

AN INVITATION INTO THE GOOD LIFE

For personal inspiration or group study.

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,
neither have entered into the heart of man,
the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9 KJV

ABUNDANT LIFE SERIES 1

Offered in the spirit of Hebrews 10:24

Ken Stoltzfus

With the supplement: *Free or Pre, a Study in Contrast*
Considering free will and predestination.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate THE GOOD LIFE to today's countless pilgrims on life's journey, church or otherwise, who know there has to be "something more".

They are seeking, some for more of God whom they already know but many who don't even believe in Him yet whose spirit unwittingly craves fellowship with its Creator.

They are on every continent, from among every tongue and color and tribe and excluding no social or economic status. Male and female made Him, male and female they seek Him. The young and the old, the great and the small, He is calling them all.

It is a Day. A time on God's calendar for His unprecedented action in bringing in a harvest of souls. A harvest of those made whole by the Father and Son's gracious redemption.

They are desperate souls in a world so marred by the prince of this world but whose darkness cannot withstand the Light of the Prince of Peace. The Light that is now shining in the hearts of many but will soon increase in brilliance through saints who have been sanctified in the purifying fire of suffering.

The measure to which darkness now seems to prevail, signals the measure to which even greater Light will soon reach into hungry souls for their joy and God's glory. Healing Light. Restoring Light. Redeeming Light. The Light of Abundant Life.

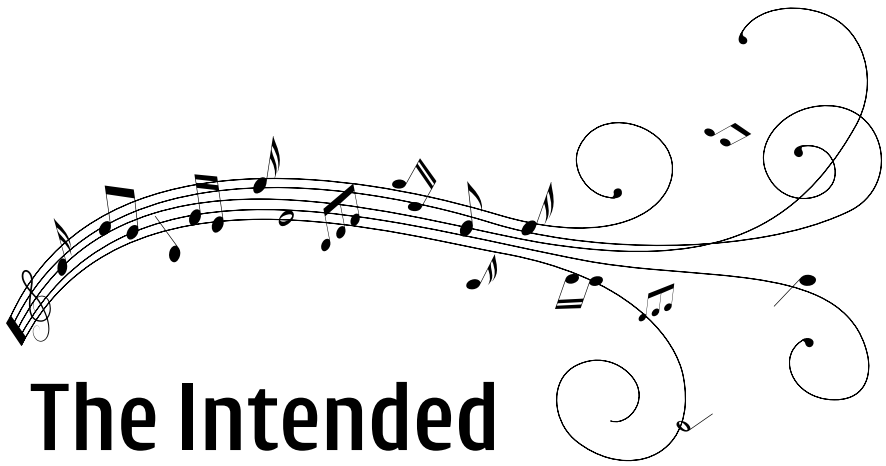
The Matthew 16:18 Church, the Church without walls, the Church that is of the Spirit and not of man, will multiply faster than man can count. It will spread through the treetops like a wind-driven wildfire—the wind and the fire of the Spirit—yet will be unseen by many whose eyes are on the world and the things of the world including the popular church of man.

"An Invitation into THE GOOD LIFE" is for those whose souls yearn for God today and who, presently pious or irreligious, will recognize Him and call to Him and receive His Life in simple childlike faith. The Day has begun. The Day is coming. Let us have eyes to see.

Ken Stoltzfus

*As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:*

From Psalm 42:1-2 KJV



The Intended Rhapsody*

As lions were made for the jungle, fish for the sea and birds for the air, so “man” was made for the Garden where he was a complete being through his Spirit-to-spirit communion with Creator God.

Our sin-cursed world is not what God had in mind for its highest form of life. It is the result of Satan's dastardly act of temptation and man's near-fatal choice that followed.

Most of God's perfect creation, from the heavenlies to the ants, glorifies Him by default as it displays His spectacular creativity and power in the natural realm. But man, whom He dared to create in His own image, was empowered to glorify Him in the spiritual realm by choosing Him over Satan in their competition for the affection of his heart.

The intended romance between God and man, each reveling in being a delight to the other, was to be like a rhapsody as they danced together in the sunrises, sunsets and storms of life. Like the perfect blend of voices in four-part harmony over world-class instrumentalists playing quietly in the background. And then came sin.

Since the fall of man and the subsequent work of Christ the Redeemer, it is in man choosing God and the transformed life He offers, that he can again be what He was created for. And it is there that God's glory—His superiority—is displayed even more convincingly than in all the rest of creation combined.

THE GOOD LIFE intends to declare the richness of the Life that Jesus won for us in our restored intimacy with Creator God, even after we sold ourselves to Satan and sin and had perverted everything we touched.

It will also expose how such Life can be thwarted by our corrupting the spiritual and relational Church that Jesus intends, by making it an institution of man.

What flowers do by nature to glorify God, man must do by choice, and it is an option for all who have heard the Gospel.

The measure of a Christian's surrender to God's rule, and to His purpose for us in a way that directs our life and sets us apart from others, is the confirmation, or contradiction, of our profession of being a Christ follower.

God's original plan for man has not changed, but we have so succumbed to the deceptive normalcy of Satan's world and of the lethargic church that we can hardly believe that life in The Kingdom of God is the Life that every human spirit longs for. IT IS, and to that we are invited, but it is as the hidden treasure and fine pearls of Matthew 13:44–46.

*rhapsody, an effusively enthusiastic or ecstatic expression of feeling. Oxford Languages

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PREFACE

MY ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are risky things but we all make them. Here are some assumptions behind THE GOOD LIFE.

GOD OUR FATHER

I assume that God our Father is good. Always! There is nothing devious about Him. No hidden agenda. No insecurity that motivates Him to use power against others to protect Himself.

He sees everything, and is prepared to meet us and make us Romans 8:37-38 “more than conquerors” when we are blindsided by the effects of Satan’s influence in the world. He is able to make beauty out of the ashes of our fledging business when it burns to the ground. He *did* that.

And He is ready to meet us in our sorrow, and flood our souls with compensating joy when the thief robs us of two wonderful adult sons, a bosom-buddy twin, and a wife who defined the words “partner, friend, and lover” for nearly 63 years. He is *doing* that.

Nothing about any of that makes Father less than good or unworthy of our praise, worship, and humble service.

And I assume that God is love. It is not just that He loves, but that He *is* love. It is His nature. To love is to give, and He is a giver. Look at the quality of the life He gave Adam and Eve in the Garden. That tells us so much about His will for man even today.

Look at the cross and what it cost God to express His love to man, even after we rejected Him in favor of Satan. And contemplate His persevering grace toward us (you) even as we (you) fail Him now. His love for us (you), and acceptance of us (you) is the same in the worst parts of our bad days as it is in the best parts of our good days. Yes, God is love.

God is never ever to be blamed for the condition of our world, or for our own brokenness. Every bit of darkness is because of man's choices under Satan's influence. However, He has made a place where we can live freely in the ways that matter most while still in this world that is under Satan's dominion. It is called "The Kingdom of God," and THE GOOD LIFE is about living there.

MAN

Man is made in the image of God. Yes, "the image of God". I assume that there is something "of God" in every human, whether saint or outright heathen, that separates us from all else in creation.

We cannot help it that because of Adam and Eve's sin (rebellion against God), we were predestined to inherit their "fallen nature". We got into this mess because of their choice but God has made a way of escape through Jesus the Christ. The choice is now man's—for those who hear the Gospel.

I assume that accepting responsibility for ourselves is the place to start, followed by countless daily choices for as long as we live.

THE GOOD LIFE talks about choice so much because it matters.

THE MATTHEW 16:18 CHURCH

I assume that the Church is comprised of those of all time and in every place who have life in Christ. It is spirit in nature and is to showcase the superiority of God's rule in the world that Satan has devastated.

I also write from the assumption that "the church" today is very different from what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 16:18. One is primarily of God and the other of man.

For example, the Church that Jesus prayed for in John 17 is identified by its likeness to Him in character and in mission. Are we?

The authenticity of those who claim to be its members is confirmed by the degree to which they love others. Is practicing Jesus' "new commandment" of John 13:34-35 an expectation today?

And the Church's success is measured by how well we give ourselves to God's purpose of making the Gospel known to our neighbors and to the ends of the earth. How are we doing at that? More specifically, how much does Jesus' Matthew 28:18-20 Great Commission shape our lives—even the life and budget of your local church?

AND FINALLY

My final assumptions are that there is hope if we repent and turn back to Him; that the path to new life includes many costly choices; and that the reward far outweighs the cost.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to THE GOOD LIFE.

I love Jesus, and I love His Body, the Church. And I love His Word, which is Spirit and Life as He said. (John 6:63-64) It tells us all we need to know about the incredible Life that He won for us on the cross and in His resurrection, and how to experience it today in the Kingdom of God on the earth.

We humans were created for the Life of the Garden and we obviously don't do well in a world that is under Satan's control.

Garden Life had come to man as the Life of God flowed into him through their Spirit-to-spirit intimacy. However, that intimacy was compromised, and its life greatly diminished by Adam's disobedience, resulting in Satan having dominion over man. Thankfully, its essential aspects were won back by the obedience of Jesus, the Second Adam, and they are available to us by faith and obedience when we are born again.

We, along with all of creation, were designed to glorify God. The main way that happens for us now, is by our choosing to believe in the Second Adam and receive the Abundant Life He offers instead of living under Satan's rule. It's not complicated, nor, because of intense resistance from Satan is it easy, but it is rewarding beyond measure for those who believe and receive it.

When we are born again, we are literally transferred from one spirit kingdom to the other even as we live on the earth. I revel in the precious truth of Colossians 1:13-14, *"He rescued us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* Let that soak in!

THE GOOD LIFE is written to help the saints understand the richness of the Life that Jesus won for us, and to encourage us to believe in and receive it. It is ours even in our years on earth with its thistles, pain in childbirth,

and the brokenness and suffering around us that portray Satan's rule in *his* kingdom.

Sovereign God has boldly established another spiritual kingdom right here in Satan's territory, and He invites us to enter it and live there in wonderful measures of freedom from the curse of sin. His Life in us glorifies Him by showing that His way is better than Satan's, and He intends that such life shines through us to draw others to Himself. (Matthew 5:14-16) It costs us everything, but it is like buying pure gold for a penny an ounce.

TODAY'S CHURCH

In general, we contemporary Christians are not doing well at displaying the Glory of God's reign. We are far too much like the world, to contrast with it in a way that attracts the lost to Jesus and the Life He offers.

A crucial error is the popular notion that being a Christian centers around escaping hell and going to heaven when we die. We essentially dismiss the claims of Christ to be Lord, and thus miss the rewards that our obedience would bring in this life—and in the life to come.

Instead, we often attempt to move into a neutral place as religious people who try to be good enough to be approved by other religious folks now—and accepted by God in the end.

I pray that God opens your mind, and that you open your eyes, ears and heart to the wonder of the Kingdom Life that He invites us into for His glory, our joy, and the salvation of many who will see His Life in us and will want it too!

*for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;
but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Romans 14:17 KJV

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 1:27 KJV

GOD AND HIS GARDEN

God created a perfect world with its spectacular solar system and more, and He made a beautiful place called “The Garden of Eden”.

Then He made man (Genesis 1:26-27)* and created the Garden for him to live in. He even gave man dominion over every living thing!

Then God looked at His creation and said it was “very good”.

MAN, IN GOD'S GARDEN

There was no conflict in the Garden, and what we know as the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) was just their natural way of life!

There was no need for patience, because there was no capacity for impatience. There was no need for forgiveness, because there was no capacity for one to act in a way that required the forgiveness of the other. Imagine that!

In the Garden, their bodies were healthy because they were nourished by appropriate portions of nutritious food. They drank pure water and breathed clean air.

The human body was not designed to handle the stress that causes us so much emotional and physical distress, but life there was stress-free!

God alone influenced man and his environment, and everything was in perfect harmony. There was nothing to deprive man of absolute health, comfort, freedom and peace.

All of that was part of God's plan. It portrayed “man” as God intended us to be—and that has not changed.

MAN

God is a spirit, and He formed man as body, soul, and spirit (I Thessalonians 5:23).

The word “soul” comes from the Greek psyche (Strong’s G5590), which speaks of our mind, will and emotions.

Our spirit is the part of us that is made in His image and sets man apart from the rest of creation.

Satan is also a spirit, and this shared spirit aspect facilitates interaction between God, Satan, and man.

MAN’S NEED

By Creator’s design, humans are incomplete in ourselves. God made us with a soul-hunger, an irresistible inner need for relationship with one greater than and outside of ourselves. A god. Can you feel that?

We *must* have a god who gives us value, purpose in life, personal security and a sense of belonging. See Psalm 42:1-2! We call that “identity,” and it tells us who we are individually and in relation to others.

This identity cannot come from within us, from another person, or from anything on the earth. It must come from a spirit, who then becomes our god. God and Satan are our only two options (Romans 6:16).

The act of giving ourselves to our god, to satisfy our soul-hunger, is called worship.

In the Garden, Creator God was man’s default god, and through their unhindered Spirit-to-spirit communion His Life flowed into man through *his* spirit and every human need and desire was perfectly met.

The earth was God’s Kingdom.** He is good, and the earth fully displayed His character and His rule. Man reflected God’s nature and it was innate in him to please God—but that was about to change.

SATAN, SIN AND MAN

Satan was an angel who rebelled against God and was kicked out of heaven. He infected other angels and is obsessed with influencing humans to follow him too.

Satan’s nature is exactly the opposite of God’s in every way. He loves evil because He *is* evil. It is his nature. He hates God and everything about Him, and He hates those who love Him.

When we read the story of temptation and sin (Genesis 3:1-7), we can see what it’s all about. Up to this point Adam and Eve only did good because that’s all they knew. Creator God and Satan, the two gods, knew both good and evil but man didn’t.

The interlinear Bible, the King James Version, and several others, render Genesis 3:5 as *“then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”*

Adam and Eve liked that idea, so they chose to eat the fruit. Just as Satan had said, they now knew both good and evil, but Satan is a deceiver, a liar

and a thief, and they now came under *his* authority rather than becoming their own god.

This was “original sin”. Very simply, sin, or *hamartia* in Greek (Strong’s G266), speaks of “missing the mark”. Sin is man’s attempt to satisfy his soul-hunger through acting according to his now-depraved instincts—and missing it because he aimed at the wrong source.

Satan will repeat “the lie” as long as we live, and we will keep believing that we are a god unto ourselves until we reverse that curse by repenting of our own rebellion against God and choosing to make Him our god. We are then born again into His Kingdom where we receive a new nature.

THE FALL

When Adam and Eve listened to Satan, man’s inner nature changed from naturally living in harmony with God, to naturally rebelling against Him.

Any temptation that we yield to, to appease a need or desire in a way contrary to holiness, reveals our attempt to be our own god. We thus glorify Satan by declaring his way to be better than God’s!

If we hope to understand ourselves, our struggle with temptation, our restoration into wholeness and the meaning of “Church,” we must understand God’s plan for man and realize what happened in the Garden.

FREE WILL, GOD’S WAY WITH MAN

The ability to choose our god and to then make moral choices, is the hallmark of the spectacular, vibrant, God-man relationship that we were created for! The spiritual intimacy and abundance portrayed in THE GOOD LIFE is not possible otherwise.

God intends that we will display His superiority over Satan, the other god. The heavens, the flowers and the birds glorify Him by default, but man must *choose* to.

We call that “free will,” and its effect in both entering the Kingdom of God and experiencing life there stands in vivid contrast to that of the predestination or “election” that some Christians hold to.

We love and serve Jesus, not as a bride in an arranged marriage but as the abused woman who said “Yes!” to a wonderful man who loved her as she was and promised to make her whole again if she would marry him.

The holiness that springs from free will’s personal, spirit-intimacy with Jesus, follows our choice to obey Him because we love Him. Love that does not flow freely from the heart, by choice, is not love at all.

We glorify God every time we choose His way. Even 1,000 times a day!

Part of God’s glory is that He, contrary to Satan, allows us to choose which god we will serve, and His sovereignty is preserved in that He alone determines the outcome of those choices.

Rejecting this Biblical truth makes us vulnerable to forming a man-made religious belief system with a distorted view of God, man, and the God-man relationship. It hinders our entering deeply into the spiritual Life*** of the Kingdom of God and handicaps us in the humble self-examination that could lead to the repentance that today's church so desperately needs.

God provides "Eternal Life" through His Son Jesus who paid the penalty for our sins, and He offers it to all who hear and believe. The challenge for us is to apply it with integrity in obeying the commands of Jesus regarding holiness in lifestyle and mission, and we have a lot of work to do on that!

*The scriptures for all such references are written out in Supplement III, "The Word". Please be as the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and judge all that I write by what God has said.

**See Supplement I on "The Kingdom of God".

***I use the form "Life", for "life", when it represents the John 10:10 Abundant Life of the Kingdom of God. It is so much more than simply being alive because we have breath in our lungs!

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2) The insights that God gave me are:

3) An action step that I will now take is :

4) An insight that I would add to this study is:

5) A question that I have is:

6) My personal testimony on this topic is:

Ken Stoltzfus

CHAPTER

2

AFTER
THE BEGINNING

- - much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17b KJV

THE CONSEQUENCES

As God had warned in Genesis 2:17, something inside of man died* when they disobeyed Him.

They were driven out of the Garden where communion with God and living in harmony with Him were natural. It was the place where the Father's Life had flowed into them through their spirit in the normal course of their day.

Through Him they had been complete in every way, but man's spirit was now inactivated* and his soul (mind, will and emotions) took over to instruct him. Think about how much your life is shaped by your soul!

So, Satan's influence was now heard through man's soulish desires (Ephesians 2:3) instead of God's influence through man's spirit, and he (Satan) became the default, or "natural" spirit source for man to try to satisfy his compulsive soul-hunger.

Man was created as the highest form in all of creation, but he could now be the vilest part. He was crazed with soul-hunger because he was cut off from constant fellowship with God the Father.

All evil in the world, and the horror and pain that follow, reveals man's desperation to find the wholeness he was created to have.

Every act of sin represents another futile attempt to get something to fill our emptiness, and that often happens by *taking* another's life, purity, property, reputation, happiness, freedom, rights, or suchlike. It all represents man's attempts to fill the cavernous vacuum inside of himself.

Man's brokenness began when he listened to Satan and followed him in rebelling against God the Father. He wanted to be his own god but it didn't work out as Satan had promised. It never does.

The consequences were earth-shattering, but Sovereign God had a plan and it would take place in His way and His time.

GOD'S PLAN

The Father would send His Only Son, Jesus, to take our sins upon Himself. Jesus would accept the punishment that we deserved (I Peter 2:24). Even more, He would deliver us from our sinfulness by breaking our bondage to Satan (Colossians 2:15).

We would be “born again” (John 3:3-7) and our spirit “made alive.” He would restore the Spirit-to-spirit relationship that we were created for, which would again satisfy our soul-hunger. In a way that few Christians understand, the most essential aspect of Life in the Garden was restored to man! The Father would impart a new nature to us—one that loves what He loves and is inclined to obey Him. *That* is LIFE!

When we are born again, we are transferred from one spirit-kingdom to the other. Paul writes, *“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son”* (Colossians 1:13, NASB, also Acts 26:18.) PRAISE HIS NAME!

We can now love others as He loves us (John 13:34-35). To love is to give, and we can now give because His Life flows into us to make us complete—and then flows through us to others! (John 7:38) This new nature is so radical that it will convince others that we are followers of Jesus.

Our new life begins when He becomes “Savior” as we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness. He becomes “Lord”, when we repent of trying to be our own god. It would revolutionize the Church today if we viewed the two as inseparable—as God views them.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the original sin event, the dominion over the earth that God had entrusted to man was forfeited to Satan.

He became prince, ruler and god of this world (John 14:30, II Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2, I John 5:19). Such is the spirit environment we are born into, and as long as we are earthlings our soul and body are in his sphere and vulnerable to his influence.

When we are born again, we find ourselves “in the world but not of the world” (John 17:13-19). We no longer fit here, so the Father has a new place for us called “the Kingdom of God” (Also “the Kingdom of Heaven”). The culture of His kingdom portrays and nourishes our new nature.

Before we were born again, we were condemned to the futility of trying to satisfy our soul-hunger from *Satan's* world. We thus developed attitudes and habits that are contrary to righteousness and we must now actively

replace them with the ways of the Kingdom of God. That involves the II Corinthians 3:18 transformational process of becoming more like Christ.

We can learn more about this transformation, which includes a renewed mind, in Romans 12:2. “Transformed” comes from the Greek word that we translate as *metamorphosis*—the process and degree of change that happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

“Renewed” comes from the Greek word that we translate as *renovate*—tearing out the old and replacing it with the new. It is a life-long process of restoration into wholeness as our love for Jesus increasingly replaces our love for the world, and the Fruit of the Spirit replaces the works of the flesh. Praise God!

This transforming and renewing process requires active confession and repentance. We release more and more control of our lives to Him and He moves deeper into our hearts. Abandoning the altar in our churches is not a good sign.

A FRESH START

Please take time now to read Romans 5:6-21. Think about how far Adam and Eve “fell” from life in the Garden to the darkness of Satan’s world, and note the four times that “much more than” describes Jesus’ work as compared to that.

Wow, could we dare to believe that the effect of our redemption in Christ is “much more than” the effect of their fall? I suspect that few of us do.

Jesus did not do just enough to help us “squeak by” so we could escape hell when we die. His work was enough to defeat Satan’s power over us and fully satisfy our soul-hunger through communion with the Father in the Life of His Kingdom.

In I Corinthians 2:9 Paul writes, *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (KJV) And the life that he prays for in Colossians 1:9-14 is for today—for those who believe!

Read Romans 5:17 again. “Receive” there is in the Greek sense that means “to lay hold by aggressively (actively) accepting what is available (offered)”. Strong’s 2983. God doesn’t just dump it on us when we confess our sins. We must repent, releasing our grip on the world and reaching out in humble faith to take hold of this new life. But first we must believe.

This is consistent with the God-man relationship in general. Sovereign God offers Eternal Life to all, but receiving it and entering into the abundance of His Kingdom through the narrow gate is our choice.

I fear we know so little of it because of ignorance, unbelief or apathy, and our love for what the world offers. It would help us so much if we truly

understood what it means to be God's people, and we'll consider that next in "A People for God."

*Actually, two things happened. First, they were condemned to die physically because if they had eaten from "the tree of life" they would have lived forever on the earth in their fallen state.

Secondly, the Greek for "dead" in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:13, *nekros* (Strong's G3498), is used both literally and metaphorically. Here it is metaphorical and speaks of "destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God; destitute of power" (Strong's, edited).

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Ken Stoltzfus

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;

1 Peter 2:9 KJV

CREATED FOR HIS GLORY

We read in Isaiah 43:7 that God created man for His glory.

Think of “glory” as the measure of superiority of one person or thing over another. If we describe a sunrise as “glorious,” we mean that it is superior to others. To “glorify” is to point out or declare that superiority.

God is the most glorious as compared to anyone or anything, anywhere, at any time, including the natural and spirit worlds. Nothing and nobody comes even close to His knowledge, power, love, creativity and more. He is “*the God of gods*,” as in Psalm 136:2. He is worthy of being glorified.

However, we know that the liar and thief Satan was able to convince Adam and Eve that what *he* offered was superior to what God had given them in the Garden.

Ever since then, there has been a rivalry between God and Satan that you can feel in your ongoing battle with temptation. It is the Galatians 5:16-26 struggle between your flesh and your spirit, both influenced by their spirit source that competes to be glorified by you choosing it in the moment. It’s not complicated!

A PROBLEM

God formed man for Himself. Man was to be the special part of creation that He would fellowship with, Spirit to spirit.

They would dwell together in the Garden and would delight in each other. We know the tragic story though—that they would soon be separated by sin.

But then, right there in Genesis 3:15, God declared that He would deal with the sin problem. He initiated a plan through which His glory—His superiority over Satan—would be shown through those marked as His special possession.

He is the sovereign God—He has the last word about everything and His original purpose for man would eventually be fulfilled.

A SOLUTION

So, God crafted Israel as His own people amidst all the other peoples.

They would be marked by His presence, favored by Him, and used by Him to show His glory to other nations. See Leviticus 20:24-26 and Ezekiel 36:22-23.

We know that the Church is where God now rules and His glory is to be displayed, but do we realize how it connects to His original intent for man, and to Israel and the Old Testament?

Do we see world and church history as one united story of God's progressive revelation of Himself as He moves toward "full disclosure" in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3, John 14:19, II Corinthians 4:4), through whom He redeemed all who would come to Him?

IDENTITY

Church, *that* is our identity. It is *who* we are, *whose* we are, and *why* we are.

It is comprehensive. It says everything about everything about us as individuals and together as the Body of Christ. It shapes what we want and why we want it.

So, my American friends, does your personal identity come more from God and life with Him, or from being "American" with our freedoms, rights—and the opportunity to indulge in the American Dream?

And where do you and your local church find your faith identity? Is it as described above in being God's special people, abiding in His Kingdom and declaring His Name, or in your belief system, facilities, or program?

ALWAYS

This chapter's main text, I Peter 2:9, connects us with God's actions in the Old Testament and with His eternal purposes. Titus 2:14 confirms it for today.

God wants His people to know that they are His and are to live for Him. In Ezekiel He says, "And you will know that I am the Lord," over 40 times!

In Ezekiel 36:22-32, God tells Israel that even though they had defiled themselves among the nations, He would redeem them for the sake of His holy name. Jeremiah 33:9 is outright goose bumpy! Think "Church!"

Nothing about that has changed, but some things *are* delightfully different under the New Covenant.

SOMETHING NEW

Before, God's word came through prophets, but it has now come in the person of Jesus, as we read in Hebrews 1:1-4 and John 1:1-14.

Before, they were born physically as an Israelite, by the will of man (John 1:13), but now we are born again spiritually, into the Kingdom of God. (John 3:5-7). Our spirit is quickened—made alive by *His* Spirit!

Before, they obeyed out of fear of the Law, but now we please God out the desire of a new heart. I John 2:3-9 is powerful. John starts with the seriousness of obeying God, and says it is an old commandment, but then he says it is a new commandment.

The point is—it is “old” because it has always been God’s will, but it is “new” because we have a new heart that is freed and empowered to want to obey. It is now from inside of us. Absolutely powerful!

It is what God had said in Deuteronomy 30:6. We would now be marked as His people by circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh. See Romans 2:28-29, Philippians 3:3, and Colossians 2:11.

Before, God was only “with” His people, but in John 14:17 Jesus said that His Spirit would now be “in” them. Romans 8:9-11 and I Corinthians 3:16 also speak of His Spirit being in us.

THE BIG “IF”

Something else that hasn’t changed is the conditional “if” of Exodus 19:5-6 and Joshua 24:14-15, and Jesus said “if” again and again as a condition for Kingdom Life.

Man’s disobedience led to original sin, and his choices ever since have defined his relationship with God.

Today, as in the Garden, God wants those who choose to give Him their hearts. To make Him the god who satisfies their soul hunger. He wants to woo us to Himself with His love and His promise to heal our brokenness and our wounds, and to then call us into His glorious presence in heaven forever. He does not want us to relate to Him as an obedient bride whose husband was chosen by her parents.

He welcomes raped bodies and souls and makes them whole. Pure. His Ephesians 5:25-27 bride. He wants us to choose Him over Satan and to obey and serve Him because we love Him and are grateful to Him.

And He invites us into the Abundant Life of our new home, the Kingdom of God. Life there becomes bigger than life itself as we are filled with meaning and purpose when we give ourselves to Him.

We eagerly await Jesus' return as we live in the spirit-kingdom that the Father created for us here on the earth while Jesus prepares our eternal home in heaven.

That—is life in the Kingdom of God and it is like hidden treasures and fine pearls.

THE EYE-OPENER

The Kingdom of God is spirit in nature, unlike Israel, the physical and political nation through whom He worked previously. Its life cannot be understood with the natural mind, which is dominated by the flesh (I Corinthians 2:14), and that's a BIG problem for us.

Only the humble, repentant and obedient heart can have eyes to see and ears to hear the mysteries of His Kingdom (Matthew 13:13-16), and thus to experience the wonders of its Life—which is entered through the narrow gate.

If we love Jesus we will obey Him (John 14:21-24), and He and the Father will come and make their abode in us and reveal more and more of themselves to us. What price of obedience could be too high for that—but obedience involves choice! Always.

THE GOOD LIFE is about Father God's provision for us and how we can experience it as citizens of His Kingdom. In the next chapter we will dive deeper into "Life, in the Kingdom of God".

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6) My personal testimony on this topic is:

Ken Stoltzfus

CHAPTER

4

LIFE, IN THE
KINGDOM OF GOD

*I am come that they might have life,
and that they might have it more abundantly.*

John 10:10b KJV

THE CHALLENGE

Yes, when we are born again we are “rescued from the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13, Acts 26:18), yet we continue to live in this dark world that is ruled by Satan. How does *that* work?

Well, God had a plan! John 1:4-5 says of Jesus, “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*” God made a way for us to live in His Light even now!

ZOE-LIFE

The English word “life” here, in John 3:16, and over 100 times in the NT, is from the Greek *zoe* (Strong’s G2222). *Zoe* speaks of quality of life; life that is abundant, rich, full and overflowing. It is Life as humans were created to know it! (I use “Life” when speaking of *Zoe-Life*.)

Zoe-Life begins when we are born again and receive eternal life, and it lasts forever, but to our detriment we often emphasize “eternal” and miss the now part.

Life speaks of the wholeness that comes when our spirit is made alive (Ephesians 2:5, Romans 8:10). Our communion with Creator God is restored and for the first time our soul-hunger can be satisfied.

That Life is the inheritance of the Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8). It is the *Zoe-Life* of the Kingdom of God! Today’s Church doesn’t often teach that, but if you believe it, it will transform you.

We become kingdom citizens by believing in Jesus (John 1:12), but to “believe” means more than mental assent. It implies to entrust oneself to the object of belief in a way that leads to action, and that implies choice. In fact, countless choices!

REST

As described in Chapter 1, man has a relentless need to satisfy his soul hunger. Until we are truly born again there is no respite from that. We are like a dog chasing its tail.

It is only in the Kingdom of God that we find rest from our otherwise futile pursuit of soul-satisfaction, but we find it hard to believe that the life of surrender to Him would lead to that. We are still tempted to think that our way can work—but it never does because it can't.

Note the Hebrews 3:7-4:16 warning about unbelief and the hardening of hearts that rob us of the rest that could be ours. Do you hear that preached?

TRUE CHRISTIANITY

A “Christian” is one who has not only “believed in Jesus” enough to escape hell, but has also switched kingdom loyalties. We now believe that the most rewarding way to fulfill any spiritual, emotional or physical appetite or need is by obeying Jesus and following Him.

Christians who have Life, will obey Jesus out of love for Him because of the Life He has given us at such great cost to Himself.

As we do that, He and the Father come and make their abode in us and disclose more and more of Jesus to us (John 14:21-24). As this happens, we find ourselves lifted into the I Corinthians 2:9, indescribable spiritual riches that He has for us.

As this Life takes root in us, we will increasingly “seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33), which will grow in us and overflow to others for their salvation and joy and to God’s glory.

This all flows naturally from a heart that is surrendered to His rule and finds its greatest joy in pleasing Him as it follows the leading of His Spirit.

AND THEN - -

As we diligently pursue Christ, the interests and appetites of the flesh will succumb to those of the Spirit and things of earth will grow strangely dim. We will come to hate evil (Romans 12:9) because it creates distance in our intimacy with God, more than out of fear of being punished for being “bad”.

And we will determine if we have had a “good day” or a “bad day” by how well we have walked in the Spirit, rather than by how our fleshly expectations have been met.

BY FAITH

This Life of the Kingdom of God is surreal in a certain way. In fact, it is frequently called a mystery.

In Colossians 1:26-27, Paul calls it *“the mystery that has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been revealed to his saints, to*

whom God desired to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Oh—I looove it!

Our English word “mystery,” from the Greek *mustérion* (Strong’s 3466), is used 28 times in the New Testament. The prophets of old knew that something better than their system of sacrifices was coming and they longed to see it (Matthew 13:17), but they couldn’t imagine what it would be like. We struggle with understanding it too!

Many err today by trying to understand it intellectually and defining it theologically, thus the powerless religion of our day. In Matthew 11:25, Jesus said, *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you concealed these things from the wise and discerning and revealed them to little children.”*

The Life of the Kingdom is for all who believe in Jesus like a child and invite Him to indwell them and rule their life.

A BIG PROBLEM

One problem is that we try to understand the things of God with our human minds, but we can’t.

Paul writes *“But a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (I Corinthians 2:14 NASB).

Further, His ways are contrary to the instincts of the flesh. Jesus confirms that in John 5:39-40: *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and these are the ones testifying about me, and you are not willing to come to me so that you might have life.”*

We are free to come or to refuse to come, and we face that question multiple times daily. As we grow, we learn that the life that we seek truly does follow coming to Him. Obedience is the axis upon which authentic spirituality and Kingdom Life, turn.

BORN AGAIN

In John 3:5-6 Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone would be born from water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. What has been born from the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born from the Spirit is spirit.”*

And in John 1:12, *“But as many as received him, he gave to them the authority to become children of God, to those believing in his name.”*

Consider the word “received” there. The Greek word means to take initiative to accept, and emphasizes our initiative.

What we are to receive is His abundant, overflowing, Zoe-Life of John 10:10!

MOVING ON

Many Christians live a dull life that is very much like the Law, living under the “should” and “should not” expectations of similarly joyless leaders.

There is little exuberance, and little that makes others want to be like them. How would you respond to my opinion that we Christians often give others reason to not want to be like us?

There is much more to this, and we’ll consider it next in “48-Bit Color or Black and White.”

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Ken Stoltzfus

CHAPTER

5

48-BIT COLOR
OR BLACK & WHITE?

*Thou wilt shew me the path of life:
in thy presence is fulness of joy;
at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Psalms 16:11 KJV

A QUESTION

Would you describe your sense of the Christian life as bursting with vivid colors or as more black and white? Sure, we all have some days with heavy clouds that hide the sun, but what do you accept as the norm?

MY SCANNER

My photo scanner needs to know what results I expect from a scan. It offers a 48-bit color option, gray scale, and on down to black and white.

I can scan a spectacular rainbow photo as black and white and that is what I will get. I cannot, however, scan a black and white image, tell the scanner to do it in 48-bit color and expect to get a color photo. It depends on what I start with.

IN MY BEGINNING

So, what mindset do you start with when you awaken from sleep? What are your expectations of the day?

I grew up in a rather black and white faith culture that included little of David's spiritually and emotionally colorful testimony in Psalm 16:11. (Above)

The thought of the spiritual vibrancy that is portrayed in THE INTENDED RHAPSODY (page vii), and especially that of "dancing" with God, would have been judged as irreverent. At least irrelevant.

Yes, there were those among us who were deeply devoted to Jesus and who lived a rich, quiet faith—especially older women like my paternal grandmother. Grandmom wrote some sweet poems about Jesus but we didn't talk about Him in a personal way.

Especially at communion time, God the Father was portrayed more as a judge than as Creator God who had made

this wonderful world for us to enjoy. And who had rescued us from the curse of sin so we could be close to Him.

Jesus was a warmer God-figure to me, but He was coming back soon and we would be in deep trouble if we were caught being bad when He popped out of those clouds.

In my late 20's I realized I envisioned a harsh and angry God standing at the door of heaven with one foot cocked back, ready to boot me out at the slightest provocation.

Those early impressions of the Christian life painted a bland picture of God and of faith. Yes, He loved me so much that He sent His Only Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, but from that point on it was without the vivid and brilliant spiritual colors that represent the Abundant Life that God intends for our Spirit-to-spirit relationship with Him.

IN FULL COLOR

When man sinned and Satan became god of this world, deep spiritual darkness covered the earth as it had done in a physical way before God made the sun. But then, just as He had made the sun to deal with physical darkness, so He sent His Son, Jesus the Christ, to bring Light into our spiritual world.

The power of Satan's darkness over us was shattered when Jesus rose from the dead and burst out of that tomb, pumping His fist in triumph after having defeated the powers of death, hell and the grave.

The full-color life of Ephesians 1:17-23, Ephesians 3:20-21 and I Corinthians 2:9-10, and the righteousness, peace and joy of Romans 14:17, are wonderful descriptions of the spiritually vibrant Life.

PIERCING THE VEIL

The redemption and restoration that Jesus won for us is in full color. And the Kingdom of God is filled with the dazzling light of Life for those who have eyes to see.

Within it is every delicacy that man needs to satisfy his hunger of body, soul and spirit—in sickness or in health, whether rich or poor, and whether loved by men or being thrown to the lions as confirmed by the Hebrews 11 heroes of faith. (Get your Bible, read it!)

Under the Old Covenant the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year to cover man's sins by the blood of animals, but that did nothing to lessen his separation from God and the life-giving relationship He had intended for man.

But then Jesus came! Because of His victory, the veil between God and man was torn and we are invited to come into His very Presence. Read Hebrews 10:19-25—dare to believe His invitation to you and enter in!

SURVIVE OR THRIVE?

Are we satisfied to “survive”, or do we believe that Jesus did enough for us that we can thrive? That we can be the “more than conquerors” of Romans 8:37-39 and the victors of I Corinthians 15:56-57 as we revel in the Abundant Life of John 10:10?

We have a new citizenship, and a new nature that is inclined toward God. We are reconnected to Him through Jesus and can literally interact with Him, Spirit-to-spirit, in everyday life. Yes, we can. Yes, *you* can!

The full-color sense of being “saved” includes release from the depravity and ways of our old nature, and from its spiritual and emotional scars and pain as we are filled and refilled with His glorious healing and restoring Presence of Colossians 1:27

We are truly a “new creation” (II Corinthians 5:17); we triumph over sin (Romans 6:14-17); and He is glorified (Ephesians 1:12 and 14).

We are “complete in Christ” (Colossians 2:10), and if we “believe”, we have rest from the ruthless inner drive to try to fill the emptiness of our souls (Hebrews 3:12-19) through things of the world.

As we grow in Christ and the Life of His Kingdom is formed in us, we will serve Him in full color as the Matthew 16:18 Church, His body on the earth. Think about that!

HIS LIGHT IN US

Hebrews 1:3a says, *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being”* (NIV). We are called to be like Him and to radiate His Presence.

Ephesians 4:13 says we are to mature *“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”* (NASB).

God intends for His spectacular glory to be on full display in the Church as we choose to make Him our god (Chapter 1) and surrender to His rule—thus embodying His Light for all to see and be drawn to.

God calls us into the Light of His Kingdom, and it is His plan that others will be drawn to His Light in us as the prophet wrote in Isaiah 60:1-3.

That is God’s purpose and plan for the Church, but it only happens as we enter the full-color Life “beyond the veil.” It reflects His Presence; it glorifies Him and attracts empty and hurting souls to Him—and it is ours for the choosing! Why then, are we so often satisfied with much less?

“GOOD MORNING!”

When we awaken to a day with potentially gloomy circumstances, do we let them define us or do we remember that the sun is above those clouds?

Do we dare to believe that *“the eyes of our heart can be enlightened, that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,”* as in Ephesians 1:18? (NIV)

Consider II Corinthians 4:4-6. In our dark moments, do we dare to cry out to the God who said, *“Let light shine out of darkness, and made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”*?

Many who claim to follow Christ are obviously dismissive of the subtle influence and deception of “the god of this age” of v4, and of the danger of the spiritual unbelief and blindness he fosters, and they miss the full-color Life of His Kingdom.

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Ken Stoltzfus

CHAPTER

6

THE CHOICE IS OURS

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17 KJV

THAT TREE!

It all started with that tree and man's choice to eat its fruit. Man's free will collided with God's sovereignty and the world changed—because God had the last word. He *always* does.

And so it is today—the struggle of our will to obey Him. We too are forbidden to try to satisfy our soul-hunger by eating the world's fruit—but we'll keep trying as long as we believe Satan's lie. What are *your* favorite apples?

GOOD NEWS

Because of Adam's sin all humans are predestined to inherit a sinful nature. However, Jesus is the “new Adam” (I Corinthians 15:45-49) and all who hear and believe the Gospel (Romans 10:9-13) are released from the spiritual-death curse of Adam's sin.

As Jesus said in John 3:16, whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. John 1:12 says that He gave the right to become children of God to all who received Him and believed in His name. And I revel in Revelation 22:17.

In I Timothy 2:4 Paul writes that God “*wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*” And II Peter 3:9 says that God “*is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance*” (NASB). All. ALL!

God is love (I John 4:7-10), and considering the wonder of what Jesus won for us at such great cost I would fear insulting Him by saying that He proves His sovereignty and glorifies Himself by predestinating some, possibly even infants, to an eternal hell as some believe. That violates everything about love.

Are the “every knee” of Romans 14:11-12 and Philippians 2:9-11, and the “Christ” of Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:2-4 and 2:7-8, not enough to prove that He is sovereign over all? They are.

ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE BUT - -

We like to quote John 3:16 but conveniently forget that those who do not believe in Him will perish; that if they had not heard the Gospel they had no choice (Romans 10:14-15); and that we are commanded to tell them (Matthew 28:18-20, John 17:18, Acts 1:8).

God provided the way of salvation, gave us the scriptures, commanded us to “go and tell”, gave us His Holy Spirit to empower us, gave us the Church as a community for fellowshiping, nurturing and serving Him together, and promised to be with us always—but we have loved the world too much to obey Him.

Those who truly have Zoe-Life will be eager to pass it on. They will be excited about it and will spread it to the ends of the earth in ways that are natural to their gifting and calling, personality, and place in life. It’s too good to keep to oneself! We are not all evangelists but we are all to be witnesses.

However, many aren’t more zealous about sharing the Gospel because institutional religion isn’t exciting enough to share in the way that the true and costly Life of the Kingdom is. We are then given witnessing formulas and acronyms, and guilt trips about not telling others about Abundant Life that we don’t even experience ourselves.

When we choose to obey Him and we experience Zoe-Life, we will freely share the Good News; others will want Him too; God is glorified; and His highest purpose for humanity is met!

RESPONSIBLE?

Many have no choice because we have not lived the authentic lives that would reveal Him to them. Or we have refused to give, to go, to pray, to tell, and/or to love them with the attractive love of Jesus.

Will we be held accountable in some way for those who are lost because they didn’t know? We are commanded to show, and to tell, and the penalty for willful disobedience is serious. “God knows!”

TO OBEY OR NOT TO OBEY?

As we saw in Chapter 1, the source we draw from to satisfy our soul-hunger reveals our choice of a god.

That shapes our moment-by-moment decisions, which determine the measure of the richness of God’s Kingdom that we experience, and thus how effective we are in our witness. Our choices literally open and close doors to Life for ourselves and others.

We can obey or ignore Jesus' mandates to forgive, to be generous, or to share the Gospel. We alone decide if we will love others as He has loved us (John 13:34-35), and take up our cross daily to follow Him (Luke 9:23-26).

However, to "believe in the Name of Jesus" unavoidably implies that we receive Him as Savior *and* surrender control of our life to Him as Lord. According to Jesus that is not optional for His disciples.

As we mature in Christ then, He will call us to go deeper and deeper in humble surrender to His mission and His lifestyle in ways that separate us from the world, and even from many who also profess to follow Christ. Yes it will. Painful, but true.

I have never before known the intimacy with Jesus that I do now, nor have I ever been more strongly called to go deeper. To obey or not to obey, sometimes in soul-piercing, excruciating ways, is the burning question.

PUSHED AWAY

Many who are "lost" have been pushed away from God by the very ones who now judge them. They have rejected our hypocrisy and superficiality more than they have rejected God Himself.

Some on the fringes of the institutional church don't get more serious because what they see inside is too fake for them.

When we choose moment-by-moment in ways that demonstrate our commitment to Lord Jesus, many who are presently outside of the Kingdom will see our transformed life and will want in too. Some are looking for that even now to confirm God's tugging in their heart.

A KEY WORD

"Repentance" means to change one's mind, resulting in decisively turning from one direction or course of action to another.

It speaks of the decision to confess our sins and our sinfulness, and to receive Christ as Savior and Lord and be born again, but that is just the starting point.

We must have a lifelong disposition of turning more and more toward Christ as the Spirit calls us to obedience in one area of life after another. James, in writing to the Church, said *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts"* (James 4:8 NIV). That speaks to us!

Additionally, in Matthew 18:3 Jesus said, *"Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* We must repent of trying to please Him in our own way, or as institutional religion might define it, and come to Him in the weakness and humility of a child and learn from Him.

I WONDER - -

Are we serious enough about choosing who we will serve? Moses challenged Israel to decide (Deuteronomy 30:15-20), and we must take his words seriously for ourselves.

Do we sometimes act as though we can just motor along with the cruise set on "go to church, pay your tithe, be good, and avoid obvious evil", and all is well?

How many "good Christians" would follow the crowds who turned away from Jesus after His words in John 6:52-66?

Matthew 7:21-23 is sobering. I fear that many who look good in church but whose lives reveal a different choice than they had professed, will hear Jesus say, *"I never knew you! Get away from me, you evildoers!"* Yes, God has given us free will, but He alone determines the outcome of our choices. Our sanctified Sunday morning smiles and our spiritual cologne may fool our friends but God sees right through them.

Just as Joshua said to the Israelites, *"Choose you this day whom you will serve - - but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15), so we too must choose. What is *your* choice?

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Ken Stoltzfus

CHAPTER

7

THE COST

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matthew 13:44-46 KJV

JESUS SAID - -

The Kingdom of God, which is entered through the narrow gate of Matthew 7:13-14, is like the hidden treasure and the fine pearls of Matthew 13:44-46. Both parables illustrate great sacrifice followed by extraordinary reward.

In Luke 14:26-35 we read Jesus' parable about building a tower but not first counting the cost. Some *really* straight talk follows and if we took it seriously, we would fall to our knees and fill our altars.

Who today dares to preach His, "*So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*" of v33? What does that word "all" mean?

He follows that with, "*Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" (ESV).

WHAT IF - -?

How would *you* respond if your pastor built a teaching around that text and connected it to our pursuit of the American Dream? Or connected it to the frequent American Christian assumption that earthly wealth is a mark of spirituality?

What if someone in your Sunday School class suggested that Jesus meant what He said there? Would you invite discussion and even prayer on the topic—or accuse them of speaking harshly from a critical spirit and want them evicted from your class?

Following Jesus can separate us from others as we are led to pursue the things of God rather than the things of this

world as they do. Our life of being separated unto Christ convicts them. Consider (II Corinthians 2:15-17) We were created as relational beings, and the approval of others can be powerful. That can ensnare us in whatever measure we have failed to find our personal identity in God.

This is all foreign to what we hear in the church in America today. Did we get a “pass” of some kind? An exemption?

Might we have a clue as to why we experience so little Kingdom Life and power in today’s Church if it is true that we can only enter the Kingdom of God through the narrow gate?

OUR WILL AND THE CROSS

There is more too, and it’s a matter of “life or death.” We must die to our instinct to be our own god for our few years on earth, in order to receive Abundant Life now and forever.

In Luke 9:23-25 Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”* (NIV).

The word “life” in verse 24 is from the Greek *psuché*, Strong’s 5590. It is often translated as “soul” and speaks of our mind, will and emotions. Our will is the part of man where moral choices are made.

In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39), Jesus openly wrestled with the fleshly interests of His humanity, and the battle took place in His will. His soul. He knew the Father’s plan for Him, which the Spirit was confirming to His spirit in that moment, but Satan was also appealing to him through his soul.

Three times He prayed, *“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will.”* Each time, He expressed His soul’s interests but concluded with the surrender of His will. (Matthew 26:36-44)

It was there, that He was proven worthy to become our Savior (Hebrews 5:7-9). Do you see the place of His “will” there?

WE WRESTLE TOO

Similar to Jesus, we also wrestle with our will in life decisions and must follow His example if we hope to experience the Life that He won for us.

We must deny our Satan-influenced, pride-driven “I can be my own god, I can decide for myself” soulish impulse regarding earthly affections—and instead submit to the Spirit of God who now speaks into our born-again spirit!

For us, as for Jesus, it can come down to a gut-wrenching struggle in choosing between the voices of the two gods.

Now read Luke 9:25 again: *“What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit himself?”* Jesus said that we can gain everything the world offers and then lose the very essence of our being. The person we were created to be and the one whom Jesus wants to restore us to become. The “you” who could be alive with Abundant Life if we would only choose His way by entering the Life of the Kingdom of God through the narrow gate and take up our cross daily!

Sometimes I think it would be easier to die physically for a good cause than to die to the soulish folly that robs us of that Life.

SURRENDER?

At issue is our choice to surrender to the living God who loved us enough to send His only beloved Son to take our sins upon Himself, and who waits to free us from the arrogant stupidity of thinking that we can be our own god.

It is one or the other, but out of fear of discouraging people we often water down the “cost” of following Jesus, which simultaneously dilutes its reward and leads to the bland, faithless religion of so many American Christians.

A TERRIBLE OPTION

In v26 Jesus says that if we are ashamed of Him and His words, He will be ashamed of us when He returns. Ouch!

That’s serious—and He is not speaking of praying before you eat in public as much as being willing to embrace the life values, world view and Spirit empowered holiness and mission that His words and His example call us to. Read that again.

This impacts the human affections of I John 2:15-17 as well as loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, serving others, living generously, defining contentment and more. Paul’s Philippians 3:7-11 testimony puts things into perspective. More choices!

PSEUDO-LIFE

The “church” in America has little sense of Life or of the path into it. We are satisfied with our institutional religion, good works, and “fire insurance” salvation.

We even attempt to redefine Life. A “good Christian” has become one who goes to church, tithes, becomes a member, serves in the church institution, abstains from certain sins, and buys into a specific dogmatic belief system.

Some of those can be expressions of faith, and some are contrary to it, but none are its source or its proof. All have the potential to give false hope and to draw us away from Life.

The authenticity of American religion can be measured by the impact we are having upon our nation's morality.

MOVING ON

It is predictable that if Kingdom Life is as good as the Word says it is, the spirit of our Satan-saturated world will try to influence us to think that the cost is too high.

Satan will come with his worldly options, which are as appealing, deceptive, and deadly today as his first temptation was to Adam and Eve—but God has provided a way for us to prevail.

Let's look at "The 'Abide in Me' Key to Kingdom Life," in the next chapter.

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2) The insights that God gave me are:

3) An action step that I will now take is :

4) An insight that I would add to this study is:

5) A question that I have is:

6) My personal testimony on this topic is:

Ken Stoltzfus

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

John 15:4 KJV

IT'S TOO SIMPLE FOR US

Sometimes we miss a simple life-giving truth. Take the "abiding" of John 15:4-10, for example. The Greek word there is *menó* (Strong's G3306), which means, "to stay in a given place, state, relation or expectancy."

Simple enough, but how do we "abide" in Christ if He is a spirit? He's not here physically—we can't snuggle up to Him and soak in the security of His love and acceptance.

Well, yes, God is a spirit, and His Holy Spirit is the part of His triune (three-part) personhood who connects us with the Father and the Son. His Spirit is *in* us, not just *with* us (John 14:16-17), and is the liaison between God and us. He is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Jesus (II Corinthians 3:17, Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, Acts 16:7, Philippians 1:19), and *our* spirit recognizes His voice as He invites us to connect with the Father and the Son.

A SPIRIT WORLD

However, Satan is also a spirit, and while he is not *in* us, he is "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Ephesians 2:2) and "*the ruler of this world*" (John 14:30).

The whole world is under his control (I John 5:19) except for those who choose to abide in the Kingdom of God instead. He is all around us and profoundly influences the culture and the activities of our world.

He constantly challenges the voice of God's Spirit in us, and the contest between them is spiritual in nature (Ephesians 6:12, II Corinthians 4:4).

Our mind is most likely to abide in the spirit realm that is our source for identity and wholeness. In the Garden it was Creator God by default. However, when man sinned, his fallen nature (Chap. 2) was connected to the spirit realm of his new god, Satan, who speaks into him through his soul. By default, humans abide in the spirit realm that he rules.

Can you feel how that works in you—how the spirit of this world approaches you and appeals to you through your mind, will and emotions?

THE GOOD NEWS

The Good News is that Jesus will set us free from Satan's grip as we repent of our rebellion against God, receive his gift of eternal life and are born again. When we are "born of the Spirit" (John 3:3-8) and enter the spiritual life of the Kingdom of God, we escape our previous bondage to the spirit of this world and God can again speak to us through our spirit (Colossians 1:13, Acts 26:18).

Oh, I just looove that truth, but there is also the rude awakening that we are now engaged in the brutal and perpetual Galatians 5:16-18 battle between the flesh and the spirit. You can feel that, can't you?

We are still "in" the world but are no longer "of" the world, as in John 17:14-16. We live here physically but are to be like the faithful ones of Hebrews 11:13b who, because of their citizenship in the Kingdom of God, were as *"foreigners and exiles on earth"*.

As we are transformed (Romans 12:2, II Corinthians 3:18), we become more and more like Jesus and our new nature increasingly becomes our default.

NOW, BACK TO "ABIDING"

Think about what happens at night when you "abide in" or "remain in" negative or fearful thoughts. Or rehash the pain of an injustice against you—maybe even in your long-ago childhood.

Can you feel the power of that? Isn't there a spirit quality about it that can suck the Life right out of you?

What about when you are "working on your weight" but join friends at a sumptuous buffet? You determine to "be good" and to limit your portions and the number of trips but—Oh wow!—your eyes dance as you see that spread and your imagination and fleshly passions quickly join forces against you. As you abide in its delights you are captured by it and vow to be good "next time".

And what happens if you abide in sensual thoughts and imaginations, especially if you use visual resources as part of the moment? That takes you somewhere, doesn't it? Can you feel a spirit quality in that?

In each case we have been drawn by the spirit of what we have set our minds on. We literally "abide" in the spiritual realm that is its source.

As a branch is connected to the vine, and resources flow from the vine to the branch which then produces leaves, flowers and/or fruit, we have connected to the spirit realm of our choice for that moment and it will bear fruit!

Why does *"bad company corrupt good character?"* (I Corinthians 15:33) Why are we warned about being unequally yoked and called to *"come out from among them?"* (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1) It's because of the spiritual nature of those settings, and when we hang around (abide in) them we will take on their spiritual

aroma—unless God calls us into that setting for his purposes and we are armored up. Simple enough? How can you tell if a farmer has been in the pig barn?

SET YOUR MIND - -

In Colossians 3:1-2 we are instructed, *“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”* (NASB)

What does “keep seeking” say to you? And consider the deliberate act of “set your mind”. Finally, did you notice the “not” between the two options? It is a matter of one or the other.

Do we Christians take that seriously and do we believe that we actually have power to “set our minds”, or do we view our mind and imagination as being like trying to walk a cat on a leash?

We also have Romans 8:5, *“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”* (NASB) It’s not complicated.

Philippians 4:4-9 also speaks of the kinds of things we are to think about. Verse 7 says that if we do so, *“the peace of God, which exceeds all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”* Verse 9 concludes, *“And the God of peace will be with you.”*

That sounds like a good place to abide, doesn’t it!

Wouldn’t such a discipline profoundly reshape the life of many Christians who struggle with low self-esteem, and with the fear, doubt, fleshly anger, jealousy, various addictions and other soul-based afflictions that rob them of the righteousness, peace and joy of the Kingdom of God?

STILL NOT SURE?

If you still wonder how you can abide in Christ and dwell in God’s Kingdom while here, read John 14:18-26 and be encouraged. Look at v23! Wow!!

Consider how important our love for and obedience to Him are, as part of abiding in Him. Yes, that is part of the “cost” but it’s like buying pure gold for a penny an ounce! (I never get tired of saying that!)

And then we have John 15:26 and 16:5-15 which reinforce the need for the active work of His Spirit in us! In v7 He even says that it is better for Him to be in heaven, and His Spirit in us, than for Him to be here as He was with the disciples. If that is so, we’d better learn how to live and walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)

And then there’s John 15:7, *“If you remain in me, and if my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* That is BIG. If we truly abide in Him, we will know His heart. We will ask according to His purposes and for His glory and not for our fleshly indulgences, and will be amazed by what He will do for us and those we love.

When you begin to fear or despair about something, read some Psalms, or chapters in Proverbs, and set your mind on those truths. Or maybe just read a

good book or go for a walk and hear the birds praising God. It can help you set your mind on Christ and abide in *His* spirit realm rather than Satan's. We will need to make such choices as long as we live, and we can develop thought patterns that take us there! Let's do it!

MY TESTIMONY

My testimony is that Jesus comes to my rescue quickly if I turn to Him when I find myself abiding in the grief and loneliness of deep losses in life. If I call to Him and set my mind on Him, He comes and speaks Life into my spirit—which relieves my soul of its distress. Please believe that you can hear His voice and know His Presence in those moments. And believe that He can draw you into greater intimacy with Himself than when your emotional, soul-slide began. I'd love to tell you some stories, but - -!

FINAL WORDS!

- *"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ."* Romans 8:9 NIV
- *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers."* Psalm 1:1-3 NIV

As the sun "calls" us to bask in the warmth of its rays on a cold day, so Jesus invites us to bask in the Light and the warmth of His Presence in this dark and cold world, and to know the glorious life of the Kingdom of God!

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Ken Stoltzfus

CONCLUSION

O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

Psalm 34:8-10 KJV

I CONCLUDE THAT - -

It is true, that Life in the Kingdom of God is like the treasure hidden in the field and the fine pearls of great value of Matthew 13:44-46. However, we are only likely to find them if we are seeking them, and the cost is great.

I have found faith in Christ and life in His Kingdom to be practical and fulfilling as I served him as a husband and dad, a commercial pilot, an entrepreneur, ministry founder, pastor, missionary, writer, and friend to many hurting people.

Elaine's and my faith sustained us through several major valleys including a fire that consumed the business we had started with and for our sons (1982), the loss of two adult sons (2011 and 2019), and then my twin (2020). And since Elaine's passing (2022) I have known new depths of sorrow that were met by new heights of joy as He met me in my sorrow.

Add to that the several potentially devastating betrayals as we served those who said they were ready to take up their cross and follow Jesus but then found it too costly.

Elaine and I knew the freedom and joy of a modest lifestyle where "investments" in things eternal, versus those of the world, offered security that no amount of earthly wealth can match.

And where Spirit-to-spirit intimacy with Jesus, and finding our identity and personal validation in Him, is more satisfying than winning the approval of the crowds.

And where partnering with God in making the Gospel known to others gives unmatched purpose and fulfillment in life.

And where the “realities” of life here must succumb to the REALITY of Life in His Kingdom because He is the greatest god and the only God!

And where a couple can know the adventure of daring to walk into the dark together out of obedience to God’s call—knowing that He will be there and will meet every need. He always did—and oh, what stories!

I think I have ended up with a fairly realistic view of both the light and dark sides of being a Christian in life, in His service, and in relationship with others in the Body of Christ, and I wouldn’t want to do it any other way! In principle I would do it all over again although some would be done a bit differently now because of what I have learned about Him, about people, and about myself on the journey.

THE DARK AND LIGHT SIDES

We Christians do many things that compromise our faith and distract us from single-mindedly loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

We quickly forget that the only truly fulfilling way to live is to invite God’s rule over us—reconnecting us to the Life that He always intended for us.

Our experiences with money, food, sex and power are key areas. They are wonderfully fulfilling and rewarding when experienced in harmony with God’s plan, but equally compromising and even destructive under Satan’s rule.

In addition to tarnishing our intimacy with Christ and robbing us of its joy, our sinful affections degrade us as humans and hurt others in the process.

They eagerly become masters who express Satan’s rule over us, but we can choose to make them servants under God’s rule. They can then draw us toward His Life rather than away from Him, and enrich us instead of diminishing us.

Kingdom Life includes the ecstasy of the “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” of Romans 14:17 and of the John 7:37-39 outflow of rivers of Living Water that draw other to Jesus. Obeying Him is a prerequisite to experiencing the life of His Kingdom—but we must choose.

Satan is a thief. As Jesus said in John 10:10, *“The thief comes only to steal, and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* (NASB) Every outright sin and every ill-expressed affection rob us of the richness that God has for us in Christ.

Many life choices are not evil in themselves but they nevertheless rob us of the richness of choosing the best.

The Luke 9:23-26 cross will cost us everything but gives us even more. It’s part of “the mystery of God”.

EYES TO SEE

Life is more spiritual than natural, and the spirit world rules over the natural world.

Our problem is that we often react/respond according to the natural because we are earthly minded. That's why the reality of the Kingdom of God escapes us. It is a spiritual reality in our physical world and is only seen with spiritual eyes and hearts. Consider I Corinthians 1:17-25 and 2:6-16.

According to II Corinthians 3:12-18, we are not able to see how wonderful Jesus really is because of our old nature, but when we open our hearts to Him, His Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes and lets us see Him.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Jesus said that we must be "born again" (John 3:5-7). When we are born again, we are born a second time but as a spiritual birth. It begins an exciting and rewarding spiritual journey of entering increasingly deeper into intimacy with Jesus and thus into the Life of His Kingdom!

It is tragic that such an approach to faith is rarely taught in today's church where our enthusiasm for the life of the institution often smothers our pursuit of the surpassing beauty of the Kingdom of God.

SUMMING UP

The whole "Christian" thing then, is about Jesus coming to earth to die on the cross to bear the penalty for our sins, and then being raised from the dead on the third day by the power of God to break Satan's power of spiritual death over us.

All who would subsequently learn of that Good News and choose to accept God's rescue plan, would be "saved". Their spirit is made alive and they can now see things as they are and live in relationship with God as He always wanted!

The assumption then, is that one's outward life, which had previously shown that they were under Satan's control, will now show that they are serving God. What happened on the inside will be confirmed by what others see on the outside.

That choice totally impacts our years on earth and determines our eternal reward. Learning to apply it in everyday life, in a Christian culture that has not done well at defining what it means, is a challenge.

Authentic faith requires our focus on the Life of God's kingdom in a way that separates us from what the world calls "The good life", but I heartily commend it to you.

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

God had a wonderful plan for man as the crowning part of His glorious creation.

It changed drastically when Adam and Eve chose to sin against Him, but praise God, everything that was impacted by “the fall” is also affected by our redemption! It is there for the taking, or better said, for the receiving! That glorifies God and He heaps His pleasure upon us.

HINDRANCES

One hindrance is our belief that the institutional church of our day is what Jesus had in mind for His Matthew 16:18 Church. We are satisfied with things as they are, as anyone who “rocks the boat” will quickly learn.

There is *ignorance* about the richness of Life in God’s Kingdom, and *unbelief* that won’t allow us to believe it could be that good.

The word of the cross, however, is our greatest hindrance. It actually *does* seem like foolishness (I Corinthians 1:18) to the nature we inherited from Adam, and pride tells us we’re doing okay without getting so serious about things. The truth though, is that the measure to which we embrace the cross will be the measure to which we experience the Abundant Life that accompanies intimacy with God—for all eternity. Period. End of discussion. Amen.

And finally, there is an increasingly popular belief system that will handicap one in pursuing THE GOOD LIFE as I have presented it here, and I will discuss it in Supplement II.

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SUPPLEMENT I

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

My sense is that I, and we, have little sense of the meaning of the Kingdom of God (sometimes, the Kingdom of Heaven).

A kingdom is a place, with its own boundaries, government, laws, culture, resources, opportunities and so forth. Jesus spoke of the KOG as a place where one could live, and he often juxtaposed it to typical life on this earth.

As you study it, you will see that He spoke of it as a place that one could enter or be kept from entering—and He talks much of the culture of that Kingdom and the attitudes/affections of those who dwell there.

I encourage you to become familiar with the incredible study resources at www.biblehub.com and www.blueletterbible.org. You can search by Strong's number or by a word like "kingdom", and see how many times it appears in the scriptures and how it is translated in different verses and in the various translations.

The Greek feminine noun *basileia*, Strong's G932, appears in the New Testament 162 times as "Kingdom". The masculine noun form *basileus*, Strong's G935, appears 118 times as "King." Finally, the verb form *basileuō*, Strong's G936, meaning "to reign", appears 21 times.

Learn to use those resources if you haven't already and you will be amazed by what you discover.

INTRODUCING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

These scriptures from the NIV will introduce you to the culture and expectations of the place God created for His people to live until He calls us home, and I encourage you to dig deeper into the topic!

Matthew 4:17: From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the *kingdom* of heaven has come near.”

Matthew 4:23: Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the *kingdom*, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Matthew 5:20: For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the *kingdom* of heaven.

Matthew 6:33: But seek first his *kingdom* and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 7:21: Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the *kingdom* of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 12:18-23: Parable of the sower, “the word of the *kingdom*.”

Matthew 13:10-17: The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Matthew 13:44-48: The *kingdom* of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all

that he has and buys that field. Again, the *kingdom* of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Once again, the *kingdom* of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.

Matthew 19:14: Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the *kingdom* of heaven belongs to such as these.

Matthew 19:23-24: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the *kingdom* of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the *kingdom* of God."

Matthew 21:43: Therefore I tell you that the *kingdom* of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Matthew 24:14: And this gospel of the *kingdom* will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 25:1+: At that time the *kingdom* of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Read the whole story in verses 1-13.

Mark 9:2: and he sent them out to proclaim the *kingdom* of God and to heal the sick.

John 3:3: Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the *kingdom* of God unless they are born again.

Acts 14:22: - - We must go through many hardships to enter the *kingdom* of God, they said.

Romans 14:17: For the *kingdom* of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

SUPPLEMENT II

FREE OR PRE, A STUDY IN CONTRAST CONSIDERING FREE WILL AND PREDESTINATION

But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. Ezekiel 33:6 KJV

SOCIALLY HANDICAPPED

Since the early 1960's I have pursued Christian faith that has a purpose and lifestyle that pleases the Father even if it separates me from the world—and from many in the organized church.

Accompanying this has been an alertness to intruders who hinder that, with a sense of call to identify and address them. I will probably bear that handicap until I die. Ezekiel 33:6 (above) is very personal to me.

REGRETFULLY . .

THE GOOD LIFE has been, by and large, a positive document and I wish I could conclude on that note. I can't though, if I want a good conscience because there is an increasingly popular belief system out there that handicaps one's pursuit of such Life.

This supplement is not a theological treatise as much as a look at how Calvinism and its Neo-Calvinism can play out in life.

My intent is not to exalt Anabaptism or Evangelicalism or to bash Calvinism. It is that we must be alert to hinderances to our becoming Jesus' Matthew 16:18 Church that is able to serve Him well today and in the coming Day—as laid out in this book and its companion, "BOOKENDS, A Truth That Matters," #2 in the Abundant Life Series, with more to come.

I am torn by how to express this clearly and candidly while being generous in spirit toward brothers whom I love dearly but whose belief system and culture are hostile in effect toward the pursuit of the Life that Jesus seems to invite us into. Please read THE GOOD LIFE entirely before challenging me on this supplement.

SOME CAVEATS

Each theological stream is bundled. Certain beliefs go together, and if we believe "this", we will likely believe "that". We call that a "belief system".

Every belief system has scriptures that are awkward to explain considering the way we understand other scriptures. Theologians then craft a belief system to navigate that as well as possible. No belief system answers all of the questions easily, and each can benefit from others.

Theology is important. It shapes spirituality, which shapes how we experience God, which shapes our identity, our personal life, and the culture of our life together.

Calvinism is to be a secondary issue, and I feel strongly about not letting secondary issues divide the Church. However, Calvinist theology is not just a slightly different approach to the scriptures. It presents a significantly different view of God, man, and the God-man relationship, and it creates a very different faith and church culture.

Calvinists, and today's Neo-Calvinists are more inclined than most to make an issue of their distinct beliefs and to try to "convert" other Christians. They are making inroads into the Evangelical community, including Anabaptists, many of whom don't understand their true nature and the culture they produce.

The core elements of free will and of Calvinist predestination are incompatible and cannot coexist unless they are made non-issues by a shared commitment to a higher agenda. I have freely partnered with Calvinists in a missionary setting, where it was a non-issue. (Is it fair to ask though, why a Calvinist would be a missionary if God has predetermined who goes to heaven and who goes to hell, and the "elect" have no chance of missing it, missionary or not?)

Each belief system can benefit from others. Some of the Calvinists I know are the godliest of all my friends. They know what they believe more than the typical Evangelical, and their confidence helps them say it. And they are people of integrity in their homes and the various aspects of life. I honor them for that.

And it was Calvinists who stood up to government overreach in shutting down churches during Covid. And it was they, who courageously addressed the horrific June 26, 2015, SCOTUS ruling on gay marriage while Evangelicals in general just whined about it and said, “how awful.” I commend them and am enriched by them—as I have been enriched by many others whom I am not in full agreement with on secondary issues.

And so, I freely embrace Calvinists as my brothers and sisters but must warn against their possible attempt to covertly transition a free will body of believers into their belief system and culture as they are known to do—and as I have seen happen.

LOOKING BACK, AND AHEAD

I have felt the need for revival in the Church for most of my adult life. I have sensed that we are in a different “Day” on God’s calendar.

Many saints can see that the present church isn’t what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 16:18 and are hungry for something more, but recognizing one’s need can make us vulnerable to unbiblical solutions.

I say boldly that the robust, daring, dynamic, spiritual vitality of the early Church and of the Anabaptists, and that of life in the Kingdom of God that THE GOOD LIFE portrays, can only come through a spirituality that is based on a culture of free will that leads to ongoing sanctification and heart intimacy with Jesus. Period. Should I repeat that?

Radical (normal) Christian faith entails a lifestyle of countless, life-affecting choices as we enter deeper and deeper into the Life of the Kingdom of God, starting with the narrow gate of Matthew 7:13-14 and including the cross of Luke 9:23-26.

Jesus’ words often call us to costly choices in following Him, and we must live in a consciousness of that as long as Satan is tempting us to do otherwise.

The contrasts, and the Life in II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 can only follow a free will mindset and a culture of ongoing choices and repentance. Such is almost irrelevant if we are at ease in the comfort of being among Calvinism’s “Elect,” and its “eternal security”.

Only those who truly understand the core message of this book will understand the distinctions I am making, otherwise you might judge me as “making a mountain out of a molehill”, as we say. I am not.

A TRANSITION OBSERVED

I had the unfortunate experience of observing firsthand, over a period of eight years, an Anabaptist-Mennonite church that was being transitioned into a Calvinist belief system and culture.

In spite of this being a very controversial topic among Christians, this transition was done quietly by leaders who felt no need to inform the body or give them a choice. Most in the church were naive and didn't recognize it, and the concerns of several who did, and who spoke to leaders, were summarily dismissed.

Calvinists are vulnerable to the sense of an elevated "ministry" as opposed to the Biblical, typically Evangelical, and especially Anabaptist sense of a "Priesthood of All Believers". That easily leads to a top-down leadership style, especially when blended with their overall sense of need to convert other Christians to their distinct and supposedly superior belief system.

An important and potentially misleading issue is how differently Calvinists use the precious word "grace". Evangelicals typically use it to speak of God's compassionate and undeserved love for us in spite of our frailties and failures. For the Calvinist though, it speaks of the moment God zaps you with a transformed heart as one of the "elect" even as He would look at others and say, "I chose *you* to be condemned forever."

Their definition of grace eliminates free will and one's choice to accept or reject the gift of eternal life, and diminishes the need for the ongoing transformation of II Corinthians 3:18.

In my last engagement with their leadership on this topic, a pastor said, "(name of church) is not an Anabaptist-Mennonite church," and repeated it for emphasis. He spoke truthfully, but if you were to ask those who attend there, many would say they are an Anabaptist-Mennonite church and it still has Mennonite in its name.

A bit later here, I will recount some of the changes that the Calvinist culture created in the body through this transition, but first, some general statements about their belief system.

NEW, OR NEO-CALVINISM

"Neo-Calvinism" is a current version of traditional Calvinism. It is a rapidly growing movement in America led by John Piper, Tim Keller, Mark Driscoll and others, and embraces the five TULIP points of historic Calvinism which, incidentally, deviate from most of Christendom.

Neo-Calvinism is especially appealing to sincere Christ-seekers and to young people. Its dogmatism gives them something to confidently believe in and a cause to stand for as compared to much of the lukewarm church.

There is something potentially mesmerizing about it—maybe something sensual in its aura of superiority that titillates pride and entices the part of our soul that hungers for meaning and purpose.

CALVINISM'S TULIP

While Calvinism is best known and most objected to for its predestination and eternal security beliefs, it is commonly summarized by the acronym TULIP.

Total depravity

Unconditional election (predestination)

Limited atonement

Irresistible grace

Perseverance of the saints (eternal security, or “once saved, always saved”)

Most Calvinists will embrace T, U and P, and a “Five-Point Calvinist,” all five. A “Four-Point Calvinist” will likely reject L, and a “Three-Pointer” will also reject I. It’s complicated.

Let’s take a brief look at Calvinism’s five points. Bear in mind that they are all at odds with Protestantism in general, and that they are not obvious in scripture. One must construct a belief system to support them.

For an excellent resource, please see David Servant’s article, “Calvinism’s Five Points Considered” at:

www.davidservant.com/articles/calvinism/

T - TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Calvinism’s “Total Depravity” underlies their belief system and leads to their predestination theory.

By “total depravity” they mean that man’s spirit is so dead that he cannot hear God’s Spirit. My favorite Neo-Calvinist describes man as “road-kill dead.” In that case, “election” is God’s only option if He wants to have humans in heaven with Him through eternity.

Christians typically reject that morbid view of man, believing that there is something of spirit in every man that gives us the capacity to respond to the Holy Spirit if we choose to after hearing the Gospel.

Certainly, there is no “good” in man that qualifies him for eternal life, but please consider that “*nekros*” (Strong’s G3498), the Greek word for “dead” in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:13, is used both literally and metaphorically. Here it is metaphorical and speaks of “destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God; destitute of power”. (Strong’s, edited)

U - UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Yes, scripture does include words like “The elect”, “predestined” and so forth. Some of them are challenging to sort out and we can’t ignore them, but one does not need to embrace Calvinism in order to understand them.

Unconditional Election says that in order to prove His sovereignty, God predetermined who He would save and who He would condemn to hell—all with no choice of their own whether they heard the Gospel or not.

The core issue is whether God, before the world was made, decided who would be saved and who would not be, or whether the elect are those whom He *foreknew* would choose Him and thus receive eternal life—as most Christians believe.

Calvinism's belief is contrary to many scriptures that come to mind about "whosoever will", and it violates God's original design for man—that we glorify Him by choosing Him over Satan as our god as previously described in this book. It also insults the character of God, casting Him as insecure and needing to predetermine who can be saved and who cannot be, in order to prove His sovereignty.

God's sovereignty is demonstrated in His love for sinners, like Saul/Paul. And me. And you. And in His being secure enough in Himself to give us free will with the capacity to choose or reject Him as our god.

And it is preserved in that He has the last word about everything, and that in the end, "every knee will bow before Him" as in Philippians 2:10-11. And how about Hebrews 2:8 and Revelation 19:11-16? Now *that* is sovereignty!

Calvinists are not united on the destiny of the aborted, miscarriages, the stillborn and infants, and it is appalling to many to learn that some of them believe that those who were not among the "elect" are damned.

One vulnerability in this doctrine is that regardless of how sincere we were, every parent made mistakes in raising their children. It is easy to dismiss our possible need to ask forgiveness from a wayward child by saying that they are simply not among the elect.

L - LIMITED ATONEMENT

Calvinism's "Limited Atonement" asserts that Jesus's death only atoned for the sins of the elect. Those whom God Himself chose in advance.

We believe that to contradict "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" of I John 2:2, and the "whoever" of John 3:16, Romans 10:13 and elsewhere.

I – IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Calvinism says that if God says, "You are in," you cannot resist Him. This harmonizes with their "predestination" which says that if He decides that you are "out" He has condemned you to hell with no hope because that's what He decided for you in order to prove that He is sovereign.

Calvinism's predestination and irresistible grace both violate the truth of free will and man's part in choosing to accept or reject God's gift of eternal Life.

P – PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

More commonly known as “eternal security” or “once saved, always saved”, Calvinists believe that it is not possible for a Christian to turn from faith.

Many Christians struggle with the assurance of salvation because they are so aware of their failures and don't understand the Biblical meaning of “grace”—of how God looks upon those who are “in Christ” but are still being transformed. When they look at their failures and wonder how God could accept them, they become vulnerable to Calvinism's “eternal security”.

I am extremely secure in Christ because of a Biblical understanding of grace, but various scriptures, written to Christians, do present the need for us to be alert to falling away. Consider Colossians 1:21-23, Hebrews 2:1-3, Hebrews 3:12-15, Hebrews 10:26-27, Hebrews 12:25, II Peter 2:20-22 and more.

Calvinists like to say that if someone falls away they were never really saved, but the word “knowledge” in both Hebrews 10:26 and II Peter 2:20 is *epignósis*, Strong's 1922, which speaks of “knowledge gained through first-hand relationship”.

God will not let His child go easily. He warns them, woos them, and extends forgiveness and restoration as they walk away, but ultimately, because He gave us free will, they can go.

THE SHIFT

These are observable shifts that I saw from up close as an Anabaptist Mennonite body was being transitioned into Calvinism.

The Anabaptist (and Biblical) vision of the Church as a spiritual body; actively led by the Spirit of God; under the rule of Jesus; emphasizing ongoing, inner transformation of the heart; with individual membership in the Body of Christ; and living and serving together for His purposes as a priesthood of believers in community; in a lifestyle that separates one from the world—was supplanted by a very different model.

Calvinism, as I have seen it applied, is more “of man”, centering around head knowledge more than the spiritual man of the heart. Jesus' words in John 5:39-40 shout warning.

Its elevated “ministerial” can more easily serve in a top-down manner contrary to Matthew 20:24-28, as I have seen happen.

“Leadership” takes on more of a management flavor instead of the shepherding of I Peter 5:2-3, thus shaping their response to those in need.

It leads to an emphasis on accountability to men more than the saints' personal accountability to Jesus, by His Spirit.

There is an obvious shift toward ones' spiritual identity and membership being in the local church, under the authority of men, rather than in the Matthew 16:18 Church and the Kingdom of God. It was once preached there that we are baptized into the local church, contrary to the Biblical view that we are baptized into the larger Body of Christ.

Supposed expository preaching can now cover Jesus' Letters to the Seven Churches, and books of the Bible that are laced with repentance themes like Jonah, Daniel, Hebrews, Galatians and others, and let the hearers untouched. Altars are abandoned.

Calvinist teachers and theologians are quoted frequently, seeming to validate them, and the library and recommended study resources will favor Calvinist sources.

Emphasis on the active work of the Holy Spirit, who speaks personal counsel and instruction to the saint and empowers us with the spiritual gifts for ministry, is replaced by an emphasis on the authority of leaders and the head knowledge they impart to us.

Finally, the importance of the *preaching* of the Word, leading to *knowledge* of the Word, supplanted the Anabaptist and Evangelical call to *obedience* to the Word, as Jesus said repeatedly. That obedience is what the book BOOKENDS is about.

CONCLUSION

I do not fear for one's salvation just because they are Calvinist. However, I say confidently that while Calvinism offers a seemingly satisfying form of religion, it (especially *dogmatic* Calvinism) is much less likely to lead to the kind of heart relationship with God that equips us to enter deeply into the intimacy with Jesus that produces the life of the Kingdom of God that glorifies Him and equips us to serve Him in bringing others into that Life.

The free will theology that most Evangelicals embrace has much greater potential to produce a discipleship culture of following Jesus from a surrendered and increasingly transformed heart in a way that influences all of life. That is the core of "Anabaptist-Mennonite" even if we don't do it well nowadays. We still can—but we must choose it.

Being prepared to represent God's heart today, and especially in the coming trials, is a basic expression of our calling as His people. We are *not* prepared.

Many Calvinists are nervous about the active work of the Holy Spirit in the individual saint's life. A negative critique of Sarah Young's JESUS CALLING devotional was most likely written by one of their company.

This, notwithstanding Jesus' words about His personal communication with us by His Spirit as in John 14:18-26. And His *"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me,"* in John 15:26. And don't forget the Psalmist' many references to God speaking to Him and leading Him. It is even more so today because we are indwelt by Jesus and His Spirit.

Few Calvinists will view the history of the Church in the Book of Acts (Sometimes called "The acts of the Holy Spirit"), as being a significantly relevant model for today. It is.

It will be very difficult for Calvinists to be part of the coming revival, which will begin with repentance among believers and carried onward through the Matthew 16:18 Church that is characterized by Spirit-Empowered holiness and mission and confirmed by Jesus through the signs and wonders of the supernatural gifts—just as He said it would. I describe that in "BOOKENDS, A Truth that Matters".

I want to be part of that. How about you?

1) The scriptures that were most helpful to me are:

2) The insights that God gave me are:

3) An action step that I will now take is :

4) An insight that I would add to this study is:

5) A question that I have is:

6) My personal testimony on this topic is:

SUPPLEMENT III

THE WORD

Most are in KJV for a reason. Please forbear, if you prefer otherwise—as I do.

The entrance of thy words giveth light; It giveth understanding unto the simple.

Proverbs 119:130

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. II Timothy 3:16-17

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Genesis 1:26-27: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 2:17: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the

serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Exodus 19:5-6: Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: 6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Leviticus 20:24-26: But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. (25) 26 And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

Deuteronomy 30:6: And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy

God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20: See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16 In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17 But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18 I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20 That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Joshua 24:14-15: Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. 15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Psalms 42:1-2: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul

after thee, O God. 2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

Psalms 136:2: O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Isaiah 43:7: Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 60:1-3: Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Jeremiah 33:9: And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.

Ezekiel 36:22-23: Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. 23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

Ezekiel 36:22-32: Look it up!

Matthew 5:14-16: Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto

all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 6:33: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 7:13-14: Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:21-23: Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 11:25: At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Matthew 13:13-16: Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with

their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

Matthew 13:44-46: Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matthew 15:8-13: This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (10-12) 13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Matthew 16:18: And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 20:25-28: But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Matthew 26:39: And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Matthew 26:36-44: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Luke 9:23-26: And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. 25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? 26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

Luke 14:26-35: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. 27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? 29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, 30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the

other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. 33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. 34 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? 35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

John 1:1-14: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (6-8) 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 3:3-8: Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born

of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 6:52-66: Look it up! 66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

John 7:37-39: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

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

John 13:34-35: A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 14:16-17: And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 14:18-26: I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. 19 Yet

a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. 20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. 21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. (22) 23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. 25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. 26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, 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 14:30: Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

John 15:4-10: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept

my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:26: But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 16:5-15: But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? 6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. 12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. 15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

John 17:13-19: And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify

them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

Acts 1:8: But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 16:7: After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Acts 26:18: To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Romans 2:28-29: For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 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.

Romans 4:11: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Romans 5:6-21: For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely

for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. 12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: 13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20 Moreover the law entered,

that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:14-17: For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. 15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 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.

Romans 8:5: For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

Romans 8:9-11: But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Romans 8:37-39: Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10:9-15: 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. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. 12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. 13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Romans 12:2: And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Romans 12:9: Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Romans 14:11-12: For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 14:17: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

I Corinthians 1:17-25: For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;

but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I Corinthians 2:6-16: Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things

also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ.

I Corinthians 3:16: Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

I Corinthians 15:33: Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." NASB

I Corinthians 15:45-49: And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

I Corinthians 15:56-57: The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 2:15-17: For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 16 To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not as many,

which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

II Corinthians 3:12-18: Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: 13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: 14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. 17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

II Corinthians 4:4-6: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

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

II Corinthians 6:14-7:1: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath

Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Galatians 4:6: And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Galatians 5:16-26: This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let

us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 1:12-14: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.¹³ In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:17-23: That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ²² And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³ Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Ephesians 2:2-5: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. ⁴ But

God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

Ephesians 3:20-21: Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, ²¹ Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Ephesians 4:13: Till we all come 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:

Ephesians 5:8: For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

Ephesians 5:25-27: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 6:12: For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Philippians 1:19: For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Philippians 2:9-11: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in

earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 3:3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Philippians 3:7-11: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Philippians 4:4-9: Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. 5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, 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. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard,

and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Colossians 1:9-14: For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; 12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: 13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Colossians 1:15-20: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; 20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:21-23: And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his

flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: 23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

Colossians 1:26-27: Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Colossians 2:10-11: And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Colossians 2:13: And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Colossians 2:15: And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 3:1-2: If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

I Thessalonians 5:23: And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Timothy 2:4: Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Titus 2:14: Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Hebrews 1:1-4: God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: 4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Hebrews 2:1-3: Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. 2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; 3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

Hebrews 2:7-8: Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: 8 Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

Hebrews 3:7-4:16: Look it up!

Hebrews 3:12-19: Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened

through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; 15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 5:7-9: Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; 8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Hebrews 10:19-25: Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 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.

Hebrews 10:26-27: For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Hebrews 11:13: These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Hebrews 11: Read all of it!

Hebrews 12:25: See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

I Peter 2:24: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

I Peter 5:2-3: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

II Peter 2:20-24: For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. 21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog

is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

II Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

I John 2:2: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

I John 5:19: And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

I John 2:3-9: And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. 9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

I John 2:15-17: Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

I John 4:7-10: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I John 5:19: And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

Revelation 19:11-16: And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King Of Kings, And Lord Of Lords.

Revelation 22:17: And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

AN INVITATION INTO THE GOOD LIFE

THE GOOD LIFE is an invitation into the abundant life that Jesus won for us on the cross and in His resurrection.

The author believes that such life is what we were created for and is the only path to true fulfillment. And he believes that this life is to be the norm in the Church as a way of glorifying God and drawing sinners to Him.

He writes much of our need to live in the awareness of daily and even moment-by-moment choices in the process of following Jesus. And He views free will not only as the opportunity to choose to receive the gift of eternal life, but as a responsibility to then actively pursue the II Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2 transformation that leads to our becoming more and more like Jesus.

Supplement I introduces you to the Kingdom of God. Supplement II, "Free or Pre, A Study in Contrast", offers observations on Calvinism's influence upon abundant life and our being Spirit-filled saints who can thrive even in times of trouble.

In addition to many scriptures embedded in the text, the book includes over 100 scripture references, with the scriptures themselves printed out in Supplement III.

Born in 1940 and raised in an Anabaptist (Mennonite/Amish) community in southeastern Pennsylvania, Ken Stoltzfus, a retired pastor, missionary, entrepreneur, commercial pilot and flight instructor now lives in northeast Ohio. He is "Dad" to three sons, two of whom are now with Jesus; a twin; husband to Elaine for over 62-years; and "Grandad" to nine—and now to 14 great-grandchildren. He is well occupied these days with writing, napping, seeking God's heart, mentoring some, befriending many—and reading more than ever.

This is Ken's second book, following "Restless Teens and Those Who Nurture Them" (2008), and is the first in his Abundant Life Series. It is joined there by "Bookends, A Truth That Matters", second in that series.

THE GOOD LIFE will inspire you personally or in group study and includes discussion questions with each chapter.

