics added]

If I may use a metaphor from cooking: The freshest vegetables and choice cuts of meat in the soup will never taste great without salt—no more than the best exegesis can inspire without God changing the heart. God does not seek to capture our thinking on an academic level, as if our ability to comprehend were required for salvation. That idea was gnostic and rejected by the apostles. God seeks to capture our hearts—give us new ones. And then all Christian doctrine comes alive with meaning! [Galatians 2:20]

Doctrine that is not the driving force behind our actions and thoughts becomes a lifeless academic that is powerless to change our world. But doctrine that strengthens faith and fills the heart with a calling to share God’s love is a dynamic and powerful witness. It is all about what has reached our hearts, the seed that produces a hundredfold.

Let us take a leisurely stroll through Christian teaching that should represent every believer’s heart regardless of denominational affiliation. This should be our testimony not a

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part of some curriculum only. We should be able to recognize in our own faith walk what the Bible is proclaiming here. The salt in the doctrinal soup that gives flavor—gives meaning to truth—is the Word written on our hearts and our hearts after God’s. But, of necessity, the only way to describe a good soup to someone who has not tasted it—has not tasted to see that the Lord is good [Psalm 34:8]—is through the poetic or picturesque use of language, and for that theologians use the *motif*.

Motifs

We often use the motif to explain Jesus’ death. A motif is a dominant idea in an artistic or literary composition. Through the use of the motif Scripture conceptualizes our salvation in a most basic story form or paradigm. The Gospel transcends culture, however, and grace is extended to all; so, though we ask the missionary strongly consider teaching these—because they are Bible—some missionaries might find themselves using different stories in cultures that do not understand these in order to explain with clarity, simplicity, and emphasis the significant truth represented in them.

Scholarship offers us a short list of Biblical motifs that describe what happened on Calvary’s Hill the day the Savior gave His life for us. But what is important is the message that is written on the transformed heart in accordance with the provision of our Lord’s New Covenant which He provided through His death. It is not the motif that is important, but the message it envisions.

In so saying, we must separate out the historical fact of Jesus’ actual crucifixion and resurrection. These are not part of the motif but what the motif attempts to explain or describe.

Listed below are the dogma and attending doctrines that Dorothy Sayers bemoaned “lands the average man at once in the very knottiest kind of dogmatic riddle.” [Sayers. *Creed Or Chaos*. 49-50] The question ‘What think ye of Christ?’,” Ms. Sayers wrote “If the ‘average man’ is going to be interested in Christ at all, it is the dogma (the message of atoning grace) that

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will provide the interest.” [Ibid. 51]. Jesus' death was an historical fact that Dorothy Sayers referred to as “the only thing that ever really happened, ...miraculous and unfathomable.” [Ibid. 8ff.] John Stott interpreting Revelation 5:3-5 exclaimed, “This must surely be why the scroll (the book of history and destiny) is now in the hands of the slain Lamb, and why only he is worthy ... to reveal its contents....” [Stott, 320].

Here are some motifs from Scripture:

1. The Old Testament *sacrifices* are a type of Christ. Romans 3:25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.
 - Christ as a sacrifice for sin paints the picture of the *Temple* precinct were the sacrifices were a type of Christ's crucifixion.
 - **Hebrews 10:1** “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming”—not the realities themselves.
2. The *ransom* or *price paid* to free from the bondage of sin.
 - In **Matthew 20:28** Jesus explained: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
 - Christ ransoming us depicts the *market* place as, for example, the story of Hosea buying back his wife, Gomer, from the slave auction block
 - In **Hosea 3:2** the prophet wrote, “So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver.”
3. The kinsmen *redeemer* to pay for our preparation for adoption in God's family. Titus 2:14 He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works. This is a *family* motif.
 - And now *reconciliation* adopts us into God's family.

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- **Galatians 4:5** says “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”
4. The *removal* of sin—not in word only but—through the image of carrying them away and burying them out of sight [depicts a *therapeutic or medical* motif]. Cain confessed in Genesis 4:13 “My punishment is more than I can bear.”
- Peter in **I Peter 2:24** wrote, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”
5. The Cross as a *judicial act*. It was judicial because it was covenantal and by which Christians’ sins are judged and punished. Romans 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”
- Christ our justification recalls the *court room* because justice is a legal term and Christ in His death paid the penalty for our sin.
 - **Romans 5:9** reads, “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”

Five Tenets

There are five tenets of faith:

1. Jesus was born of a virgin —Mary—
 - **Luke 1:34** “I know not a man” [The reference to a ‘virgin’ in
 - **Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. and therefore,
2. Jesus is God —God’s Son — [Jesus is actually God come in the flesh or as a human.

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- **John 3:16;**
 - **Luke 1:23** “the Son of the Highest:” The Christian faith maintains that Mary carried Jesus to term before she was married to Joseph which made Jesus, God’s Son] and therefore,
3. Jesus is, therefore, a member of the Trinity—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—
- **Ephesians 4:4-6** Paul spoke of “one Spirit..one Lord.. one God and Father of all.”
 - **I Corinthians 12:4-6** “same Spirit..same Lord..same God.” Also: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
 - **2 Corinthians 13:14**] and therefore
4. When He died on Calvary, God died for our sins—He died on the Cross, that we might live forever with Him in heaven — [It is important to note that it was God, in the person of Christ, that died there. A mere human could not satisfy the punishment for the sin of the whole world] and therefore,
- **Hebrews 2:17** For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.
 - **Hebrews 1:3** The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
5. The Bible IS God’s Word. -The message of the Bible is all about the Cross and our Lord’s resurrection.
- **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is God-breathed

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What We Do Know

1. Sin brings death.
 - "The wages of sin is [always] death." [**Romans 5:23**]
2. Jesus was God incarnate.
 - "existing in the form of God ... he had come as a man ... to the point of death —even to death on a cross." [**Philippians 2:6-8**]
3. Jesus volunteered freely to go to Calvary.
 - "This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." [**John 10:17-18**]
4. Jesus was sinless.
 - "...tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin." [**Hebrews 4:15**]
5. Jesus' death was substitutionary
 - "God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." [**Romans 5:8**]
6. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.
 - "According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." [**Hebrews 9:22**]
7. The Provisions of Calvary are available only through repentance. "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent." [**Acts 17:30**]

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Four Doctrines

There are four truths only Christians believe:

1. Jesus is the only Savior of sinners,
 - **Acts 4:12** "There is salvation in none other nor is there another named being, anywhere introduced to humanity, in whom is the necessary means to save us."
2. We cannot find a way back to God without Him,
 - **Isaiah 53:6** "We are stray sheep, having lost our way"
 - **John 6:44** "No one is able to come to me," Jesus affirmed, "unless the Father goes and gets them"
3. The death of Jesus Christ alone made reconciliation with God possible.
 - **Romans 5:12** "If while we were hostile toward God, He sought our friendship by such a great sacrifice, His Son, indeed, this friendship is forever"
4. His sacrifice, Jesus' death, is the ultimate cause of our *justification*.
 - **Romans 3:25-26** "Jesus Christ was God's appointed instrument of His mercy through His blood, His death ... that God might show Himself just and also justify those who trust in Jesus Christ. "

Why Jesus Died

All believers recognize 3 reasons for Jesus' death:

1. For **us** because He loved us.
 - Calvary shows how much God loved us because He was willing to die for us. He inspires us, in turn, to love on a higher level. We were apathetic when it came to His love for us.

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Calvary offers us a new life in Christ (John 3:16). Love was not made for us but we were created for His love.

- **1 John 4:16** And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.
2. For **The Father** because sin stood in the way of reconciliation
- Jesus had to die if we were to be forgiven because sin against God is punishable only by death. He died in our place because we were, indeed, guilty.
 - Calvary satisfies God's justice.
 - **Isaiah 53:10.** "After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."
 - **Romans 6:6** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.
3. To defeat **Satan** because **Satan** needed to be defeated. Jesus' death had something to do with some unseen, spiritual, war being fought between God and Satan.
- **Colossians 2:15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Five Things Jesus Accomplished

Jesus Accomplished five things in particular on Calvary that Christians recognize as requiring His death and resurrection.

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1. Jesus died to deal finally and decisively with sin.
 - **I Peter 2:22-24.** “Jesus, who had never committed sin nor could anyone ever catch Him in a lie or being deceptive, while being verbally abused, mocked and falsely accused, never lashed out in kind. He suffered their threats in silence, unjustly delivered over to the authorities. He, Himself, carried our sins in His body upon the Cross in order that by removing our sins, we might live right in relationship with God.”
 - **Hebrews 9:28.** “Christ Jesus (and He did this only once ever) offered Himself in His death to God to provide for the removal of our sins. He will return for us, not to die again but, to rescue from this present world those of us who have been faithfully looking for Him. ”
2. Jesus freed us from a bondage to sinning
 - **Matthew 20:28 & Mark 10:45** “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to free many, who accept it, from slavery to their sins.”
 - **I Timothy 2:5-6** “For there is only one God, even one peacemaker between God and us, the man, Christ Jesus. Who gave Himself (to death) in our place at the time appointed by His Father to free us from slavery to our sinning.”
 - **Revelation 5:9** “And they sang a song never before sung: “You are declared worthy to take the scroll and break its seals, because ... with your blood you bought a people for yourself from every ancestral line and language and nation and race.”
3. Jesus’ crucifixion was the cause of our sinning and sinfulness. It was necessary in God’s plan of our salvation. “He bore our sins.”

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- **Isaiah 53:4-6** “Surely he endured the wounds of our sin and carried a heavy load of our pain (mental and physical), yet we concluded God struck Him down for His own sins because God was punishing him. But not so! He was being wounded because of our rebellion, he was crushed, shattered, in pain spiritually, emotionally, physically, from the waywardness for which we were liable; His discipline brought us peace with God, and from the stripes, the whipping He bore, healing for our souls and bodies. Yes, we all, like sheep, all of us, strayed from the fold, each of us went our own way; and the Lord punished Him.”
- **Romans 5:18-19** “Indeed, therefore, as by one act of disobedience (Adam’s) the sentence of death was passed on all of us, likewise, through the obedience of one man, Jesus, all of us can live aright before God. Let me explain it this way: because of one man’s unwillingness to listen (regarding the forbidden fruit) many were declared liable (sinners), and likewise through one man’s obedience (in His sinlessness and innocence going to the Cross), many are declared in right standing with God.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:14** “For the love of Christ has us in its grip; we concluded this, that He died for all, in their place.”
- **Romans 5:7-8** “You will seldom if ever hear of a just man taking the penalty for someone criminally liable. For a good person’s cause, perhaps, someone might consider risking their life. But God proved His love for us because while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place.”
- **I John 2:1-2** “My dear children, I write these things to you to discourage you from sinning;

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but, on the outside chance you might displease God, doing your own thing and ignoring His wise counsel, don't lose heart. That's why He sent Jesus who always knows what is right, who comes from the Father to do His bidding. Concerning our sins, He went to Calvary for this very reason, to deal with everyone's sins."

4. Jesus satisfied [fulfilled] the Divine requirement for our salvation.
 - **Romans 8:1** "Therefore, there is now no one judged worthy of punishment for those in Christ Jesus."
 - **Romans 5:9** "Therefore much more now rather being declared just by His death on the Cross, we will be spared His anger, which is coming."
5. Jesus' death and resurrection by faith restores our relationship with God
 - **Romans 5:10-11** "If, to explain, while we were enemies of God, we were restored to friendship and relationship—this through the death of His Son—so much the more, we can conclude that now having been restored to friendship, our being rescued from being enslaved to sin, is assured through His resurrection from the dead."
 - **2 Corinthians 5:19** "God was in the person of Christ Jesus (He is God) restoring our relationship with Him, not keeping the record anymore of our sin (rebellion or waywardness).
 - **Colossians 1:20** "God, through Jesus, restores all things, both on earth and in heaven (as He made them before Adam and Eve disobeyed). Said another way: He made peace through the blood of His Cross (Jesus' death on the Cross)."

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Summary

As Christians we have found, what seems to be, a limitless interest in details to explain the Savior's death and resurrection, but Paul wanted us to only preach it. Romans 10:9-10 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine *heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the *heart* man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

If we are capable of pressing the remote and activating a flat screen TV to watch our favorite movie without—I might add—any knowledge of how the crazy thing works, we ought to be capable of accepting the simple truth the Jesus died for us and rose again without requiring God to explain every detail of His eternal plan. Faith accepts. Faith does not require more than it is given because to do so would place conditions on that faith and it would not any longer be faith but doubt and skepticism.

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“Guard your heart above all else, for from it are the issues of life.” -
Proverbs 4:23

If we are correct in thinking that God’s plan, all along, was to change the heart of those who by faith would accept it, we should expect to, at least, see something in the Old Testament narrative from the beginning that alludes to this.

What we are wondering is whether we can interpret God’s interaction with mankind in the early days as a hint that Ezekiel 36:26 was already being written between the lines. Genesis is the beginning of all things including the Crucifixion of Jesus in Genesis 3:15; so, dare we imagine God looked at Adam and Eve as they left Eden and mused within Himself, “They need a new heart!”

So we begin near the beginning with Cain, the first son and his gift of produce. The word “gift” will later be used to designate an offering of grain, either barley or einkorn or emmer wheat. But here perhaps millennia before the Levitical code or law was written, it speaks to a gift offered to God. Abel’s “gift” was a choice lamb, the fattest of the flock. But whereas Abel’s gift was called the first of the lambs, Cain’s gift was not taken from the first of the harvest which might have meant that his offering was mediocre at best. He lacked that special interest that might have suggested he offered God his best.

In Genesis 4:5 we read that God did not respect Cain or his sacrifice. The Hebrew says literally that God looked away. We might be reminded of 1 Samuel 16:7: “*The LORD sees not as man see; ... the LORD looks on the heart.*”

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Professor Keil in his commentary on Genesis 4:7 wrote: "The reason Abel's sacrifice was accepted, and Cain's was not is to be found in the fact that Abel's thanks came from the depth of his heart, while Cain merely offered his to keep on good terms with God, a difference that was manifested in the choice of the gifts which each one brought from the produce of his occupation. The essence of the sacrifice was not the presentation of a gift to God, but that the offering was intended to shadow forth the dedication of the heart to God."

God's Reasoning

In Isaiah 1:18 the Lord admonishes Israel, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This appears to be God's message also to Cain. He didn't reject Cain or threaten punishment. It is more reasonable to interpret the text as God's concern about what crime Cain was capable of if he didn't master his feelings.

God used the word "sin" probably in the sense we originally read it, "missing the mark." Cain would miss out on future blessings unless he gained self-control over his disposition—whatever feeling or feelings that represented.

God's conversation with Cain and with his parents earlier when they were barred from Eden, can be contrasted with later conversations after Jesus' resurrection. God shows Himself merciful wanting to discuss with Cain his fallen countenance and anger. This conversation is about Cain—as with Jonah under the gourd [Jonah 4:6]. What is absent here is that personal relationship we have come to expect in which God shares His heart with His servant, as He did with Abraham. God was a friend to Moses but He became a Counselor only to Cain. This distinction is worth noting.

When Jesus spoke of sending the Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come, this would speak to the "power of the Gospel" [Romans 1:16] that the Lord armed His

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servants with [Acts 1:8] but here Cain shows no humility in accepting God's counsel.

Cain's "sin" was a prelude to something more, an act more destructive—not just to Abel but—primarily to *Cain*. His bitter spirit would destroy him. We know how this story ends. God reasoned with him to no avail, no conviction. Here is the opening act in a story about the hardness of men's hearts because of sin.

Of greater significance than "the voice of [his] brother's blood crying unto God from the ground" for justice/vengeance [Genesis 4:10] is the Savior's blood according to Hebrews 12:24. The writer to the Hebrews looked back on this early moment in human history as that first outcry for divine intervention. It is reasonable to say that as God was mindful of the need of all mankind in Adam for restoration [Genesis 3:15] there is echoed in this exchange between God and Cain the cry of Abel for a justice that will only be possible in Christ's death.

Time Out

Are God's words to Isaiah applicable here? This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." [Isaiah 29:13] God might have added, "Cain honors me with his gift, but his heart is far from me." In 1 Kings 3:9 Solomon prayed, "Give your servant a listening heart to judge your people, to discern between good and evil."

Is not this the heart of the matter we should be focused on, a *listening heart* to discern between good and evil? This Cain did not show. Even later when God called him out for murdering his brother, he indignantly shoved the matter aside claiming he had no obligation to Abel. As with Adam and Eve, so with Cain, there was attrition [sorry they got caught] but no contrition or repentance—a spirit God will honor.

The theological Dictionary called the heart, "the seat of spiritual capacities" [Kittel, III. 606] The heart can be called "the seat of conscience." Take, for example, the story of Abigail, Nabal's wife, interceding on behalf of her husband and David in

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preventing the future king from killing Nabal. She appealed to David's *conscience*. In 1 Samuel 25:31 we read her pleading with David not to go after Nabal, "That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor *offense of heart* unto my lord" So, David could pray in the matter of Nabal, as he did regarding Saul, in Psalm 17:3 "Thou hast *proved my heart*;" showing the heart the seat of moral character.

In all this Cain was deficient. Cain was the quintessential person described by the Preacher, "He lives like a fool, *lacking heart* [understanding]." [Ecclesiastes 10:3]. We can clearly see the condition of Cain's heart in that God's words fell to the ground unheeded! We can see Cain's need for a new heart, one that beats in rhythm with God's counsel and love.

What 's In a Name?

Adam to Noah through the line of Seth spanned a mere 1056 years if we measure it by the age of each generation at the beginning [birth] of the next. In one millennium God noted in Genesis 6:5 "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his *heart* was only evil continually." This verse depicting this time period, alone, shows the need of mankind for a new heart. There is much to share in the names in a Biblical genealogy because often parents had good reason to call them what they called them.

In Genesis 4:26 we read "then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." If this was at the birth of Seth's first born, Enosh, [who is mentioned in verse 26. His named meant "mortal man"] it indicates that man is awakening to his mortality. At this point in time no-one dies of old age yet, but we know about Abel's murder. Enosh's grandson was named "God be praised" which indicates a spiritual awakening perhaps driven by the curse God pronounced and there is a general spirit of repentance within the family of Seth. Mahalalel's grandson, Enoch, "walked with God" and didn't live to old age because God "took him." But his son's name, Methuselah, was a constant reminder of impending death. Maybe Enoch knew of a coming flood.

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We might say, there is for a while a residual interest in God, a witness to His creative genius, that on occasion is revealed in a family member, but according to Jared's name [Enoch's dad] there is a general moral decline which only shows God was right in barring the way to Eden. Lamech in Genesis 4:23 confessed to a murder and in Genesis 5:29 he named his first born Noah in the hopes of some relief from the curse God pronounced against the ground a millennium earlier.

The Heart's Function

What is the heart's role in this narrative? One function that is very revealing of "the heart" is in relationships. It is the seat of every imagination and thought [Genesis 6:5; 8:21] and of deepest feelings; so the Bible can even speak about God's heart being grieved [Genesis 6:6]. Cain's heart was hardened.

In Exodus 8:5 Pharaoh's hardened heart was in our terms a recalcitrant defiance [the verse makes clear] against *God*. For all those theologians who think God did this to the Egyptian leader without his consent, ask yourself if God would ever seek to turn anyone apostate against Himself [James 1:13]. God opens hearts [Acts 16:14]. Nothing is clearer in the story of Cain where God wanted to move him off the path he was on.

Pharaoh became an instrument in God's hands that He, God, would be sanctified among the Israelites and to get Israel to believe in Him and trust Him for the upcoming wilderness journey. It was true for a moment [Exodus 14:31: "And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses."].

The Heart's Limitation

You may have observed that in the Old Testament the heart is limited in that it expresses human emotions and thoughts. It is not the primary instrument, as it is in the New Testament [John 16:8; Philippians 4:7], referring to an awareness of God and His voice. This is why mankind needs a new heart and it would be

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provided in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. In Proverbs 4:23, we are admonished to keep *our own* hearts—unlike Philippians 4:7 where Paul encouragingly taught that this was now the *Spirit's* ministry to us. Isaiah understood this truth as a promise: "Thou wilt keep [guard his thoughts] him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed [leans on you for support] on thee: because he trusts in thee." [Isaiah 26"3]

Rabbinic Thought

I thought it interesting to see what Rabbinic teaching had to say here; so, I made inquiry to A.I. because my library is limited in this regard. A.I. referred to Proverbs 4:23 as "anchored in the broader Jewish conception of the ... (heart) as the center of thought, will, moral judgment, and spiritual orientation." A.I. called the spirit—not the heart—the seat of deep feelings, emotional energy and empowerment. Such a division of abilities within us seems too philosophical for me.

It is true the Bible speaks of a spirit of rage or sorrow, for example. And we might speak of a spirited remark, but to contend for such a "division of labor" reflects more the inquisitiveness of a philosophical mind than the language of a David or Solomon.

The heart clearly is the seat of knowledge and in a Biblical sense—knowledge of God affirmed by faith: For we walk by faith, not by sight [2 Corinthians 5:7]. Only believers can appreciate this truth.

In a purely religious sense, *in Judaism*, the heart as the center of thought and will is that part of a man that learns and, therefore, loving God with one's whole heart speaks to obeying Torah law [Matthew 19:17]. This is legalistic or moralistic [as we knew it would without a new heart] and does not take God's grace into account. In Rabbinic teaching the onus of responsibility rests totally on the "faithful" to the Torah Law, but for us, who have new hearts and the "law of God" is written there, there is a thankfulness for the role God's grace plays in our Christian walk.

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The Hebrew Dictionary has identified a definition of “spirit” it considers a late nuance in the language that like “heart” is “the seat or organ of mental activities” [BDB 925]. Exodus 28:3 and Deuteronomy 34:9 refer to the “spirit of wisdom” In Isaiah 29:24 the prophet speaks of those who wander about in *spirit*, meaning they are perplexed and confused, but they shall come to understanding. This is activity of the mind but spoken in terms of the spirit of a man.

“Behavior,” A.I. continued, “flows from the state of the heart and the governance of inner drives.” And then A.I. brought me back in the Rabbinic phrase “evil inclinations” to Genesis 6:5 [at the time of the Flood a mere millennium from the Garden of Eden] which we referenced above: “his heart [all mankind except the Noahs] was only evil continually.”

Rabbinic teach recognized in describing the human spirit a link with the human heart. According to Isaiah 11:2 the spirit of a man is described as having the same characteristics of the heart. Rabbis describe the spirit as a *passion* for wisdom whereas the heart is the *seat* of wisdom.

The Spirit of a Man

Heart and spirit are irreducibly complex. In fact there are 5 words used to describe us: body [flesh: carnal], soul [self], spirit [feelings, passions], mind [the faculty for understanding or mindset: Hebrews 10:16], and heart [inclination and drive]. Each seems to operate within a certain domain but not without influencing all the others.

In the Old Testament the spirit is unable to ascertain God’s will. Conviction in the New Testament sense will be the result of the coming Holy Spirit [John 16:8-10] to dwell in us and not just with us [John 14:17]. Ephesians 2:5 makes it clear that with salvation we get a new heart and God revives or brings to life again our spirits: “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” Paul taught that Jesus is a quickening spirit. [1 Corinthians 15:45].

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Because of Calvary, we now can talk to God and know His voice. Martin Luther taught that the spirit "... is the highest and noblest, part of man, which qualifies him to lay hold of incomprehensible, invisible, eternal things; in short, it is the house where faith and God's Word are at home." [Thayers, 520].

The spirit of a man in the Old Testament was instead only the seat of lively or intense feelings: a spirit of sorrow [Proverbs 15:13] or anger [Ecclesiastes 7:9] or jealousy [Numbers 5:14], or impatience [Proverbs 14:29], for example.

When Adam and Eve left Eden, that lively conversation they had known with God, when His words were inspiring and life-giving, is over. Now, outside Paradise, they will hear Him speak no longer of Himself. This will become the Spirit's opportunity only to those who are revived through faith in Christ [John 16:13]. Now, instead of a heart to heart revelation of Who God is to them, He will use less intimate means of only reasoning with them about their sin or He will institute an elaborate sacrificial ritual—though it was much, much more—and needing an entire tribe of Israelites to represent what they will only understand as forgiveness.

The Old Testament references to the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, were primarily limited to prophets prophesying [1 Samuel 10:10]. God would give them dreams and send prophets to foretell the danger of copying the surrounding nations and serving false gods [Exodus 20:1-4]. "Prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: " Samuel trumpeted the call to repent [1 Samuel 7:3]. Solomon, in dedicating the New Temple to the Lord, prayed, "hear [Lord] in heaven ... and forgive, (for you ... only, know the hearts of all the children of men;)" [1 King 8:39].

A Plane Analogy

Let's use the analogy of a plane because to be airborne it requires features and personal that correspond well to the believer's new heart and spirit.

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When Paul closed his first letter to the Thessalonians he prayed, “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1 Thessalonians 5:23]. He didn’t mention the heart because we already know that it is newly created by our Lord at our salvation and it is not subject to the same challenges the rest of our being is. If life were a plane:

- The **body** or “flesh” is the plane, itself. This goes without saying. But what we can add here is a description of the many systems in a plane that can go wrong or malfunction. Spiritually this is carnality.

These systems are its instruments or members. There is a right and a wrong use for them: Paul admonished us in Romans 6:12 “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

- The **heart** is the pilot, that’s you and me.
 - In Mark 12:30 we are admonished to love the Lord with all our heart. In Philippians 2:12 we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling [with focused attention]. Our bodies will crash land if we don’t take the controls. There is the Fruit of temperance in Galatians 5:23 and God’s approval to honor in 1 Corinthians 2:27.
 - The Theological Dictionary defines the heart as “the seat of all functions of the soul and spirit attested in many different ways in the New Testament.” [Kittel, III, 611].
- The **soul** is the engine.
 - It is what animates and makes alive. The soul of the plane is its engine grabbing the wind and lifting up on it like a bird on the wing. Without an engine a plane is not a plane, but a lifeless form.

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- From dust according to Genesis 2:7 “man became a living soul.”
- The *spirit* is the navigator
 - Only in the New Heart is the spirit of a person in touch with the “Tower” of Grace and God’s Spirit. Without this connection the pilot will crash.
 - With Christ, it is His Spirit with ours. In Romans 8:16 Paul wrote, “The [Holy] Spirit himself *testifies with our spirit* that we are God’s children.”
 - In the non-believer the spirit is not in touch with God. 1 Corinthians 2:14 “the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

As believers with the Spirit of God, we get our navigation back. “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. [Ephesians 2:1] and our heart has direction and a destination.

This also supports St. Augustine’s notion of “original sin” which has become the Christian’s understanding behind the “Fall.” When Adam sinned, all mankind lost navigation. The plane swerved and weaved with every “wind of doctrine.” Paul taught in Ephesians 4:14 “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

Emphasizing a new heart, like a plane’s pilot, is not an incidental thing but should be centric to our theology. Without a heart after God’s we are flying blind and if there is a pilot, he is untrained. We will inevitably crash. In Proverbs 4:23, again, Solomon reminds us: “Guard your heart above all else, for from it are the issues of life.”

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“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,” - Acts 2:46

This is a chapter I was not sure I was going to include. I have thoughts here that to me are important, but I'm going to leave out the documentation, leave out the scripture references, to allow you, the reader, to decide for yourself and to research it out yourself. Some of the things that I plan to say in this chapter may sound strange, maybe even wrong, but I've given much prayer and study to it before I took it upon myself to write this. Perhaps my original reluctance is reflected in my choice of words.

There are biblical words that are not nuanced the same as English translations might suggest to the casual reader. There are as a result Biblical themes that are threaded through the entire Work of God from Genesis to Revelation and the significance or theological importance of these words can be lost if taken out of that total Biblical context. See, for example, the “Oneness” God spoke to Adam about which would become a metaphor for Christ and the Church. Some, in error, think that, perhaps, God discarded this idea of “one man and one woman” because it was lost to history because of the hardness of men’s hearts [Matthew 19:8].

There are, also, a number of Christian truths that are very much a part of the faith of some only. Because they are part of faith, they should never be argued against. I think of a lady that I knew that wanted to believe very strongly in the grace of God to hold onto her, especially when her son was in a

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motorcycle accident. It would've been wrong to give her a Wesleyan viewpoint that somehow made her responsible for how she felt or suggested that she didn't have faith. And yet there are other Christians that somehow see the importance of acting responsibly in a crisis. I knew a brother once who liked my sermons, but he wanted to return to his old church because there they spelled out exactly what spirituality was and the worship ritual was key to him. I left it an open question only answered in much prayer. So you see our faith is tied to our beliefs, even though the word *faith* in the scripture according to some—and I believe they are correct—never means “doctrine.” It always refers to a life lived faithfully for the Lord while trusting Him.

We have different ways of worship and we have different doctrines, but if we are believers, we have the same *heart* and that's the point of this whole chapter. We must not condemn what another Christian believes when it does not hurt their faith, nor hurt our faith. We must not think ourselves smarter than we really are. And we must be very careful when we read the scripture and we are sure it says something it probably does not say at all.

Old Testament Faith

The Old Testament word for *faith* is the word, “amen.” This word in one form has been called the passive form. The term “passive” here is unimportant because we're searching for a word that would explain the Hebrew or Old Testament use and that's what scholars came up with. The Jews call this a binyan or structure. In this form, “faith” only refers to God's steadfastness—the fact that He is unchanging, immutable, the same yesterday today and forever. But when this word is put into another form which we call the causative form or binyan—and this makes a little more sense when we hear it—it means that He causes us to be faithful or He causes us to believe or He causes us to trust Him. The point that we're making here is that God didn't just ask us to believe Him, but to believe *in* Him. We're not believing in

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something he said, although we do believe the promises. Our faith is in Him personally because we trust Him and we don't trust Him out of thin air or because it's church doctrine or because we are the cowardly lion saying "I do! I do! I do believe!" No! We trust Him because He has earned our trust by His faithfulness. I slipped this in here to say, what I will repeat over and over again, that it is important to understand that our relationship with God is a *heart to heart* relationship.

So it's important to understand that when we're talking about some of the doctrines that we hold to it is OK to extend our understanding of biblical truth beyond the border of that truth in an effort to try to explain it or understand it. But the logic must support faith. When we explain why Jesus had to die on the Cross for our sins, the important point is that He died for our sins regardless of how we explain the reasons. Paul said it best: "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."

Punishment or Chastisement

We are great at telling stories. That's a human trait. [I like my airplane analogy.] And because we tell stories, we put them in metaphors, parables, analogies, and we use them to go deeper into a truth to understand it. So our stories, which is what some of our doctrines have become, are simply there in support of the basic and essential truth. The truth is that had Jesus not died on the cross *for* our sins, we would die *in* them. If we know this, by faith in our hearts, we only know this by revelation—God shared this truth with us and by faith we said, "Yes, it is true!!" So what I want to do is take a look at some of those doctrines that I think might be logically concluded beyond the scope of this simple truth.

Let me give you an example: our use of the word "punish." We say that Jesus took our "punishment." This may be absolutely correct, but it was never Paul's main point. All Paul said was that if Jesus had not gone to Calvary's Cross, we would die in our sins or we would be under the wrath of God—wrath indicates God's judgment. We also have the word "chastisement"

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that is found in Isaiah: “the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” Surely this means that he suffered so that we would not suffer. Absolutely! The Greeks have a mantra: *πάθει μάθος* [learning through suffering] and this is noted in Hebrews 5:8 about Jesus: “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” Was His suffering a form of punishment is the question? Did Isaiah simply mean to say that He came and suffered because of us—in order to save us?

Does chastisement mean punishment? There are many languages which do not distinguish between these two words: chastisement and punishment. But the Greek language does, and it would make more sense, perhaps to use the word chastisement. Punishment benefits the punisher because it gives the punisher a release for their vengeance, but chastisement is a word that means to correct or in the case of a child to train. Neither one of these definitions is probably exactly what Isaiah meant. If you ask the Jews, they always understood that anybody being chastised was suffering because of some sin they committed. Isaiah is saying that suffering was actually meant for us—instead of and not on account of us! Jesus suffered because of our sin. The best understanding of Isaiah or Paul or Jesus Himself is to understand that His crucifixion and the suffering that he received was necessary for our salvation, but now we seek to understand why that was true.

Debt

So the early church fathers came up with the idea of a debt. Because Jesus was both God and man, one church scholar, Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1033/4–1109), a Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian of the Catholic Church, proposed this idea [Cur Deus homo 2.6]: “Our situation is compounded by the fact that in order to compensate God we need to give back more than we owed originally and by the gravity of our offense, having dishonored God, so that the debt we have incurred is of infinite proportion. So no one but God could pay a debt of such magnitude, but no one but man is obliged to pay it. It follows that our salvation requires God

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become man.” [Craig 118] Perhaps the idea of the ransom, which is very biblical put the early church fathers up to the idea that a debt explained why Jesus was crucified. But Paul never used the term in that way.

There are two scriptures that in modern interpretation have come to refer to the debt paid by Jesus on the cross for our sins. But this particular use of language was a change in the meaning of both of these scriptures. The first one was when Jesus said “It is finished.” They say that the word “finished” is a legal term which means “paid in full.” But there is another interpretation of Jesus’ saying. Older scholarship believed that it referred to the completion of the prophecies from the Cross. Jesus’s death fulfilled all Scripture and, of greatest significance, the Mosaic Law. There’s another verse that refers in like manner to the “handwriting of ordinances” that were against us. Handwriting is supposed to be a word that indicates a handwritten note to indicate something owed and again it suggests in modern interpretations that a debt was paid from the Cross. But the older understanding of the word simply meant the law, especially the ceremonial law, was no longer applicable for salvation.

The Reformers

It was the reformers in the 1500s that decided to talk about punishment in judicial terms. Punishment was the penalty for a capital crime against God, which would be death and which should have been pronounced against the sinner. Jesus took that punishment for us, and then He rose from the dead, providing a resurrection for all of us. Orthodox theology held that Jesus’ death provided a spiritual healing from sin not a punishment. Because the reformers spoke of punishment as a judicial act, they maintained that we were only *declared* righteous—another way of saying *justified*—by faith *alone*. A declaration of justification [in our court system: acquittal] is all a human judge could do. No human judge could “make” or “declare” a person “innocent.” The reformers borrowed a judicial argument from the Greek philosopher while the Orthodox Church, since they believed that

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saving grace began with one's baptism, argued against Luther's premise of sola fide [faith alone]. It is difficult for the reformers to see Ephesians 2:7-8 any other way than "faith alone."

A Declaration of Righteousness

And what about the word righteousness when the Bible speaks of "The Righteousness of God"? Look at the word "of" in this phrase. It can be used in two different ways and mean 2 different things. Let me remind you again of my simple example that I use. If I, in referring to a woman, were to talk about: "the love of a man" am I talking about the woman and her love for him or am I talking about him and his love for her?

We have the same situation in the phrase, the righteousness of God. Are we talking about righteousness that God gives us or righteousness as an attribute of God? Some scholars believe very strongly that this speaks of the righteousness God gives us and they translated it *justification*. This is acceptable. But some see it as God's righteousness or an attribute of God and refer to it as God's *covenantal faithfulness*. This is also acceptable; so, you see we have a scripture or an idea in scripture or a word in scripture that becomes a little bit less clear. If it is justification, some believe it means to be declared righteous, which is what justification is. It is the judge, deciding not to pronounce sentence. It's like an acquittal. This is the office or power of a judge to sentence or release. They would have no power to return you to a state of innocence if you were guilty. In fact, an acquittal is not the same as innocent. It kind of fits what Paul said that for those who are in Christ there is no *condemnation*.

But not every scholar sees it that way. Some see it as the faithfulness of God in covenant "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." [2 Corinthians 5:21]. He made us righteous instead of only declaring us righteous. "This is a bold statement of the nature of justification." We read in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, "Not only does the believer receive from God, a right standing before him on the basis of faith in Jesus, but here Paul says that "in Christ" the believer in

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some sense actually shares the righteousness that characterizes God himself. These 15 Greek words [in this verse 21] carefully balanced defy final exegetical explanation dealing as they do with the heart of the atonement." [Expositor's X, 354].

If God declares someone righteous, but then takes them to heaven when they die a minute later, and they are then made righteous, what was the difference? With God a minute or a lifetime is about the same. This gets even knottier if one believes they cannot lose their salvation as in some doctrine; then, the declaration surely must mean "made"—even though, those who maintain saving grace is "without repentance" [Romans 11:29] also believe that righteousness in this context is only declared.

There is no argument here. Christians are famous for finding theological loopholes in other denominational teachings. It is time we shared instead our commonality, what is clearly Scriptural. If we were divided on this, we would be telling the world that the Bible has a confused Truth or worse. This is not our intention. We must learn again to listen to our hearts. If we have lost that message, ask any newborn in Christ.

Church Tradition

Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? All we know is that He had to be crucified to save us and that's a beautiful truth that we must not tarnish with arguments and disagreements over doctrine, especially when those doctrines have been expanded by human logic and our desire to know more about it beyond the scope of scripture.

We do not realize how many of our beliefs are simply the product of human logic. When Saint Augustine started talking about original sin, he was trying to understand what we've always wanted to know what went wrong in the garden of Eden. "Original sin" like the term the "Fall of Adam" are not biblical phrases. They are not Pauline, but that doesn't make them wrong. That means that they are there to help further explain the central truth of Jesus' death and resurrection.

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There are other reasons why some of our doctrines represent different views. They might be a theological moat—like a castle moat—to add protection against assaults made against core truths. When we read the trouble Paul had explaining grace, we might have thought that we need to shore up our theological defenses with explanations that are culturally more reasonable. Most of our theological arguments are not intended as offensive weapons against other Christians but a defense against true enemies of the faith.

The preacher, also, may over emphasize some truth so that others will never forget it; or, they create simple metaphors or word pictures—perhaps, not totally applicable—that will make the truth into a Christian tradition easier to remember and share. Isn't that what I did with my airplane analogy? It wouldn't work so well in the Kenyan Bush country, probably. I was a programmer for years and could use a programming analogy but most Christians would know it to be a bad idea because programming was not their thing. But financial and court motifs work quite nicely. And, maybe, that was exactly what God was thinking!

There are probably some persons that will find it all disturbing to suggest their faith rests are some doctrine that is beyond the scope of the biblical message. This should not be disconcerting but rather encouraging to know. We never gave God any feedback or input on the plan of salvation that He drew up. We became His enemies, anyway. No matter how you explain it when Adam was expelled from the garden of Eden with him all of mankind was expelled. So we had no part in drawing up the divine plan to save us, nor were we capable of that level of genius or wisdom nor were we empowered in any sense to participate in such a plan. It had to be God and God only and that's a good thing. That's why Jesus on the cross was *God* because only God could draw up that plan, participate in it and provide so great a salvation. So when we are seeking explanation beyond the scope of scripture, we are asking God to explain a very adult thing to a very childlike mind and it's just

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not possible. The new covenant came with a “new heart” to give us faith to trust in Him while we wait on answers.

Paul

To give you more insight into what I’m saying here, let’s use the example of Paul’s teaching. Paul said that when Jesus died on the cross, He took the *curse* on Himself that belonged on someone else. That someone else according to some scholarship was the Jewish nation, but according to others, it was all mankind. But the Jews, when they read the phrase “cursed of God is anyone that hangs on a tree” they read something different than Paul. Does that mean that by hanging on the gallows or dying on a cross one is cursing God, which is what the Jews felt it said? Or does it mean the curse that Jesus, as God, took upon Himself in our place, which is what Paul said. You can see how Paul had a different slant on the Rabbinic teaching.

Another one was when Paul referred to the seed of Abraham in the *singular* referring to Jesus. The Jews always understood it in a *collective* sense or the progeny of Abraham. I go with Paul. But along with the story of grace in Paul’s teaching, there seems to be much the Jews were not capable of fully understanding in their own writings. We would be presumptuous if we thought we were any better. Paul received the Truth by revelation, and he said that he would deliver onto us what he received and that is exactly what he did. We are beholding to God for saying what He did say, and providing for us the salvation that He did provide the way He did even if we have to wait on all the explanations.

So why talk about heart in this context? It should be obvious that our head is a bit confused or at least our knowledge is incomplete. Knowledge that we can obtain by study is not sufficient to explain our salvation. We need to know in our *hearts* that salvation is real and there is no amount of logic that’s going to replace *faith*. It’s because the plan of God goes beyond the scope of our understanding or even our ability to understand that the Lord put faith in our hearts in order for us to be able to follow Him.

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Gnosticism

In biblical days, gnostics were a religious group that came up with different explanations as to how one could understand that they were saved or how one could become saved, and these explanations were based on knowledge, but not the knowledge of the heart—knowledge that is academic, that's logical or that is symbolic. Symbolism and mythology have always fascinated human thinking. We seem drawn to it if there's a mystery to be solved, as there is in the case of godliness. The mystery of godliness Paul said was a great mystery. We must be satisfied with just believing it in our hearts, even if we want to also understand it logically in our heads. Gnostics came up with an elaborate scheme that's half myth and half logic, and it was rejected, of course, by the biblical writers. The apostles were content to trust God with what He did tell them and what He did show them. Their message was the message of the Cross and of the resurrection unembellished by a myriad of explanations that we have discovered only serve to divide Christianity.

Theories of Atonement

Since I began to mention the unmentionable, let me raise the unthinkable: Why did Jesus have to be crucified to provide for our salvation? God is in charge and He is omnipotent as well as omniscient, why couldn't He offer a salvation not based on "The Suffering Servant," Jesus' suffering and crucifixion?

Scholarship has broken this down into 4 questions [compliments of A.I. but I can attest to it]:

1. What problem does sin create between God and humanity?
2. Why was Christ's death necessary (or was it)?
3. What did Christ's death accomplish?
4. How does that accomplishment restore communion with God?

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Many, as myself, grew up comfortably “knowing” the answers: We were estranged from God because of Adam’s disobedience— becoming, ourselves, sinners. Yes, Jesus’ crucifixion was necessary because He paid the price for Adam’s and our sins. Jesus’ death successfully thereby removed the sin, forgiven and forgotten, thrown into the deepest sea and was now able to give us a new life in Himself, reconciling us to God. How did this work? Judicially. He satisfied the Law and removed the curse that was on us as sinners.

But Orthodox Christianity sees Calvary as providing a spiritual *healing* rather than a judicial act. I asked A.I. if it had a rough count on how many different theories might be out there and it wrote, “Most theologians would say: between 7 and 12 major theories, with many variations and hybrids.” Most disturbing! I shouldn’t have asked.

But I know this, having studied about Jesus’ crucifixion not only in Scripture and the language of Scripture but in Christian theology in “books.” I wrote a book and then rewrote it and rewrote it again adding answers to questions I, personally had, even if never asked by scholars.

The Christian Church tends to “protect” believers leading us to believe that “our” church has the Gospel while others don’t and, in some cases, goes so far as to squelch any stray interest in such questions, shaming the christian who expresses that deeper interest in any addition inquiry into Jesus’ cruel and painful death. We know God chose Him our “Paschal Lamb” and He wrote a rather lengthy Levitical code to bring this to our attention. It is probably a sad thought that most church goers probably haven’t read the Book of Leviticus—let alone studied it. But it is quite revealing as to God’s mind and heart—something we should be interested in if we are going to ask questions about the Savior’s death.

The Missionary's Challenge

This is not my area of expertise but it is all our concern that some persons, with whom we share the salvation message, may have cultural and worldview barriers to overcome in order to

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understand the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Not only does the missionary have to separate out the actual gospel message from their own cultural interpretation of it, they must then "fit it in a new native garb" for it to be understood in turn by the peoples they are called to. Paul spoke twice of "putting on" the new man [Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10] and living the Christian life: each verse offering a different perspective on the new culture a believer is called to that may or may not conflict with ancient beliefs and practices.

Paul taught the Ephesian church that true Christian behavior has its beginning in God recreating us into persons we were not before—truly a new birth. "that ye put on the *new man*, which *after God* is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is not just starting over but becoming someone we were not before. Here we can correctly call it a "new" nature—living a life devoted to God's will. To the Colossians, he added, "And have put on the *new man* which is *renewed in knowledge* after the image of him that created him." In a real sense we have a new beginning in which God's Word once mysterious and hidden now opens up to us because the new us has been created like Him, Jesus, in His image. Professor Lightfoot refers to this as "the spiritual man in each believers's heart" [Lightfoot on Colossians, 215] supporting our main point that salvation is about a new heart. In Ephesians 4:22 Paul said it this way: "put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man." Or as St Augustine discovered when a voice instructed him to pick up the Bible and read it [Tolle, lege]. He turned to Romans 13:14 "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He found salvation in that verse.

How does one explain this even to persons living in an industrialized nation or culture that has gone postmodern or—in a new word—"woke"? "Rather than seeing the event [Jesus' crucifixion] as a redemptive sacrifice, some cultures may interpret it through their own values, such as treachery, weakness, or collective guilt." Some find the message "profoundly contradictory." Even Paul's message of Jesus' humility and "emptying Himself," setting aside His honored place in the Godhead, and coming to die [Philippians 2:5-8] was

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to the Greek's way of thinking contradictory because Paul claimed that Jesus was the only true *God* in verse 6.

Reading the stories of missionaries and the task before them is an eye-opener. Missionaries spend years learning the native language and culture they are called to in order to be able to refit without compromise the gospel message into a tribal world where Biblical stories, types, parables, and analogies may not have any meaning or worse may contradict their value system. Every culture is built around an ethos which in turn defines for them right from wrong. And the so-called "civilized" world is no different. We become "home" missionaries finding ourselves with a truth to share that is debated endlessly and thought by some to be based on myth and falsity. But in that smog of disbelief and ridicule God may find a listening ear and a heart He can open. That's why we do it. That is true missionary work.

Systematized Doctrine

And if this is not hard enough: Old Testament theology cannot be viewed systematically. R. K. Harrison pointed out that "...the theological concepts of the Old Testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization..." [Harrison, 479]. Although, Harrison was particularly referencing the Covenant of God as a major Old Testament theme, the principle is equally applicable to the Messianic passages and Isaiah's account of the Suffering Servant. But what do we mean by a "Systematic Theology"?

Systematic Theology is a topical approach to learning Scripture in distinction from learning a particular book of the Bible. Such a study takes the entire Bible as its context, but there are some challenges with this approach not faced in a Book by Book study of Scripture.

1. The Bible is viewed as a single authorship, though 40 or more writers, which highlights possible inconsistencies in the text. When a single work is explored, the student need not go beyond the writer's meaning for context. But in viewing the Bible as a whole—like with a single

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writer or book, but now farther reaching in meaning—scholarship demands more inspirational clarity in, now, the overarching context of the Bible and in God’s choice of language.

2. In ascertaining the Theme of the entire Bible—to determine context—a wider look is required. Often in zooming out for a higher level understanding of the Scripture in totality, though it blurs minor discrepancies and scribal errors in the Text giving them less importance, such a study challenges scholarship knowing the theme might not be immediately evident throughout all its pages. Looking for that one overarching Truth that binds the 66 [plus] books together is more demanding. No such theme implies either multiple authors or a work without the continuity, consistency, and cogency inspiration demands.
3. Misunderstood passages now have more Biblical real-estate to work with in searching for a better understanding. This often leads to multiple interpretations which contravenes the idea of a single authorship.
4. Although scholarship is less likely to rely on secular language and historical studies—because more textual volume means more possible answers to unsolved Biblical mysteries—scholarship is more likely with God, a single author, to “put words in His mouth” than with a single known writer. This leads to theological language often based on reason and not the text.

When we add these to the missionary’s task, we can see more clearly why God needed to equip His church with “new” hearts so that He might continue to have input into a study of Scripture. There are too many stray ideas floating aimlessly through our Bible studies and fellowship gatherings that look attractive to young Christians but which do not have the clear, emphatic and simple support of Scripture.

We are still human, which means, we love to reason things out, imagine the yet unimagined, try to solve mysteries,

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and explain the Bible in terms of our own experiences rather than surrendering to the Sacred Text.

How was it possible otherwise for Paul's simple message, unadorned by secular thought—philosophical jargon, and rhetorical gibberish—to become so complex that centuries of debate and church counsels, innumerable academic volumes, scholarly lectures, and post-graduate degrees still could not explain the preacher's passion. Yet every humble believer already knows in their own heart the message of the crucifixion and resurrection of our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” - Acts 4:32

In Acts 4:32 we read “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” Some believe this to be more the thrill of novelty than a lasting wisdom that could sustain the Church through times of persecution and hardship. We view this verse now merely as a piece of church history. Something God proposed for time and eternity, I believe, like Esau’s birthright, had been sold for a bowl of religious pottage. The Church’s beginning was a heart in common and a poverty of spirit that prioritized one another over self. Scholarship thought it not worth the keeping because it was not organized, which the neglected hellenic widows would attest to. The sheer numerical numbers of the early church meant they would outgrow that humble, spiritual awakening. The Church would eventually need organized leadership, defined dogma, and governmental oversight. The Council at Jerusalem temporarily quelled a theological storm brewing between Jew and Gentile but eventually grace would mean a multicultural and multi-language mix which would have outgrown such a simplistic beginning as read in Acts 4. Through denominational interests, the Church began to divide along doctrinal lines that never existed in the minds of the Apostles.

All we retained of Acts 4:32 was the phrase “heart and soul” in the lyrics of a song or in a movie, a secular chime and a romantic refrain in a human love story! The inspiration, started

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by the Spirit of God, which gave the Church its early identity and witness, the single-heartedness God blessed those first Christians with, is now all but buried under the refuse of generations of internecine conflicts and a lifeless social message.

It is clear that whatever else, Satan knew, Acts 4 must not continue and with so many weapons at his beck and call, he made war with God through persecution and language ambiguity. The “heart” lost its biblical significance. By the Middle Ages it was thought to be the seat of emotions—an interpretation that even Artificial Intelligence correctly notes is mis-identified.

Inevitably there would be the development of a thousand denominations and independent churches, all promoting the “pure” gospel which was no longer pure. The church was no longer an organism alive with the breathe of God but a secular organization controlled by men.

This Acts 4 congregation was known for its fellowship which was far more than a banquet. It was a disorganized conglomerate of cultural interpretations but theirs was a heart in common for God.

Fellowship

The word “fellowship” in the Bible comes from a Greek word which, in its various forms, means: *fellowship, community, communion, joint participation, sharing, intimacy, jointly contributing, partnership, co-labor.*

Fellowship is the single most important characteristic in a society where Christ is honored, God is worshipped, and the Spirit of God leads. Fellowship, biblically defines the “Church.”

Christian unity cannot exist without fellowship. Those “tongues of fire” which came upon each of them on Pentecost [Acts 2:3] was from a single flame, one God [1 Corinthians 12:6], one Spirit [1 Corinthians 12:4], and it promoted a single faith [2 Peter 1:1] and a single baptism [Ephesians 4:5].

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In Acts 4 the Church was not just united, it was in “one accord.” “One accord,” in Acts 2:1 is “homothumadon” referring to Christian unity and in Romans 15:6 “one mind”. This term should hold a special place in every believer’s understanding. “homo [same] thuma [passion] don [designating form or structure]. Christian unity on that day came in the form of a single passion, a single mindset, a single *heart*. One accord-ness was how their fellowship was structured. As the Greek word points out, this speaks to how their worship was structured around fellowship and the importance to God of fellowship.

If the devil can minimize this aspect of Christian community, emphasize more a gathering in terms of a concert or lecture or a meeting where our individual participation is discouraged and call “it” worship, he has successfully removed Acts 4 from our bibles.

In lieu of this, Satan must redefine it so that it becomes a church dinner without the mention of the Savior, without a discussion around the importance of His death and Resurrection, without a testimony of what Jesus is doing in our lives or the blessings of following our Lord, without participation in worship. In Colossians 3:16 Paul urged, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” This is fellowship, Acts 4 style. [Pass the mustard, please.]

Singleness of heart

Luke recorded in Acts 2:46 “And they, continuing daily with *one accord* in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and *singleness of heart*.”

Fish have found power in numbers; so, they swim in “schools” but we who are smarter than fish, have not discovered the benefits of unity? Singleness of heart as a divine provision means that we *can* unite not that we will, but when we do have those moments in sharing our concerns of life and understanding of the scriptures something positive happens to

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our faith because we are being restored, refreshed, encouraged, warned, admonished, and supported.

Paul was at liberty to write to a young startup church [1 Thessalonians 5:14] to encourage them to turn a fellowship experience into an opportunity for God to use them to “warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, [with] patient toward all.” He urged the Galatian believers [Galatians 6:1] “if a man be overtaken in a fault [do something about it!], you who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness....” There are only two possible ways this succeeds or becomes a healing moment. Either someone is a trained counselor or we who gather together, gather in “singleness of heart,” in one accord, in fellowship around God’s Word [with or without food].

Perhaps the argument is yet to be proven correct but when there is unity around God’s word spiritual healing takes place, the Spirit has opportunity to use one believer as His instrument to help another—even unknowingly—because the believer is not the Wonderful Counselor, *God* is. In an atmosphere of Christian love pride is dismantled and the walls of pretense and self-defensiveness come tumbling down; God gets to open hearts. The very presence of His Spirit—where 2 or 3 are gathered together—begins to speak to hearts.

A Computer Metaphor

When I returned to college to learn computer science I learned, at the time, there were 2 different architectures for the hardware or the computer, itself: RISC and CISC. [You can look them up.] One was used by Microsoft and one by Apple. I also learned that all databases do not use the same structure nor the same language. In 1967 the ASCII standard [American Standard Code for Information Interchange] was finalized [later to become the ISO - International Organization for Standardization] to solve a critical interoperability problem in early computing and telecommunications. Even today in 2026 it can be an issue. I have a friend whose computer is Microsoft, his smart phone is Apple, and his tablet in Amazon Fire. He does not have the freedom I

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have to update my calendar or directory on my IMAC and have it done automatically in turn on my wife's tablet and smart phone—all are Apple products. A common architecture, operating system, and database together with a common “cloud” for storage makes it possible.

God came up with this idea first of standardizing the means of communicating truth across differing circumstances, opportunities, callings, and experiences. It is a common *heart*, a single interest in and love for Jesus that opens up an understanding of His Word that we can share though everything about our lives, otherwise, is different. That common heart for Christ is—in technical language—the transforming hub that takes our love for one another, translates it into a language understood by another and then offers that love to them in an inspiring and supportive way.

Computer hardware and programs can also be proprietary which means you cannot replace something broken with parts or code from another company. If you begin with Microsoft, only Microsoft replacements will work, etc. But someone began the idea that software should be free and universally available; so, much to the disdain of those who systems are proprietary, the idea of free and universal parts and replacement code took root—as we knew it would.

Denominationalism tends to be proprietary. Leaving one for another is like going from Apple to Microsoft products and becomes a brand new learning experience. Believers face new theological terms and meanings they are unfamiliar with—in some cases a sufficiently different christianese like learning a new language. This tends to guarantee religious support when a believer needs counsel or spiritual help. Often they are limited to the church they attend even though next store is a believer whom God could use from another.

God's original idea was a universal heart that He could share with all believers regardless of church affiliation, culture, or language. But the rub is that believers need to recognize the importance of our commonality with all believers and limit our communication—when across denominational boundaries—to

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what can be heart-felt and heart shared. We need all over again to learn to listen to our hearts —to the instruction God’s Spirit puts there to share and share it in Christian love. Most of us have probably strayed so far from this opportunity that we might not even recognize the difference between the counsel God has put into our hearts from our own wisdom in our heads. We may even be of a shy disposition and miss out on God using us in this way. Or we may assume that is why God gave us pastors and care more about introducing a hungry heart to our church rather than letting God use us in the moment.

Forsake Not Assembling

Hebrews 10:24-25 reads, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” This says it all.

The word “provoke” is a good word meaning “to stimulate, urge, spur-on” and we can sometimes do that simply by being part of the “gathering.” Sometimes, we do this by simply taking the first step and others will follow. [This is why I, as a pastor, always tried to be the last one out the door lest I encourage others to leave earlier than they felt to do in their heart.] Provocation can be another word for encouragement especially if someone is simply not used to the attention. Some are surprised to learn somebody actually cares about them or their situation and there you are representing Jesus. None of this happens without gathering together, without fellowship and a shared heart.

One Another

Are you familiar with the “One Another” principle which in Greek is the word “Allelous” meaning “one another.” There are 20 verses in the New Testament that outline ways we can and ought to minister unto one another in Christ:

Okay, here they are:

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1. "comforted together" (Romans 1:12);
2. "kindly affectioned one to another" (Romans 12:10);
3. "same mind one toward another" (Romans 12:16);
4. "edifying another" (Romans 14:19);
5. "likeminded" (Romans 15:5);
6. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7);
7. "admonishing one another" (Romans 15:14);
8. "having the same care one for another [without partiality or favoritism]" (1 Corinthians 12:25);
9. "So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat [the Lord's Supper], wait for one another [and see to it that no one is left out]." AMP 1 Corinthians 11:33
10. "by love serving one another" (Galatians 5:13);
11. "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;" Ephesians 4:2
12. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his "neighbor: for we are members one of another. " Ephesians 4:25
13. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32
14. "Submitting yourselves one to another" Ephesians 5:21
15. "Bearing ... one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2)"
16. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Philippians 2:3
17. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;" Colossians 3:9
18. "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another," Colossians 3:13

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19. "comfort one another " 1 Thessalonians 4:18
20. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." 1 Peter 4:9

If we scan this list we discover they are not the kind of instruction that the mind can learn without the heart. Perhaps, one might learn a little about their importance and use in seminary or college, but they are not academic exercises.

The Two Shall Be One

The marriage oneness God spoke of in the creation story of Adam and Eve [Genesis 2:24] was a metaphor for Christ and His Church [Ephesians 5:31-32]. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ... I speak concerning Christ and the church." The only way to achieve this oneness is through a commonality based on *singleness of heart*. Jesus knew this was possible when He prayed for our unity. [John 17:21].

Marriage reflects a covenantal faithfulness that all believers collectively experience in union with Christ. A oneness with Christ requires every believer share in the same oneness with each other. The Church is thereby one Church, one bride, one body.

An attribute of the heart in the language of scripture, as we pointed out, is *commitment* and in no place is this more evident than in marriage. Fidelity is the cornerstone of marriage. It is the soil that marriage oneness grows in. Everyone knows this instinctively without manuals because it is written on the heart as the single most essential attribute of love.

It has been called exclusivity but we call it fidelity or faithfulness to our Lord. As Christ promised it to us, we, now, promise the same to Him. Perhaps, no scripture is more descriptive of this truth than Hebrews 10:23 "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." The previous verse [22] defines this attitude as a *true heart* and a *clear conscience*. This is the core of all morality in a human or natural sense. It is the core spiritually of a holy life.

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Marriage is not a contract but a covenant between two persons lovingly intending to submit to one another willingly and wholeheartedly. Two persons bequeath everything they have and are in support of this covenantal union. The marriage vows are not a requirement by law but an offering of love. There is no human expression of grace more empowering. None more divine “Love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.” And none more self-serving at the same time: “He that loves his wife loves himself.” [Ephesians 5:25, 28].

So as a covenant, it best represents in metaphor and motif the union between Christ and us. Marriage embodies the Gospel message; for in believing the Gospel, we enter into community, a singleness of heart, with all believers and begin preparation for our wedding day in Christ. Marriage is, therefore, uniquely fitted to mirror the Gospel. No other relationship even those most enduring of friendships or partnerships can offer as clear and powerful a picture of the Gospel than marriage oneness illustrates. No other relationship melds two persons together into a single individual at heart because no other relationship is based on who they are and not only what they offer. Friends share what they do together; partners share a common project; but in marriage two people share themselves. Oneness means inevitably that you and I are no longer a ‘we’ because we have melded into a single person in heart—in understanding, in desire, and in mind.

Marriage amplifies God’s message of grace through this relationship testifying to the world the redemptive love that Christ has shown to the Church. This joining of hearts, a oneness with Christ, into a single passion and focus in Him is the message of grace and embraces all you seek Him. This is true across race, gender, ethos, nationality, language, and culture. It is the believer’s hope, dowry and inheritance, regardless of religious affiliation, class status, past history, age or potential or anything else. It is the gift of a grace through faith that God bestows on every believer not only by giving them a new heart but the same new heart to make such a close and enduring union possible.

A Perfect Heart

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.” 1 Chronicles 28:9

The modern meaning given to the heart is the seat of “deep interests” and “sincere feelings.” “From the bottom of your heart” means “very sincere.” To lose heart is to lose courage or enthusiasm. But to lose “your” heart is to “fall in love.” To “have a heart” is a plea for pity. The word “heart” in modern, secular, speech, therefore, is primarily a synonym for deep emotions.

One word I didn’t read in connection with the modern use of “the heart” is “commitment” while the biblical use of the term is all about commitment. “Heart: is not mere feeling but a faithful, voluntary, and knowledgeable commitment to a person in a defined relationship with them, as friend or spouse ...or God. If we love God with all our heart, we love Him faithfully, freely, not under obligation or duress, and knowingly, with full awareness and a profound sense of joy. Feelings join in or as C. S. Lewis once quipped, “...it sure helps to have the band playing while we march.”

If one’s heart is in what they are doing, this speaks more than an excitement. In Proverbs 8:5 Solomon spoke of an “understanding” heart. In Psalm 10:17 David testified God prepares the heart of the humble to listen [hear Him]. In Psalm 19:14 David prayed that the meditation of his heart would be acceptable to God.

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God—the God of covenant— is not seeking to give us a good feeling or shower us with emotional blessings; He seeks a commitment from us. When God opened Lydia’s heart, as Rev. Alistair Begg said it, “The Spirit of God worked in her heart in such a way that she paid attention.” In both modern and biblical language we ascribe to the heart a degree of focus with intent. Pastor Begg continued, “It is the Spirit of God at work in the heart and mind of a person that even grants the ability to pay attention.” Lydia paid attention because, first, there was a message to be believed, faith is an affirming presence to the divine message: believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead [Romans 10:9-10] and secondly, again quoting the good pastor, “and secondly commitment to the One Who made the promises.” [taken from “Getting Our Spiritual Bearings,” a Youtube video in the Truth for Life series, 2022]. In Romans 10:9 our confession is that Christ is our *Lord*, we listen to His voice.

It is in this way we can understand 1 Kings 11:4 “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father.” [1 Kings 11:4; 15:3]. A *perfect* heart is one with a life-long commitment in covenant with God.

I would have understood the verse to be talking about a heart with integrity or one not inclined toward selfish interests, but the Hebrew word here is *shalom*: a *shalom* heart. The Hebrew Dictionary interprets, “keeping covenant relations with God. [BDB, 1023] David could be said to be “at peace” [shalom] with God.

The Dedication of the Temple

Peace dwells in the heart or not at all. Professor Keil calls a perfect heart: “serving God with an undivided heart.” [Keil, 1 Chronicles, 291]. It is a humble heart completely committed to God’s will. David’s heart in Psalm 25:4 cried out, “Show me your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.’

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At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon in addressing the people maintained that the meaning behind such a glorious structure was not in the stones, but in the God whom they worshipped there. Says the Chronicler: “That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, *and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect* with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day. [1 Kings 8:60-61]. A perfect heart is a perfect witness.

In his prayer of dedication Solomon proclaimed, “O LORD God of Israel, *there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keeps covenant, and shows mercy* unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their *hearts*: 2 Chronicles 6:14].

For Solomon, a “perfect” heart meant walking in God’s statutes and keeping His commandments and Solomon understood one thing about God, as well—He keeps covenant which means He shows mercy. In closing his prayer Solomon spoke of walking [living] before God [with the Lord] with their whole hearts, that is, that no part of their life dishonors the covenant they have with God. As we have said, A covenant with God defines a relationship with Him which means our faithfulness to Him as much as His faithfulness to us. A perfect heart is a faithful heart—a heart in covenant with God..

We must not pray to God without recognizing His faithfulness to us in His covenant. God’s Word is a Word of promise because God is a God of covenant who is faithful. God’s mercy testifies to His covenantal faithfulness.

But on our part in this covenantal relationship with God it is required we walk before Him with all our *hearts*.” Hezekiah defined this as having “walked before the Lord in truth and with a *perfect heart*, and have done *that which is good* in His sight [Isaiah 38:3].

I might argue that this is typical Judaism or Rabbinic teaching presupposing that obedience to the Law is what perfection is all about—but I would be wrong. Such an argument

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fails to explain the reason for the Biblical reference to “the heart.”

Our life is not said to be perfect as if we never broke a single commandment. It is the “heart” that is to be perfect. The dictionary called a perfect heart: “A mind at peace, keeping covenant relations. [BDB, 1024]. God knew that the covenant Solomon ministered under would someday be replaced with a new one written on their hearts. God being just, according to Romans 3:25-26, waited patiently for that day when a new covenant would issue new hearts to all who by faith accepted Him as their Lord [Romans 10:9]. Meanwhile God provided the type of Christ, the sacrifice, as an object lesson, to continually remind them of their need of salvation from sin.

The sacrificial system was a part of Solomon’s dedication. Jesus’ crucifixion would replace it, but for them, a perfect heart was a heart that brought their sacrificial gifts to God, came to the High-priest with a sacrifice to atone for sin, tithed, and celebrated the Passover and other festivals. All these were a constant reminder of their need for reconciliation with God, but it had to, unlike Cain, be offered with a perfect heart, a willing heart, a heart after God.

2 Chronicles 5:6 called the number of sacrifices at the Temple dedication innumerable. Later we read that 142,000 sheep and oxen were sacrificed. No doubt some in devotion and praise to God but clearly most to atone for sin, individually and nationally. “And king Solomon offered [the priests offered] a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.” [2 Chronicles 7:5].

Afterward, “The priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.” [2 Chronicles 5:14]. God was pleased.

The point being made over and over again is that though the sin and shame [guilt] offerings show failings and missteps in the matter of Torah. Law, God continues to examine the heart to determine sincerity, willingness, and love for Him. Their walk may not have been perfect, but a perfect heart spoke to a

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devotion that believed in repentance and prayer and the sacrifices. He is not only the Heart-knower (Psalm 44:21; Acts 15:8), but the Heart examiner.

God Tests the Heart

During a theology final, my Greek professor whispered to me to go to his office to retrieve another ream of writing paper for the students taking the test. I sought to decline anxious that I might not finish the test myself, when the professor shrugged off my apprehension, assuring me, "You got an 'A'!" This was not a whimsical comment tossed my way because we were "friends." This was the confidence of a professor who knew my work not just this past semester but over the course of the 3 years so far I was there. I was also—as now—keenly submersed in Greek and Hebrew studies and would attempt a translation of Romans in my final year in one of his classes. He knew *me*. I had already passed without the need of this exam [though I did finish it.]

I thought of this experience when I read David remind us that God tests us, too, but it is our "hearts" not our "heads." Psalm 7:9b-10 reads: "the righteous God tries [tests] the hearts and reins [the seat of deepest affections and emotions]. My defense *is* of God, which saves the upright in *heart*." Jeremiah 11:20 agreed: "O LORD of hosts, that judges righteously, that tries [tests] the reins and the *heart*."

As we have already discovered in talking about Cain when God looks at us [or doesn't] it is our hearts that He is observing. Samuel learned, "*The LORD sees* not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." [1 Samuel 16:7].

Numerous verses repeat this familiar truth: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*." [Psalm 139:1]. God examines our hearts, but why?

Jesus' Seaside Chat

In John 21:15-17, the Risen Savior wanted to talk to Peter, alone, during that memorable cookout by the Sea—though others were

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there in that small group of at least 7 or 8 disciples [verse 2]. Peter had, perhaps unwittingly, encouraged some of this group to return with him to the sea [verse 3] to fishing—a good distraction for fishermen from the confusion that, no doubt, troubled their minds [Luke 24:37-38; John 14:1]. Their dreams of ministry and glory were misplaced and misunderstood—not fantasized.

Peter probably felt that Jesus had every right to exclude him from any future plans. Peter's denial in the courtyard must have lingered as a haunting regret. It seems unlikely someone in that group of fishermen wouldn't raise the matter to, hopefully, downplay its impact on his thoughts and feelings. We were told in verse 2 that Thomas, the doubter, was there, who might support Peter's despondency as reasonable, making matters worse. And there was Nathaniel, the man of impeccable honesty and transparency, who probably made little of Peter's outburst at the hand warming incident, since, Jesus was obviously in a forgiving mood. Jesus cooked a fish banquet for them! Two disciples on opposite ends of an argument possibly raised to determine the weight of Peter's misbehavior while Jesus was before the Tribunal.

Perhaps, none of this happened that way, but something was on the Savior's mind when He singled out His forlorn follower who had withdrawn alone—God knows where—for days to weep and perhaps punish himself with thoughts of “what have I done! I lied!” Peter might have concluded that there was no future worth dreaming about anymore. At the time, he was not privileged to have the rich theological discussions we are prone to banter about, nor a pastor who would pray with him. But he did have Jesus!

This sets the stage for what Jesus said to him. He didn't call him, Peter, nor Simon. He used *both* names, “Simon Peter, son of Jonas,” with his new honorific, his calling card and new life in Christ centered symbolically between his Jewish name and progenitor, “Peter” by which he would forever after be known.

There is a compassionate tenderness in the Savior's voice, no doubt, reminding His disciple not only of his heritage

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“Simon ..son of...” but more so of his calling, “Peter.” And the Savior went to the well 3 times [maybe more. Three could mean countless—like with Paul’s thorn in his flesh?].

“Peter do you love me?”

Excellent question when we feel like quitting—not because of something the Savior did or didn’t do, but—because of our own short comings and failings.

Peter was inevitably “grieved” [this word “to be in pain” requires the context for meaning] over the Savior’s persistent “badgering”

“You keep bring it up! Of course, I love You, Jesus!”
Simon Peter, son of Jonas, reiterated.

Finally, Peter, added, ““Lord, You know all things! You know I do!”

Perhaps, this was where the Savior was going. Perhaps, Peter’s emotional healing would begin with “Lord, You know all things.” Translated: “Lord, You who know me, know my heart. I humbly want to more perfectly love you. Help me to be this person!”

Peter’s future was in the hands of the “All-knowing” One, something it is always good to know especially in desperate, anxious, moments [and especially if, like Peter, you tend to make rash decisions].

Peter’s future was in those 5 words [4 in Greek] The term “know” here means “to perceive.” Jesus had a different perspective than Peter did; for, Peter had no idea at that point what was happening. Who expected Jesus to invite them to a fish-fry? They went from no catch to too many fish to haul to shore! It was John who first recognized that the man on the beach was *Jesus*. John told Peter —impetuous Peter—who in verse 7 dove into the water. Did he give any consideration as to how far it was to the shore!?

But in keeping with the theme of this book: This spontaneous act of hurling himself into the sea speaks to the state of his heart, his desire to be with the Savior and, in an ultimate sense, follow Him. No matter what else Peter did or

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didn't do or say on that most recent Passover eve, this single moment of leaving the boat in such a dramatic fashion told Jesus all He needed to know about this man's heart!

Once on shore and probably enjoying some of the best cooked fish ever, through a simple quiz Peter was to learn that the shame of his denial was past and must not become the accuser's opportunity to hinder him in his calling. The Father had already given Jesus a burden for Peter. Luke recorded Jesus saying to Peter on an earlier occasion, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat, [Oh, the message in these verses!] But I have been in prayer for you Simon, that your faith should not fail." [Luke 22:31-32]

Jesus in this seaside chat did not directly reference Peter's actions in that courtyard, but the student of God's Word can imagine it was on Peter's mind. Jesus was not looking at Peter's past failings because *He was looking at his heart*—which is what God does. To assure Peter that he was still very much a part of all God was doing and going to do, Jesus instructed him to feed His sheep [and lambs].

Now I wonder if this incident was on the Apostle's mind when he penned 1 Peter 1:7? It is your faith being tested—not you. You will not be next to a fire [as he was when Jesus was falsely indicted and Peter was warming his hands]. You will be *in* the fire that your faith can be purified. Isaiah 43:2 prophesied, "When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you."

Our faith is being purified to the Glory and Honor of God at Jesus' appearing. God's "tests" serve, then, a double purpose: to strengthen faith and affirm the call of God on our lives.

Don't lose the main point of this story, the difference in perspective between Peter and Jesus. Peter saw his failings. Jesus saw his *heart*!

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Want To Want To

One college professor tells the true story of a former student who was doing 'F' work in class when they were not intellectually handicapped. So the teacher decided to put a 'B' on the next test handed in—even though it was their “standard” 'F' work. The student was speechless, flummoxed, but in another way excited about the grade. To the surprise—no doubt—of all their friends but not to the surprise of the professor, this student began to complete 'B' work for real. The teacher knew something about this student that may not have been obvious to others because most people look at grades and reports. The professor saw something else in this student others missed. He was not looking in the same place as they. A familiar verse is 1 Samuel 16:7 when God wanted Samuel to anoint a new king from the sons of Jesse. God chose David. “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature ... for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

This is the point of this brief chapter that God isn't looking in the same place we look when we judge or evaluate others in error—their spirituality, their actions, their dedication to God. We have built into our new hearts a “want to want to” meter of which Paul spoke in Romans 7:22. He testified, “I delight in the law of God.” He meant “I want to want to follow the Law! Of God” In the next verse he put a “But.” But he didn't always obey it and he had no excuse! He was registering high on his “want to want to” meter, but very low in practice.

Might Paul have said, in Romans 7:25 “With my *heart* [mind] I served the law of God”? In a few instances, the “heart” in Hebrew has been translated “mind” in Greek because one function of the heart is *understanding*, as we already noted in Proverbs 2:2. If this is correct, then the question as to whether Paul is speaking of himself or using an editorial 'I' is moot because it can be *both*. Paul, the pharisee, loved the Law of God! He never denied but affirmed that it is *holy* [Romans 7:12]. And if it is holy, we might say that, the Law is representative of God's

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own “heart.” It is sacred! But it could not nor was it meant to save anyone. This he discovered as a devout Jew which only became more evident to him when He met Jesus on the Damascus road and God wrote that Law on his new heart. Written on our hearts, the Law still does not save; but it continues to represent God’s holiness only now its function makes sense. That’s verse 25.

Maybe we are pulling F’s and not B’s but we want to, or if not that, we “want to want to.” God will not toss us aside, having seen something in our hearts that He might “reason” with—or, might I say, tutor [Isaiah 1:18]. He wants us to go for an A, a perfect grade ... a perfect heart.

An Open Heart

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” - Acts 16:14

As children we used to sing of letting the sunshine into our hearts. You might recall the first stanza and chorus if you, too, sang this song:

Mommy told me something
A little boy should know
It's all about the devil
And I've learned to hate him so
She said he causes trouble
When you let him in the room
He will never ever leave you
If your heart is filled with gloom

Chorus

So let the sunshine in
Face it with a grin
Smilers never lose
And frowners never win
So let the sunshine in
Face it with a grin
Open up your heart
And let the sunshine in

I was surprised to find that the idiom that referred to the “opening of the heart” was found in a single verse, Acts 16:14, and it was God who did it, *not* Lydia. As a result she took in what Paul was teaching and this led to the salvation and baptism of her entire family.

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All scholars seem to care about with this verse is whether or not Lydia was married with an infant at home that needed to be water baptized. Instead of inquiring about the uniqueness of this phrase, “God opened her heart” they wondered more whether God opened her baby’s heart.

The only other reference the computer could give me was from the Qumran scrolls in a thanksgiving hymn [1QH (Hodayot / Thanksgiving Hymns) 12.27–28. ca. 1st cent. BCE–1st cent. CE] which read: “And you opened my heart to understand by your wisdom.” [וְאַתָּה פָּתַחְתָּ לִּבִּי לְהַבִּין בְּחַכְמַתְךָ] “In context, the hymnodist thanks God for sovereignly opening his heart to divine understanding, knowledge, mysteries, or instruction—enabling insight into God’s ways, truth, or wisdom that would otherwise be inaccessible.” [A. I. research]

In Akkadian the “open heart” might relate to confession or omens, not divine illumination. So, this phrase is rare and here Luke uses it to—if we learn nothing else—emphasize that salvation has more to do with the heart than the head or actions alone. Learning the teaching of the Church or attending a church service has no meaning to God if it doesn’t have meaning to us—in our hearts. Israel surely learned this truth: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:” [Isaiah 29:13; 1:5].

The Inner Man

The heart is, in the language of Scripture, the innermost part of a person. Deep feelings associated with the spirit of a person, and, therefore, their heart, are never felt in the head but deep inside the stomach area of the human body. We sometimes call it a “gut wrenching” or a “gut feeling.”

- Psalm 5:9 “For *there is* no faithfulness in their mouth; their **inward part** [Greek: heart] *is* very wickedness;”

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- Lamentations 2:11 “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my **bowels** [Greek: heart] are troubled, my liver [seat of emotions] is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people;”
- Proverbs 22:17b, 18 “hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them **within** [Hebrew: **womb**; Greek: heart] thee
- Ezekiel 13:3 “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own **spirit** [Greek: heart], and have seen nothing!”

The heart, if it is distinguishable from the soul and spirit, is that part of the inner self that reasons, imagines, develops motive and intention, along with other—what we would call—mental activities. It is, to use another metaphor, the factory that collects the resources of the body, soul and spirit of a person and produces the final product, the final thought and action.

The Greek word used on occasion to translate the Hebrew word for heart is a word meaning “the faculty of understanding.” This prayer of David is a primary example of the heart as the seat of a person’s thought life, their innermost “thoughts and intentions” [Hebrews 4:12]: David prayed, in 1 Chronicles 29:17, 18: “I know also, my God, that you try [test] the heart and hast pleasure in uprightness. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this [pleasure in uprightness] for ever in *the imagination of the thoughts of the heart* of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee:”

The word “prepare” can mean: establish, make firm, fix, make ready, prepare, provide for, furnish, or direct. [Blueletter Bible]. Why not use them all to translate this verse! This prayer should be on all our lips and in all our hearts!

The Spiritual Man

When we took a “closer look” in the chapter on “A Loving Heart” we mentioned the 2 Hebrew words for “heart.” Let’s look even closer now that we have been discovering the importance

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of the “new heart” God gives each believer and the “inner” or “new” person that God has created in each of us.

The Theological Dictionary tells us that “The wealth of nuances in the underlying Hebrew words is reflected in [the Greek word for heart] in the [Greek Old Testament]. It is the focus of [a believer’s] being and activity as a spiritual personality. Hence it is also the source and seat of his moral and religious life.” [Kittel, III, 609].

In the New Testament the word “heart” agrees with the Old Testament distinct from any secular use in Greek literature. Even more emphatically and clearly the heart is the main organ of spiritual life in man “at which God bears witness to Himself.” [Ibid, 611].

Our hearts were made for God! To use my analogy of the plane, We pilot our lives by a heart after His. “The heart is supremely the one center in man to which God turns...,” The dictionary affirms [Ibid. 612].

As Peter admonished, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:” [2 Peter 1:19].

Tithing

Consider tithing in the Old Testament. What if we compare it to a giving heart in the New: “Every man according as he purposes in his heart,” Paul urged, “*so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.* [2 Corinthians 9:7]. Who hasn’t read this verse before and not questioned the “law” of tithing. Some interpret Paul to be disregarding the tithe, perhaps as a Jewish law that does not apply to Corinthian believers. But there is nothing here that contradicts tithing as a Biblical directive. Tithing does not need to be written in law; perhaps, because it is already written on the heart of every believer!.

Some believers still challenge it, though, not on theological grounds but—let’s be honest—because they worry

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over their own finances or it's a lifestyle issue and they dream of raising their standard of living. They don't think of giving in terms of tithing.

No matter how one does the math—whether rich or poor—no one has more than 100 percent to divide up and the government [all levels combined] wants half of our income to begin with—right? So, after taxes, housing, food, medical insurance, and utilities, whatever is left is “discretionary spending” only. Unlike the government, we cannot go deeper each year into personal debt and get away with it. The government can lower interest rates and print money to give the appearance that things aren't as bad as they look; but we cannot. Our personal GDP is visible in a weekly grocery bill. When the offering plate is passed, we might be embarrassed to be seen putting nothing in [even though no one cares]. Is it our conscience or the Spirit's conviction that is raising the issue within us of “tithing”?

We might have legitimate reason for not honoring a weekly commitment of the tithe if it is public knowledge that the church is mismanagement money. We might be on subsidized living and the pastor drives around in a Tesla—and for some reason that bothers us? We live in the projects while the pastor owns a 4 bedroom home with 2 1/2 baths—you get the picture. Truth be told, if we want a reason not to tithe, there are hundreds to pick from or we can make up new ones. I call this rationalizing.

When it comes to giving to God's work, we might listen to our hearts as believers! If, indeed, the tithe as a principle of scripture, is written on the believer's heart, no amount of rationalization can out argue conviction. We can always attend another ministry or give our money to Christian missions or a para-church organization or find a George Muller out there who could use our financial help in his orphanage. Or we can remain faithful in the ministry we are in and maybe God will appoint us [I'm not being facetious when I say] a voice of wisdom—as long as it's the ministry we care about and not us trying to use money to get what we want. I knew one person who designated their

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entire tithing to a separate missions fund within the church to keep it out of the general church fund because they thought the general fund was not being managed properly. [I cannot recommend this!] But they still tithed!

There are reasons why a Christian isn't tithing even though their heart is supportive. Maybe they are married to a non-giver or an unbeliever and tithing leads to verbal abuse and painful confrontation. They are trying to practice Paul's advice to "study to be quiet" [1 Thessalonians 4:11].

Yet, there is a reason why this issue is raised in this book. We have argued about tithing from a theological point of view as an intellectual matter, a biblical commandment, a "law" of God [Malachi 3:10] and have not been addressing the issue at all from the perspective of the christian's *heart*. It was from this perspective Paul admonished the Corinthians to give in 2 Corinthians 9:7. He was asking them to listen to their heart. Within the believer's heart there is inscribed a clear and emphatic directive that will guide their decision.

Theology is cold and often in the arena of debate it provides no clear course to follow. Theology cannot instruct. Theology cannot guide. A theology on "tithing" is an academic exercise that only logic and rhetoric can appreciate. It decides nothing nor can it. If we break the tithing rule, theologically, we are left with a feeling of guilt or we push back in a defensive attitude. Neither is befitting a believer.

The Lord through the Prophet Isaiah cautioned, "Listen to *me*, you who know righteousness, the people in whose *heart* is my instruction:" [Isaiah 51:7]. Job agreed, "Listen to his instructions, and store them in your heart." [Job 22:22]. So when we get to Malachi, whose prophecy spoke of the "tithing" on the eve of our Lord's incarnation, [Malachi 3:10] we read in context chapter 2:2 "Listen to me ... because you have not taken my warning *to heart*."

The difference between the theology and the heart is a personal one and when we discern what God has put into our hearts to do, we will do it "cheerfully." Should it be ten percent?

An Open Heart

Talk to your heart and then decide.

Pauline Thought

Paul never spoke of God opening one's heart but he did speak of one already opened.

- Romans 2:29 - a circumcised heart: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.
- 1 Corinthians 7:37 - a stedfast heart: Nevertheless he that stands stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.
- 2 Corinthians 6:11 - an enlarged heart: O *ye* Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.
- 2 Corinthians 8:16 - a caring heart: But thanks *be* to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.
- Ephesians 5:19 - a joyful heart: Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
- Ephesians 6:6 - an obedient heart: Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;
- 1 Timothy 1:5 - a pure heart: Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned [without hypocrisy]:

Does an open heart make a difference, not only in our status before God as being saved us but in how we read scripture, how we understand God's Word and how we practice our Christianity? It does not matter if we have no learning in the Biblical languages or theology as long as our heart is right before God because it is to the heart of a person not their intellect that

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God reveals Himself. Now, Paul can say that “God’s Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit,” [Romans 8:16].

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, who were of a Greek culture and some, no doubt, were learned, “The things of the Spirit of God ... are spiritually discerned.” [1 Corinthians 2:14]. When Paul spoke of a circumcised heart, he explained it as being “in the spirit” [Romans 2:29]. Paul spoke of circumcision because it was the physical token to Abraham [and his progeny] of being in covenant with God. Now under the New Covenant which fulfilled all older covenantal provisions, circumcision represents the spiritual operation God performs in reviving the spirit and creating in us a new heart.

Lydia’s heart was opened. All we know about this rather unique phrase is what Luke described next: “She attended unto [held unto every word and took to heart] the things which were spoken [by] Paul.” [Acts 16:14]. Lydia began to understand and hunger for what Paul was teaching. It was her new heart opened to the Lord’s Word. It made sense to her having now a heart capable of understanding it. But we would never eat if we were not also hungry. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.” [Matthew 5:6].

Consider the 2 disciples walking to Emmaus after Jesus’ resurrection. [Luke 24:13-35] Their salvation was not described as God opening their hearts but their eyes [verse 31]. But the heart was very much involved; for, they testified, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us.” [verse 32]. Two disciples meandering down a country road to Emmaus, two disciples despondent beyond words for Jesus was the promise of Israel now thought buried and forgotten. But here He comes along side, though, their grief did not allow them to see Him. Ever so slowly as He spoke He ignited once again that eternal hope that excites pure joy in the soul. So when they reached Emmaus, they could not sleep but had to return to Jerusalem with the news, He’s alive!! I recall Paul writing, If you “believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” [Romans 10:9]. Luke just recorded the salvation of these disciples.

A Knowing Heart

“They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me” - Jeremiah 31:34

I like to say that whereas Moses’ friendship with God was called a face to face meeting, “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaks unto his friend” [Exodus 33:11] ours is more intimate: a heart to heart because the Spirit of God is within us [John 14:17]. He has become our comforter and counselor [John 16:8] and guide [Romans 8:14].

In rather eloquent language—from a heart of love for the believers in Philippi—Paul prayed, “...that your *love* may abound yet *more and more* in *knowledge* and in *all judgment*; That you may *approve* things that are *excellent*; that you may be *sincere* and without *offense* till the day of Christ” [Philippians 1:9-10].

These words were carefully chosen by Paul to speak of a growing or deepening love the Philippian congregation had toward one another rooted in their love for the Lord. This love was not mere feeling but came with a growing knowledge of Christ [2 Peter 1:3]. When Paul spoke of judgment, he meant that their love to serve the Lord and each other, based on a true knowledge of the Lord’s will, was a love in action, a decision, that was sincere [or genuine and not diluted or mixed with hypocrisy]. Their love was a love that sought not to offend. There was with it no bitterness or selfish interest hidden in their thoughts, words, or actions that would poison the well from which it sprang. It should be clear and obvious this is describing the heart of the believer.

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The opposite might be described by Isaiah when he uses in Isaiah 29:13 a word of which the Greek equivalent is *never* used in the New Testament about believers. Let me walk you through the higher weeds here:

Isaiah's prophesy points out the sharp contrast between true devotion to God and what is mere form when he wrote, "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their *fear* toward me is taught by the precept of men:" [Isaiah 29:13].

"Their fear toward me," says the Lord, "is taught by the precept of men" it was not in their hearts to honor the Lord and worship Him, "in spirit and in truth" [John 4:24].

The Hebrew word "fear" often used to describe the "fear of God" is in the Old Testament language generally a very good thing [Ecclesiastes 12:13] and when it is used this way, the Greek translation honors this truth using the Greek equivalent for a "respect" for God. But this isn't always the case—and certainly not here in Isaiah 29:13! God alerted the prophet that "fear of God" in Israel while they were worshipping idols was a dead dogma without a heart beat. It was in their teachings but not in their hearts! So, Isaiah used a word for "fear" which meant form over substance, ritual without heart. The Apostles shunned away from this word when talking about real faith in the Lord.

The word, fear, then, had a place in following Torah law and an Israelite's devotion to God in obeying that law but not in describing Christian faith! The Greek translation described their fear of God as an idle, fruitless, useless, and false devotion. They spoke of such a devotion as "vain." It is used primarily by Luke to indicate a misplaced devotion, a religious zeal in defense of doctrine, that did not honor God [Acts 13:50].

Lydia before God opened her heart was called "devoted" being among the Israelite women who were faithful to *the law* of God. Though the word may express a genuine fear of God, it doesn't represent an open or new heart which God

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creates in the believer at salvation, because that heart is different in quality having God's Word written on it.

Paul, likewise, never spoke of a believer worshipping God using the Old Testament term "to worship" which means "to do obeisance." It is probably comparable to using the Christian phrase, "being on your knees" as a symbol of prayer. It does not always represent a genuine expression of worship.

There are other New Testament words that have a limited usefulness because they do not necessarily come "with heart." James, for example, explains that a person is self-deceived into thinking they have true *religion* when they cannot control what they say [James 1:26]. Paul in Colossians 2:18 spoke of the heresy of religiously worshipping angels. This word, *religious* or *religion*, referring to a religious sect, does not serve our Christian faith, though James will allow us to use it if we show mercy to the poor and orphans and widows—oh, and control our tongues!

Godliness

But godliness, which etymologically speaking means "good worship" and which has been called "living your life with one eye on God," is a mark of a true believer.

To briefly summarize: Richard Trench references Lord Brooke's grand name for "religious" [the word we just looked into] as the 'mother of form and fear,'—the external framework of which *godliness* [our word here] is the informing soul. [Trench, Synonyms, XLVIII, 175].

Peter [2 Peter 1:5-7] develops this idea between patience and brotherly love where it surely belongs. Upon the foundation of our faith in Christ we build true fellowship [in verses 5 and 6] through living a virtuous life, learning Christ through following Him, and self-control or mortifying the deeds of the flesh—all essential to true godly living. It is on this basis true fellowship or brotherly love flourishes and we ultimately discover we are capable of loving others even our enemies. None of this is

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accomplished through books but through a walk of faith. It is heart knowledge.

How Do I Know

How do I know I am saved?

A believer shouldn't have to ask this question, but if they do, the question itself, indicates a searching heart, which a non-believer who has no interest in a relationship with God would never think to ask!

Through our secular education we have entered the age of reason in which anything can be denied or found reasonable if argued enough. We can begin to question our salvation if we are confused, going through hard times, or because of an overwhelming grief. Months, even years, of walking with the Lord, confessing His goodness, affirming His presence, experiencing His healing touch, testifying of His love, all forgotten in a moment of doubt. For that moment, only the memories that support doubt seem to come to mind. The enemy of our soul, who accuses us of hypocrisy, spreads his lies and then, disappears into a modernism that denies his very existence.

"So where did these damaging thoughts come from if not from within ourselves," we argue within ourselves. And are they true? All we need now is for other believers to accuse us, also, of a lack of faith or of a lack of devotion to God—even though our hearts have longed for and continued to long for Truth, His Truth, God's Truth! And now we reach the point where we do not know what we believe or how we know our salvation is real!

We need to converse with our own hearts. We just want another "drink from the well" to refresh our faith and to assure us of our salvation. Like the woman at Jacob's Well we might argue theology and religion [John 4:12, 20] and that's the mistake because it is our head that is confused not our heart!.

So, how *do* we know?

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Works

I was told an interesting story by my Greek professor who had to determine if something a student did warranted dismissal from the college. The student appeared before him contrite repeatedly asking him, because he was in charge of disciplinary action, to forgive. To which this professor over and over again responded, "What did you do?" The student reminded him again and again what it was. To which this member of the faculty resolutely replied, "I have no such record of such a thing happening." The student desperate to make amends tried to help this professor remember—to no avail. Finally he left the teacher's office happily confused. This teacher told me that he knew, based on the student's contrite heart, that there would be no repeat. Not unlike what Jesus' forgiveness is all about.

The question of our standing with the Lord is often a question of "works" whether we sin or not. James said "... faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." [James 2:17]. But are works always a good indicator of the condition of the heart? Only God's Word can discern between thought and intent, the writer to the Hebrews informed us [Hebrews 4:12]. Only God is the "heart-knower" [Acts 1:24]. Although we may not fully understand our own hearts, we can talk about it to a God Who does! And He can reveal to us what we can accept by faith when necessary.

Let me stretch your thinking for a moment. A dog's bark doesn't prove it's a dog. Other animals "bark" [seals?] and dogs may go a long time with no reason to bark. It is not a dog because it barks; it barks because it's a dog! When a dog barks, this action is natural to what it is ... a dog. We don't train a dog to bark. We don't—or shouldn't—discipline a dog because it barks. [This would be cruel.]

On one cable program my wife watches on occasion to get news updates, the participants usually close with a video each one brings that is funny. One of the men periodically quizzes the others with an animal sound asking them to guess the animal. Their batting average as a team is dismal. And yet,

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do we really know someone is a Christian because they feed the poor! I think you get the point.

What if we read James 2 from a dog owner's point of view:

- :17. Even so a dog, if it does not bark, is dead; it is a stuffed animal!
- :18. You say that you have a dog, but mine barks. Show me your dog not barking [it is not what you say it is]. I will show you my dog *barking*.
- :20. But do you know, O brainless man, that a dog that doesn't bark is dead?
- :22 By barking this is a perfect way to show that it is a living dog!

Now use the word "heart" instead of "faith" since the heart is where faith resides:

- :17. Even so a heart after God, if it does not love Him, is dead; it isn't beating.
- :18. Yea, a man may say that he has a heart after God, but show me your heart lacking love for God. I will show you my beating heart by my love for Him.
- :20 Don't you know, O vain man, that a heart without love is dead?
- :22 By love is the heart made alive.

It is important that a believer in co-operation with God in prayer learns the condition of their own heart before listing all the things others say define spirituality. Your heart knows best what loving God is about! If you have a heart after God, it will beat loudly for Him! It is what a heart after God does by [new] nature!

Looking at the Scripture through the lens of the spiritual condition of our own heart simplifies our theology. There is a lot of Scriptural truth to learn but somethings "in our heart of hearts" we *know* that we know—as one brother once phrased it: "as clear as a a bell and as sharp as a razor." We need to recognize that this spiritual truth is itself revealed to us by God

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and is a mark of our salvation. It is, as if, we are arguing with our own hearts. While the head contends it has doubts, our heart cries out "I know my salvation is real."

Rewards

A man was taking a leisurely walk at lunch time through a residential neighborhood when he heard—he took it to be— an animal barking, though he could not see where it came from. Later when his wife asked how his day went, he mentioned the barking sound that seem to pursue him as he walked along. He said it was a dog. But how did he know it was a dog or did he just think it was a dog because what else "barks" in the suburbs if not a "dog"? The dog's bark bore witness to what type of animal it was.

Our works, lifestyle, habits, the company we keep, our language, all, bear witness—like the dog's bark—to whether or not we are followers of Christ. "Works" do not save us nor do we need credit them with keeping us saved, but they have everything to do with how pure and emphatic a witness for Christ we present—far more so than any debate with a sinner over their eternal destiny.

Have the debate when God provides opportunity but consider this possibility, that the witness in what we *do*, not just say, can be The Lord's opportunity to open a few hearts; so, later the words count for more!

And what about rewards of which Jesus spoke often. One story highlights the significance of rewards in the context of our witness. When Jesus sent the 12 out to proclaim the coming kingdom of God, He gave them one heavenly principle to remember. Jesus assured them, "He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me." And then He underscored the fact that God will take account even of the smallest kindness shown them and He will reward them for it.

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one [and only one] of these little ones [the least among my disciples] a cup of

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cold water [which is the least they could do] in my name because you are my disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." [Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41].

What kind of "reward" could the Lord promise someone, who, in a neighborly fashion, invited a couple of Jesus' disciples into their home for a meal or even a glass of water on a hot summer's day? Jesus said if it was given in His name, which means, the host or hostess knew these men to be Jesus' disciples, this act of kindness would not go uncompensated. The language of Scripture leaves us one answer: "The person who receives a profit, receives Christ, his word, ... and his gospel, and expresses solidarity with the people of God by receiving them for Jesus sake." [Expositor's, Matthew, 259].

Jesus said, "In receiving you, they receive me!" Paul taught, "You shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ." [Colossians 3:24]. In saying "they receive me" Jesus was saying they were open to the message the disciples brought with them. They were bearing witness to Christ; for, Jesus' disciples were known to be His disciples which means whoever invited them into their homes were accepting the Savior, as well.

If we assume an earthly reward, as if God would bless someone with a windfall of cash because of a favor they did a disciple, we would misinterpret Matthew 10:41 "He shall receive a prophet's reward; [or] a righteous man's reward." If the reward has eternal value to the man or woman of God [and it always does] it must be so for the person who showed such a caring interest in them.

Nothing Jesus said about rewards [17 times in the Synoptic Gospels] conflicts with Paul's message of grace. Jesus was not talking about deeds that determine our salvation, but our rewards in heaven. Nothing counts toward heavenly rewards more than our witness which is not only a matter of what we say but what we do and how we live as believers. I want to believe the rewards in Glory are the souls we introduced to the Savior through our lives [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; Philippians 4:1]. I want for nothing more!

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“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” - Matthew 5:8

In 1 Corinthians 5:8 Paul cautioned believers against gathering to celebrate the Savior’s death, and yet, become known for tolerating the very sin He died to free us from. In tolerating it the Corinthians sullied that very truth. Paul called it leaven after the Jewish Passover in which leaven was forbidden. He admonished them, “Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of *sincerity* and truth.”

In verse 7 he urges all believers to “Purge out therefore the old leaven.” The language is emphatic. Don’t just purge or clean the cupboards, but the pantries and wherever else leaven or yeast might be found. There is no clearer metaphor for mortifying the deeds of the flesh or putting off the “old” man, its habits, behavior, and lifestyle. Purge it *out*. Get rid of it, *completely*. And here Paul is talking about the sins that are being tolerated among the Corinthian believers as if the Gospel made room for such.

Paul said the old is gone, make room for the new. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation [someone he never was before]: old things are passed away; behold, *all* things are become new.” [2 Corinthians 5:17]. Paul’s language seems hyperbolic but this is what Jesus, Himself, said calling it a “new birth” [John 3:3]. Ezekiel called it a “new heart” [Ezekiel 36:26]. Paul called it a restoration to spiritual life [Ephesians 2:5].

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Made Righteous

And yet, that is exactly Paul's point! "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be *made righteous*." [Romans 5:19]. "*Made* [?] righteous"! Francis Godet commented, "The question arises whether it is to be taken in the sense of being regarded and treated as such [only declared], or being rendered such [actually made]. The second meaning, if I'm not mistaken, is the most common in classic Greek" [Godet, Romans, 226].

If "made sinners" [not just declared sinners] refers to the actual "Fall" of mankind into sin [Romans 5:18, "by one [man, Adam] ... [the] offense ...[came] upon all men,") then should not the parallel truth be that in Christ we are "made" righteous? If we are only declared righteous, were we not only declared sinners?

If there is a difference in emphasis it has to be in the *time*. "Made righteous" is spoken of as *future*. If Paul meant to be declared righteous why should he say that this won't happen until God's Kingdom is set up [Romans 5:17]? Paul's theological argument with the Jews is the power of the Gospel of grace to free from sin *in this life*. It was never with Paul just an eschatological hope [all about what will be when Jesus returns].

If Paul meant that we are in this life only *declared* righteous, then, his comment has to be understood proleptically [the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does]. We, then, may ask, does not the power of God's grace also empower the believer to live free from sin? Is Paul's point eschatological? In the meanwhile we live not only with temptation but at times *seemingly* powerless to say no to it? After all, a temptation is not a temptation unless it tempts!

I'm Just a Sinner

Paul called himself the "chief of sinners" in 1 Timothy 1:15. Did he mean to say that he was still a sinner only under the covenantal provision of God's mercy and grace? Is this an

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example of a believer's status in Christ—saved—though still sinning, whether with reasonable regularity or on those rarest of occasions when his true character as a sinner shows itself?

John Bunyan's autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* echoes Paul's sentiment to Timothy, but does it mean that he remained a sinner after his conversion?

"I thought none but the devil himself could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind." He wrote [¶ 36]. "I was the chief of sinners, and so continued to be, even while I was a converted man." [¶ 131].

Modern historians saw this as a self-condemnation caught in cycles of despair and a gripping fear of damnation. Perhaps, Bunyan's self-awareness bordered on Martin Luther's "Anfechtungen" [his deep struggle of conscience in which Luther was assaulted by doubt, guilt, fear of judgment, and feelings of abandonment by God.]

John Bunyan's self-identification as a sinner is less about specific sins and more about the spiritual battles and inner torment he experienced. Later, Bunyan explained, "Now I was sorry that God had made me a man, for I feared I was a reprobate... yet afterward the Lord did quiet me." [¶ 299]. Bunyan reflected the puritanism of his time.

"The Puritan conception of godliness was inseparable from the visible conformity to a set of cultural and moral practices. To be pious was to live within a framework of observable devotion, disciplined habits, and communal norms." [Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, 1939, Vol. 1, p. 147]. We used to identify these as the set of "do's and don't's" the church promoted and enforced in its membership. If wearing jewelry is sinful, no wonder, an otherwise, godly woman would call herself "a sinner."

This has nothing to do with Paul's seemingly self-abasing comment to Timothy. John Chrysostom (4th century) wrote, "Paul does not say this as accusing himself, but as showing the greatness of God's grace. For when he says, 'of whom I am chief,' he speaks not of what he now is, but of what

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he was formerly.” [Homilies on 1 Timothy, Homily 3: PG 62.529; NPNF1, Vol. 13].

Theodoret of Cyrus (5th century) wrote, “He calls himself ‘first of sinners’ not because he persists in wickedness, but because he recalls his former madness against the Church.” [Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy, PG 82.809].

Thomas Aquinas wrote, “[Paul] is called first of sinners because of the gravity of his former sins.” [“Dicitur primus peccatorum propter gravitatem priorum peccatorum.” - Commentary on 1 Timothy (Lectio 3)].

Theodore Beza in *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* wrote, “De vita priore loquitur.” [“He speaks of his former life.”].

Even Matthew Henry says, “[Paul] refers to his former life as a persecutor.”

But the larger question would be why this self-flagellation from a born again believer? If it is only theological—what they were taught—it, perhaps, needs to contextually emphasize the power of God’s grace and not become a sympathetic recognition of a Christian’s sins. And, perhaps, sin needs to be understood only in the light of God’s covenant in Christ and not culturally.

If, however, a believer, like Luther is living with *Anfechtungen* [overwhelming spiritual challenges in their own mind and feelings of inadequacy in following Christ] or they are not sensing the forgiveness of God or His peace but want to, this is another more immediate pastoral concern that should be addressed.

Sanctification

This is where we begin to argue for a definition of the Pauline term “sanctification” or “holiness.” These are the same Greek word but whereas many speak of a progressive or gradual sanctification, many Christian denominations do not use the word “holiness” in the same way. [Catholicism does teach a gradual holiness].

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A position or status of "holy" or being separated for God's purpose or will [Rom 12:1] has no meaning proleptically or progressively. Protestantism does not believe in a partial salvation. "Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" [Hebrews 12:14].

We must not make excuses for the Christian's failure to recognize the power of the Gospel within their own lives! We attempt to explain the unexplainable—how we can be "new" in Christ and yet sinners. So, along with a gradual or progressive sanctification, we maintain theologically that the 'old' nature is still alive or active—in some zombie state. This is theological rhetoric using metaphor and analogy not to explain sanctification but to explain away the believer's spiritual weakness when it comes to temptation. Paul promoted none of this language!

The Apostolic Fathers and early patristics (Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp), I am told, did not speak of sanctification and holiness separately. They spoke, instead, of faithfulness, obedience, perseverance, integrity, etc. The New Covenant is categorically "binary." A person is either "old" or "new."

Even the "second definite work of grace" is in Paul's understanding a necessary ongoing submission to the Spirit's leadership. [Romans 8:14; Ephesians 5:18]. Most preachers recognize the present tense in Ephesians 5:18 "being filled." And since "filled" logically has a brim to the "cup" it is better to understand Paul to mean "stay filled" or refill when necessary—which is every moment of every day! Some Christians may have denominationalized the Spirit's presence in the believer's life [John 14:17] by, perhaps unintentionally, implying that the infilling is a "second work of grace," that it is some plateau once reached we have obtained some "level" of spirituality. This conclusion doesn't line up with Scripture.

The Mind of Christ

I apologize if this sounds harsh and threatening. The intention here is to alert us that we can and should own our faith and live it—and not use it as a doctrinal sledgehammer against another

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believer or a palliative for a spiritual illness that is curable! No Christian doctrine was ever meant to assuage the guilty; it was meant to encourage repentance. So, even while being so critical of some theology, all that is being asked here is—not that we discard our beliefs, but—reinterpret them in the light of what our hearts are telling us about our love for the Lord and desire to follow Him!

What did Paul mean by our having the same “mind” as Jesus in Philippians 2:5? “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Bishop Lightfoot in his commentary interpreted “in you” to mean “in yourselves, [that is] in your hearts.” [Lightfoot, Philippians, 110]. We must end this incessant debating within ourselves as believers, arguing with ourselves when our hearts—having God’s Word now written in them—are irrefutably and dogmatically asserting that living for our Lord and following the Savior is what we should now be all about. The life we knew before has no relevance, no meaning, and can bring no happiness or sense of fulfillment to us anymore.

But we argue for a theology that condones a spiritual weakness instead of getting to God’s gym and exercising the Truth, lifting a divine admonishment that seems so heavy at first but will get lighter and lighter as we gain the muscle, the resolve, to honor that truth [Hebrews 5:14]. In the meantime, you and I both have a “new” heart [Ezekiel 36:26] that knows something about us that is worth our finding out, too, in our actions and life. We are capable of far more than, perhaps, we thought.

If we cannot understand the role our ‘new’ hearts play in our Christian experience, if we cannot “read” our hearts, which are God’s line of communication with us and ours with Him, then, the Christian life is reducible to a doctrine and a church meeting with no serious encouragement for living that life.

Purity

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The word “clean” is the Savior’s word on the mount in talking about the heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart.” Paul added another term in his letter—the word “sincerity.” This word means ‘judged pure when held up to the sunlight.’ In 2 Corinthians 2:17 Paul explained “not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of *sincerity* in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” His heart was held up to the *Sonlight*. “All sympathy with evil is completely foreign” [Godet on First Corinthians, 267].

Paul claimed a pure Gospel message. Just as Jesus gave it to him, he has shared with all—not corrupted with personal interests, ambition or greed. He was what he claimed to be down to the core of his soul and heart. “In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God,” Paul professed, “we lived before you and everyone.” [2 Corinthians 1:12].

Can we say that? Can we claim not to just appear sincere, genuine, real, as a follower of Christ, but down to the center of our being, our motives, intentions, desires, and thoughts are all in step with our testimony as His servants? Can we attest that there is no hypocrisy, no hidden agenda, no unrepentant sin to cloud our passion and love for our Lord and no ulterior motive. But with a clear conscience and wholeheartedness we proclaim Christ!

You say, “I’m reaching for that goal!” Me, too! Philippians 4:8 is one of the most difficult verses to live by: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

I want to live this verse. On some days, I want to want to! But, and this is important to know: God knows my heart!

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Have a Heart

When Paul urged the Roman believers to consider it most reasonable to give their lives wholly to God's service, he appealed to the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ for the lost. [Romans 12:1]. This word "compassion" is defined in the Biblical language as "a heart of compassion" and rightly so. If we look into God's great heart and see the burden He carries, we just might ask to help Him with it. The heart of the matter of our dedication and perseverance in following Christ is a matter of heart—it always was and will be.

No theology or college education is engineered to motivate us, when it is a long distance run [Hebrews 12:1]—a lifetime decision. Many students who pick career courses on the advice of others or because it looks interesting will fall out when the work becomes challenging. Only those who have wanted to chart that course will do so. We won't reach the finish line by accident.

"The weight that besets us" was how the writer in Hebrews 12:1 describes the distractions that are like blips of fun and amusement that tempt us to postpone what a single lifetime tells us cannot be postponed if it is to be achieved. Delay learning and we will simply not learn! Delay serving Christ and we will discover a life wasted on vain things. There has to be a total and final commitment to leave diversions where they lie! Leave them behind and run!

It is the act of abandoning them to rust and decay. It is Matthew's receipt of customs he can never return to; so, the heart, too, must be consulted in such an undertaking. There is no logic alone that will sustain our interest or support us when weary in well doing. The Boston Marathon has an incline on the course known as "heartbreak hill." It is where the race is won or lost. And it is correctly named because only those who have the heart to climb it go on to finish the course into Boston.

I was told in a documentary [whether it is true or not, I cannot say] that around one third of the membership in evangelical churches in America in recent years [of this writing,

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2026] have simply vanished [closer to 40% in megachurches over 2,000 at their height in attendance]. Research targets the disappearance of Generation 'Z' members who grew up in those churches but elected not to stay as adults. If asked, most will probably cite no doctrinal issue; they just didn't "feel" it was for them. I will never put someone on the defensive if that is their reason: their heart just wasn't in it!

There are, of course, other reasons for church attrition but with Generation 'Z' we hopefully learned that making them grow up quietly on a cushioned seat or amusing them with Bible stories or having them memorize scriptures is never enough. It isn't their brains that needed washing but their hearts—and God does reach many of them.

But making ministries "seeker friendly" was a socialistic approach to ministry that required no serious commitment, no self-introspection, no admonition to follow Christ. Church for children was probably easy enough to sit through but when adulthood snuck up on them and they hadn't by then any heartfelt interest in following Christ, it would have been the bigger surprise had they stayed. It is, indeed, a matter of the heart!

But what is the most surprising thing of all is that a commitment to care for the poor and do the real work of God is what Generation 'Z' youth wanted all along. But they couldn't find it in a church that was built on entertainment and business principles for the sake of numerical growth and not built on genuine Christ-centered ministry. Perhaps, they had a heart after God all along but like a seedling planted in good ground then neglected by the farmer they began to wither and die.

I think: God is transplanting them!

A Prayerful Heart

“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” - Psalm 34:4

““Delight thyself also in the LORD,” David admonished. If the Lord had not given us new hearts, this could not be true because we would have no awareness of His presence with us. This is what is so “new” about our hearts after salvation: an awareness of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. In John 15:7 Jesus assures us “If [we] abide in [Him], and [His] words abide in [us], [we] shall ask what [we] will [desire], and it shall be done unto [us].”

This is a spiritually dynamic statement for Jesus to make, which, if taken out of context, can be most troubling because any misunderstanding can lead to a disappointment in what appears as unanswered prayer and the believer, then, usually blames themselves for a lack of faith. This is pain on pain and the problem is in the interpretation of scripture.

Because we know that “abiding in Him” is a euphemism or metaphor for salvation, itself—and we are saved—we believe we should receive what we ask for. And we begin to back up this theological position with other scriptures. But the language of this interpretation is transactional not covenantal. Our relationship with the Lord is covenantal [page 12].

We need to look closely at our praying in the context of this covenantal relationship, which should explain exactly what Jesus was saying. We must linger here for a while and meditate on what this means and exactly what kind of prayer is an “asking” prayer using the word Jesus uses in John 15:7.

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Joseph Thayer points out in his dictionary that this means “to ask for something to be given not done” [Thayer, 18]. In our Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 some scholars count 3 “asks” [Let’s use the word “request”] or 3 requests: asking God for daily provision, forgiveness, and deliverance from evil. So, we were right to ask! But how does a covenantal relationship differ from a transactional one? There is where the misunderstanding lies, if any.

In addition, Paul urged Timothy to encourage 4 more aspects of prayer: “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made [1 Timothy 2:1]. Our word “request” is not in this list. Lastly, there is another word used for a request if it is asking for something to be *done*, not given” This was the word Jesus used in John 17:20-21 when He prayed for our unity. It is often translated “to beseech” [1 Thessalonians 4:1] because the person desires something happen rather than requesting something be given.

A Transaction

These distinctions would matter if our relationship with God was not covenantal. If our relationship with the Lord was transactional—a contractual agreement in which I promise to serve Him if He promises to give me what I want—requests should be the only kind of prayer there is. If my faith can obtain whatever I want with God, He has become my private “genie” whether I admit this or not. It seems a legitimate question to ask, “When would I just talk to Him about His needs or His burdens or His day?” Probably: Never! Conversation for conversation’s sake or for fellowship’s sake is covenantal!

And what if His will and ours come into conflict. A transactional relationship is a preset agreement between two. What should be done in that case. Transactional, to use one of my favorite metaphors, is using prayer as a means of enjoying the cookies without ever meeting the baker! There is, in effect, no real relationship because each party depends only on the contract between them to address contingencies. When I hired a

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lawyer to draw up a working document for me, after he was paid, I never saw him again because I didn't need him any longer!

A Covenant

If God's needs or interests matter to us, as they are and should, we are in a covenantal relationship and prayer takes on a different significance to both God and us..

A covenant is what we have with our Lord! We can use the marriage relationship as an example [a marriage that is "one flesh"] because it represents our relationship with Christ [Ephesians 5:32]. When a spouse ignores a request from their mate, it is the same as "not listening" to them because every conversation either draws 2 persons closer if heard and responded to or farther apart if not. Requests are never in a marriage just for "things." Every word reveals a vulnerable aspect of their need of each other. It becomes an opportunity to care; a moment to honor the relationship; a chance to say, "I'm here for you." So, a spousal concern should never be treated lightly or with disinterest because it is always an opportunity for revealing more about themselves to each other; a chance to draw closer and love each other more visibly and intelligently. This does not describe any one "type" of prayer but the merging of all of them into any single moment with our Lord.

Prayer

Prayer is prayer. Prayer is always and at the same time: supplications, intercessions, and requests with thanksgiving. When we talk to God, we meet with Him. There is nothing long distance with prayer. We don't call into heaven or make a video call. We are always in His presence when we talk.

Richard Trench wrote "Thus much on the distinction between these words ... [having] been said, it will still ... remain true that they will often set forth, not different kinds of prayer, but prayer contemplated from *different sides* and under different aspects." [Trench, Synonyms, section LI].

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Here is how Herman Witsius [1636–1708: a major Dutch Reformed theologian and one of the leading figures of post-Reformation orthodoxy] said it:

“It seems to me that one and the same thing is designated by different names according to its different aspects. Our prayers are called (*supplication*) insofar as by them we testify before God to our need, for [*the Greek*] means ‘to be in need.’ They are called *prayer* insofar as they contain our vows [our faithful commitment to the Lord]. They are called *requests* insofar as they express petitions and desires. They are called *intercessions* insofar as God allows himself to be approached by us not timidly and distrustfully, but familiarly; for [the word speaks of ...] a familiar conversation and encounter. And that *thanksgiving* is the giving of thanks for benefits already received is more well known than needs to be pointed out.” [Ibid.]

John 15:7

So what did we read in John 15:7? “If [we] abide in [Him], and [His] words abide in [us], [we] shall ask what [we] will [desire], and it shall be done unto [us].” Because we are in this covenantal relationship with Christ, our desires are not ignored by Him. Getting to know Him is learning that He cares. A covenantal relationship draws us closer to one another in which are needs are important to Him, but nothing is done outside that relationship. Jesus didn’t say—because He didn’t have to—that selfish personal interests do not honor our relationship with Him. They cannot draw us closer to Him “You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.” [James 4:3]. Peter concurred that God’s covenantal promises are provided to deepen our relationship with our Lord. [2 Peter 1:4].

In this context, using my metaphor, when we “request” the cupcake, we personally talk to the baker and He wants us to know his reason for baking. But more so, as we enjoy the sweet taste of His blessings, we remain very aware of who gave them to us and why! In Psalm 34:8 David did not say, “Taste and see the blessing.” He said, “O taste and see that the *LORD* is good:

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blessed is the man that *trusts in him*.” There is more here in this verse about the Baker than about the cake!

Perhaps, no verse better explains this covenantal relationship than Psalm 34:4 “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” This verse clearly describes the mutual relationship we have with the Lord [Delight in Him and He will give you your desires] ... and it adds—not incidentally but fundamentally—of our *hearts*. This is a prayerful heart. This is the mark of a believer having a primary passion, and active interest, in talking to our Lord about everything of importance to them [1 Thessalonians 5:17] ... or just talking to Him to be with Him, enjoy being near Him, and finding a thousand reasons to thank Him.

In the New Covenant, this is a “new” heart that uses requests [every need] as an excuse to have an audience with their Lord. This is the word “intercessions” used in 1 Timothy 2:1 which Witsius referred to as “a familiar conversation and encounter” with our Lord. Thank God for needs. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” [Hebrews 4:16]. And don’t forget to be thankful! [1 Thessalonians 5:16].

A Heartfelt Christianity

A prayerful heart now takes on this multidimensional covenantal relationship with God. We intercede in prayer because we want to be with Him, near Him, nearer to Him; we pray because we want to be in conversation with Him: to talk to Him and to listen to Him. We bring our supplications to Him because we recognize our need of Him and our utter dependence on Him. We make requests of Him, because He has the answer and He is love; and we always come with a thankful heart. This is one prayer and the only prayer we ever make! This is a true heartfelt Christianity. “When You said, Seek my face; my *heart* said, Your face, LORD, will I seek.” [Psalm 27:8].

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“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.” - Psalm 51:17

Our Lord does everything under the provisions of a covenant which is perpetual or permanent and, as already noted, a covenant with God defines our relationship with Him. Covenants are relational. God’s covenant is not about what He does but Who He is toward us. The New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33 reads: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” The Old Testament word for “law” is “Torah” meaning “instruction.” God is all about teaching us, but what?

Not what ... who? God! Verse 34 reads: “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

A covenant with God is a relationship whereby we get to know Him. The calling of “pastor-teacher” in Ephesians 4:11 is an affirming role because under the provisions of this new covenant, Jesus promised, “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” [John 14:26].

When Isaiah exhorted Israel to be bold and remain steadfast in their trust of the Lord [Isaiah 26:3] in the larger sense he prophesied of the Church under this New Covenant.

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“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people *in whose heart is my law* [Torah: teachings]; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid.” In verse 16 the Lord declares, “I have put my words in your mouth, and I have covered you in the shadow of mine hand, that I may ... say unto Zion, Thou art *my people*.” [Isaiah 51:7, 16].

C. F. Keil wrote, “There is one person who speaks [the ‘I’ of Isaiah 51] ..., the servant of Jehovah, who is introduced in these prophecies with dramatic directness, as speaking in his own name. Jehovah has come to his people in his servant.” [Keil, 7, 276]. This is Jesus, Isaiah’s “suffering servant.” Unlike Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who wrote of the covenant, Isaiah spoke of God’s suffering servant [Isaiah 53]. Secular scholarship since the late 19th century, in many seminaries, failed to identify this Servant of the Lord.” No one was looking at Isaiah with an eye to interpret its inspirational prophetic value. But the traits that identify God as covenantal are all here as well as in the other prophecies.

The Covenant and Our Hearts

If we fail to appreciate theologically that our God only speaks in covenantal terms and only to establish a relationship with us, we fail to interpret the Scriptures. This goes to the “heart of the matter.” A covenantal relationship is always and only established on the basis of a knowledge in covenant language [the language of a divine love] written on the heart. It is on this basis God claims us as His own and He becomes our God, according to the prophets. Peter wrote, “... you are a chosen people. ...a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *God’s very own possession*. ... for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.” [1 Peter 2:9 NLT]

Too many scriptures are interpreted transactionally or statically. For example, if I think “When I pray, God will give me what I want” without any dialogue with Him to understand whether or not such a request fits into His plans, then, I err in my belief. If we see our salvation as only positional [which is

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what some people mean by “once saved, always, saved”] it isn’t the doctrine that is necessarily wrong, but the understanding of it in a static way that claims no matter how much we sin, we can’t lose it. Such a view fails to appreciate the covenant of the Lord. If faith is a set of doctrines only and not a life faithful to those beliefs, it is not honoring the covenant of God. If our lifestyle is not based on the truth that we are God’s people now and not our own we are not honoring the covenantal relationship with our Lord. In Galatians 2:20 Paul testified, “I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God [by my trust in His faithfulness: covenantal]”

A relationship with the Lord is dynamic, not static, because it is growing, deepening, ever becoming richer in meaning, closer in oneness. With maturity on our part comes a change in our wants as well as how God can use us or where He will lead us, and how we will interpret answered prayer.

The irony in all this is that: In our heads, we, in a most human way, question, what in our hearts we clearly already know by faith. Our heads like simple, static, transactional, but our hearts know relational, covenantal. The head wants reasons, logic; the heart goes on faith and trust. In our heads, God is incomprehensible, but in our hearts, as believers, we know Him! In our heads, the Trinity is a puzzle but in our hearts we know it’s true. Much of church doctrine went through centuries of contorted logic before eventually being written in the creed as sacred truth. But the irony in this is that a simple reading of Scripture tells the heart that we finally got it right! Who Jesus is, the Trinity, the Inspiration of Scripture, The Deity of our Lord, His virgin birth, and that He was crucified and rose again to save us from our sins—as N. T. Wright told us, “this announcement making itself at home in our minds and hearts, generating the belief that it was true, and transforming our lives with a strange, new presence and power.” [Romans 10:9-10].

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Different Covenants

At first glance, perhaps, it might appear that God drew up different covenants for different ages [dispensations] in human history but this is not correct. There is only one God, who is author of all scripture, and He has only one covenant in mind: the New One in Christ. Every other covenant offers some detail[s] about this one new covenant only in prophetic or symbolic language.

Adam

From Adam to Noah, to Moses, to David, the new covenant through Christ is “in vetere latet” [is hidden in the Old Testament]. In some ways it is clearer than in others. For example in Genesis 3:15 God promised that a descendent of Eve would crush the head of the serpent, referring to Jesus’ victory on the Cross over Satan. Paul explained that Jesus from the Cross “...having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” [Colossians 2:15].

Noah

God told Noah in Genesis 9:15-16, “I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” This cannot be dispensational because it is an “everlasting” covenant, not for only a single period or epoch of time. We are still under this covenant! Does this mean we are under 2 covenants—Noah’s and the New one in Christ? Of course not! That would imply that God has established, somehow, a “dual” relationship with us, that we are both His children and His creation. “My wife is also my best friend” might be an analogous example, but this makes “wife” and “friend” descriptive of a single, fuller, relationship not 2 separate

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relationships! And this is the point. All creation is now included in our redemption! In Romans 8:21 Paul explained, "...the creature itself also [all creation] shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

David

The Covenant with David is well established. It reaches from David to Christ, who will ultimately receive the crown. David declared in Psalm 45:6, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter." And the writer to the Hebrews equated this prophecy to Christ, as God's Son in Hebrews 1:8: "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom." In 2 Samuel 7:16 we read God tell David, "Your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you: your throne shall be established for ever." This is the Davidic Covenant according to Psalm 89:3-4 fulfilled in Christ proclaimed by the angel to Mary in Luke 1:32-33, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Jesus is the new David. The Davidic Covenant is a Covenant with Christ. This makes it descriptive of the New Covenant of our salvation in Christ.

What we are seeing is that all the covenants God made through history are finally and ultimately fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. All the covenants fold into one "New Covenant" because they are, and have been from the start, addressing in some symbolic way the covenant God makes now in Christ with us as His children through faith by grace [Ephesians 2:8].

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Moses

This is in some ways easier to see in The Mosaic Covenant. But in other ways, more difficult, if we are prone to skip the Book of Leviticus in our devotional reading of the scriptures. It is easy to see the the Old Testament sacrifice represented Christ's crucifixion, but, the word seems to carry more meaning—not more important, but additionally as significant. When a husband is to love his wife like Christ loved us enough to sacrifice Himself for us [Ephesians 5:25] or we are asked to offer ourselves in a sacrificial sense in Romans 12:1 we know there's more to discover about God in the Mosaic Covenant. When we read about 7 different sacrifices or offerings, are we not the least bit interested in how they all relate to Jesus!

If the Mosaic Covenant is only historically fulfilled in 3 to 6 hours on the Cross, perhaps, there is nothing more to learn. But if this Covenant is teaching us something about our relationship with Him, we have much to discover!

The Sacrifice

What is immediately obvious is God honored the sacrifice as far back as Abel in Genesis 4:4, though at that time it was not called a sacrifice but a gift or offering. A sacrifice as an offering to a god in pagan and tribal rites, however, was interpreted reciprocally. As we already pointed out, a person brought a sacrifice to a god in return for a favor. Their relation to that god was reciprocal and what each did was transactional. "The structure of vows and prayers is similar to a commercial contract." Professor Mueller informed us, "There is an established record of payment, or the offer of a specific payment, in exchange for which the human beings asks for a specific service." [Hans-Friederich Mueller, "The Pagan World" Sacrificial Religion: Episode 6, 65].

Of the 7 offerings in Torah Law, 4 were animal sacrifices: The Burnt offering, The Sin Offering, The Guilt Offering, and the Peace Offering, all which were brought willingly as a sign of devotion, atonement, forgiveness, and thanksgiving,

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respectfully. The Grain offering was never offered alone or separate but always with the Burnt or Peace Offering. The Drink Offering spoke of Fellowship and the Incense Offering of prayer. This was clearly not descriptive of the sacrifice under Moses.

This is not intended to be an in depth study but a high level look at the Mosaic Covenant to point out that through all these offerings, the common theme was reconciliation—a covenantal provision.

True Worship

The biblical sacrifice to God was more than ritual. It represented a heartfelt prayer to God. It had to come from the heart [Isaiah 1:11-14; Psalm 51:17]. Biblical sacrifices were expressions of a worshipper's

1. Wholehearted devotion to God [the Burnt Offering, Leviticus 6:8-13]
 - Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.
2. Desire for Fellowship with God [the Peace Offering, Leviticus 7:11-12]
 - Ephesians 2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*;
3. Desire to atone for sin [expiatory] and be reconciled to God [the Sin Offering, Leviticus 5:1-13],
 - Romans 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a [reconciliation] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
4. Gratitude [thanksgiving] for God's Provisions [the Meal Offering, Leviticus 2:11-13]

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- Accompanies the Peace and Burnt Offerings
 - Colossians 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;
5. Recognition of the necessity of a ransom for sin, reparations [The Trespass Offering, Leviticus 5:14-19]
- Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand
6. A public expression of a celebratory [joyous] heart [the Drink Offering, Exodus 29:14]
- Accompanies the Peace and Burnt Offerings.
 - Philippians 2:17 I am poured forth upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and joy with you all
7. A Desire for Communion with God [the Incense Offering, Exodus 30:1-10]
- Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

God instituted this worship in the form of a sacrifice looking ahead to the death of His Son on the Cross. John, the Baptist, called Him “the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29]. Paul called Jesus the Passover Lamb [1 Corinthians 5:7].

None of this parallels pagan sacrifices which were designed to appease the wrath of the gods. When the Lord desired mercy and not sacrifice [Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7] His forgiveness was predicated on His love and not a supplicant’s act of appeasement.

Pagan gods *required* worship through sacrifices. Our God saw the sacrifices as a *type* of His Son’s coming crucifixion. True worship is freely given requiring only the faith of the worshipper. “The true worshippers,” Jesus told us, “shall

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worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such [this kind of worshipper] to worship him." [John 4:23] A God that *seeks* is not demanding. The primary reason for sacrifices according to Paul was as a schoolmaster to remind us of our need for God's mercy and His salvation [Galatians 3:24].

God's Oracle

"You *are* my witnesses," declared the LORD, "my servant whom I have chosen" [Isaiah 43:10] He told Israel. "Unto them," God revealed to Paul, "were committed the oracles of God." [Roman 3:2]. And the best place to keep them would be in a sacrificial system God specifically patterned [Exodus 25:40] as a type of His only begotten Son's planned death to save His creation, "a shadow of good things to come." [Hebrews 10:1].

There were only two general conditions God would require of His people:

1. God would accept a sin or trespass offering for sin done "through ignorance" in breaking a commandment [Leviticus 4:2; 5:18]. "It shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance" [Numbers 15:25]. There was no offering to atone for the sin of rebellion against God. "the soul that does ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproaches the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people." [Numbers 15:30; Exodus 23:21].
2. God only accepted offerings freely offered. The Burnt Offerings [Leviticus 1:3], the Peace Offerings [Leviticus 6:12, 16], and the Grain Offerings [accompanying the Burnt and Peace offerings but never the Sin or Trespass offerings] were so designated as free will. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering." [Exodus 25:2, 35:29]

Although the Sin and Trespass Offerings were required as part of the regular offerings and because sin not atoned for

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would mean expulsion or excommunication from Israel, God always and only looked at the heart of the supplicant:

- 1 Samuel 15:22 — "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The Lord, through Samuel, said this to Saul after he valued the sacrifice over obedience; God rejected his excuses and sacrifices.
- Psalm 51:16–17 (David's repentance) — "For You do not delight in sacrifice... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart..."
- Proverbs 21:3 — "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."

Especially with the sacrifices in the Mosaic Law a humble heart was not optional. The ritual was designed to establish a tradition in which to keep the message of redemption before all. Now it is written on our hearts!

In Micah 6:6–8, the prophet summarizes for us God's heart in the matter: "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

A Heart After God's

“The LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart” - 1 Samuel
13:14

“I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after mine own heart,” the Lord testified, explaining then, “which shall fulfill all my will.” [Acts 13:22]. This is a profound statement about the man who wrote Psalm 51 especially when considering that the word “will” speaks more of what God is inclined to want and not the result only of planning, advice or counsel. As the Father from heaven spoke of Jesus in whom He was “well-pleased” [Matthew 3:17; 12:18; 17:5] God can—and ought to—be pleased with us [Matthew 25:21]. His will is not His counsel as much as it is His desire or what gives God pleasure.

At the close of a Sunday morning service in a church I attended years ago the congregation would recite Psalm 19:14: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” The Greek translation of the word “meditation” in this verse speaks of thoughts that linger in the forefront of our minds, what we are ever dwelling on. When the Psalmist prays that God would find them “acceptable” he actually is praying that God would find these constant thoughts pleasing and not objectionable or grievous to Him.

What we have constantly on our minds is constantly on our hearts. David’s service to God was not based on a list of instructions but a common understanding, a common passion, a common heart. Again, this better describes the covenantal relationship he had with the Lord. If we were to ask David whether God would be pleased with this or that, David could

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answer based solely on his relationship with the Lord. Like Enoch and Noah who walked with God, David walked before the Lord with a perfect heart [1 Kings 8:25; 15:3].

Let's consider what this might mean as regards our walk before the Lord. In Romans 8:3 Paul said that Jesus "condemned" sin from the Cross. Our Lord in His death brought a judgment against it and freed us from it "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." [Romans 8:4].

Think of this provision: that the holiness represented in the law given to Moses was not only satisfied in Christ's death but—in another sense, now—in *us*. Ezekiel 36:26 explained God wrote it on our new hearts! And what kind of people are we? We are, according to Romans 8:14, *led* by the Spirit. And here? We *walk after the Spirit*.

Enoch and Noah walked *with* God because they were obedient to Him; David walked *before* his Lord. Is there a distinction to be made between these two words: *with* and *before*? It was also said of David that he had a heart like God's own heart [1 Samuel 13:14]. When we read the Psalms we begin to imagine there is something more here. Noah was said to walk *with* God because he was "moved with fear" according to Hebrews 11:7. The actual wording is best understood to mean "he was devoted to God." Noah undertook the task of building a rather large boat at least 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high [3 stories]. His devotion to God would sustain him and keep him going through the times of discouragement or ridicule from onlookers [because his prophecy was, no doubt, nonsense to them]. The Bible narrates, "Thus did Noah; according to *all* that God commanded him, so did he." [Genesis 6:22]. Noah's "walk" with God was tied to a task God gave him.

But David's walk before the Lord with a perfect heart appears in the Scripture not related to any particular task but his life as shepherd and king. David's devotion seemed more personal and intimate: "[Thou, Lord, desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part [in my heart]." David prayed, "Thou, Lord, shall cause me to know wisdom." [Psalm 51:6].

A Heart After God's

Since the Savior has made provision through His death and resurrection, we walk now *after the Spirit*. The Spirit is not only with us but He is now in us [John 14:17]. This is not the description of an occasional meeting with the Spirit but rather living with Him, walking with Him while He is involved in every aspect of our day, of our lives. There is no decision or even thought we might have that will not please or grieve Him. There is no longer any neutral place where we live independent from Him. We are never out of sight of His watchfulness. We are never alone.

The Beatitudes

Perhaps, the best description of a believer's heart is found in 10 verses, Matthew 5:3-12, the Beatitudes [The beautiful attitudes]. The preacher cannot exhaust this text and its accompanying verses through chapters 6 and 7. Here is the blueprint for following Christ and what carrying our cross means; here is also a description of how heaven is going to be or how we will be in heaven; here is Christ-likeness. Here is the believer's heart after God's!

The greatest benefit of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is to be acquired in the presence of an open hostility to Christianity. Jesus' wisdom here could be summed in 15 words: "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me" [Matthew 10:38]. As Archbishop Sheen taught, "The Sermon on the Mount is so much at variance with all that our world holds dear that the world will crucify anyone who tries to live up to its values." [Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's "Life of Christ," the Beatitudes. cp. <https://www.ewtn.com>. Provided courtesy of: The Catholic Resource Network Trinity Communications 703-791-4336]

We can affirm with Dr. Lloyd-Jones, "The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount," [D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Introduction]

The ultimate test of a disciple's commitment and dedication to the Lord is their ability to represent the Good

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News—as only good news can be represented—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy. But reaching this level of commitment is a journey through stages of spiritual development.

There are many ways to interpret Jesus' words in these verses—all of which lend added emphasis and importance to this Sermon of all sermons. We shall be eternally grateful for Matthew's account. Perhaps, having been a tax-collector he had pen and paper ready as he sat there at the Master's feet hanging on every word!

For those not already informed: the word "blessed" is actually the word "happy." Here is the recipe for true happiness—if you have the heart for it! When we began this work, we mentioned that Jesus turned this word on its head from how the natural mind interprets happiness. But happiness is still happiness. It's a very personal acceptance of life at peace with its surroundings—only, now, the believer sees God's opportunity in their circumstance. It is pleasure with contentment says the dictionary. True enough! But for a believer none of this is possible if they are battling with a heart that wants to draw closer to God while they keep their distance spiritually. Living for one's self used to be the way to happiness, but now carnality is at war with that happiness in the believer. Here is how we know we belong to the Lord. John wrote [my translation] "We perceive we have stepped over the threshold from death to life [we know we are God's children] because we love one another." [1 John 3:14]. And how can we perceive this? We know it in our "new" hearts now filled with this love! And we are purely happy in a way we had not known before.

Jesus didn't relate the beatitudes as a pep talk with thoughts of a happiness coming later when the sorrows of this life end. His sermon was much more. He wasn't minimizing the force of the blows an enraged world would deliver to silence our message, as if we could be immune to the pain. Neither was He speaking of a happiness in spite of poverty, burdens, hunger, need, opposition, lies, and persecution—an umbrella in the

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pouring rain. Our new hearts have found a genuine happiness *in* the storm. Our hearts have redefined happiness in terms of a cross. And that to the world is the strangest thing!

1. Matthew 5:3 - Blessed are the poor in spirit,
 - Our happiness is found in our total dependence on our Lord for all our needs.
2. Matthew 5:4 - Blessed are they that mourn,
 - We have found happiness in sharing in God's great accomplishments through our prayers, in praying for lost souls. As deep our sorrow for the lost, so is our happiness when the Lord saves.
3. Matthew 5:5 - Blessed are the meek,
 - We have found more happiness in a gentle word than a bitter outcry. But more than this: we could not be happier than when our Lord is using us and being glorified through us..
4. Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,
 - There is no greater happiness than an eternal happiness. Commitment is no commitment if it is temporary, and we serve an eternal God!
5. Matthew 5:7 - Blessed are the merciful,
 - We are never happier than when we are giving of ourselves and our resources away to others that cannot repay us.
6. Matthew 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart,
 - Happiness is a clean conscience, a life not burdened with deception, hiding the truth behind a false face. We are free to be who God wants us to be—is making us into, Christlikeness. And freedom is happiness!
7. Matthew 5:9 - Blessed are the peacemakers,

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- Happiness is a Christian hug; the embrace of a new friend in Christ. Happiness is the cessation of hostilities, with others, with ourselves, with God. Happiness is true fellowship in Christ.
8. Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
- Happiness is knowing that you are now a bonafide follower of Christ. The happiest moment of life is when He looks upon you and says, "Follow Me."
9. Matthew 5:11-12 - Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
- This is the only verse in the list of Beatitudes that speaks of joy and not happiness—for a reason. their joy does not depend on their happiness; *their happiness depends on their joy*. Joy is the shared testimony of what God is doing among them.

No matter which way we turn this 8 or 9 attitudes, no matter how we interpret them or express them, they are conditions of the heart. As we become more aware of our actions becoming representative of them, our hearts will reward us with a deep sense of happiness as only the Lord can instill within.

Fellowship

It seems, therefore, reasonable to focus on the believer's heart where God has put His wisdom and understanding. In Romans 8:16 Paul wrote, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Upon reading the verse before and after this verse, we notice that the text is connected as one continuous thought, beginning at verse 12 "Indeed therefore." Verse 13, 14 and 15 begin with "for." 17 starts "And" and verse 18 continues again with "for." But Verse 16 has no connecting word.

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Verse 16 is an abrupt thought almost interrupting the flow of the apostle's thought as if in a parenthesis.

Let's read verses 15 and 17 without verse 16: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.... And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Smack tap in the middle of this thought the apostle blurts out, "The Holy Spirit is a our witness to this exciting news!!"

Paul could have said, "For the Spirit, Itself, confirms what our heart is telling us about God." But Paul left off the word "for." The lack of a connecting word like "for" or "therefore" is a sign here of deep feelings in his writing. The revelation of his sonship with God was not an incidental memo read and discarded by Paul. He built his life on this truth, because now he was praying—not to a God distant and untouchable, but his Heavenly Father! The Spirit's "witness" to him, confirming his heart, was an exciting revelation to his faith.

This shared testimony of the Spirit's witness as believers to our familial relation with Christ unites us and is foundational to our fellowship together: learning Jesus, studying God's Word, supporting one another in prayer, "Communicating to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" [Ephesians 5:19]. This is what worship—what "church"—was meant to be! It happens in the small group setting among believers who cherish the spiritual relationship they have with Christ and one another.

Fellowship is intimacy or closeness—a common burden, a common heart, a common prayer as well as working and worshipping together. It is because of Calvary that we experience in this life a taste of the richness of fellowship with one another that will be ours in its fulness in the Kingdom to come.

Here are some scriptures that encourage the "one another" principle of Christian community: "comforted together" (Romans 1:12); "kindly affectioned one to another"

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(Romans 12:10); “same mind one toward another” (Romans 12:16); “edifying another” (Romans 14:19); “likeminded” (Romans 15:5); “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7); “admonishing one another” (Romans 15:14); “having the same care one for another [without partiality or favoritism]” (1 Corinthians 12:25); “by love serving one another” (Galatians 5:13); “Bearing ... one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)” ...and more.

Christian Community

“The gospel was plowing new ground.” The professor exclaimed, “Understanding ... kinship ... makes us better able to understand the responsibility of Christians to ...live in harmony with one another.” Being a Christian is not just “me and Jesus. I am ... part of God’s household. ... I become part of His *we*. God saves us into ... a community.” [Taken from Richards, Randolph E. & Richard James. *Misreading Scripture With Individualist Eyes*].

Unwillingness to share our Christian experience, disinterest in assembling with other believers, disunity on any level, is not a mark of a believer who is fully appreciating and appropriating Christ’s death and resurrection (Hebrews 10:25).

It isn’t brilliant leaders who bring us together, nor the professionalism of a well organized religious event, nor the latest book from across country, nor the oratory of a polished speaker, nor the draw behind a publicized miracle, it is the *Spirit of God in us*; it is our *hearts* calling us together; “This was the LORD’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.” [Psalm 118:23].

Does this mean we don’t need pastors or that there is no spiritual benefit meeting in large assemblies? Of course not! Ephesians 4:11 still applies: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” Whatever these ministries represent [different groups understand them differently] the reason for them is clear in verse 12 and 13: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come

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in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:"

God isn't raising up ushers to collect offerings, Sunday workers to replace parents as spiritual leaders, specialists to work a media presentation, or business minds to build cathedrals [bigger and better "religious" barns [I stepped in it now!]].

Are these things "bad"? No! They are not priority either! It isn't what you do that means as much as who you are in Christ in Christian Community.

God's primary interest is in raising up leaders who know and live His Word in front of His church, leaders who are capable of discipling others in spiritual matters, in spiritual warfare, in living their Christian witness in persecution. We all from time to time get weary or discouraged or are truant and we need one another to stay the course.

Off Key

Did you know that civet oil was once used to enhance florals, orientals, or musky perfumes. It was pioneered by Arabic perfumers around the 10th century and became hugely popular in Europe from the 16th century on. A tiny trace adds depth, "animalistic" attractiveness, longevity, and a skin-like warmth to the perfume.

And did you know: If you're painting and want that "perfect white," ask your paint store to add a tiny drop of black tint to your white base—lots of people do it and love the results!

And did you know that the person next to you who sounds like they are singing off key is actually adding an augmented seventh note to the chord and if you listen with your heart—trust me—it will sound beautiful!

And did you know that the Spirit of God is well capable of giving the person on your other side something to share that will be the reason God led you to this meeting—and it is

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absolutely brilliant, though, they probably never finished high school!

And did you know that you can ask the Lord to explain the Scripture you are reading—and He *will!*

And did you know your testimony—what the Lord is doing in your life—is more dynamic of His power and love than the parting of a thousand red seas! He can use what you say about your relationship with Him in ways you cannot even begin to imagine. Your testimony is often exactly what someone else present needed to hear!

And did you know just in being there in that group of believers [and you can invite hunger hearts that are inquisitive about the Lord] a lot of your earlier questions will disappear into answers, like: how do I recognize the voice of Jesus within or His peace over the din of voices He doesn't want me listening to; how do I know what the Lord wants of me instead of doing my own thing; how can I know if He is calling me to serve Him in some ministry.

And did you know that there is a lot of healing going on out of sight within that group: believers once estranged now united; forgiveness being discovered to replace the pain of the past; spiritual maturity; even, yes, a physical touch from the Lord. Some of these might be shared in a future testimony or two which encourages the faith of others who need the same. Community encourages community! "From faith to faith..." [Romans 1:17].

Smaller is Better

This may not be happening as readily in the larger group organized to stay within a busy timeframe especially when we all must sit and be quiet—no participation. Community means participation and that works better in a smaller group.

The fear is that the oversight provided for the one larger group isn't there in countless smaller gatherings to which pastors cannot physically be expected to attend. Prayer meetings devolve into gossip sessions; bible studies get off track into

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mysticism or heresy; persons in serious need of professional counseling now depend on the “misdirected” advice of idiots. We, professional, ministers simply can’t control it!!

And that’s the point! We are convinced the Spirit of God alone being in charge of a group of believers gathered in a home to enjoy each other’s thoughts on God’s Word is too risky! I just wonder how the Lord ever kept His Church together before we came along to help Him! Perhaps, He is raising up more pastors than the seminary statistics count and maybe the right hand of fellowship among group leaders is credentialing enough with God.

Organization

But, some may argue, the early church still needed to be organized to make sure the Gentile widows didn’t starve [Acts 6:1]. And there were doctrinal issues to be resolved—like who Jesus was—God or man, both or neither! The center character of our faith was a mystery and we were admonished to follow Him! The Church needed to be organized. We needed Bishops and Arch Bishops and Arch, Arch Bishops [if necessary]—a leadership that could decide these issues for us. History dare not leave Christianity to the whims of cultural interpretation, scientific inquisitiveness, or maverick religious leaders that by the sheer force of their personality—like a pied-piper— could lead the masses astray!

But what we didn’t realize was no Bishopric was big enough to handle these problems. If they were going to be tended to, it would take the Lord, His Holy Spirit; and He worked in [not just among] the people! Perhaps, we created our problems—not solve them—when we decided to give the Church to men to govern.

Samuel told us that Israel asked for human leadership. Is there a lesson here? “They said, we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations [1 Samuel 8:19-20]. But Samuel argued for God in 1 Samuel 12:6, “*It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.*” But they were undeterred saying in

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Verse 12, "Nay; but a king shall reign over us" even though Samuel argued, "the LORD your God *was* your king."

The question might be, Can man-made leadership co-exist, co-reign, with God's? The story is told of Bishop Tommy Reid [<https://www.facebook.com/bishoptommyreid>] pastor emeritus of The Tabernacle in Orchard Park, New York, that in a vision or dream Tommy asked the Lord what He thought of his church as they observed it lit up against the night sky. Then the Lord took Tommy high above the Tabernacle to view the town lit up by many glimmering lights in countless homes about the Tabernacle. Whereupon the Lord asked Tommy, "What do you think of mine!?"

No one is suggesting that the "church" be dissolved but the life blood of the body flows through capillaries not just veins and arteries. Capillaries account for most (often 90%+) of the total length of the vascular system due to their sheer branching. In short, capillaries "go to" every metabolically active cell in the body with oxygen. I wish Paul had known this when he made his comparison in 1 Corinthians 12:14 "For the body is not one member, but many." Christianity might have put a greater value on small group fellowship interaction and prayer. Christianity might have spoken more of the New Heart provided in the New Covenant in Christ because this important level of fellowship would never have been possible without it!

Large ministries often encourage their congregations to attend smaller group meetings during the week; but the question should be asked: Are the smaller weekly groups there to maintain attendance in the larger meeting or is a larger Sunday gathering designed to add some benefit to the major work of God going on in the smaller weekly meetings? If a natural disaster or storm made the Sunday service impossible for most to attend over a long period of time, would the work survive? Only if the smaller Christian "family" groups are doing the larger work of God: prayer, Bible study, fellowship, support, etc.

It is all about the Christian's heart. It can only be about the believer's heart because it is from here that the Spirit of God leads His people. For God's people it was never about money, or

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elaborate productions, or famous speakers or captivating sermons. My sister said it best once to her pastor, at the time, "Why aren't you teaching us the Bible!?"

Generation Z, younger Christians, still seek the Lord and meaning from the word of God. Small group gatherings in homes feel more authentic to them. These younger believers are listening to their "new" hearts.

Large congregations are about being blessed; small personal gatherings are about being that blessing to someone else. Many Christians *want* a calling; they *want* to be involved, not in some mechanical way, as part of the machinery of a religious performance or ritual but in some genuine and meaningful way of caring about someone who needs their care! When all giving has to go in support of the church mortgage and the homeless family near the corner falls between the cracks of a society that doesn't even see them anymore, persons who have a heart after God's know something is drastically wrong!

I have been told, as of this writing, that there is a shift to viewing church primarily through social media—something probably started during the pandemic. If this is happening, we will inevitably discover that this, too, will be unable to replace the interpersonal ministry that thrives in small group fellowship. We need each other; it's that simple.

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Christianity was never based on a common doctrine written in books or law or tradition; nor was it ever intended to be the gift of scholarly minds to share; nor even in a common language to be understood. In His profound wisdom, God wrote it in incredible verse in the only place where it could be the property of a common faith by us all. He has written it on our hearts.

In this book we looked at the genius of God in writing His message on our hearts. In Christian fellowship—not through media presentations or church attendance but—in relationship with each other, as believers, we experience God’s Truth, and the Revelation of His Word unfolds before us in a way not possible without that new heart He gave us at our second birth.

Christians know this. We do not fellowship out of curiosity or hoping somehow we can pretend to be someone we are not. Fellowship is transparent and Christians attend to be visible and a part of something real, not hidden behind rows of strangers in the darkness.

Fellowship is a heart to heart experience without planning, programs, or self-help books. What distinguishes true Christian fellowship from other social encounters, therapy sessions, or emotional support groups, is Jesus at the center of their conversation and the Holy Spirit sharing or confirming the simple truth of God’s Word to their hearts. “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, [and He has!] he will guide you into all truth.” Jesus went on to explain, “For he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” “He shall glorify me,” Jesus made clear, “for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All

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things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you." [John 16:13-15].

Paul agreed, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the [natural unregenerate] heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God." [1 Corinthians 2:9-10].

Forgive the bluntness but a Sunday Concert cannot by itself fulfill this divine promise even with the most erudite preacher, because such an occasion lacks the dialog, the exchange of thoughts and ideas, God can use to center everyone's focus on what the Lord wants to teach.

Isaiah 50:4-5, we believe, is talking about Jesus: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakens morning by morning, he wakens my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back."

The prophet sees in these verses the "Servant of God," a learner. He then takes this knowledge into ministry to help the weary. This sounds like Jesus who said "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" [Matthew 11:29]. Is He present in the small group setting? He promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." [Matthew 18:20].

It is when we view these scriptures as either historical or eschatological only—already fulfilled or yet to be fulfilled—that we assume the Spirit of God cannot oversee a Bible study, directing the hearts and minds of the participants and teach them from God's Word what Jesus wants taught!

When Paul began, early church leadership was a bit nervous because of his reputation. It helps to have Barnabas at his side who knew him better. Paul then assured us he was genuinely called, testifying, "When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been

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given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” [Galatians 2:9].

Learning

In brief: Fellowship around God’s Word required believers be given a new heart and that new heart is of greatest value in such fellowship. Now, let me get personal in finishing this book.

I discovered that a degree in Bible is only a humble beginning in learning God’s Word and some time is usually dedicated to focusing on doctrines that later fall out of the sermon notes. I am over 80 years now and my hunger for God’s Word is as voracious as ever with so much more to learn. Thank God for a heaven where we may continue.

I have also discovered that there are believers who are tired of sitting in church and wasting another opportunity to learn—really learn—God’s Word. This has to be far from true in all churches—only some, where the message is taken off the Biblical emphasis and put on corporate interests. Whatever the reason, some believers have a greater capacity for God’s Word than the church is filling.

We might point out that there is a greater interest in Biblical theology than systematic theology. By this I mean, in the traditional sense, learning only church doctrine and not digging into the text to understand what it actually says.

But do I believe in higher Biblical studies? Need you ask after reading this book! We cannot get enough! We need learned men and women—the more, the better—whom God can use to smooth over the rough spots in our discussions. No one wants to pushback on another, but at times, we need to stop and listen to wisdom, praying that God would use someone in that capacity when we need them. And many times, that will be the pastor whose office makes us all more prone to listen than argue.

We also observe that believers who value Christian ministry and fellowship value Christian unity also. We *learn* love

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not just claim it. We embrace others of the same faith in Christ even though not in the same denomination or church. And how is this? Our hearts want nothing less.

We need to experience God's Word—live it—and for that we need others whom God might use in spiritual support to counsel us, pray with us, care about our fears and doubts, without critical judgment and unwarranted opinion. We need to discover that Jesus can use us if our hearts are open to it, if we are willing to wait on Him in prayer and surrender to His Word, if we are willing to let Him lead.

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Bio

Pastor King was known in Western Pennsylvania for his knowledge of Koine Greek and Classical Hebrew, having taught in Western PA Bible Institute in Butler, The Lighthouse Ministry in Washington, and Faith Seminary in Bethel Park, PA in the 1970's. He also taught at the Charismatic Conference in 1979 at Duquesne University. He graduated from a four year ministerial program at Northeast Bible College, which is now Valley Forge University, and later returned to complete a course of study for a B.S. in Bible. In 1982, he received a Master of Bible Theology from the International Bible Institute & Seminary, Florida.

Pastor King is the author of 22 books, currently: (1) Can You See God In This Picture? A Letter to My Sons Making Sense of 25 Years as a Pastor; (2) A Monologue of Life: A Search for Love and Meaning; (3) Grandma's Eyes: A Grandfather's Perspective on Love; (4) Challenged: Living Our Faith in a Post Modern Age; (5) The Dream: A Retired Pastor Reflects on The Perfect Ministry; (6) Jots & Tittles: Discovering Truth from the Language of Scripture; (7) I Forgive You: A Personal Journey into Forgiveness; (8) Poems and Other Things; (9) I Remember: An Introspective Look Back at My Childhood; (10) Following Jesus: A Study in the Beatitudes; (11) Talking to God: How I Found Peace; (12) The Day After Time: A Biblical Study of Eternity; (13) The Gospel Story: When God Walked Among Us; (14) Understanding God: A Study in Grace; (15) The Cross: Provisions of Grace; (16) Jesus: God's Gift of Himself (a student manual of "The Cross;" (17) Broken Bones: A Study in Psalm 51 (18) Inheriting the Kingdom of Light: A Study of Heaven; (19) The Henotic Relationship: A Biblical Study in Marriage Oneness; (20) Christian Riches: Practicing Our Faith Cautiously Within an Awareness of God's Peaceful Vigilance; (21) A Heavenly Citizenship: Living in the World but not of It.; (22) The Suffering Servant: Isaiah's Astonishing Prophecy

Currently retired from the pastorate, he lives with his wife of 50 plus years in Massachusetts.

Books Written by John H. King

1. A Monologue of Life - A quick overview of my life
2. A Reasonable Salvation - Toward an explanation for Jesus' Crucifixion
3. After Eden - About the "Fall" of mankind
4. Biblical Discipleship: For New Christians - A discipling Guide
5. BROKEN BONES: Psalm 51 - On repentance and forgiveness
6. Can You see God in This Picture? - 25 years of Ministry
7. Challenged: Living Our Faith in a Postmodern Age - A Christian perspective on today's issues
8. Christian Riches: Practicing Our Faith Cautiously Within an Awareness of God's Peaceful Vigilance - All about money
9. Devotional Thoughts from God's Word - Essays on grace
10. Discipleship: Following Jesus - A dialog on bearing our cross
11. Eden - Adam and Eve and what went wrong
12. Essays in God's Righteousness Justification or Covenantal Faithfulness?
13. FINDING GOD REASONABLE - A philosophical treatise on the reasonable believer
14. Grandma's Eyes: A Grandfather's Perspective on Love - A tribute to my wife
15. I Forgive You: A Personal Journey into Forgiveness - Learning to forgive, Biblical style
16. I Remember - My early years in Buffalo
17. If It Be Possible - Did Jesus have to die?
18. Inheriting The Kingdom of Light: Essays on Heaven
19. ISAIAH AND THE SIX WOES - Prophecies for today
20. Jesus: God's Gift of Himself - All about the Cross
21. Jots and Tittles - The Language of Scripture
22. Poems & Things - Insight into "Me" through my poetry
23. Romans: Paul's Covenant Theology - A Commentary
24. Talking to God: How I Found Peace
25. The Cross: Why Jesus Had To Die
26. The Crusade For the Souls of Men: The Gospel Story: When God Walked Among Us
27. The Day After Time: God Put The 'More' in Forever
28. The Dream: A Retired Pastor Reflects on The Perfect Ministry
29. The Heart of the Matter: A Heartfelt Christianity
30. The Henotic Relationship: A Biblical Study in Oneness
31. The Suffering Servant: Isaiah's Astonishing Prophecy