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God's Plan for Spiritual Battle

Victory over Sin, the World, and the Devil

Russell M. Stendal

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Preface

Let me ask you a question. What section of Scripture is most relevant to your Christian life? Between the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible, most of you would probably pick the New Testament. If you were to consider what the most important part of the New Testament is, I think most Christians would probably single out the four gospels, recognizing that the life, death, resurrection, and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most important part of the New Testament.

Out of the four gospels, if you were to pick three chapters that sum up and synthesize the message that Jesus Christ came to leave with us, the Sermon on the Mount is the prime candidate. At times, it has been called the Constitution of the kingdom of God, the Magna Carta of the Christian church, and the Little Gospel. There have been more books written on the Sermon on the Mount than on any other Scripture text. Entire libraries could be filled. The Sermon on the Mount has challenged Christians ever since it was given. The proclamation of the Beatitudes by Jesus Christ at the beginning of his public ministry marked the climax or watershed of moral teaching. After His message on the kingdom of God, proclaimed both by His lips and through His very life, death, and resurrection, this world has never been the same. Human history was divided in two: before and after Jesus Christ.

The first few times I read the Sermon on the Mount, I sensed that it contained something important; but for many years, Jesus' Beatitudes and His Sermon on the Mount seemed as if they had been written in code. I knew they contained something special, but I couldn't put my finger on it. In confirmation class, I was taught the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, and the Ten Commandments, but I couldn't figure out why I had to memorize all these things. It seemed like an unbelievable waste of time. I never understood the message God was trying to reveal to me, as I'm sure many of the thousands and thousands of young people who have been forced to memorize the same things never really understood its purpose.

One day I was driving up the road from Miami to Minneapolis. As we were going through Chattanooga, Tennessee, I turned on the radio and heard a preacher I didn't know, but what he said stuck in my mind. He said, "How in the world can we expect to have a deep revival when we are dealing with such a superficial generation?" Do you want a deep revival? Would you like to see a deep revival? Would you really like to see the power of God move in our present society?

Well then, we need to search for God. We need to uncover our hearts before Him. We need to seek Him in a very deep and profound way. God will not give His valuable treasures and powerful gifts to people who just want to be mediocre, superficial Christians, to people who are trying to do the minimum to go to heaven. That's a terrible position to be in. God is looking for people who will seek Him in spirit and in truth and who are willing to go His way no matter what.

The great heroes of the faith all went through trials and tribulations. God told Abraham to leave

his family, friends, and home town and travel to a land He promised to give him. After Abraham obeyed, God promised him a son, an heir, through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2). Twelve years after the miraculous birth of Isaac in his old age, Abraham was called upon by God to sacrifice his son who was most dear to him. When Abraham passed that test, the Bible says that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness and that Abraham is the father of those who have faith. Faith (believing God) is closely linked to obedience in the Scriptures. If we truly believe God, then we should also be willing to obey Him. If you don't desire to obey God, you really shouldn't read any further in this book about the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.

I say this because I don't want to have a part in bringing someone under worse condemnation than they already deserve. If you are not going to act on revelation of truth, it might be better for you not to know any more about it because then your responsibility will be less. If you listen to the Sermon on the Mount and begin to understand Jesus' message, but do not apply it or begin to practice it or implement it into your life, there is a great and grave responsibility that comes with refusing to act on your knowledge of revealed truth.

Jesus' ministry was preceded by John the Baptist, who was a typical prophet in many ways, but not typical of many preachers today. He preached a simple message, and it was this: repent and prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. If you are truly repentant, your life should change, and there should be visible fruits of repentance. John said that the axe has been laid to the root of the tree (Matthew 3:1-11). Time is running out; judgment is at hand. That was for the Jews, the ones who rejected this message, those who rejected Jesus, whom John the Baptist was announcing. They didn't have long to wait before their entire nation was uprooted and destroyed, and the survivors dispersed all over the known world.

John the Baptist was heralding the end of the age of the Old Testament (the old covenant), the end of the worship in the temple at Jerusalem. A new age, the age of the church, was dawning. In this age, God promised to live in a temple not built with human hands. God's temple is now us, His people.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy that one; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (I Corinthians 3:16-17).

I am convinced that we are now drawing near to the end of the age of the church. The city of Jerusalem is once again in the hands of the Jews after almost two thousand years of being trampled by the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). Our Lord Jesus Christ's return is getting closer and closer. God is getting ready to move again and do something special, something new. He desires to raise up a people, a victorious people who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, who have left their own plans and ambitions to one side and have become willing to do things His way, no matter what the cost.

There is a cost involved in following the Lord; but it is a price that we must pay voluntarily, of our

own free will. Jesus is not a terrorist. He's not like the communist guerrillas I met who point machine guns at people in order to get them to do what they want. He doesn't do things that way. If we want to try our own way and implement our own ideas, He lets us go ahead with them. We are free to discover the disastrous consequences of going our own way. Tragically, much of Christianity today is wandering around in the wilderness of man's good intentions and has never been able to enter into the promised land of God's rest where God fights our battles, where God opens the doors, where God leads the way, where God miraculously breaks the power of the enemy, and where we come along behind Him and possess the land in His Name.

As we look at the world today, organized Christianity is being thrown for loss on most fronts. We complain about the secular humanism that is running rampant in the schools of North America. We complain about the news media. We complain about Hollywood. We complain about all the sexual perversion and the abortions that are going on across this continent. We complain about the drug traffic. We complain about violence and insecurity. The list of our complaints goes on and on. Why should it be that the power of the enemy, the power of rebellion and the power of sin are so strong as to displace Christianity? How can this be? Iniquity should not be able to displace the presence of God; the presence of God should be able to displace the darkness.

What I believe it boils down to is that many of the people who are calling themselves God's representatives, calling themselves members of God's church, calling themselves part of the body of Christ, really, truly are not manifesting Jesus Christ through their lives, their attitudes, or their actions. They are not fighting the battle according to His plan. What many call Christianity is in reality humanism, religious humanism, and it will not, cannot, stand against the enemy. Religious persons and organizations are doing their own things in the name of God, expecting God to bless them, and He won't. He can't. God has some powerful things to say about it. Let us read just one of them.

And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons, and the hold of every unclean spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the Gentiles have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the power of her delicacies.

And I heard another voice from the heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye not be partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto the heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (Revelation 18:2-4).

God is talking about the fall of "Mystery Babylon." In the course of biblical history, Babylon has symbolized many things, all the way from the ancient (Old Testament) kingdom we know as Babylon to the early Christians calling pagan Rome Babylon, to Babylon being a type of apostate (prostituted) Christianity which has been defiled by the man-made, economic, and political systems of the world under Satan's control. In a nutshell, the roots of Babylon are in human selfishness which always brings mankind under bondage to the enemy. Babylon is a type of the religious

humanism that attempts to conduct the church of God according to the ways of the world, the world that according to the Scriptures is at enmity with God (James 4:4).

Are we going to implement God's kingdom our own way, this world's way? Or will we do it God's way? The Sermon on the Mount talks about doing it God's way. So often, when we receive good Bible teaching, we say "amen" to the preacher and leave church saying, "That message was right on." Then we go home and pigeon-hole it in the Babylonian file system in our minds; we put it right in its niche, right on top of the Babylonian foundation on which we have built our lives and human organizations, and then wonder why we are not seeing God's power and glory in our lives and in our churches.

Some of you can remember back to a day when God was moving, back when there was a real, authentic move of God, and maybe you are wondering why it isn't happening any more. In a certain sense, we cannot decree when God should move; He is not our servant; we are His servants. But in another sense, if we are not where God wants us to be, and He wants to move, He will pass us by and find someone who will do it the way He wants. That's tragic. Throughout history, He has passed different nations and peoples by. He dearly wanted to be received by His people, the nation of Israel. I believe the offer He gave to the Jews was a genuine offer. He wanted to bring the millennium in right then and there and begin to bless the world through the Jews, but they rejected Him. And out of the ashes of that rejection, He instituted the Christian church.

And the Christian church has a mixed record as we look back over history. There are huge sectors of the world where Christianity has made few inroads. There are Muslim countries in the world today where the Christians can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. These enemy fortresses have hardly been touched by Christianity. Or worse yet, there are places where Christians have gone, only to be defeated again and again and again. But what really bothers me is that enemy power, strength and resources are growing right in the midst of what used to be Christian nations in Western Europe, United States, and Canada.

The apostle James says that when we know that which is good and don't do it, that it is sin (James 4:17). I think one of the great sins of the Christian church has been our failure to oppose the enemy, failure to oppose evil according to God's way and according to God's plan.

I want to look at the Beatitudes, not just in the light of something you can define as "Isn't this wonderful? Aren't they logical? Doesn't it all fit beautifully?" but in the light of a battle plan, in the light of "This is something that we can begin to practice and implement in our lives, so that we will be able to stand in the day of evil that is coming. So that when everything else is shaken, we won't be shaken." The Bible says that everything that can be shaken will be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-27). Do you want to stand? Do you want what you believe to be your Christian faith to fail the minute there is some adversity? Or do you want to develop godly character in your life that will stand against any attack of the enemy, so that the storm can rage, the winds howl, and the floods rise, yet your house stands firm because it was founded on the rock. Jesus says,

Therefore, whosoever hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him unto a prudent

man, who built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded upon a rock.
(Matthew 7:24-25)

The Greek word for house, *oikos*, has an extended or figurative meaning. It can mean house, or it can mean household. Jesus was talking about a house that represents our household or family. He was saying that if we put His teachings into practice, our families will be founded on the Rock, which is Himself, and we will not be shaken no matter what kind of storm is brewing around us.

We are living in dangerous times. I find Christians who didn't believe in a literal devil or in a literal hell, and suddenly some of their children were almost sacrificed to the devil by literal Satanists. I meet people who didn't believe that when the Word of God speaks out against homosexuality and promiscuity, that it was a message for us in our present day and age. Now some of these same people are dying of AIDS, others are witnessing the death of their children or their friends.

There are incredible forces of darkness at work today. Satan is in the business of bringing as many people down with him as he can. He realizes that his time is short. He's not playing games. Satan plays for keeps. When he louses somebody up, and that person dies that way, it's for keeps. People are really being lost, people who could even be from your own family. The stakes that we are playing for are incredibly high. We are talking about the priceless lives and souls of men, women and children.

We are definitely in a spiritual battle for the hearts and souls of those held in bondage by the enemy. I hope and trust that the truth God has revealed to me from the Beatitudes will have as great an impact on your life and ministry as it has had on mine.

This truth was not revealed to me in an abstract manner, but through the lives of men and women of God who have had a great impact on my spiritual formation. To give due credit to all those whom God has used in my life would require that I write a separate volume, but I wish to mention one very special person that God placed in my life.

This person is my father, Chad Stendal, who laid the spiritual foundation (total commitment to the Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ) for everything that I would accomplish later in life. My dad is still my best friend, and I have called upon his God-given wisdom, insight, and discernment for help and correction throughout the writing of this manuscript.

There is a sense in which this book has been coming together for the past ten years, ever since a memorable incident in early 1983. I had been in a very frustrating type of ministry since 1974 when my brother and I homesteaded a ranch in eastern Colombia with a vision to train, send out, and support Christian workers to evangelize Indian tribes. I was on a rare trip to Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, and was lodged in the San Diego hotel downtown. It was clear to me that our ministry was in a stalemate; we were not winning over the enemy in eastern Colombia. Armed gangs of violent drug traffickers and groups of Marxist guerrillas were threatening most aspects of

our work. But what really bothered me were the inconsistencies and defeats I was experiencing in my own personal life.

After spending some time alone in prayer in my hotel room on the seventh floor, I picked up the phone and on an impulse called an old friend of our family. Ricardo was bubbling over with joy from a revelation he had just received from the Lord while ministering in Venezuela. In a few minutes, he met me at the San Diego and began to share it with me. The message was none other than the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord met with us in such a way that we both made a commitment to dedicate the remainder of our lives to preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Little did we know what the full ramifications of our meeting that afternoon would be.

The message of the Beatitudes turned out to be like the scroll that was given to the prophet Ezekiel (and later to the apostle John in Revelation): it tasted sweet, but was bitter to stomach. I no sooner started preaching Jesus' message than I was put to the test. I was kidnapped and held hostage for almost five months. The Lord allowed me to prove the Beatitudes under extremely difficult circumstances so I could preach them with authority.

Since that time, God has opened many doors for ministry in seemingly unlikely or impossible circumstances. I have learned a great deal about God's plan for battle as I have followed the Lord into public schools, universities, army barracks, prisons, churches, and even back into the guerrilla camps. I have learned some of God's secrets for victory and revival that I now feel great urgency to share in print.

I love a good fight. And when unjustly attacked, I have learned to seek the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit and retaliate by overcoming evil with good. There's a huge difference between a peacemaker and a pacifist.

This battle plan, gleaned from the life and message of Jesus, has been on my heart even before I was kidnapped by terrorists in 1983 and held hostage under extreme conditions. Since then, thousands of missionaries, pastors, and Christians have been kidnapped, murdered, or forced to flee from their places of ministry in rural Colombia.

Many of those who chose to remain in the path of ever present danger have rallied around this message. A thriving underground church is beginning to multiply in a huge area about the size of North Korea in the south and east of this country where Bibles, church buildings, formal ministry, and even house meetings have been prohibited for more than 25 years.

Severe persecution in rural Colombia has served to bring real Christians together, identify the true church, and cleanse believers from corruption so that the promises of God can be fulfilled.

– Russell M. Stendal, November 2009

*When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him
(Proverbs 16:7).*

*And they have overcome him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their
testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death (Revelation 12:11).*

About This Sample Book



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Going God's Way, Not My Way

A little church in a small town invited me as a guest speaker several years ago. Unknown to me, this congregation in western Minnesota was going through some problems. These difficulties had the potential to harm the church. The pastor, not knowing what to do, decided to bring someone in from the outside to preach, hoping that God would use an outsider who knew nothing of their problem to address their need. After a lot of prayer and reflection, he chose me. The pastor called me and was overjoyed when I confirmed that I was available for the date he had in mind. He even put an ad in the local paper announcing that I was going to be there Sunday morning and evening.

Everything was going fine until the Saturday night before I was scheduled to speak at this church. A dear friend phoned and wanted to know if I could be in Winnipeg, Canada by 10:00 a.m. Monday to appear on a television program. Years before, at the start of my ministry, I had promised the Lord that I would not cancel a small meeting to do a larger one somewhere else. I did not want to be a respecter of persons or churches and I understood that many times small things are more important in the Lord's work than the big things are. But now I forgot my promise to the Lord.

Sunday morning, I preached in the little church. The sermon went well, and even though I didn't know anything about the difficulties they were having, I hit on their problem. The pastor was really excited and enthused until I told him after lunch that I needed to be in Winnipeg by 10:00 a.m. the next day. I wanted to get out of doing the evening service and leave immediately. "No, don't do that," he said, "Take a nap; you can sleep in my bed. Do the evening service and then drive all night if you need to."

"No, I need to be in good shape when I arrive in Winnipeg." I was thinking of being on TV and did not want to arrive with circles under my eyes. "No, I've got to go. There's this big opportunity to be effective for the Lord on television."

So I climbed in the car and started to drive (at least I thought I started to drive) to Winnipeg. I headed north on a US highway and soon arrived in Montevideo, Minnesota where there is an unusual triangular intersection. It was raining very hard, and my alternator belt started to slip. I was getting a discharge indication because it did not want to run the lights, the blower and the wipers all at once. I found an old abandoned service station where I could drive in out of the rain and try to tighten the belt. But when I came back out on the road at this funny triangular intersection in the heavy rain, I went the wrong way. I turned south instead of north. So, because I had to make that appointment in Winnipeg, I was driving as fast as I could go, but in the wrong direction.

After two or three hours of driving, the discharge light came on again, so I pulled off the road and found a better place to work on the car. I pulled my blue jeans on, got out a crowbar, slid under the car, and really tightened up that alternator belt so it could not slip any more. Then I went to make a phone call. The area code on the public phone was from either the extreme south of Minnesota or the northern part of Iowa. I was chuckling to myself, "Imagine the crazy nut that brought a pay phone from Iowa and installed it all the way up here in northern Minnesota."

I was still chuckling about that when I got back in the car and drove out to the main highway. A sign indicated north or south, so of course I pulled out north, going the right way now. I drove and drove and drove for another couple of hours. Finally, I started thinking that I should have hit the interstate a long time before. Where in the world was I? I pulled over at another intersection and got my map to find out where I was.

I could find no such road in northern Minnesota, so I had to look all over the map. Finally, I found that I was thirteen miles south of Clarkfield, which was where I had started, and I had been driving all afternoon. "Oh no, it's almost time for the evening service." I thought, "And I'll be driving right through Clarkfield. What if someone sees me? They'll think I was a liar when I said I had to go to Winnipeg. I better not go through the town; I better turn left at this intersection and go out to Interstate 29 and up to Winnipeg through the Dakotas."

I turned left on the county road that intersected the US highway and drove about three or four miles when there, before my eyes, I saw a pay phone out in the middle of a cornfield – just a cornfield and a pay phone sitting beside the road. When I saw that phone, I knew the Lord was speaking to me to pull over, so I picked up the phone, called the pastor and said, "If you still want me to speak, I'm available." The pastor was just leaving his house for the church, and I said, "I haven't got time to explain, but if you still want me to share, I can be there."

He said, "Yes, come on down."

So, I returned to the church and arrived several minutes late. The song service was in progress, and I had to speak in my greasy blue jeans. I told them how I had spent the afternoon. That message turned out to be very effective and hit the nail right on the head in terms of the error of some of the people. The church was reconciled and went forward in the Lord. I got back in the car and drove all night to Winnipeg and appeared on television the next morning. After the show, I conked out in the middle of the television studio offices, so I had to tell them what had happened too.

When our hearts are set on serving the Lord and doing what He wants, even if we make a mistake and get the 'bit in our teeth' or become confused, the Lord can still intervene and help us. I thought I was going to Winnipeg, but I had told the Lord that above and beyond everything else I wanted to serve Him and He was in charge of my life. So, if I wanted to drive up and down the state of Minnesota, that was my problem, but He was going to securely help me arrive at the right place at the right time. As we become sensitive to the Lord, and as we learn to walk in His Spirit,

we don't have to beat our heads against the wall so much, and it becomes easier and easier to follow Him.

God offers us complete security in Jesus Christ if we will only submit to His authority. He is the only one who can overcome the enemy, and He is offering to dwell inside each and every one of us.

The story of Gideon (Judges Chapters 6 and 7) gives perspective to what we will study in this book. Throughout the Bible, an Old Testament story will contain a type or reference of Jesus Christ (in parable). King David, for instance, typified Christ in many ways. Joseph typified Jesus, as did Joshua and many others. Gideon is an outstanding example. He was the youngest son in the least important family in Israel. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and called him to lead His people to victory. Gideon checked it out; he wanted to make sure it really was the Lord. He didn't want to go following after any spirit that was talking to him. He genuinely wanted to know if this was God, and he resolved his doubts by putting out fleeces. But once he was sure that God was really talking to him, he began to follow orders wholeheartedly.

Gideon blew the trumpet and announced the message: God's people were in bondage, and they needed to overcome the enemy. You remember the story – thirty-two thousand men answered the trumpet call to fight in the Lord's army against Midian. Then God said to Gideon, "Tell the ones who are afraid to go home." Twenty-two thousand men went home and left Gideon with only ten thousand men to face a vastly superior enemy force.

When it comes to engaging the enemy, when it comes to standing for the Lord, when it comes to really taking on enemy strongholds, when it comes to getting the victory over sin in your own life, what is your attitude? Are you afraid to try? Are you a person who wants to be saved and no more? A person who wants to do the minimum required for salvation in the future with no desire to be saved from the habitual bondage of sin here and now?

How can we have assurance of salvation and eternal life through the power of God in the future if we are not experiencing the power of God in our lives at present to save us and deliver us from the bondage of habitual sin here and now through the presence of His life within us? Remember that the simplest definition of sin according to the Word of God is "going our own way, instead of going God's way."

There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

For the wages of sin is death, but the grace of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Jesus said unto him, I AM the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

One day, a dear friend of ours (a clergyman) brought a man to us who was frothing at the mouth, gritting his teeth, rolling his eyes, and screaming demonic curses. With difficulty, he got him to the door of the house, and we occupied ourselves in dealing with the situation. I turned around after a

few seconds to greet our friend, wondering why he wasn't helping us, but he was gone. He brought that guy to our doorstep and took off running as fast as he could go.

I'm sure that is how those twenty-two thousand would-be warriors of Gideon's were. "Are you afraid?" "Yes!" "Well then, go home." And Gideon didn't have to say another word to them; they all disappeared.

That left ten thousand men, and you know how the story ends; God only chose three hundred. He asked Gideon to have them pass before him and drink water. The ones that laid down their weapons, lay down on the bank, and scooped up the water with both hands, God said were unfit for His army. But the ones who had their weapons in one hand and were ever watchful for the enemy while they lapped the water with their other hand, those were the ones He picked, the ones that really meant business. The water might typify the Holy Spirit – for our comparison, let's assume that it does.

We're talking about ten thousand Christians attempting to be filled with the provision of God's Holy Spirit, yet out of that army of ten thousand, 9,700 of them were no good for facing the enemy. Why? Because they were interested in taking the water of the Holy Spirit (the power, gifts, and blessings of God) only for themselves and for filling their own needs. They were not really interested in their weapons, or aware of the enemy. They were just sitting there fat, dumb, and happy; too stupid to really understand the danger that they were in.

As I travel and speak across the country, I see churches full of people who are using the anointing and gifts that God has given them to get things for themselves; they are not fully aware of the enemy or of the great spiritual battle raging around us.

They are not alert and interested in getting the job done; they're not interested in pressing on and winning the victory. God cannot use them in His army because if He tried to put them in the front lines of the battle, they would be wiped out. So rather than lose them, He sends them home too. Another reason He cannot use them in the battle is that when He wins the battle, they'll think they did it, and they'll take the credit for it and become so proud that Satan will trip them up.

So, the thirty-two thousand men who joined the army of God were reduced to three hundred. God gave them a strange, strange plan. He told them to take three hundred pitchers and three hundred torches and to cover the torches with the pitchers. Then God told them to take three hundred trumpets and get into position inside the enemy camp in the middle of the night.

Have you ever heard of such a crazy plan? It's the only plan I can think of in the Scriptures where the light is covered up. The Sermon on the Mount says we are to let our light shine and be like cities on the hill top (Matthew 5:14-15). But here the Angel of the Lord is talking about covering up the light until the proper time. If we are really going to get the victory, if we are really going to win the battle, we have to follow our orders. God has chosen to work through His people. God has chosen to use people like you and me. If God can't get us, His people, to do what He wants done when He wants it done, how is He supposed to win the battle? At the end of the book of Isaiah, He says He couldn't find anybody to help Him with what He was going to do, so He rolled up His

sleeves and did it Himself. But it's talking about bringing terrible, terrible judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth. Do we want that? (Isaiah 63:5).

Gideon's three hundred men got down into the midst of the enemy camp and broke their clay pots, exposing the light. I think the clay pots are a symbol of the earthen vessels that we are. God isn't interested in polishing and smoothing and making bigger and better earthen vessels. If we are going to win the victory, the clay pots have to break to let His light shine out. We are still trying to keep our clay pot intact while at the same time we are trying to let our light shine; it's a contradiction; we can't have it both ways. If the light is to shine through us the way He wants it to, our clay pot must break or the light will always be hidden under the bushel.

You and I need to be willing to let Him break us of everything He does not want. We must be willing to allow the Spirit of God to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13). Only then can God's light shine forth (through us) in a way that will overcome the enemy.

The enemy became confused; the enemy did not know what to do. At the same time, Gideon's men blew their trumpets, which is the call of the message: the living Word of God that only He can put on our lips which will rally the people of God for battle and strike uncontrollable fear into the hearts of their enemies. The Bible says that the enemy (the Midianites) turned upon themselves; Gideon didn't really have to kill all his enemies; they took care of most of it for him.

Then, when the Midianites were on the run, the Bible says that the 9,700 men that were sent home, the twenty-two thousand men that left because they were afraid, and some guys that never showed up to be in the army in the first place all came running out of the bushes and helped finish off the enemy and chase them out of the land. The entire nation of Israel was delivered, probably several million people.

So we do not have to be a majority. It only takes a few men and women, or even children, who are interested in building on the right foundation, which is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It takes total surrender to Him as Master and Lord and willingness to give up everything and follow Him; the willingness to say, "Lord, break me, make me into what You want me to be." This is the battle plan.

I'm not much of a theologian, but I've told some of the theologians I know that I believe there is only one essential doctrine that is worth fighting for. That doctrine is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He's right; He's the only one that is right. It's not my opinion vs. your opinion vs. someone else's opinion, or this doctrine vs. that doctrine. It's what He thinks about it, and how He feels about it, and what He wants done about it. That's where it's at. If we look at the body of Christ from this perspective, He will draw true believers together to Himself and lead them to victory (Genesis 49:10).

The Scripture is clear: It says *unto Him shall the gathering of the people be*. If we are trying to unite people under any banner other than the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we will ultimately fail, and Satan will bottle up the church again. It's not a question of whether the Protestants are better than the

Catholics or the Baptists vs. the Presbyterians or the Pentecostals vs. the Charismatics. Is Jesus Christ the Lord? Is He the King? Are we willing to act on that no matter what the cost?

I have known people with their theology totally warped, with theology that would make your hair stand on end if they told it to you, but who were sold out to Jesus Christ. Jesus will work with people like this, and He'll straighten them out in the end if they have submitted to Him and placed their lives under His authority. Not only that, but when we give Him authority over us, He gives us security. This is how Gideon won the victory. This is how Jesus intends to win the victory over evil and purify all of the things that are wrong in our personal lives, in His church, and in the world that we live in today.

The victory is available, and in a certain sense it is free, because Jesus Christ has already won the victory. But in another sense, it will cost us everything we have because to be a part of His army, to be part of Him, we need to be willing to leave everything else behind. *For whosoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it* (Matthew 16:25). This is the only way to be truly satisfied.

So, imagine that you are a Pharisee who has been standing in the (spiritual) desert beside the Jordan River, listening to the preaching of John the Baptist. You have come under conviction from the Holy Spirit, and you have decided you want to repent from the dead works of your organized religion. You want to turn from going your way and doing your own good works; now you want to go God's way. John the Baptist has baptized you in the Jordan River, and Jesus Christ is sitting up on the mountain; you have followed Him there, and now you are going to listen to what He has to say.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain; and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him; and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, . . . (Matthew 5:1-2).

The first thing you now must decide is are you one of the disciples who left everything to follow Christ, or are you one of the multitude who is looking on? Some of those people were probably wondering, "Boy, John the Baptist is a fiery prophet, and they say this one is even better. He does all kinds of miracles. I wonder what He's going to say. He's probably going to say, 'Unless you repent, you're all going to be cast into the depths of hell and burned up.'" They were probably expecting literal fire and brimstone. And what they got was *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens . . .*

A paraphrase of this verse in Aramaic (which is probably the language Jesus taught in, according to the Peshitta text which is still used by the Eastern Orthodox Church) could be: Blessed are the poor in pride for they and only they have God as their King. The word "poor" here is not a word that means you have a little bit of something, like a little bit of pride or not too much pride. It's the word used for the beggar who is absolutely, totally destitute; he has been completely dispossessed. It is the beggar who is standing there with no clothes, no food, no money, no nothing, the one who is stripped of everything.

I'm also told that in the original context there is an element of choice, so it could be translated: Blessed are those who choose to relinquish their pride no matter what the cost because they are the only ones who really have God as their king. This is the only way into the kingdom of heaven; there is no other way. As long as we think we have a better idea than God, as long as we think we are sufficient in some way apart from God, as long as we think God owes us favors, as long as we think we can appease God by giving Him back a little bit of what He's given us, as long as we think we can impose our own will on God by worshiping Him indirectly through intermediaries, we will not receive the full blessing of the Lord.

The only way to enter the kingdom of God is to recognize that we are destitute before Him and acknowledge that we don't have anything apart from Him; we need to depend on Him for everything. We wish to bow before Him and declare that He is to be sovereign over us. We choose to have Him dispossess us of all our pride, arrogance, and conceit.

If we could be saved by memorizing some Bible verse, repeating some prayer, or participating in the sacraments and traditions of our church, it would be salvation by works, not by faith. Don't let anyone mislead you; we can only be saved by Jesus Christ. We can only be saved by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling Him our Lord. "Lord, I want You to be in charge. I want to turn from going my way, I want to go Your way." There is no in-between way. It's either our way or His way. Either He's right, and we're wrong, or else it's the other way around. We must turn (repent) from going our own way and place our trust (faith) in Jesus Christ, so that by His grace (power) we might live a life pleasing to Him.

I've heard preachers say that repentance is no longer necessary, only belief; all we need is faith. How can we have faith without repentance? How can we go God's way if we haven't given up our own way first? Even when we talk about repentance (to many of us and for a long time myself included), it only means repenting of the negative things that the Bible or the church said were wrong. In other words, don't lie, don't cheat, don't murder, don't commit adultery, no fornication, no this, no that. If I had done any of these things, then they needed to be confessed and forsaken, and that is true. But this is not complete repentance. What did man take for himself? What did Adam take for himself in the Garden of Eden? How did man fall from God's grace in the first place?

God said, "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, but don't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God said to Adam and Eve, "Don't try to decide what's right and what's wrong for yourself. Let Me decide that. And the day that you decide for yourself by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die."

Satan said, "No, you won't die, you will be like gods, deciding good and evil." They thought that would be nice. They thought they were not going to die; they would be enlightened. They partook of the fruit and died spiritually. They fell from God's grace and became mortal. And we are still fallen, and the curse is still here. The effects of the curse did not stop with Adam and Eve because

God had placed creation under their dominion; their fall literally signed the title deed of the earth over to Satan.

Adam and Eve fell by appropriating the knowledge of good and evil for themselves. They fell by doing something that they thought would be good. But look at us. We are preaching a repentance that is only half way. We'll let God decide what is wrong, but we'll still decide what is right. We'll pay God our tithe, but we're still going to decide what to do with the 90 percent that is left over. We'll go to church on Sunday, but we're still going to decide what to do with the remaining six days. We want the blessing of the Lord, but we are not willing to pay the price of returning the knowledge of good and evil back to God.

The tragic thing about this is that it is not the path to restoration; it is not the way to re-obtain the blessing of God. There is a catchy word going around in Christian circles: "renewal." Exactly what is it that we are trying to renew? Many good things God doesn't want to renew. There are man-made divisions, doctrines, traditions, and barriers that we try to renew which God may want to dismantle so his church can truly be restored.

God wants to restore us. Restoration is different from renewal. Renewal can be superficial; restoration goes down as deep as it needs to get things back on the right foundation. The path to genuine restoration of the church requires that we be willing to dismantle some of our good human ideas which are really an abomination to the Lord (if they were never ordained by God in the first place), so He can start over and complete what He originally intended (making us into men and women of integrity by conforming us to His image). Renewal can mean polishing up our hypocrisy so that it looks nice. God does not necessarily want to renew our human plans, traditions, programs, and religious machinery that we have attempted to implement in His name; He wants to restore us to proper fellowship and communion with Himself. He only wants to renew those things that He deems right and were developed on the right foundation in the first place.

The word "renew" is used less than a dozen times in Scripture, the first usage being the renewal of the kingdom of Israel under King Saul, which was a disaster (I Samuel 11:14). In half a dozen positive uses of the word "renew" in Scripture (such as in Romans 12:2), the word is carefully qualified by the context to mean the renewal of that which sovereignly comes from God.

On the other hand, the verb "to restore" is used over one thousand times in the Word of God and contains connotations of completion, purification, and a return to wholeness (peace). It is also related to the Hebrew greeting "shalom," which means peace (wholeness). This peace can only come from a right relationship with the Prince of Peace, not just from an absence of war.

Blessed are the poor in pride, those who choose to relinquish their pride, those who choose to have God divest them of their pride, for they and only they have God as their King. Do you want to have God as your King? Do you want to belong to Him? Do you want Him to say, "Yes, those are My people. They belong to Me."

Or do you want Him to look at you and say, "Well, they did all kinds of wonderful works; they prophesied and cast out demons in My name, but I never knew them. They never did the will of

my Father in heaven. They belong to themselves. They belong to the world and to the prince of this world. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23).

It’s going to be one way or the other; there is no in-between course. Do you want to be able to stand in the presence of the Lord and look Him square in the eye and have Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things. Come, receive your inheritance because now I am going to put you over many things.” Do you really want this to happen?



Training for the Battle

For, behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that comes shall burn them up, said the LORD of the hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness be born, and in his wings he shall bring saving health; and ye shall go forth and jump like calves of the herd. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I make, said the LORD of the hosts. (Malachi 4:1-3).

John the Baptist came as a type of Elijah to prepare the way for the ministry of the Lord. In hindsight, we see that he came to herald the end of an era; the Old Testament age had ended. Most of the Jews rejected the ministry of the Lord. They turned on Him. They said, “Crucify Him! Let His blood be upon us and our children.” (Matthew 27:23-25). This is exactly what happened. The Christian church was planted by the Holy Spirit in the ashes of the Jewish rejection of Christ, and the gospel was then offered to the Gentiles. Only in recent years has the nation of Israel come back to the Holy Land, after almost two thousand years of blindness and continued rejection towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ (their Messiah).

The Bible says that Jerusalem will be downtrodden by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Now, with the Jews back in Jerusalem, it is clear we are approaching the end of the age of the church. Every day that passes comes a little bit closer. We do not know exactly when, but we do know that the Lord is at the door again, and we are waiting for His second coming. This is the hope that all believers have.

The prophet Malachi reported that. Therefore, we now say blessed are the proud and even those that work wickedness are prospered. I did a film on the cocaine traffic, and one scene showed some of the mansions the drug traffickers are living in. School principals and people in the educational system said, “Don’t show that to the kids. If they see those mansions, they are going to want to live like that, and they’ll all want to be drug traffickers!”

We are living in a day and age when the arrogant are called blessed, when the people who can find a way to beat the system, to traffic in drugs, to cheat, lie, or steal to get ahead, are looked at in many quarters with a certain amount of respect. But the Lord says there is a day coming when He is going to act, and the tables are going to turn.

There is a day coming which will be like a furnace, and all the stubble will be burned up. Only the gold, silver, and precious stones will be left. Only that which we have done in obedience to the call of Jesus Christ will have lasting, eternal value. The prophet Malachi says that for those of us

who fear His (God's) name, a new day will dawn, a new age of righteousness. We will go forth on that day, and the wicked will be like ashes under our feet. *Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD: and he shall convert the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with destruction* (Malachi 4:5-6). This is complete destruction or anathema such as what happened to Jerusalem in AD 70.

Family reconciliation is essential to God's plan. It's at the very center of God's plan for redemption. He bought us with a great price (He gave His life for us), and His plan is to incorporate us into His own family. We are to be a holy (righteous) nation (family) of kings and priests. There are two aspects to family reconciliation; one has to do with the family of God, and the other deals with our physical families and the need for the fathers (here the word for father means "parent" and applies to both father and mother in the family) and their children's hearts to be turned towards one another. This applies to all of us. There is not one of us who is not either a father or a child. All of us either have children, or we were born into a family some place. It covers all of us.

On another level, this is talking about God the Father reaching out to us and desiring us to return our hearts to Him. Unless we turn our hearts to Him and allow Him to change us from the inside out, we will be caught in the terrible destruction that is coming upon the whole earth at the end of this present age.

You see, that which is not pure, that which is not holy, cannot stand in the presence of the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, the people believed that if they were to see God, they would die. Several times when the Angel of the Lord appeared to someone they said, "Woe is me, I'm going to die. I've seen God." They knew they could not stand in the presence of God and live. That is why there was a veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple. You could not look right into the presence of God and expect to live.

But with the death of Jesus Christ, that veil was rent through the middle (Luke 23:45). If you study Ezekiel Chapters 40 through 47, you will see that in Ezekiel's temple there is no veil. The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies are no longer divided.

Jesus has opened the way for us to come right into the presence of God the Father. We take it lightly; we take it for granted. Many times we pray, and we say any old thing that pops into our mind. I want this; I want that; so and so bothers me. I have wondered how some of these prayers sound to the ears of God, or if God sometimes is forced to tune us out because we are talking utter nonsense because our hearts are not right before Him, and we have not turned our hearts back to Him (to do what He wants).

I drove past a church the other day and saw a sign: "Talk to God. He will listen." That sounds nice, doesn't it? But you know there are lots of people talking to God with very little evidence that God is listening. I believe a more scriptural statement would be: "We need to put all of our attention into listening to God because He has very important things He wants to say to us."

He wants to talk to us. We have defined prayer as us expressing ourselves to God, us talking to

God, when God's definition of prayer is that He wants to communicate (two way) with us. It's not just us telling God what to do.

Have you ever spent a couple of hours on your knees telling God how to run His universe? I have spent a lot of time telling God that He ought to do this, and He ought to do that, and I needed this and that, giving Him a whole bunch of orders without realizing who He is and who I am and what a great privilege I have in being able to come before Him. I need to find out what He is trying to say to me. What does He want from me?

But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you (Matthew 6:33).

Several times when I have been confused in my life, not knowing the will of God or not being able to get a clear answer, one of the main causes that has blocked my communication with Him has been that God wanted to say something to me, and I just was not listening. He had something important He wanted to say to me, and all I wanted to do was complain about my problems and insist on trying to convince God to implement my will in these matters.

We need to look at things from God's perspective. Many times, God in His mercy reaches out to us, gives us gifts, grants us favors, and does all kinds of things for us that we do not deserve, starting with His whole plan of redemption. But as we grow and mature in the Lord, He wants to bring us to a point to where the cart and the horse are in the proper order, we realize who He is, and our relationship with Him is not something we take in a superficial, frivolous manner.

What would happen if the phone rang in your house and you were told that the President was expecting you and wished to spend fifteen minutes with you on a certain day and at a certain time? How would you treat that interview? Would you go and talk about the weather, complain about your neighbor and this and that, or would you give it some serious thought so you did not squander your time. Would you respect his time so that after your interview was over, the president's impression of you would not be: "What a superficial, self-centered, selfish lout that just walked through my office."

I think many times we come into the presence of God concerned only with ourselves, concerned only with things that are bothering us, not concerned with what God wants, and not concerned with the needs of those around us. This is the type of situation the prophet Malachi is talking about. He is saying that in order to have the blessing of the Lord and see a day when the proud are not called blessed, when we will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked and between those who serve God and those who do not, the priorities in our lives must be in order; we must put God first.

In the previous chapter, we dealt with the first beatitude, the poor in spirit, the poor in pride and those who choose to let God deal with (divest them of) their pride. We cannot deal with our own pride. Every time I start thinking I don't have any pride left in my life, guess what happens? The Lord allows me to go through an experience that reveals to me there is still plenty of pride left. All of us in the natural have pride. Why do we have pride? You see, we are created in the image of

God. This means that all the qualities and attributes that God has, we also have the potential to have, but on a much smaller scale. God is sovereign over the universe, and God has allowed each one of us to be sovereign over our tiny will. We can choose to serve God, or we can choose to go our own way, which will ultimately end in bondage to Satan.

God experiences emotions; the Bible contains many references to God's love, God's anger, and God's jealousy when His people stray after someone else or something else. God wishes to place all of these things in their proper perspective. He wishes to change our hearts so His emotions can begin to flow through us. I was reading a quote the other night by Oswald Chambers. He said, "You cannot think a spiritual muddle clear; you have to obey it clear."

When things are confused, when you don't know what to do, when you're not hearing the voice of the Lord clearly, it is impossible from the level of our human thinking to reason our way out of it. The only way out, the only way to regain that intimate communication with God, the only way to regain that total peace and tranquility that comes from being in the will of God, is to begin to obey God. Take steps of obedience. This is the only way to be able to hear from God on a continual basis. If we are not willing to obey God in the small things, we will not hear Him on the big things. If we only consult Him every time there is a major decision, we'll be one of those people wandering around not knowing what the will of the Lord is and saying, "I can't hear the voice of God. I'm confused. I'm not sure if what I'm hearing is the still, small voice of God or not."

God has created each of us with a conscience so we can know if we are pleasing God or not. The more we obey God and respond to what we know is right, the more sensitive our conscience becomes.

Now look at the next beatitude. *Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted.* The Greek word for mourn, *pénthos*, is very important. It is the term that was used for mourning the dead. It can also mean a passionate grief that leads to action. Those who mourn are those who die to their own way and live to follow Christ, their master. This leads to some very hard choices. Worldly pursuits that used to provide fleeting pleasures must be renounced. Jesus tells us that *No man can serve two masters.* Those who truly surrender to God and submit to the authority of Christ will grieve at the status of the world around them. They will renounce ill-gotten gains, as well as the pursuit of worldly power, prestige, and pleasure even if it causes them great grief at the time.

Those who renounce their own way and the ways of the world to take up their cross and follow Christ will be comforted. The Greek word, *parakaléo*, translated "comforted" has a wide range of meaning. It can mean anything – calling for aid, beseeching God in prayer, being exhorted, being encouraged (or even won over to a given plan), and being comforted in times of sorrow. This is the same root as the word used in the gospel of John for Comforter (Holy Spirit).

When we choose to give up the ways of the world by renouncing everything that belongs to the kingdom of darkness, God responds by giving us the down payment on our inheritance in Christ: He sends us the Comforter. The Holy Spirit will exhort and encourage us in the way of the Lord. He will convince us of the truth.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all the things that I have said unto you (John 14:26).

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32).

When the Holy Spirit shines God's truth into our hearts, a transformation takes place. All darkness, gloom and despair must flee from the light of His presence. Those who are comforted have a heart that has been softened. It's a heart that is tender. It's a heart that operates from God's perspective and feels things the way God feels them because it is a heart filled with His presence. It is a heart that is repentant of the sins of the past and can recognize the consequences of these mistakes. It is a heart that continues to mourn and cry out to God saying, "Lord, change me, I don't want to be like this anymore," every time the Holy Spirit brings to light something that needs to be placed on the altar and disposed of.

It is a heart that when it comes in contact with someone else who is hurting, produces tears as it identifies with that person. What if that was me? How would I want to be treated if it were me? What does God want me to do for this person? It's a heart that begins to feel the same way God is feeling when we come into contact with sin and with its devastation and destruction around us. It is a heart that can begin to implement God's supreme strategy for victory by loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us, and overcoming evil with good. It is a heart that understands the strategic importance of "turning the other cheek" and "going the extra mile."

There is another way to mourn. We can mourn out of bitterness because we did not get our way. We've all seen what happens when a little child doesn't get his way; he pouts and stamps and begins to cry because his will has been thwarted. That kind of mourning and those kinds of tears are not blessed. It's the other way around. That's not what God desires; He desires a heart that is set to follow Him. He wants a heart ready for Him to change, a hard heart that He has softened. He begins to soften our heart when He begins to change our heart, which is what happens when genuine conversion takes place.

Once he has plowed up the hard, fallow ground, He will plant His humility, meekness, tenderness, righteousness, and mercy in our hearts. Like an expert gardener, He will continue to cultivate His good fruit, and at the same time, pull out the weeds by the roots until our hearts are pure. His goal is to form men and women of integrity who will overcome evil with good.

Giving up our own way, and the fleeting pleasures of the world may cause us to mourn, but Jesus promises to comfort us. He will send us the Comforter, His Holy Spirit.

Ye have heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not commit murder, and whosoever shall commit murder shall be guilty of the judgment; but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother out of control shall be in danger of the judgment, and whosoever shall insult his brother shall be in danger of the council, but whosoever shall say, Thou art impious, shall be in danger of hell.

Ye have heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you,

That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28).

What is Jesus describing here? He is talking about someone who is no longer thinking in the legalistic terms of the law of God, but who has been softened and is repentant from the heart. To fully understand what Jesus is telling us, we must realize that true repentance goes beyond the letter of the law. It is not just *Thou shalt not murder*; it's not just, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. God wants to deal with the very seeds and roots of rebellion (going our own way), wrong thoughts, and wrong feelings in our hearts before they ever get manifested into words and deeds.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. The meek are those who submit themselves to God. *Praüs*, the Greek word translated “meek” is a very interesting word. The ancient Greeks used this word to describe their war horses, among other things. The horse was perfectly trained, ready for battle, and would go into battle and trample enemies underfoot. It would participate in the war with the rider; this was called a meek horse. The words meek and *praüs* are not identical; the translators did the best they could, but the Greek word carries a different range of meaning from ours.

I'll tell you why the Greeks called their horses *praüs*, or meek. When the horse got to the level of training where it would obey the master (the rider) no matter what was going on, it could be trusted in the heat of battle not to do something stupid or foolish. Once the rider knew that he could trust the animal, and it would obey him no matter what, he called it a meek horse even though it might be a powerful, thoroughbred stallion, capable of killing enemies in the battle.

This horse has tremendous power, capacity, and ability, but it has given up its own way and is allowing itself to be guided and ordered by the master. That is what the word *praüs* means; it means submission to the master. It doesn't mean submission to just anybody. A meek person in the biblical sense of the word is not someone who allows just anybody to tell them what to do. It is not someone who allows everyone to trample over the top of them and just goes with the flow. It is all of our gifts and abilities, everything that God has put into us, under His control and submitted to Him so that even in the worst crisis imaginable, we're not going to take the bit in our teeth and bolt on our own way. We will continue to go His way under intense pressure, persecution, danger, or need. This is what it means to be meek.

Look what happens to the meek: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* They will receive God's inheritance. They are the ones who will be placed in charge of God's creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the ones who submit to Him now and allow Him to have His way in everything down to the smallest detail.

There is an interesting passage in the book of Job that people shy away from using because much of it is the advice of Job's comforters. Why would all of the philosophy and doctrine of Job's comforters, who were proven wrong in the end, be included right in the Word of God? If you look over what Job's comforters said, most of it is true. It is hard to disprove anything they said. Their

only problem is that they misapplied the truth. They applied it in the wrong way at the wrong time by their human minds.

When men take God's principles and decide to apply them according to their own wisdom, they fail to provide a blessing. Job's comforters were not a blessing to Job. His crowning affliction was that he had to listen to them on top of everything else that had happened to him. But I'm not going to preach to you from words of Job's comforters. God, however, speaks out of the whirlwind in Job Chapter 39.

Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him leap as a grasshopper? The glory of his nostrils is formidable. He paws at the earth and rejoices in his strength; he goes forth to meet the armed men. He mocks fear and is not afraid; neither does he turn his face from the sword. The quiver rattles against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swallows the ground with fierceness and rage; the sound of the shofar does not trouble him; for the blasts of the shofar fill him with courage; he smells the battle afar off, the thunder of the princes and the sound of the battle-cry (Job 39:19-25).

This is God's description of a "meek" horse. He lives listening for the call of that trumpet. It is his life to go charging into battle, submitted to the master who is on his back. This is what Jesus is talking about when He says: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* He's talking about people who are waiting for the sound of the trumpet blast, waiting for their orders; they can't wait to have God send them into the middle of some terrible battle in the most unexpected place. These people have no fear because they are totally submitted to Christ. When we are submitted to Him, God says that perfect love casts out fear, and He is perfect love.

There is no fear (terror) when we are in Him. Let us not confuse this with another type of fear which is the fear of the Lord – this fear is not a terror type of fear, it's a respect and a fear of being afraid of displeasing Him. If something causes you to fear such that it dominates you and modifies your behavior causing you to respond to circumstances and change your behavior to the point where you are making decisions based on fear, you are not totally submitted to Jesus Christ. You are not operating in a meek attitude of allowing Jesus Christ to be your complete Master and Lord. There may be something that you think you have submitted to God, which maybe really isn't.

Just a few months ago, when our son was two weeks old, he got very sick and was in intensive care for five days. We were not sure what was going to happen to him. There was a twinge of fear that went through my heart as we were taking our baby to the hospital. Then the thought went through my mind, "Whose baby is this? Is it mine, or is it the Lord's? Have I totally placed this child in the hands of the Lord? Am I willing for whatever God ordains for the life of this baby, my only son?"

Once I double checked that, once I reaffirmed before the Lord that this was indeed the case, the fear left. Yes, it was a difficult time, and we had to run back and forth between the hospital and home a lot. There were many different things that needed to be done. It was tiring and exhausting, but panic and fear were not there anymore.

Fear can only manipulate and control us and cause us to react when we are not totally surrendered to God. If we are willing to do what He wants, even if we lose everything or they kill us or we go through all the troubles that Job went through, Satan can't terrorize us with his fears any more.

The book of Job opens with a description of the wonderful relationship that Job had with God and of all the wonderful children, property, and possessions that God had showered upon him. From Satan's perspective, Job had everything. He complained to God that the only reason Job served God was because God had put a hedge around him and had blessed him abundantly. From God's perspective, Job lacked at least one very important thing; he still needed to learn a very important lesson. This comes out in chapter 3:

For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I never had prosperity, nor did I secure myself, neither was I at rest; yet trouble came (Job 3:25-26).

God's peace is not dependent on external circumstances. It is an inner state. Job had to learn to overcome his fear before he could truly become everything God wanted him to be. This is one of the reasons that God removed the hedge of protection around him, allowing Satan to strike. Even though Job was blameless in God's eyes before, during, and after his experience, God delivered him of all his fears by taking him through the middle of his worst nightmares and bringing him safely out the other side.

When I was kidnapped by the guerrillas and they threatened to kill me, the first couple of times it was, "Oh-oh, they're going to kill me!" and fear would grip me. But then in prayer before the Lord, I had to resolve: Am I willing to do and say what God wants done or said, even if they torture me, even if they shoot me? If that's the case, then they can't terrorize me anymore. It immediately takes away their weapon of fear.

When God talks of delivering us from our fears, I believe that many times the form His deliverance takes is to bring us to the place where we are willing to go forth in His name and face our worst fears because we are in submission to Jesus Christ, and this is all that matters. Then we become like the horse who doesn't like to stay in the stable.

He doesn't like to just be eating his corn or hay with an easy life in the stable. He is straining his ear for the call to battle. *He mocks fear and is not afraid; neither does he turn his face from the sword. The quiver rattles against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swallows the ground with fierceness and rage; the sound of the shofar does not trouble him; for the blasts of the shofar fill him with courage; he smells the battle afar off, the thunder of the princes and the sound of the battle-cry (Job 39:22-25).*

He's straining his ear; he wants to find out what the commanders are saying because he's going to follow orders. He can't wait to get into the thick of it. These are the kind of people that God wants to raise up. These are the kind of people that God wants to bless. He doesn't want us to be always

living in a day when the proud are called blessed. He wants to bless His people and lead them to victory.

Meekness has to do with faith in Jesus Christ, with submitting to Jesus Christ, with obedience to Jesus Christ. Faith and obedience cannot really be separated. When James says that faith without works is dead, he's not talking about self-works, but of God-ordained works. In other words, if we say that we have faith in God, but we are not doing God's works, the work that God has called us and empowered us to do, then we are just playing games (James 2:14-26). We won't be able to stand in a real battle; we'll be dominated by our fears; our fears will get the better of us. Satan will be able to hem us in, and we will live our lives in a cage of fear that we, ourselves, helped him build.

I've had certain birds and little hamsters that had lived for so many generations in a cage that if you take them out of their cage, they just sit there and tremble with fear; they don't know what to do. They can't do anything. In fact, I'm told that there are animals that die when you take them out of their cage because their security is gone. Their security is the walls and the bars of their little cage, and they can't live outside of it.

There are other birds and animals that are so used to being free that if you put them in a cage, they will die. They can't live cooped up in cage. Which one do you want to be? Do you want to live in a cage and never see the blessing of God and never win a victory over the enemy? Do you really want to live in perpetual fear about what's going on outside those bars that you have surrounded yourself with, the fears that Satan has used to entrap you?

This spirit can take many forms. It can be fear over what's going to happen to our kids; it can be fear over what could happen economically if something were to happen to our savings. Some people fear cataclysmic future events. Any area of our existence that is not totally surrendered to the Lordship of Christ is open to attack. I don't know what your area of fear is, but I do know that if you really want God to deal with it, lay yourself on the altar, and He will.

If you truly wish to submit in all areas to the Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ, He will train you for war so you can win the victory over wrong desires, fears, the world, and our enemy, the devil. Then it can be said of you, like the horse God describes in the book of Job: He has no fear. He's straining his ears, trying to hear the sound of the trumpet, the sound of the commanders and the battle cry. His hooves (feet) eat up the ground. He can't get to the battle fast enough when he's called upon. He wants to be right in the thick of it wherever and whenever God's moving, helping to defeat whatever stronghold of the enemy that God wants torn down. His only worry or fear is that he continues to hear the voice of the Lord and not lose that intimate heart-to-heart communion with Him.

"Is the Lord calling on me? Does He want me to do something? What could it possibly be?" The minute there is the slightest indication that God wants that person to move, he's gone. He takes off and goes for it like the horse that obeys even the slightest nudge from its rider.

In Matthew 5:17 Jesus says, *Think not that I am come to undo the law or the prophets ...* What was

the law? The written Word of God is what they called the law. They called the Scriptures that they had the “Law and the Prophets.” It was the revealed written Word of God for them. Jesus said, *“I didn’t come to undo God’s laws, but to fulfill them.”* All of the blood sacrifices, the ceremonial temple laws, were fulfilled in Christ through His death and resurrection, and that is why we don’t have to keep the symbols, types and shadows any more. Now we have the real thing.

There are things written in the books of the Old Testament that the Bible says are to be observed forever and ever: the Ten Commandments and all of God’s principles and precepts that He set forward as His moral law. In the New Covenant, He says He is going to write His laws on the tablets of our hearts and in our minds. He is going to imprint His law into our souls. He is going to give us the ability to think and feel the same way He thinks and feels so we don’t have to get out a great big manual and start looking it up to see if something is right or wrong, like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. All we have to do is make sure that our hearts are totally committed to the Lord, and the Lord will be more than happy to let us feel the same way He feels about it. He will then confirm those feelings with both with His written Word and with the testimony of other Christians.

I’ve found myself happily doing the will of the Lord when, all of a sudden, a sickening feeling will come over me, and my intimate communion with the Lord is shaken. I know that something is wrong. I can tell immediately because there is unrest in my heart. Something I did or said to someone else affected my intimate communion with the Lord. The best thing to do at that point is to get down on my knees and spend some time with the Lord. I need to tune out the background noise and the clutter of the things that are going on around me. Then I can allow the Lord to speak to me and put His finger on where I began to deviate from His way. I need to find out where I began to grieve His Holy Spirit and what He wants me to do in order to correct the situation.

Think not that I am come to undo the law or the prophets; I am not come to undo, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law until all is fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall undo one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 5:17-20).

The Pharisees knew many Scriptures by memory. They made great consultations about whether a certain action was against the Scriptures, and they were careful to follow the letter of the law. When Jesus spoke about them, He said, *Do what they say, but don’t be like them.* When they are talking about the Ten Commandments and these other things, that’s all fine and dandy, but don’t be like them. Why? Because they wanted to take their own human reasoning and understanding and use that to apply God’s principles to their lives. The letter of the law put to death the spirit of the law to the point that when God Himself came to live among them, they were not able to receive Him.

Jesus walked right in their midst, and they did not even recognize Him. They said the mighty works He was doing were done under the power of the Devil, and He was casting out demons under the power of the Beelzebub. Jesus said,

And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come (Matthew 12:32).

Why? Because someone can be mistaken and may not realize who Jesus is, but when they start saying that the feats of God are not the deeds of God, that the wonders done by the Spirit of God are the doings of the devil and vice versa, there is nothing more that can be done for them because they reject God with their eyes wide open.

When we are driving down the road, there are highway signs along the way: dangerous curve ahead, slow down – workers on the way, bridge out, speed limit. As you are going down the road, you can decide for yourself. You can say, “I’m smarter than those signs. The bridge isn’t really out. I know it says slow down to 35 miles per hour, but I can still go 65.” When we follow this kind of reasoning, which again has to do with our pride, we take our life into our hands, and not just our own life, but the life of anyone who might be in our car. There have been lots of terrible accidents because people did not pay attention to the signs.

As we are going along the road of life, Jesus Christ Himself, through His Holy Spirit, puts warning signs along the road. He will speak to us; He will witness to us. He’ll say, “Watch it! Start putting on the brakes. You’re coming into a danger zone.” If we still don’t watch it, He’ll send someone to tell us we are skating on thin ice. He’ll warn and warn and warn. If we continue to disregard all of His warnings, there comes a time when we will crash.

In the Old Testament, this is what happened to His people. Moses said,

I call the heavens and the earth to witness today 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, that thou may love the LORD thy God and that thou may hear his voice and that thou may cleave unto him; for he is thy life (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

When they went God’s way, they were blessed, and when they went their own way, they found danger and difficulties that ended with their beautiful city of Jerusalem being destroyed two times (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. But now, through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can have His presence inside of us. We (in the church age) have a greater opportunity to live according to God’s will than anyone who has gone before us in human history. We have the opportunity to recall those who have gone before us and learn from their mistakes. In Colombia, they have taken cars that are smashed in on all sides and set them up in some of the key intersections to remind people by saying, “See what happened to those people. We don’t want that to happen to us.”

Some of the greatest men of God made some horrible slip-ups and lost important blessings. King

David was a man after God's own heart, but because of his sin of adultery and murder, the Lord declared that bloodshed would never leave his family; he would experience problems with violence in his family in the future even though he was personally restored. David went through that terrible problem with his son, Absalom. God has allowed these examples to be recorded so we won't have to experience similar things; we can learn from what happened to other people. If we are willing to be poor in spirit, let God deal with our pride, and mourn our own deeds and our own way, God will send us the Holy Spirit that we might submit ourselves totally to Jesus Christ. If we choose His way, God says the kingdom of the heavens is ours, and we will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. The new birth, birth into the realm of the Spirit, will produce hunger and thirst for righteousness (being filled with the character of God), just like natural babies hunger and thirst for milk. The motivation of the heart changes, and our new nature now hungers and thirsts for righteousness (being and doing what God wants). We must feed our new nature daily by allowing the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives. This is the requirement for continually being filled to overflowing (baptized) with the presence of God's Spirit. Those who attempt to live solely on their past experiences with God will stagnate.

In many churches people are introduced to the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit by repeating funny phrases after the teacher. They are told to talk baby talk and just open their mouth and say any strange phrase that pops into their mind. That's not what the "baptism" is at all. We must allow God to deal with our pride until we mourn the deeds of the old man under the old nature. Those who mourn will be comforted with the genuine Holy Spirit. There must be a genuine seeking after God. We must allow God to break the hardness of our heart. When He changes our heart and gives us His heart, it comes with that hunger and thirst for righteousness and for meekly doing things His way. The person who receives the genuine infilling of the presence of God need not strive after superficial manifestations of spirituality; this person simply begins to bubble over, to overflow with the supernatural presence and love of God. Jesus promises a well of "living water" that will spring up out of our innermost being (John 7:38).

There are counterfeit spiritual experiences in the world. Many try to bypass the only true entrance to the kingdom of God. They refuse to enter at the narrow gate. They refuse to allow God to deal with their pride. They refuse to give up their own way. They want prosperity and blessing, but they refuse to embrace the cross of Christ. These are those who falsely think they have been saved when in reality they are not, those who falsely think that they've been filled with the Holy Spirit when they are not. They've been filled with some other spirit, some cheap spirit that will neither produce nor satisfy a genuine hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Whole groups of "Christian" people are just playing games with one another. The tragic thing is that the fruit isn't there. The battle isn't being won. Their house is built on the sand, and when the storm comes, everything they have placed their trust in will come down with a great crash (Matthew 7:27).

There are large sectors of Christendom where instead of a witness being given for the Lord, the overall testimony has been against the Lord. Lofty ministries have come crashing to the ground. The end result in the eyes of the world has been to give the Lord a black eye. The salt has lost its savor and has been trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13).

God wants to change this. He wants to give us the victory. He wants us to charge into the battle like the horse described in Job Chapter 39. He doesn't want us bound by our fears living in a cage that we have made for ourselves. He doesn't want Satan to hem us in. He wants us to go forth into victory without any fear in our hearts. God says, "He (the meek horse) laughs at fear and strains his ear for the trumpet, for the sound of the commander and the battle cry." He can't wait to engage the enemy.

For the idols have spoken vanity and the diviners have seen a lie and have told vain dreams; they comfort in vain; therefore they went their way like sheep; they were humbled because there was no shepherd.

My anger is kindled against the pastors, and I will visit the he goats, for the LORD of the hosts shall visit his flock, the house of Judah, and shall make them as his horse of honour in the battle. Out of him shall come the corner, out of him the stake, out of him the battle bow, out of him also every oppressor.

And they shall be as mighty men, who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall fight because the LORD shall be with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded (Zechariah 10:2-5).

In Old Testament typology, the horse represents man's effort or strength. Thus, those who do battle on horseback, trusting in horses instead of the Lord, are put to shame. On the other hand, God promises to make those who submit their gifts, abilities, and strength to Him into His own (corporate) royal horse that He Himself will ride to battle and win the victory.

And I saw the heaven open, and behold a white horse; and he that was seated upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war (Revelation 19:11).



The New Covenant: God's Law Written on Our Hearts

The war horse in the last chapter was trained for battle, snorting, stamping and straining to hear the sound of the trumpet and the shout of the commanders. This horse is described by the Greek word, *praius*, or meek, because the horse is perfectly trained, perfectly submitted to its master, and can be relied upon to obey orders even in the heat and confusion of battle. I would like to give you another example of meekness:

Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth
(Numbers 12:3).

Moses started his career by taking the law into his own hands and killing an Egyptian. Moses was a killer before God dealt with him out in the desert, preparing and training him to do battle God's way. Moses submitted to God and became meek. God then used Moses beyond the maximum potential that he could think of.

Maybe Moses stuttered; he didn't think that he could speak on God's behalf. Yet God brought Moses to face Pharaoh, who was the most dangerous figure of the day. Pharaoh had enslaved God's people and ordered the killing of innocent children. God sent Moses to confront Pharaoh, backing him up with one of the most awesome displays of power that has ever occurred in human history. The ten plagues ended in God breaking the back of Pharaoh and his army, destroying them in the Red Sea and giving freedom to His people.

If we submit to God and allow Him to have His way in and through us, we will see amazing events take place. God will begin to utilize us above and beyond what we consider our potential to be. Each of us has been created by God with special gifts and abilities; none of us are the same. We will never be truly happy and satisfied until we utilize our God-given gifts and abilities to their maximum potential. And we won't be able to utilize what we have to our maximum potential unless we are surrendered to Jesus Christ, unless we are meek, unless He's the Master and we are submitted to Him, willing to do things His way. When God chose to interrupt the downward moral slide of human history by direct revelation of His will (law) to mankind, He chose the meekest man on earth (Moses) as a channel for His power.

I was speaking to a group of young people, and I shared the experience of when I shot my foot with a .22-caliber rifle at age fifteen. On the one hand, I had been asking the Lord to intervene in my life and help me get my schoolwork done on time. (I was studying high school by correspondence and had trouble managing my time.) On the other hand, I continued to goof off and do anything except what I was supposed to be doing. As I fell further and further behind

schedule (I couldn't seem to bring myself to hit the books), I continued to plead with the Lord for help. I told the Lord that He could have a free hand to do anything He wanted in my life if He would only help me to get through high school on time. Finally, one evening I had a hunting accident (while I was goofing off) and shot myself in the foot. This laid me up in the hospital for quite a while (Infection had set in and several doctors even suggested cutting my foot off). I ended up developing good study habits. When I studied hard, my foot got better, and when I goofed off, it got worse. I finished my course on time and also scored very high on my college entrance exams.

One girl came up to me after my talk and said, "I'm never going to commit my life totally to the Lord like you did. What if something like that were to happen to me."

Afterwards I thought, "What if God had not intervened in my life? What if He had not disciplined me every time that I needed it? Where would I be today? I would be a mediocre Christian, doing mediocre things, incapable of facing the enemy, incapable of winning a victory, wandering around in the wilderness of my own good intentions, wallowing in prosperity, useless for participating in the army of God."

It was God's mercy and God's love for me that allowed Him at several key times in my life to make me very uncomfortable, to prick the bubble of my pride, my will, and my own way to the point where I was willing to bow to Him and say, "Okay Lord, You can have it Your way. My ideas aren't as good as I thought they were. I want Your better ideas, I want Your best way."

Without real Christians, without a living demonstration of the presence of Jesus Christ living within us, it is not possible to evangelize effectively. The Bible says that unless the Father draws men, they cannot come to Jesus Christ (John 6:44). How is the Father going to draw them to Christ if we represent Christ, and people look at us and cannot see Christ in us? How is this supposed to happen? (Matthew 5:14).

God says that He wants to write His laws on the tablets of our hearts so we will not be under a legalistic law of do's and don'ts. By His grace (power), He can change our hearts and motivate us from within. He wants to place His Spirit within us and sensitize our consciences so that whenever we are in a difficult situation, we will automatically be prompted to respond in the manner that God wants.

Let's look at the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy Chapter 5.

And Moses called all Israel and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and rights which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them and keep them, to do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, all of us who are here alive this day.

The LORD spoke with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to show you the word of the LORD, for ye were afraid by reason of the fire and did not climb the mount)... (Deuteronomy 5:1-5).

Only one man went up to the mountain to receive God's law, and that man was Moses. This man has been given as an example of meekness. He was the only one who was unafraid of the fire of the

presence of God. He went up the mountain while the trumpet blast and the thunder and the lightning of the presence of God caused the rest of the children of Israel to cower in fear.

When it is time to hear from God, what is our reaction? Is it fear? “No, no, no! Not me. I’m not going to have anything to do with the trumpet and with the fire and with the thunder and with the lightning. I don’t want to speak face to face with God. I can’t stand to listen to God. What if He were to tell me to do something that I don’t want to do? What if He were to want me to give up something that I don’t want to give up?”

That’s the way the children of Israel were. Things have not changed much with the Christian church either. Most people would rather be comfortable and have somebody else go hear from God instead; maybe their pastor, or their priest, can go hear from God. We’ll listen to him when he comes back. But we don’t really want to hear from God ourselves; we don’t really want to get close to that fire because it might burn something up that we hold dear. Have you ever felt like this?

So God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, literally. He wrote them with His own finger on two tablets of stone and handed them to Moses. The Bible is the Word of God, and all Christians are more or less in agreement that it was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But there is one little piece of it that was literally written on tablets of stone by the fiery finger of God the Father, and that is the Ten Commandments: the moral basis of the Old Covenant. Now, God the Father, through the advent of Jesus Christ, has offered us a New Covenant; He is offering to take His blazing, fiery finger and write His laws on the tablets of our hearts and in our minds (Jeremiah 31:33). By His grace, He wants to purify and regenerate our hearts and minds; He wants to set His Spirit within us. The Beatitudes are to the New Covenant what the Ten Commandments are to the Old Covenant.

Going through the Beatitudes, I hope you notice that they build on themselves. A blessing is not something that happens overnight. The blessing must be planted and cultivated before it can be harvested (Galatians 6:7). God’s blessing is not something that can be institutionalized. God’s blessing does not automatically reside on a nation, church, or ministry for generation after generation, regardless of what each generation has planted. There is a succession of God’s blessing, but it depends on men and women in every generation who will continue to walk in the ways of the Lord. It is not possible to have a blessing of the Lord that goes on forever unless certain conditions are met. This is a true saying: God has sons, but He has no grandsons.

Elisha received the double portion of the spirit (blessing) of Elijah, but there was a very important condition. He had to have his eyes on Elijah when his master was taken from him. This meant that Elisha had to pay very close attention to the way that Elijah operated according to the Spirit of God. Elisha followed God according to the same obedience of Elijah and was blessed with a “double portion.” The true blessing and kingdom of God will always increase (remember Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed). There are conditions to God’s promises; He never sustains His power, anointing, and blessing on those who refuse to walk according to His ways.

Some of these conditions are found in the first three commandments. They have to do with man’s

relationship to God.

I AM thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters beneath the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons unto the third and fourth generation of those that hate me and showing mercy unto thousands, to those that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him innocent that takes his name in vain. Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God has commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath unto the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son nor thy daughter nor thy manservant nor thy maidservant nor thine ox nor thine ass nor any animal of thine nor thy stranger that is within thy gates, that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and that the LORD thy God brought thee out of there with a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore, the LORD thy God has commanded thee to keep the sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:6-15).

Egypt is a type of our self, the flesh. It is a symbol of our human nature and the worldly system of bondage that is produced whenever human selfishness reigns. God's plan is to deliver us from trying to do things our own way, from trying to be self-righteous in our own sight, from the bondage of "Egypt" (the flesh), which will always result in slavery to "Pharaoh" (the Devil). He has delivered us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery to sin, the flesh, and the Devil. Now He wants to show us the path through the wilderness of trials and temptations to purify our hearts, so we might enter the promised land of His blessing (His Sabbath rest).

Immediately after crossing the Red Sea (symbolic of Christian baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ), the children of Israel came to Mt. Sinai, and God gave them the Law. He made a covenant (the Old Covenant) with them and inaugurated the age of the Law. The apostle Paul says that *the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ* (Galatians 3:24). Now, under the New Covenant, in the church age, He promises to write these same laws *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind; and love our neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:37, 39) on the tablets of our hearts and in our minds. He promises to place His Spirit within us and give us the grace (power) to do His will.

The first commandment says *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*. As we look at the church, there are lots of gods that we place before the one and only God. We might not bow down and worship them, but any material possession that is more important to us than the Lord is an idol. When we spend more time reading the newspaper, magazines or fiction than the Word of God, our priorities are wrong. We rush to look at what the secular news media wants to program into our minds, which can lead us into a mentality of fear and despair, and we do not read God's promises

of what God wants to do (There are over thirty thousand promises in the Word of God). Listen to what God wants to do: He wants to bless those who keep His commandments.

Have you ever noticed that sin feeds on itself, and evil continuously gets worse and worse? Maybe you have seen the graphs where someone set a penny aside for interest two hundred years ago, and it turns into a trillion dollars over a certain amount of time. This is the way good and evil are. Good is always getting better while evil is getting worse.

Why are the sins of the fathers punished to the third and fourth generation? Have you ever seen how drug addicts and alcoholics and divorcees affect their children grandchildren, and even down to the great-grandchildren? In our ministry we routinely deal with cases of those who have gone through severe trauma and are emotionally scarred because their parents or grandparents turned their backs on the Lord. The Lord wants to break this.

And showing mercy unto thousands (of generations) of those that love me and keep my commandments. When we turn our back on Satan and begin to do things in the way that God wants us to do them, we can start a chain reaction of God's love that will plant godliness in our children. We can plant a blessing that will multiply and grow in our children, our children's children, and on into infinity. This is the promise of the Lord for future generations.

Verse 11 says, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him innocent that takes his name in vain.* In the Christian church, we have traditionally felt that this meant swearing. But it isn't just swearing. It's saying, "Thus saith the Lord..." when the Lord did not say it. It's saying, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord," when we are not being obedient to the Lord. It's coming in and singing all the songs and saying we are in agreement with the Christian faith, identifying ourselves as the people of God, when we are not living our life in obedience to the Lord.

Imagine a business manager of a large corporation who has control of the company check book. He is supposed to write checks to finance the needs and objectives of the company. What would happen to him if he started writing unauthorized company checks for a new house, a new car, a brand new swimming pool, and anything else he felt like for his own personal use? Someone like this would be put in jail in very short order. When the Lord promises that whatsoever we ask for in His name, He is going to do, it is not a magical formula. Some people think we can ask for anything we want and just tack, "in Jesus' name," on the end of our prayer, and it's supposed to happen.

When we use the name of the Lord, it means that our petition is on behalf of the Lord. In other words, when He has called us and given us our orders, we are in His will; then, when we ask according to His will, He will provide what we need to stay in His will and get His job done. That is what He is saying. We cannot take promises that apply to His will and use them for personal gain, any more than a business manager can take the corporate funds and pocket them for whatever He pleases.

The Christian church is full of people asking for everything under the sun in Jesus' name when really it is in their own name. Some of us have a gift and anointing of persuading others of truth,

the ability to be preachers, teachers, evangelists, or to minister through music. If we take our God-given gifts and start using them for our own benefit, we are taking the anointing of God and pouring it over our own heads. We will short circuit the blessing of the Lord and will be guilty of taking the name of the Lord in vain.

If we are just trying to stamp the Lord's name all over the top of our own selfish plans and ambitions (individual or corporate) to dress them up and make them look nice and acceptable, we are taking the Lord's name in vain. We may not have any literal idols, but if we are spending our time and money on good things that keep us from pursuing God's best, these things become our idols.

God wants to write His laws on the tablets of our hearts. God wants to write the essence of the Ten Commandments that the Jews could not keep on the tablets of our hearts. He wants to change our hearts. He wants to give us His feelings. He wants to motivate us from within to hunger and thirst for His righteousness, so He can fill and satisfy us. He wants to fill us with Himself. When we are full of the Lord and begin to get a little inkling of how God feels about sin, it has a tremendous impact on our behavior.

The first three commandments deal with our relationship with God. The next seven commandments concern man's relationship to man. If our relationship with God is not right, we will not be able to maintain a satisfactory relationship with one another either.

When we are submitted to the Lord and in a proper relationship with Him, He says, *My yoke is easy and my burden is light*. The children of Israel thought that if they went up on that mountain to hear the Word of the Lord, everything they held dear would be burned up in God's fire; they might lose their very lives; they could not come into the presence of God and live. This is what Satan will try to tell us. He will try to tell us that unless we hang onto the things that we hold dear, we won't be happy. This is not true. The only way to be happy is to die to our own selfish way and surrender everything to Jesus Christ. The happiest people I know are the ones who don't have many physical possessions, the ones who live for others and for the Lord.

Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God has commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God gives thee.

Thou shalt not murder.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not give false testimony against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field or his manservant or his maidservant, his ox or his ass or any thing that is thy neighbour's
(Deuteronomy 5:16-21).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the Ten Commandments to a new level:

Ye have heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not commit murder, and whosoever shall commit murder shall be guilty of the judgment;

but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother out of control shall be in danger of the judgment, and whosoever shall insult his brother shall be in danger of the council, but whosoever shall say, Thou art impious, shall be in danger of hell (Matthew 5:21-22).

Here Jesus applies the law to the inward state of our hearts. Hatred towards our brother is the moral equivalent of murder under the New Covenant. Lust is the same as adultery. Jesus tells us that the status of our hearts will determine our outward conduct (Matthew 15:18-20).

Look what Moses says at the end of the Ten Commandments:

These words the LORD spoke unto all your congregation in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone and delivered them unto me. And it came to pass when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness and saw the mountain that burned with fire that ye came near unto me, even all the princes of your tribes and your elders; and ye said, Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God does talk with man, and he lives.

Now, therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.

For what is all flesh that it should hear the voice of the living God that speaks out of the midst of the fire, as we heard, and live?

Go thou near and hear all that the LORD our God shall say, and thou shalt tell us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it (Deuteronomy 5:22-27).

Some said, and still today say, “Okay, God spoke. Yes, the Bible is inspired. I believe it. But I’m going to continue to make my own plans. I’m going to continue to make up my own good ideas. Whenever the pastor has something he feels is a real revelation from God, he can share it on Sunday morning, and I’ll listen. But I’m afraid of that intimate communion, that intimate contact with God, because the things that I hold dear (my own way) might get burned up in the fire.”

Let me tell you what happened to the generation that went out with this attitude after such a tremendous revelation from God. Guess what happened to them? They all died in the wilderness. None of them made it into the Promised Land. A new generation was raised up under Joshua and Caleb that went into the Promised Land. The mentality of being slaves that they had brought from Egypt, the fleshly mentality of depending on worldly comforts, the cage they brought with them, they were never able to totally overcome. Even though God delivered them physically out of the land of Egypt with an awesome display of His power and might, He was unable to get the Egypt out of most of them, and they wandered around in the wilderness until the entire generation (except two men) died.

God does not want this to happen to us. In the New Testament, it specifically says that these

things are recorded so we can learn from them (Jude 5), and they won't happen to us. God wants to speak to us. He wants His living Word to be within our hearts. He wants to have full authority over our lives. He wants to be able to discipline us when we need it. He wants to be able to bless us, to prosper us, to open and close doors for us. He wants to be able to use us effectively, but He cannot do this as long as we cling to something for ourselves instead of onto Him.

If we really want to walk a life of victory and be used of God effectively, there is no other way, but to put everything on the altar. There is no other way, but to say, "Lord, there are aspects of my life that I might not even be aware of, but I want You to deal with anything that needs to be dealt with. Even if there is an area in my life where I'm not willing or capable of making the proper commitment, make me willing. You are God. You are sovereign. You can do anything."

But God has chosen to limit Himself in one little area in His relationship with man. He is a gentleman. He has manners. He is not rude or obnoxious. He does not impose Himself on people who do not want Him around. If you want your relationship with God to be aloof, He will respect your will. He won't force Himself on you. But He also says, *Draw nigh unto Me, and I will draw nigh unto you*, and *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*. They will be fulfilled and satisfied above and beyond their wildest dreams. Nothing satisfies more than obeying God.

Prior to the time when I was kidnapped, I did not have much to show for being a missionary, maybe a handful of people that I had influenced for God. But since that time, the Lord has given me the joy of being able to work with a large number of people and has allowed me to have the satisfaction of seeing many of them grow more like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is real satisfaction. It is lasting satisfaction. The godly character that is developed in us or in others will be ours to enjoy for all eternity.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Or is righteousness something that is optional? Is righteousness for you like dessert; you can take it or leave it? Or do you have to have it? Is it something you can't live without? Remember, righteousness means both doing what God desires and being what God designed us to be. In Spanish, Greek, and Hebrew, the words for righteousness and justice are the same word. God wants us to hunger and thirst for what is right, what He approves of, and what He promises to fill us with.

Don't settle for second best. Don't settle for a superficial experience with the Lord. Don't settle for hearing from somebody else who's heard from the Lord. Don't let anybody else get between you and God. Don't live on borrowed revelation. Don't shy away from the fire. Don't be like many in America today; they want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, speak in tongues, and have emotional experiences, but they don't want the fire because the fire might burn something up they hold dear. John the Baptist said:

I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance, but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire, whose fan is

in his hand; and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the storehouse, but he will burn up the chaff with fire that shall never be quenched (Matthew 3:11-12).

We have taken the message of John the Baptist on repentance and cut it in half. We have decided to let God be the God of what's wrong. He can tell us what's wrong; if we have broken any of His commandments, then we will repent, but we still want to decide what is right. We refuse to expose our good plans and our good desires to his fire to see if there is any chaff. We are still clinging to a piece of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and that half of the apple that we refuse to give up (the knowledge of choosing what is good for ourselves) is still blocking our access to the tree of life (the full blessing, power and glory of the risen Christ).

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, some only want the fun things. They want the emotional experiences. They want to impress others with their spirituality. They want the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but they don't want the fire. So, they take half of what the Bible teaches on repentance and half of what Jesus offers us. They want His Spirit, but they don't want His fire, and then they wonder why Satan is overcoming the church, why we can't stand against temptation, why so much evil is going on around us, why the harvest isn't coming, and why our children or our parents aren't what we think they ought to be. The answer: we aren't what we ought to be. We need to return to the way the Lord Jesus Christ taught. We need to repent of our own way and our good ideas along with the things that we know to be wrong.

The church has lost God's fire. The fire is not there like it was before. We must get back to the fire; we must go back up that mountain and hear from God. We need to plunge right into the middle of the fire and lightning that the children of Israel wanted to shy away from. "Oh, no, we don't want to hear any more from God. We don't want to be near that fire lest we die."

This is what it is all about: to be effective for God, we must die. We must participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must die to our own way where we are controlled by our corrupt natural desires. Our natural desires must be nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ so the power of His resurrection life might spring forth inside of us and manifest the power of His grace to a world that is lost and dying.

This is the gospel of the kingdom according to Jesus Christ, not according to anybody else. This is the gospel that Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed in the Beatitudes. He taught first of all about those who are poor in spirit, the ones who have chosen to let go of their pride. Genuine repentance is the only way into the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn with a contrite heart will be comforted. God will send the Comforter to lift them up and restore their faith. Only the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives can cause us to be meek. The meek, those who totally submit to the Master, are the only ones who will inherit the earth. They are on the winning team. They will overcome the enemy.

When the Holy Spirit comes in, what does He do? He breaks the power of the flesh (circumcises our hearts) and writes the laws of God on the tablets of our hearts. We begin to respond to

situations the way that God would want us to respond, in meekness and out of a restored sense of His justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

When repentance (turning from going our own way) and faith (submission to and confidence in God so we might go His way) start producing a change in our hearts, God starts giving us the desires of His heart; we start hungering and thirsting for His righteousness because this is what God yearns for in us. He will give us that same longing, that same hunger and thirst for doing and being right. He promises to fulfill and satisfy us.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Mercy is more than superficially forgiving others. Mercy is treating other people the way we would want God to treat us if we were in the other person's shoes. Have you ever wondered how to treat someone else? I believe that any true Christian can instinctively know how God wants us to respond to others around us no matter how difficult the situation. God says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. What if I was causing an awful problem? How would I want to be treated? How would I want to be corrected if I needed correction? How would I want God to treat me if I were in the position of that other person? We all know how we would desire to be treated, so all we need to do is put ourselves in the other fellow's position, and God will reveal a course of action that is both just and merciful.

Mercy is not letting other people get away with murder. Sometimes the most merciful thing we can do with one of our children is some very sharp correction. But unless that correction comes from a loving heart and unless a loving relationship has been established between us, our attempt at discipline may fail because the child will not have the proper respect for our authority. Instead of correcting the situation, our unmerciful application of justice will backfire, and our children will become bitter. For this reason, the Bible says that the fathers are not to provoke their children to wrath.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. This really means planting mercy. It means treating other people the way that we would like to have God treat us. The Bible says we reap what we sow. If we are asking God for things and want Him to solve problems in our lives, we cannot turn our backs on someone who comes to us with a problem that we can solve and then continue, "Oh Lord, please help me." How do you think the Lord will feel about us? Is He going to want to help us? Will He feel like helping someone who is ungrateful? Will He continue to bless someone who partakes of His blessing and mercy, but refuses to share it with anyone else? Many times God continues to help us when we do not deserve it, but there is a limit to His patience.

Another aspect of this involves forgiveness. Humanly speaking, we can forgive someone who comes to us in repentance and says, "Oh, I'll never do it again. Please forgive me. I'm so sorry. I'll make it right."

It is within our human capabilities to say, "All right, buster, you better not do it again. I'll forgive you just this once. I won't forget it, but I'll forgive you." But what about someone who has hurt us, is continuing to hurt us, and will probably keep on hurting us in the future? How about forgiving

someone like that? In the natural, it is impossible. Jesus was the only one who could hang on the cross and say, *Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.*

If we are to forgive others from the heart, we need the kind of mercy that only He can place within our hearts. If we allow Him to plant his forgiveness and mercy in our lives, they will have a cleansing, purifying effect on our hearts. But we need to remember one very important thing – our desire to forgive others must be manifested in merciful words and deeds towards those who have wronged us in order for God's dynamic of blessing to be fulfilled in our lives and extended through us to those around us. This is how to overcome our enemies God's way.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Have you ever been confused and unable to see God? You don't know where God is, you don't know why so many difficult things are happening to you. You're confused; everything seems to be coming down around you. Where is God? If you cannot see God in your life in spite of the difficult circumstances you may be going through, check your heart. It might be that your heart is not pure before God. It might be that there is a root of bitterness, a little unforgiveness, or a lack of mercy in your heart. Even if you have been an innocent victim of the slights, selfishness, and abuse of those around you, you can still be emotionally scarred by what has happened if you refuse to forgive those who have hurt you. Then you will lose sight of God.

Our hearts are mirrors of our souls. Our hearts are designed to reflect God. If that mirror is dirty, it will not reflect a clear image of God. Not only will we not see God, nobody else will see God reflected in us either. Do others see the image of Jesus Christ in you? Or is the image of Christ that they see in you a distorted image, coming out of a dirty or warped mirror that distorts a beautiful and loving God, making Him look grotesque? If our hearts are pure, they will reflect God. The Bible says we are created in the image of God. This is how we were created, and then we fell. God wants to restore His image to perfection inside each one of us by purifying our hearts. He wants us to respond to the injury and injustice in the world around us by reflecting His image. We are to overcome evil with good.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in the heavens is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

With our human limitations, it is hard, if not impossible, to be perfect. So why is God asking us this of us? Because there is one area in our lives that can be perfect and that is our heart (our will and motivation). God wants to take our heart out, the heart of stone, and replace it with a heart of flesh, His heart; and His heart is perfect. If we want, we can have a pure heart. We can have His heart. We can be included in the body of Jesus Christ. His heart is big enough to include all of us.

If there are others that you have excluded from your heart, others that you have kicked out of your heart, remember that it is impossible to hate your brother and love God at the same time (1 John 4:20). If you want Jesus to prevail in your heart, you have to open your heart to everyone. You have to be willing to have a place in your heart for your worst enemy, and the Lord will make that place because it is His heart. If you want to know how to relate to those around you, it is very


simple; just have a place for them in your heart. Deal with them from the heart, and the Lord will show you what to do.

Think for a few minutes on the status of your heart. Can you see God? Or is your image of God fuzzy? Do things happen, and you say, “I have trouble getting a word from the Lord? I have trouble hearing the voice of the Lord. It’s not crystal clear like it used to be, or like it ought to be.”

If you are not hearing the voice of the Lord clearly, there is some major surgery that needs to be done in your heart. God is not in the business of trying to polish and renew your old stone heart. He wants to do a heart transplant; He wants to give you His heart. He wants to restore His image in us. Let Him do it. Tell Him that He is free to work in your heart. Tell Him that He is free to cleanse your heart, to remove any trace of unforgiveness or bitterness.

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Russell Stendal was born in Minneapolis and raised on the mission field in Colombia, South America. He became a missionary jungle pilot at age nineteen. Almost ten years later in 1983, he was kidnapped by Marxist rebels and held hostage for five months. His book, *Rescue the Captors*, relates his experience, including how God worked in the hearts of the rebels.

Russell has written many other books, produced videos, and edited two Bible translations, the Spanish Reina-Valera 2000 and the Jubilee Bible in English.

Russell heads up the work of Colombia Para Cristo which operates 12 radio stations involving more than 100 staff and coworkers and covering much of Latin America with the Gospel. A thriving underground church has developed in remote jungle areas of Colombia. New high gain antennas are now beaming the Gospel message deep into areas of deepening crisis across the borders of Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil as well as throughout Colombia.

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