

Light in the Darkness

THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

by

DAVID W. DYER

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*Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from
the New Testament are from The Father's Life Version.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	5
1. GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN	7
2. HOW THE DEVIL WORKS	11
3. THERE IS A SAVIOR	25
4. BEING TRANSPARENT WITH GOD . .	40
5. THE "SOUL-LIFE".	55
6. HOW GOD MADE MAN	64
7. THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT	72
8. REBUKING OR "BINDING" THE DEVIL . .	77

And we *also* have the sure word of prophecy [*the scriptures*] to which you should pay attention, as if to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Pet 1:19).

PREFACE

When I began this writing, it was not with the intention of producing a new book. My plan was to write a small article to address what I felt was a neglected subject in Christian circles: the renewing of the mind.

However, as it progressed, the writing kept growing to include other aspects of the subject which were unforeseen by me.

The need for real change in the lives of believers around the world is ever more urgent in these days. Many institutions seem to be collapsing into chaos, including those of long standing. Our world around us is changing rapidly and these changes will probably only accelerate as we come closer to the second coming of our Lord.

Therefore, the need for His children to become intimate with Him has never been greater. There is an urgency for all of us to seek Him ever more earnestly so that we will be able to withstand the evil days which are coming and also not be ashamed when He appears.

May our God use this small writing to change hearts and lives for His glory.

1.

GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN

Whether we like it or not, we are in a battle. If we are a true child of God, we are involved in an intense struggle about who will dominate this earth.

Now I know some will say that Jesus has already won the battle, but the fact is that we are still intimately involved in the working out of this victory. Just because Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection was victorious in the eyes of God the Father does not mean that our part in this war has been finished.

You see, sometime in the distant past (we don't know exactly when, but it appears to have been long, long ago), Lucifer was given authority over this planet. We can be sure of this since, during his temptation of Jesus, he claimed to have this authority (Lk 4:6). Jesus did not dispute this fact.

Obviously, if Satan has authority, it must have been given to him by the source of all authority, which is God Himself. Also, we can deduce that this rulership must have been given him before he rebelled against the Most High. If

not, no authority whatsoever would have been given him.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He charged them with several responsibilities. One of these was: "...to fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). Now in the Hebrew language this word translated "subdue" means "to conquer" or "to subjugate."

But wait a minute. This earth already had a master. There is a being who was given authority over it! Yet suddenly, in the Garden of Eden, God introduces another creature who looks just like Himself into the equation and charges him to take this authority for himself. This then began the conflict for control of the earth.

Obviously, Adam was not intended to become a god himself, but was merely the representative of Another. We can know this because Adam was made "in the image of God." So he was placed upon the earth with the task of taking charge of the planet as God's representative, he himself being under the authority of God.

In this plan, Adam would "gain dominion" over the earth, living righteously in obedience to God and filling it with his obedient offspring (Gen 1:28). Then, when the task of subduing the earth was complete, God, as the head of this new creature, Adam, would be the supreme ruler over it, "recovering it" in a manner of speaking, from the being who was first given charge of it but then rebelled.

As you already know, Adam failed miserably in this task. Yet someone called “the last Adam,” also known as Jesus the Anointed One (Christ), has won and now is still winning this battle. However, the devil has not given up yet. He is not yet practically defeated.

Through Jesus and His descendants (real believers who are born of God), God is still in the process of establishing His rulership over the earth. He is populating it with His own children who are supposed to be under His authority.

However, it may be no surprise to you to learn that not all of God’s children are obedient. Not all of them are truly submitting every aspect of their lives to Him.

Unfortunately, a great many of them are self-centered, liars, cheaters, unforgiving, and sinful in a great many areas of their lives. This behavior puts them into the camp of Satan. Their behavior shows that, instead of being obedient to God, they are expressing the nature of the god of this world.

This then is where the battle lies. Just as the devil succeeded in deceiving Eve and seducing Adam, today he is still working very hard to deceive the children of God.

In this way he keeps them from becoming God’s true representatives who express His righteousness. As long as believers express the nature of the enemy instead of God’s, they are still part of the problem and not part of His solution.

In many ways, Satan is limited by God concerning what he can and cannot do with men. For example, he is not allowed to sweep in and kill millions of men and women with one stroke. Although he can do such things *through* men who are under his control, he himself is not permitted to do many such things himself.

But, he is allowed to talk. He can speak into the thoughts and hearts of people. He seems to be able to "speak" into our minds, inserting his thoughts directly, or using other individuals who are under his control to speak to us. Most people do not recognize or "hear" this speaking but it is going on all the same. This "speaking" then is his primary weapon.

We must realize that the devil is extremely intelligent. He is much, much more clever than we are. He is cunning, creative, and farsighted. No believer should ever think that they themselves can outwit him. Our only hope of not being misled by him is to have a complete dependence on and genuine submission to God.

2.

HOW THE DEVIL WORKS

One of the primary ways the devil works is by inserting thoughts into our minds in a way which we do not perceive them. Many of such thoughts are accepted by us as our own thoughts. Therefore, we receive them as "truth." Some of them we have been receiving and accepting for a long time, even from our childhood.

Therefore, they find a place in our thinking as if they were normal. The devil and his evil spirits do this very subtly, in a way that most do not know that it is happening. They can even make these thoughts "sound like us," so we take them to be our own thoughts.

Satan's work in human beings begins when they are born. He uses other people to influence their lives, causing them to do and say things which seem to "affirm" the lies he is constantly telling them. For example, many children are physically or verbally abused by others (young or old) who are under the devil's control to

install in their minds certain patterns of thinking. These patterns then govern how they understand the world around them and other people.

These "truths," which are actually lies, then become a basis for their living. They influence how these people interact with others and how they react in various situations. These thought patterns, which we have accepted as fact, govern our behavior in a great many situations.

They may cause us to act and react to others and our environment in ways which are unnatural, unhealthy, and wrong. Yet, since we have long accepted these thought patterns as being true, we are blind to how much our own actions, reactions, and words are not in harmony with truth.

You see, human beings are being "groomed" by the devil and his invisible hosts. They are being prepared, each one in an individual way, depending upon their vulnerabilities, personality etc., to become his tools in the future.

He and his hoards are working on them throughout their lives to establish a certain series of thoughts in their minds which, when triggered, can impel them to say certain things and act in pre-determined ways.

Perhaps we may take as an example a child who is sexually abused when they were young. This experience (or these experiences) create in the mind of such a child a certain set of thoughts about others, about intimacy, about vulnerability

ty, and many other things. This person may have a lot of interior pain, confusion, and anger concerning the subject of emotional or physical intimacy.

Therefore, in later life, when such a person finds themselves in situations which involve intimacy, actions, words, and reactions come out of them towards others, which may be completely unrelated to their present context.

They may become fearful when there is nothing to fear. They may become angry when no one has harmed them. They may, like a wild animal which is cornered, lash out to wound the person who is seeking intimacy with them in order to escape the situation which is causing them discomfort. Some may even enter into a kind of emotionally inert state, a kind of cold, unresponsive passivity.

These kinds of reactions can be something which they learned as a child trying to endure the abuse they suffered. Perhaps they have learned to think about something else, pretend they were somewhere else, or imagine that nothing was happening to them, in an effort to make it through the experience.

Those who are interacting with such a person may have a hard time understanding such reactions. Imagine, for example, a husband who marries a woman who has been abused in her childhood.

When the time comes for intimacy he expects from her a normal, womanly reaction.

Instead he might find anger. Or perhaps his wife withdraws emotionally, becomes "frigid," unresponsive to his affection, and distant.

Such a relationship will be very hard to maintain. It is very common for a husband who finds himself in a marriage with a wife who cannot respond to him normally to become frustrated and angry. This leads to marital disharmony.

There can be arguments and fights. Each one might blame the other. Perhaps the wife cannot even understand her own lack of responses. It is very common then for the situation to devolve into adultery. A frustrated husband can very easily blame his wife and seek satisfaction somewhere else.

Unfortunately, such a situation can also result in the husband abusing his own daughters to try to satisfy his own desires. In this way, the devil succeeds in passing the abuse from one generation to another.

Another example might be a young man who is often beaten by his father. When the father comes home from work frustrated and angry, he uses his son as a punching bag to relieve his frustrations. This young man then develops a fear of other men. He has trouble in later life having close relationships with men due to his early trauma. Satan has succeeded in establishing certain "truths" about others and life in general in the mind of this person.

So we see that the devil begins working in the minds of everyone beginning at childhood.

But he doesn't stop there. All through our development, and even later in life, he works to arrange our thinking according to his patterns.

He influences our parents (especially unbelieving ones) to instill values and ideas in us. (Obviously, godly parents can be used by God to pass on to their children His righteousness, but we are speaking about the work of the evil one here.)

I know of people whose parents encouraged them to smoke pot and practice sex outside of marriage. I have heard of men whose fathers taught them to have sex with as many women as possible, insisting that this was the right thing to do.

Others have their parents teach them, by words or example, to lie, cheat, take advantage of others, drink alcohol excessively, tell dirty jokes, gossip and many, many other worldly values which come from the prince of this world. Unfortunately, this kind of behavior happens in "Christian" homes also.

Not only do parents and families have influence over the minds of developing children, but friends and society do also. Using many techniques such as ridicule, exclusion from some group or other, the circle of friends and acquaintances of each person influences them to conform to the patterns of thought and behavior that the others have.

For example, groups of children are notoriously cruel to others who do not conform. Each

group of our acquaintances, be they from our work, leisure activities, family, or friends, exert a certain pressure to adapt to their standards. Satan uses everyone in his kingdom to influence those around them to conform to their ways of thinking.

Throughout our lives we are constantly bombarded with influences which impact our thinking and therefore our actions. Satan's goal is to program every human mind to accept his "values," attitudes, and opinions. Although the details of behavior which is considered acceptable in different societies may vary, the devil's goal is to be sure that they are not in line with God's righteousness.

In today's world, for example, we are constantly pressured to accept a series of attitudes toward certain modern behaviors. We are bombarded by the media and every other available means to accept homosexuality, sex changes, abortion and other such behaviors which are not in harmony with God's law. Anyone who does not conform is severely criticized, ridiculed, and ostracized, just as in grade school.

The devil, being the prince of this world, has great success in conforming the great majority to his kind of thinking. Thus society becomes programmed to his "values" and he has an easy time leading it.

But the values of society cannot be our standard. Only God's holiness is the true basis for what is right and good and what is wrong.

Human societies can be, and have been throughout history, seduced by the devil and his fallen angels to accept and practice many different kinds of atrocities. Many ancient societies burned their own children as sacrifices to their gods. Does this make it right?

Others made human sacrifices and then ate the victims. They practiced cannibalism. Their societies accepted this behavior as being okay. But just because Satan can convince the majority of people in some group or other that something is right doesn't make it right in the eyes of God.

HIS WORKING IN INDIVIDUALS

The result of all of Satan's work throughout the life of each individual is that they are programmed. Although everyone is not the same as each other, each one has received a lifelong dose of programming which has been arranged by the evil one and which is in harmony with him.

One result of this is that Satan then has a lot of influence in the life of these programmed individuals. Depending on the work he has been able to accomplish in each person, he can impel that person to do and say things which he wants them to do.

Working through already established thought patterns which the "victim" has accepted as normal throughout their life, the devil can insert thoughts into their minds. These thoughts

cause a person to then react, saying or doing something to others.

For example, let us suppose that the devil has carved out a suspicious nature in someone. This person is then always suspecting others of having ulterior motives. Let us then imagine an office environment with a group of people working together.

One of them – the suspicious one – receives a thought: “That person over there is trying to take your job.” As a result, the suspicious person begins to say and do things against that other person to try to protect their position from an imaginary threat. To fortify this lie, the devil can even push others in the office to say or do things which seem to “confirm” what he has told the suspicious one.

Then the suspicious one begins to persecute the “offender.” He or she does everything to make life miserable for them. He or she speaks to others in the office to try to influence them against that person.

The more the victim tries to do well at their work in spite of this persecution, the more convinced the suspicious one becomes that they are after their job. Eventually, the victim may become so miserable at work that they quit. They’ve lost their job. Their family suffers. And the devil is rejoicing!

Any evil work, anything which makes humans miserable, anything which promotes suffering or unrighteous behavior on the part of

the creatures which were created in the image of God, makes Satan happy.

Another example could be a couple, a husband and a wife. Perhaps the husband has had some problem crop up at work or with the car. His intense thinking about the subject leads him to be silent and perhaps appear unhappy.

Let us imagine that the devil has worked over the years to establish some deep insecurities in the wife's mind. So, while she is seeing her husband uncommunicative and silent, the devil suggests to her: "Look, he doesn't love you anymore. He has found someone else. See how closed up he is to you? He's probably thinking about some other woman right now!"

This could then lead to the wife accuse the husband of infidelity. She herself could begin to act as if she were being betrayed and rejected, leading to the husband being hurt emotionally.

Perhaps she actually accuses him of this imaginary infidelity. Such a thing could balloon out of all proportion and become an obstacle to marital harmony. If left unchecked it could even lead to divorce.

These are just some very small examples of the millions or even billions of ways which humans are influenced every day by the "speaking" of the evil one. He has worked to establish his "pathways" in their thinking and so he is able to influence them constantly to act and speak according to his impulses. He has ingrained in the minds of humans ways in

which they view others and the world around them.

These “pathways” are open doors to him through which he and his minions can use these people for their purposes whenever they choose. We read in 2 Timothy 2:26 that people are in: “...the snare of the devil where they were taken captive by him whenever he wished”.

When we talk about the evil spirits inserting thoughts into the minds of people, we are not referring to what many call “hearing voices.” These inserted thoughts are not audible. They probably do not even appear to be something entering into the mind from outside.

Since the victim has had these same thoughts throughout their lifetime, they easily accept them as their own. Although people “hearing voices” – even audible ones – does happen, this is not our subject here. Perhaps we may touch on this later on.

In the “normal” everyday situation we are presently examining, the evil spirits take the greatest care to make their thoughts seem like the thoughts of the very person into whose minds they are putting them. They don’t want anyone to know that another being from outside of the person is the source of these ideas and opinions. They want it to appear to the victim that they themselves are doing the thinking and reasoning.

Therefore, almost no one realizes that their thinking is being influenced by another entity.

The “victims” are completely unconscious that they are being used and guided by something outside of themselves. They don’t know that they are just pawns in someone else’s game.

They are walking in darkness. In fact, it is very important to the evil spirits that their influence not become apparent to their “host” person. So they continue to work secretly disguising their insertions into the mind of their victims as coming from the victim themselves.

MAN HIMSELF IS ALSO EVIL

I am not saying here that every wrong thought of every individual is from evil spirits. I am also not insisting that human beings do not have their own thoughts and reasonings, independently from evil spirits. Of course every person thinks and reasons themselves. God has given everyone the ability to think as an independent person.

What the evil spirits do is try to find weak spots where they can insert their thoughts. They work hard to exploit personality traits, fragilities, vulnerabilities, sinful tendencies, or any other possible weak place where they can insert their thoughts and so begin to establish a kind of beachhead in the minds of the individuals.

However, most people are not controlled by the devil in everything they do, but are influenced by him to varying degrees in different areas of their lives.

People, all people, are affected by the evil spirits in this way. But some are influenced to a greater degree and some to a lesser degree. Furthermore, the ways in which people are influenced varies greatly. Not everyone is the same and so the work of the powers of darkness in them therefore varies also.

These influenced people are not “possessed” by the devil. They are simply vulnerable to his influences in some areas of their lives and thoughts. The solution to this is not “to have a demon cast out.” Instead, it is to have their mind renewed by Jesus Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is something which we will be investigating as we go on.

Of course, there are some people who are possessed by an evil spirit. Such a thing does exist. However, the solution is different. These spirits can be cast out by those who are in the name of Jesus. However, this is not our subject here and we will not dwell on it at this time.

It should not be our impression that all evil in man is the result of the work of evil spirits. It definitely is not! When man fell, he fell into sin. Sin became part of his nature. Therefore, our personal thoughts can also be, and often are, sinful. We do not need the devil to generate them. We read that man’s thoughts “...were only evil continually” (Gen 6:5).

This explains why the evil spirits find such fertile ground in us. We were already born fallen. It is our nature.

I am not insisting that every man has only evil within him. Some vestiges of good seem to remain from God's original creation. Men can and do accomplish some very admirable things. Even so, they cannot escape completely the inherent evil within them. This is something which frequently goes on in recesses of the human mind, but is often hidden from others.

Since we cannot see into others' minds and read their thoughts, we might suppose some people to be good. But just imagine if we were able to read and even hear their thoughts! No one would ever get close to anyone else again!

If we could know what they thought about us, about others, and even about themselves, we would be appalled and repelled. Most of this is, of course, kept secret from others. Who would want everyone to know their inner thoughts? They would find them repugnant, and avoid us at all costs.

Imagine for example, what a man thinks when he looks at a beautiful woman. Would he want everyone to know his thoughts? How about a woman who sees another woman who is more beautiful, rich, popular, and successful than herself? Would she want the world around here to hear what she's thinking? These are just a few examples of people's thoughts that are often very ugly, something we would not want anyone else to know.

I am not insisting that all of man's thoughts are evil. But the evil is there all the same. People

exert a lot of energy to hide it. They put on a good front. Many dress up nicely. They try to control their actions and words. They do everything they can to try to have others think well of them. They may not even be very aware themselves of the depth of the evil that lurks in them.

But every once in a while, when the pressure is on, or when strong temptation comes their way, it pops out. Yet even that which "pops out" is just the tip of the iceberg. The mind of man is corrupt right to the core.

So here we have the problem of mankind. We have an inherent tendency to sin. This tendency is augmented by the actions and words of a host of evil spirits which work constantly to push every man and woman further and further into darkness and sin.

Unfortunately, it seems that many, perhaps most people, are not troubled by this. They arrive at a place where they accept their condition. Perhaps they even embrace it. They think that this is the way they are and they have no desire or will to change.

Possibly some make excuses for their sinful tendencies saying something like: "Well, everybody else does it. Everyone is just like me." Others may be uncomfortable with their sin but try to hide this tendency or pretend it isn't there.

Still others see their condition and are looking for a way out. There may also be many who do not even really understand or admit their true condition.

3.

THERE IS A SAVIOR!

But whatever the case may be, in whatever condition a person finds themselves, there is a Savior! There is a cure for sin. There is a Way out of this miserable, sinful life. His name is Jesus.

This man is the Son of the living God who came to this earth for the purpose of providing a way for men and women to escape from sin. That's right! Jesus died on the cross to provide a way for us to be free – completely free – from our sinful thoughts and tendencies.

I would like to re-emphasize this right now. Yes! There is deliverance from our inward sin. A real, heavenly, supernatural deliverance exists. This deliverance is accomplished by Jesus the Anointed One.

Of course, to obtain this great miracle of deliverance, you must first come to know Him. You first need to meet Jesus. Every human being desperately needs a personal experience with the Lamb of God. It is not sufficient just to pass through a process of convincing yourself mentally of some ancient facts, which some call

“faith.” Nor is it enough to merely give your intellectual assent to some Bible verses or biblical truths. You must actually meet Jesus!

You must have a genuine encounter with the God of the universe for yourself. Anything less than this will never arrive at deliverance.

How can a person meet Jesus? It is quite simple. We must seek Him. We must ask Him to reveal Himself to us. We need to call out to Him with all our heart, asking Him to help us to know Him.

I’m afraid that some readers may object to this by stating that our salvation does not originate with ourselves. Instead, it is a gift of God (Eph 2:8). Thus, they may insist that we can do nothing but try to “believe.” By this they seem to mean trying to convince themselves of certain eternal truths.

It is quite true that we can do nothing by ourselves and that salvation comes only from God. However, a person can only cry out to God – wishing to know Him for himself – if God draws them. No one can come to Jesus without the Father helping Him. It is written: “No one can come to me unless the Father – the One who sent me – draws him” (Jn 6:44).

You see, having a willingness and a desire to know Jesus is something which can only come from God. If He, by His mercy, does not grant us this hunger for truth, we will never seek Him.

So if you find in your heart a hunger, a yearning for reality, something beyond this sin-

ful, fallen world, God is already working in your heart. If you experience a desire to know what is really true; if you wish to be different from what you are and not keep destroying yourself and hurting others over and over again by what you do and say; if you long for an experience of eternity which will capture your heart and give you a real purpose in this life, it is because the heavenly Father is drawing you to Himself.

When we call out to Him from a sincere heart, He will answer us! It might not be right away. It might not be when we think it should be or in the way we imagine, but He will answer us just as He promises.

We read: "Ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened" (Mt 7:7,8).

When you are willing and ready, God will reveal Himself to you. Then, and only then, will you be able to truly "believe," which means that you respond positively to this revelation.

When we respond to Jesus revealing Himself to us by affirming that it is really He (this is called believing), then something indescribably wonderful and supernatural happens: we receive Him inside of us. The eternal life of God Himself germinates in our human spirit. A miraculous, eternal birth occurs.

We become "born of God" (1 Jn 3:9). His eternal life enters into us, joining with our own

spirit, to generate a new spiritual being (2 Cor 5:17). The Bible calls this “being born again” (1 Pet 1:23) or, perhaps more clearly, “being born from above” (Jn 3:3-7).

This then is the first step in our deliverance from sin. Receiving Jesus inside of us. From that point onward, He begins working in our interior to change us from what we are into what He is. In simplified form, this is accomplished by His life, which He implants in us at the new birth, growing up inside of us. The more this new life grows up, the more we change. The more the life of God matures in us, the more like Him we become.

This change takes time and attention. It might be quite gradual. It can be very rapid. There are very many aspects of this spiritual growth which can be, and in fact need to be, addressed. But for now, just to simplify things, we need to know that for this life to grow, we must feed it. No life grows by learning. Every life demands food to grow! And our spiritual food is Jesus Himself.

We can feed this new spiritual “man” within us through intimacy with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. When we spend time with Him in prayer, in worship, or while meditating in the scriptures, our spiritual man grows. Just as with physical food, we need this spiritual food daily. We must cultivate the habit of spending “quality time” with God every day, speaking with Him, listening to Him, and letting Him fill us

with who and what He is. This is called “communion,” which means having close fellowship with someone.

If we do not spend intimate time with Jesus, our new spiritual man will not grow, our Christian life will stagnate, and we will not be delivered from our sins. Jesus teaches us that if we don’t “...eat His flesh and drink His blood” we won’t have His life in ourselves (Jn 6:53).

This “eating His flesh and drinking His blood” is merely referring to having these intimate times with Him in the Holy Spirit (Jn 6:63).

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

As His life grows up within us, light begins to dawn. We begin to see ourselves and the world around us more clearly. Jesus, who is the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12), begins to illuminate our inward parts.

This is an important key to our liberation. You see, the people who are being influenced and even controlled by the evil spiritual beings without their knowledge are “walking in darkness.” Jesus let us know that the whole world is in this darkness. It lies “in the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19).

The whole human race suffers from this lack of understanding of how they are influenced by the invisible spiritual world. They are blind to it. They have no idea that their thoughts are being manipulated and their lives being influenced by

invisible forces. Therefore, they are walking in darkness.

Although most people can see the physical world with their eyes, they don't perceive the spiritual world. Walking in darkness could be compared to walking in a completely dark room.

As you walk, suddenly you feel a sharp pain in your shin. You have just stumbled into the coffee table, but you didn't see it beforehand because you were in the dark. This is the case with humanity today. They don't know where they are going because darkness has blinded their eyes (1 Jn 2:11).

The god of this world is the prince of darkness. He does his best work in the dark. As long as we are unaware of how he is working in our minds, we are helpless to stop him. So he keeps his tactics and strategies secret, operating in the dark so that no one will know what he is doing. Therefore, the people of the world are held in a kind of captivity to him and his hordes.

But Jesus, our Savior, is "the light of this world" (Jn 8:12). He says that those who follow Him won't walk in darkness any longer but will have: "the light of God's life" (Jn 8:12). As we get to know Him and grow up spiritually, this light becomes brighter and brighter and begins to expose how the enemy is working in our individual lives.

We begin to see how we are being, and have been, influenced and manipulated by unseen

evil. We also begin to realize the inherent evil in our own fallen minds.

Jesus came “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). His purpose is not to whisk us off to heaven, but to deliver us from all the influences of Satan and sin. He desires to save us completely! And He has the power to do it! His death and resurrection proved before everyone and everything in the universe that He is the One who defeated all the power of darkness, even including death itself.

Now, in this writing, we will go on to discuss how such a wonderful, supernatural deliverance is possible. But first we need a little background, some kind of fundamental understanding of how man was created, so that we can see more clearly what God’s marvelous plan is. We will start with how man was made.

THREE ABILITIES OF THE SOUL

When God made man, He made him “a living soul” (Gn 2:7). This soul of man has three abilities. A man can think, he can feel, and he can decide. We, therefore, have a mind, emotions, and a will. Of these “functions” of the human soul, the mind is the leader. It is the primary factor in all that we feel and decide.

Of course we all know that our thinking guides our life. We think, we analyze, we arrive at conclusions and then we act. Therefore, the source of our thinking is critical to our living.

Our thoughts are what guide us. This then shows how important our thoughts are to how we conduct our life.

Many do not realize however that our thoughts also are the source of our emotions. We are not talking about physical feelings here, but emotions and sentiments. It appears that all emotions are triggered by thoughts.

These thoughts may be subliminal. They may be quick little thoughts. Some thoughts may be so rapid that they don't register as thoughts. We might not even perceive them. But emotions do not occur in a vacuum. They just don't come on their own. They are a result of thoughts passing through our mind.

Certain thoughts trigger certain emotions. For example, we might see a snake and our minds thinks: "A snake!" This might generate fear. Or we might see a beautiful flower and we think: "How lovely," giving us pleasant feelings. Our emotions are governed by our thoughts.

For example, some people suffer from depression. Their feelings are often gloomy and they see no way that their life can be better. These feelings are being generated by subliminal thoughts. No doubt many of these thoughts are being inserted by the evil one.

Such folks may have thoughts such as: "I'll never get better," or "No one even likes me." Certainly the devil will cause other people around them to say and do things to reinforce

these ideas. Such a person desperately needs Jesus to renew their mind.

Our thinking is also the source of our decisions. This is quite obvious. We think about something, reach a decision, and then act upon what we decided. Of course our emotions can enter into this, but as we have seen, they too are a result of thoughts. Through all this we understand how critical our mind is in how we conduct our life. It is what controls our living.

So we see that the key here, the key to being changed to be different people, is to have our mind altered so that it no longer is full of our own sinful thoughts. This also involves being freed from any and all influence and/or domination of evil spirits.

When our thinking is changed and we are freed from the influence of evil spirits, then our whole being is changed, since our mind is the key to all our thinking, feeling, words, and actions.

What Jesus has provided for us is something called: "the renewing of the mind" (Rm 12:2). We are taught that we should not be conformed to this world, but instead to be transformed by this process of the renewing of our mind. This means that our thoughts can be altered. Our values can be changed. Our goals and desires can be made different. Our opinions and ideas can be like that of our Maker.

This miraculous change is accomplished by the light of God shining into us. First, God

reveals to us the evil of our own thoughts. Although we might think that our evil thoughts are apparent, this is not always the case. Frequently, the darkness in which we live and have lived has hidden these things from ourselves and others.

Perhaps much of our thinking, opinions, and ideas, which we have had for many years, seems to be harmless to us. Or, maybe we are unaware of how we really think. Although it may seem strange for someone not to know their own thoughts, it is a very common experience.

Many of our thoughts are so familiar, things which we have assumed, and ways of thinking which are of such long standing, that we don't even notice them. They pass through our minds quickly and we take no time to analyze them.

We are so accustomed to our daily thoughts that they do not stand out to us. Or it could be that we have rationalized away and excused ourselves for our thinking patterns. Possibly we say to ourselves that everyone else thinks that way, so there's no problem.

The reason we are unaware of our thoughts is that human beings are in spiritual darkness. Although meeting Jesus can and does change that, this change takes place over time – perhaps a long period of time. Therefore, the vast majority of believers in Jesus also still have darkness within them.

This then keeps them blind to many of their thinking patterns which are not in harmony

with God, but instead with His enemy. They simply are not aware of them. Although they may have some light, many of their ways of thinking and reasoning are still part of the old creation.

The renewing of the mind which is available in Jesus Christ is a process which takes place over a period of time. It is not instantaneous. This process is the replacing of our own ideas, thoughts, and opinions with those of God.

BORN FROM ABOVE

As we have said, when we are “born from above,” the life of God is born in our human spirit. We read: “That which is born naturally is the physical body, and that which is born of the Spirit is *our human spirit*” (Jn 3:6). We also are taught: “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). So we understand that the Holy Spirit of God unites with our human spirit and a new birth takes place.

Now when God’s life is born into us, it is born as all other lives are: a baby. That’s right. Jesus’ life doesn’t begin in us fully grown and mature. It is just what the Bible clearly says: a birth.

We have already spoken about how this life grows through communion with God. As it grows, the light of God shines ever brighter within us. This gives us more and more clarity about our thoughts and shows us more of God’s

own thoughts. We read: “The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord that sheds light on one’s inmost being” (Pr 20:27 NIV).

The plan of God is for this new life to grow to maturity and become the source of all our living. All of our thinking processes can be brought under its control, therefore guiding every word and action. We perceive our own erroneous ways and also God’s excellent ones.

In this way, we change our way of thinking. We begin to adapt to His values and plans. We, little by little, begin to express His righteousness, because our mind is being renewed. Our thinking, our plans, and our opinions all change to be in harmony with those of our Maker. We then become an expression of God in this world.

This replacement also includes our value systems, or in other words, the things which we value and of which we approve and those which we do not. All of our mental processes need to be brought into alignment with those of our Maker.

Some believers may imagine (and it really is only imagination), based upon a Bible verse, that we already “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). But an analysis of the Greek verb tense here shows us that it is not in the past tense, or in other words, something which has already happened to believers.

Instead, the verb tense is called the: “present, active, indicative”. That is, the tense is the present tense and is describing an action taking

place now. It is something which is happening, not something which already has taken place. Perhaps we should understand this as: "We are having the mind of Christ."

Jesus is the light of the world. He promises us that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness (Jn 8:12). There are a couple of key points we should notice here. One of them is that they must follow Him.

If we are to experience complete freedom from our own sinfulness and liberation from the wiles of the devil, we must follow Jesus. We must obey Him. We must seek His presence every day. We must become His disciple. Since the light we desperately need comes from Him, unless we stay very close to Him, we will not have this light.

The second point is a kind of promise. If we follow Him, He will dispel the darkness within us. His light will shine brighter and brighter. We read: "The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Pr 4:18 NIV).

This light of God is what we desperately need! Without it, we have no hope of ever being changed or ever being made free. There is no way we can change ourselves. As mentioned in the beginning of this writing, our enemy is vastly more intelligent than we are.

Therefore, we must have the light of God! Only He can and will change us by shining His divine light into the recesses of our mind.

God's light reveals several things. It reveals what we are and it shows us who God is. It exposes our sinful nature and unveils His holy nature. God shows us how He thinks about many different things and compares them to our thoughts. He reveals His values and opinions and contrasts them to our own. He shows us His holiness which exposes our sinfulness.

This is a wonderful thing. However, it can bring some serious discomfort to us. The evil which is in the heart of every single man and woman is not pretty. In fact, it is extremely ugly. If you do not know this about yourself, then you have never gotten very close to God.

Yet, despite our ugliness, we must never avoid or flee from this exposure. It is essential! We desperately need it. Only in God's light can we become free from what and who we are. In Him, we will know the truth and it is this truth which will set us free (Jn 8:32). It is only His light which will change us.

If we avoid it, we will retard our spiritual progress. If we, in order to avoid embarrassment, to avoid humiliation, to avoid others seeing our sin and sinful tendencies, resist the illumination of God, then we will only remain the same.

If our pride keeps from permitting our Lord to expose the evil of our human nature, our transformation and liberation will only remain a doctrine or a dream and not our reality. We must be willing to face the truth of who we are. Only

then will God continue His process of changing us into what He is.

One important thing on our part for all this to occur is that we must be willing for some radical things to happen in us. Since God is going to remove something from us – that is our old ways of thinking and reasoning – this will involve the loss on our part, perhaps some things we may consider drastic losses.

You see, we will be losing our soul-life. We will be losing who and what we are. Carrying out this loss – this process of removing from us what is old and sinful – is done by God Himself. Yet He will not do anything in us, absolutely nothing, unless we are one hundred percent willing.

Therefore, there must be on our part a complete yielding. A total surrender of our will to His is necessary. We must have the preparation of heart necessary to allow this crucial, death-to-self work to be done. Our lives must become a living sacrifice (Rm 12:1,2). Who and what we are cannot be more precious to us than who and what He is.

4.

BEING TRANSPARENT WITH GOD

Here we will speak a little about being open to God. What does this mean? It means revealing to Him all of ourselves. It means that we “let Him on the inside” of us completely. The emotional opening of our life is not a physical act like opening up your hand, but a very real act based upon a personal decision.

Every human relationship has a degree of intimacy. This degree of “closeness” depends on the willingness of both parties involved to reveal themselves to each other. God is no different in this respect. Although He will in no way force us to be open or insist upon our transparency with Him, it is what He wants from us.

Obviously, you will have the relationship with God which you choose. You will be as intimate with Him as you allow yourself to be. There is no resistance on His part to complete intimacy of communion. Therefore, the most satisfying relationship with Him, and the kind

of relationship which will most transform us, requires complete openness on our part.

Originally, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked. What does this tell us today? To be naked means nothing is hidden, nothing is secret, nothing is covered up. That's the kind of intimacy we need to have with Jesus.

Now I'm not speaking about physical nudity here. Let no one suppose that I am talking about anything to do with naked bodies. This is a spiritual lesson for us. We can relate to God with none of our inner man hidden, nothing secret, and nothing covered up. It is completely up to us.

What kind of a relationship with God would you like to have? A distant sort of thing where you acknowledge that He exists and He acknowledges you also? Or would you like a kind of occasional friendship, where you get together every so often and spend a little time together?

Or would you instead like to enjoy a full and glad surrender of everything you are to Him, resulting in a full enjoyment of His person and the possibility of walking daily in His presence while having intimate communion with Him?

When we take a close look at the bride of Christ who is revealed in the last part of the book of Revelation, an interesting fact appears. She is entirely transparent. There are no interior walls. There are no barriers. There are no dark places. Nothing is secret. Nothing is hidden.

Everything is transparent and full of light. This light is radiating from God Himself.

Everything and everyone is evident for all to see. And what they will see is the glorious splendor of God's light shining through each individual who is part of this composite bride.

This transparency in our relationship with Jesus is what will result in our being part of His bride. Only in this way will you and I be able to let Him work in us in a way which will prepare us to be part of this indescribable blessing.

Can you imagine a couple getting married when they hardly knew each other? How about two people getting married who were not in love and who had no emotional intimacy whatsoever?

How can we imagine being part of the bride of Christ if we are not close to Him now? How can we think that suddenly, at His appearing, all our resistance and our closed up heart will suddenly disappear? This is just wishful thinking. It is a fantasy. Since God will not forcibly remove our resistance to Him now, He certainly will not do it later either.

Jesus is the light of this world. This light is shining brilliantly in the darkness and the darkness cannot put a stop to it (Jn 1:5). However, you can stop it in your life. You can limit and resist this light, or you can embrace it. You can remain closed up or open up your heart fully to Jesus. You can let Him "see" all that is in you, whether it is attractive or even repulsive. You

can choose to yield your whole being completely to Him, thus allowing Him to do His work within you thoroughly.

This is what the Christian life is really supposed to be like! Although we can limit God's work in us, this is not really very satisfying and will certainly keep us from enjoying Jesus in all His fulness.

We are called to "be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). This is our right because we have become God's children. This is His will for us since He sent His only Son to die so that we could enjoy it. May we never be satisfied with less!

Although I have said that we should let God "see" into us, the fact is that He already does see everything. Hebrews 4:13 reads: "And there is no created being that is not transparent in his sight but all things are stripped bare and exposed before the eyes of him from whom this word came."

He knows our inmost thoughts. He knows everything that is in our heart. He knows how we feel. He reads the thoughts and meditations of our mind. He even knows what we are going to say before we speak.

What He needs is not to know about us, but for us to open up to His work and will. He needs our permission to transform us and all the different experiences which this involves.

God never forces Himself upon us. He completely respects our free will. Therefore, He will

not move one millimeter inside of us beyond where we feel comfortable or where we do not want Him to move.

This is a wonderful thing, yet at the same time, terrible. On the one hand, our loving God is so kind and gentle that He will not push beyond where we want Him to be. On the other hand, it means that we can miss out on His will for us. We can hinder His work. We can retard our own transformation which is meant to be a great blessing to us.

God's work in us involves His light. As we have seen, the world and its inhabitants are in spiritual darkness. The source of much of what goes on within them is not clear. Their own evil is often very well hidden.

So, once we become a child of God, He begins to shine His light into us. He reveals sin. He shows us our attitudes and opinions which are contrary to His nature. He also shows us His own holy, pure nature and how it compares to ours.

This then is how He renews our mind. He exposes our own ways of thinking and reveals His to us. He shines into us by showing us who He is. The comparison between us and Him is what brings us to repentance and helps us to be willing to be transformed.

In the book of Hebrews we encounter some interesting verses which speak to this subject. Some of the traditional translations and even our English language have somewhat obscured

the meaning of these passages, but a fresh look at them shows us something wonderful.

For example, in Hebrews 9:14 in the New International Version we read: "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

However, in the Greek language, this phrase "cleanse our consciences" does not mean exactly what it does in English. For many English speakers, to "cleanse our conscience" means to relieve us of guilt or a feeling of guilt.

But in the Greek it can mean much more than that. Thayer defines this word as meaning: "The soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commanding one, condemning the other."

It then refers to our moral consciousness, or our inner moral compass. In other words, it involves our inner viewpoint of what is right and wrong. It is not just a guilty feeling, but our entire understanding of what is evil and what is right.

With this in mind I would like to offer another translation of Hebrews 9:14 which is based upon this idea. We read: "...how much more will the blood of the Anointed One – who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God – purify your moral con-

sciousness concerning right and wrong so that you don't perform acts which produce death, enabling you to serve the living God?"

You see, the death of Christ opened up the way for God to have intimate communion with us. And it is through this intimacy that He purifies our minds by shining His light into our souls. When this light shines, we can have different reactions. A person can embrace the light, confessing their sins and receiving a new way of thinking.

Others however, even believers, tend to resist the light. Perhaps they excuse themselves for a variety of factors. They might insist that everyone else is just like they are. They might argue that no one is perfect. They could say that they could never be that holy.

Of course in this they are correct. The only way to be truly holy is to have our mind filled with the mind of Christ. It is to allow His thoughts to fill our thinking. It is to embrace His opinions about many different things, including what we think about others. We can never be holy by our own strength or efforts.

But the life of a holy God has been born inside of every true Christian. And this life is supremely and completely holy. Even more wonderful is the fact that it can grow. It can spread. It can fill us more and more with all that He is. It can even change our "moral consciousness" so that even our thoughts and opinions are different, coming into harmony with those

of a holy God. This is real salvation. This is what Jesus came to do in us.

Under the Old Covenant, the laws of God which told us about His thoughts and opinions were carved into stone. But He promised that He would make a New Covenant.

We read: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will impress my laws on their hearts, and inscribe them upon their minds" (Heb 10:16). You see, this renewing of our mind is the promise of the New Covenant. It is God's will for all of His children. It is what He came and died to accomplish.

This, brothers and sisters, is true salvation. It is for everyone, not only a select few. As children of God, it is our right to inherit from the Father everything that He is. Don't be put off by thinking it is impossible.

Of course it is, humanly speaking. But that is exactly why Jesus died! He died to save us from our sins (Mt 1:21). When He rose from the grave, He defeated death, thus giving Him the authority over death. He is mighty to save anyone and everyone!

Since this radical change doesn't depend on us, but on the risen Lord, of course a complete salvation, a total deliverance from sin, is possible! It is not only possible but necessary.

Please don't find an excuse to resist the light, the light of life. Open up to it. Receive it! Don't run away. Look fully into the wonderful face of

Jesus, trust Him to do His work in you in the best possible, most loving, way.

Although we should not do so, many believers resist God's light for very many different reasons. Perhaps it would help some readers if we took some time examining some examples.

Let us take an imaginary story here about a sister who was always full of problems. She was tormented inside by demonic influences and on the outside had a very difficult personality. It was hard for anyone to get along with her. She was always seeking solutions from other brothers and sisters but no one could seem to help. This situation persisted for many years.

But one day it came to light that, before knowing the Lord, she had had a secret abortion. This was during a time when such abortion was illegal.

This sister had a terrible time being completely transparent before the Lord. She didn't want anyone to know. She was afraid of the consequences. At the time of the abortion it would have been considered murder. Perhaps she could be prosecuted.

This lack of openness on her part greatly inhibited her spiritual progress. It kept her locked up in darkness. This imaginary sister could have been set free many, many years ago. But her tight hold on her dark past and sin kept her from much progress.

Another example could be a woman who was raped as child. This is a situation that we

touched on at the beginning of this writing. This person could have a lot of buried trauma and pain that she does not want to think about again. Consequently, she may avoid at all costs this whole situation coming into the light. I've known women who told me that they had repressed such an event so much that they had even "forgotten" it.

But all such things need to come into the light. Jesus' loving hands cannot heal us and change us if we hold tightly onto whatever it is in us that is painful or shameful. We must trust Him, believing that He loves us, and open up even the most difficult parts of our lives so that we can be free.

In Luke 11:34,36 we read: "The 'lamp' of your whole being is your eye {vision, understanding, Gk}. When your vision is clear, your whole being is also full of light ... If, therefore, your whole being is full of light, having no dark part, everything will be completely clear inside in the same way that a lamp radiates physical light."

I love this phrase, "having no dark part." These words came from our Lord Himself. What a salvation! What a deliverance from the devil and his minions with all their subtle influences, little lies, and evil suggestions. What a wonderful thing to be walking in the "light of this world."

This is great liberation. It is God's will for you! Let us all seek His face with sincerity so

that we can obtain all that Jesus died for us to receive.

HOW GOD'S LIGHT FREES US

So we see that our opening up to God's light is essential. We must not resist or run and hide. In this light is our salvation.

In the case where our thoughts have their source in evil spirits, the light exposes them for what they are. Then, we can simply stop listening to them. We can stop paying attention or responding. When the light shines and we realize that certain thoughts are not our own we can reject them and the power of the enemy is weakened.

Recognizing the source of these thoughts enables us to turn away from them and stop responding to them. In this way, the evil spirits begin to lose control over us. They can no longer rely upon inserting certain thoughts and causing us to act in predictable ways.

Light defeats darkness. Perhaps this could be analogous to how sunlight kills certain bacteria and viruses. When the light shines, you no longer keep banging your shin on that coffee table. You can see clearly where you are going. You begin to understand with increasing clarity why you acted and spoke in certain ways.

Just this understanding will change you. When you begin to see, the darkness loses its power over you. Light is essential for us to have

liberty from the powers of the dark forces. We must walk in this light.

When we accept the light which God gives and act accordingly, God will give us more. When we maintain an intimate communion with Him, He will shine more and more brightly into us. As we agree with what He reveals, He will show us more. This will bring us into greater and greater freedom and joy.

Just recently I received an email which might help the reader. A woman wrote to me wondering how to be free from blasphemous words which would suddenly crop up in her mind. She explained that she had a terrible time not saying these words. She loved the Lord, but she was tormented because she always had these blasphemous thoughts and was tempted to say them.

I told her that no doubt these thoughts were from the enemy. He was inserting these thoughts into her mind and then accusing her about them. Since she herself loved Jesus, it seems very doubtful that these thoughts came from herself. "Seeing" in the light the origin of these words and thoughts should free her from them.

The autobiography of John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, seems to be an account of someone tormented by demonic thoughts in a similar way. Although God delivered him with the passage of time, I was always sad to see that he never seemed to realize that

the source of many of these evil thoughts was not himself.

Instead, he spent years agonizing about the condition of his mind. Yet, it seems to me that he was receiving these thoughts from the darkness without realizing it. He too was still in the darkness so he needlessly suffered so much mental torment. By accepting these thoughts as his own, he agonized about them without much real progress.

BRINGING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

The following section is being included because of a verse that has lead some people to think about the renewing of the mind in the wrong way. Since it has been misleading to some, we will spend a little time to investigate this idea.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 we read about Paul telling us that he was ready to be: "...Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (KJV). Now many believers think that this verse is referring to trying to control their individual thoughts. They imagine that we must police our thoughts constantly and try to control them according to the scriptures or some other standard. They confuse this with the renewing of the mind.

However, our mind is not renewed by self-effort. We are not changed by our own power,

even mental power. Transformation is not achieved by trying to control our own thoughts. A person could drive themselves crazy trying to keep track of every thought and “make it behave.” No such effort could possibly make an eternal change in us. Please don’t waste your time trying to do it.

The renewing of the mind is something which God does in us by His Spirit. It is by His grace that He shines His light into us and it is He who changes our thinking. It is His work and He will do it.

The subject Paul is addressing in the previous passage is the ideas and opinions of *others* who were opposing his teaching. He wasn’t speaking about his own thoughts. He was talking about correcting the wrong ideas of others. When we read the context of this verse, this becomes clear. Let us read together in 1 Corinthians in a different version to verify this truth.

“Now I Paul appeal to you through the meekness and mercy of the Anointed One – I who in your presence am humble among you but now that I am absent am bold toward you – yes, I plead with you that when I am present I will not have **to be bold with the confidence with which I plan to be bold against some who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.**

“For though we walk in bodies of flesh, we don’t fight according to the flesh. For the

weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but mighty in God to cast down strongholds, overthrowing human reasonings and all “superior” arguments which rise up to oppose the knowledge of God, taking every wrong concept captive to the obedience of the Anointed One. And we are prepared to correct all unwillingness to hear once your obedience to God is perfected” (2 Cor 10:1-6).

You see, Paul was planning to be bold toward some *other people* who were criticizing him. He was going to overthrow their arguments and reasonings. He was going to correct their wrong concepts, not his own. So we see that this verse is not a basis for trying to police our own thoughts and rearrange our own thinking.

5.

THE SOUL-LIFE

Yes, it is true that people can and do have their own evil thoughts. These thoughts do not come from evil spirits but from themselves. So what can be done about this? What is the solution to this problem?

The source of such thoughts is our old life which we inherited from Adam and Eve. It is called in the Bible, the “soul-life” which is PSUCHÊ in the Greek language. This might surprise you, but the only solution – the one and only solution to this problem – is death.

You see, only the dead don’t sin. Only those who are dead don’t think evil thoughts. Since our soul-life is contaminated by sin, as long as it is alive, it will produce evil thoughts.

But how is it possible for our own life to die? Wouldn’t that mean the end of us? Wouldn’t we cease to exist? By the grace of God, the answer is no. There is a way in which we ourselves can die and yet not cease to be.

Do you remember how, earlier in this writing, we spoke about having God’s life born

inside of us? We spoke about meeting Jesus and being “born from above,” which means that the life of another being – an eternal, holy being – has germinated inside of us. This new life is the solution. It is a real life. In fact, it is “more real” than our own, since it is uncreated and therefore eternal.

Due to this new life in us, we can face the death of our own life, knowing that we will not cease to exist. We can lose the old soul-life with which we were born without fear because we now possess a superior, endless life which comes from God. As our life is put to death, this new life takes its place.

People who don’t know God don’t have this option. They are kept in bondage to sin throughout their whole lives because of the fear of dying (Heb 2:15). But we need have no fear. We can deliver ourselves to death believing that the One in us, who rose victoriously from the grave, will raise us up also together with Himself (Eph 2:6).

How then is it possible for us to die? We certainly can’t commit suicide. If only the dead don’t sin, where does that leave us? Well, God has done a miracle. When Jesus died on the cross, humanity died with Him. In God’s eyes, the race of Adam was finished. He was the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45). When we believe into Jesus and receive His life inside of us, this death becomes a possibility for us.

Almost all Christians believe in their co-death with Christ. Yet for most this is just an

imaginary idea. It is not real to them. It is not their experience. But this should not be our case! All that Jesus purchased for us on the cross should become real to us. We must all experience it! And this includes our death, the end of ourselves.

How then is this possible? First we must discuss an important aspect of this process which we already talked about to some degree. That is that God will not push past our resistances. He will not force His will on anyone.

This is very important! God will not do anything inside of us which we are not completely willing for Him to do. Therefore, we must be one hundred percent willing for this death to occur or it will not. But, with our complete permission, God can apply the death of Jesus to our old life and nature. In this way, we become free from sin.

Not surprisingly, the first step in this death to sin is light. First God exposes who and what we are. Then, and only then, can we have the wonderful opportunity to repent. Repentance means to change our mind. It means that we agree with God's sentence of death on sinners such as ourselves. We agree that people who think and practice such things should not populate the earth.

We are taught: "When we agree *with God's judgment* concerning our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all immorality of character" (1 Jn 1:9).

Notice that God will do two separate things when we “agree with God’s judgment” (literally “speak together,” Gk) concerning our sins. First, he will forgive us. Then, he will “cleanse” us, which means he will work to clean up our lives so that we no longer sin.

This cleansing means dying. The Holy Spirit can apply the death of Christ to us. This can really happen! It can and should be our experience. In some supernatural way which we cannot fully understand or explain, God, through His son Jesus, can put our old life to death. It can really cease to exist. In this way, we will no longer sin.

WE REALLY CAN BE FREE!

It doesn’t matter who or what we are when we come to Jesus. We may be greedy. We may be full of lust. We may be liars. We may have a strong attraction to members of our own sex. We may be very selfish and self-centered. These and endless other conditions are where members of the human race find themselves.

But God knows all this. When He sent His Son to earth, He already knew all about every human condition. Therefore, His provision for us is adequate to treat any and every human situation. There is no one, there is no human problem, from which He cannot rescue us.

It is written: “Therefore, he is also able to save completely {to perfect} those who are continually drawing near to God through him

because he is always alive to intercede for them” (Heb 7:25).

Also, we can again remember the words of the angel who announced Jesus’ birth to Joseph. He stated: “Joseph, you son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son and you shall call his name JESUS, for it is he who will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20,21).

We must never believe that our case is too difficult. We must never think that the problem is too deep or has gone on for too long a time. We must believe in the promises of God! He can save us completely from who and what we are. He can deliver everyone and anyone from their sin. This is really true! Believe it!

As already mentioned in chapter three, we must believe that there really is a Savior! He has the power and the authority to do what we cannot and never could do ourselves.

His deliverance means our death. When we have died, we no longer sin. We read: “We know this: that our ‘old man’ is being crucified with him so that sin in its entirety would be rendered inoperative, in order that we would no longer be in slavery to sin. For he who is dying is *being freed from sin*” (Rm 6:6,7).

This death is a crucifixion. It is a painful and prolonged death. It also involves suffering. We read: “Since the Anointed One suffered while in the body, prepare yourselves also with the same

mindset, for he who is suffering in the flesh is made to desist from sin so that you no longer should live the rest of your time in this body following human lusts, but doing the will of God” (1 Pet 4:1,2).

Many Christians think that after receiving the Lord, they will stop suffering. They imagine that they will escape all emotional and physical pain. Unfortunately, this is not the truth. Anyone who wishes to be free from what they are will suffer and probably suffer intensely. Crucifixion is not a painless death.

Paul says: “*I want to know him and the power of his resurrection – which comes through participating in his sufferings and becoming integrated into his death – so that in this way I may be experiencing the resurrection from the dead*” (Ph 3:10,11).

Paul was: “...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that it is necessary to go through many afflictions to enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

It is interesting to note that Paul’s teaching them to prepare for “afflictions” was considered to be “strengthening them.” 1 Peter 4:1,2 reads: “Since the Anointed One suffered while in the body, prepare yourselves also with the same mindset, for he who is suffering in the flesh is made to desist from sin so that you no longer should live the rest of your time in this body following human lusts, but doing the will of God.”

Jesus taught us that before we decide to follow Him, we should take a moment and count the cost (Lk 14:28). This is because there is a cost, in human terms. Of course this salvation from who and what we are is completely free. You cannot buy it with money. Yet, there is a “price” to pay, humanly speaking.

This price is the loss of our soul, which, if the truth be known, is no loss at all but a wonderful deliverance. However, we must be prepared for this cost. It is a real one. If we are not, it is easy to become offended with Jesus because of our suffering and turn away from following Him. No doubt this has happened with many.

Our co-crucifixion with Jesus needs to become our experience. An actual death needs to be applied to us. Although we don’t die physically, a genuine death can be applied to our Adamic life.

This is how we are really delivered from sin. There is no other way. There is no shortcut. As stated before, only the dead do not sin. Therefore, to escape sin, our old life must die. While it lives, it will always express its own nature which is sinful.

This death is applied to us in a mysterious way by the Holy Spirit. We cannot crucify ourselves. I am not speaking here about a great effort of self-denial. I am not advocating using our will power or determination to change ourselves. I am speaking about a miracle which God does in us by His grace and mercy.

Due to Jesus' death and resurrection from among the dead, the Spirit of God can apply this death and resurrection to us. When we are ready and willing, He will do it in us. This is what actually does deliver us from sin.

However, perhaps the great majority of believers do not experience this deliverance. Far too many are still bound in sin and self. There are a couple possible reasons for this.

First, many are unwilling to die. They do not wish to lose "themselves" and/or they are not willing to go through the suffering which this deliverance involves. This can be an intense, prolonged suffering. Crucifixion is a kind of torture – a slow and painful death.

Second, many do not know this is possible. From the teachings they have received and the testimony and lives of the people around them, they have no idea that such a deliverance is possible. Or, if it were possible, they don't see how it can become real to them.

Unfortunately, it is even true that there are so-called Bible teachers who insist that our sin is not important. They imagine that God doesn't see it and doesn't care about it.

How foolish this is! Such false teachers will be judged severely by God for depriving His people of their rightful heritage, which is actually to become holy by His power. This is the very reason Jesus came and died! He came to free us from sin. We read: "And you know that he was manifested to remove our sin" (1 Jn 3:5).

Therefore, those who don't realize this wonderful possibility of being free from sin, don't believe it. They don't seek God for it and they don't expect any drastic, genuine changes to occur in their lives. Without faith, God will not move in them.

It is important for us to realize here that the "cost" in terms of our suffering is nothing compared to the blessings it will produce. Paul boldly declares: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us (Rm 8:18).

Believers must learn to rejoice in their sufferings. They need to look beyond today and see the holy results which will come. They must have light from God to see how their suffering is producing an eternal weight of glory.

For this we need to prepare our mind. We should recognize the necessity of suffering and be ready for it. We read: "You should have the mindset which the Anointed One, Jesus had who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be retained.

"Instead, he emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, even being made into the likeness of men. Then, being found in human form, he humbled himself even further and became obedient even to death, yes, the *humiliating, painful* death of the cross" (Ph 2:5-8).

6.

HOW GOD MADE MAN

When God made Adam and Eve, he created them with a curious deficiency. They did not have the ability to make moral decisions. They could not tell right from wrong. They could not distinguish good from evil. This then put them in a position of having to depend upon God. When confronted with a moral dilemma, they could only consult with their Maker who, it seems, frequently walked with them in the Garden (Gn 3:8).

This “deficiency” caused them to be partially dependent upon God. Since they lacked this moral capacity, when they were faced with any kind of moral question, their only recourse was to ask God.

Yet their Lord allowed another option to be available to them. He permitted the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” to grow in the Garden of Eden. This tree offered to this first couple freedom from this dependence on God. It provided the possibility of becoming completely independent and self-reliant. There was

a way for them to free themselves from this “bondage” of having to depend on God and make their own moral decisions. They could think for themselves and direct their own way. We have all around us today the results of their decision to have this freedom.

The other tree which stood prominently “in the midst of the garden” (Gen 2:9) was something called “the tree of life.” This tree also offered something to the first couple. It offered some kind of “life.”

Obviously this must have been a variety of life which they did not yet have. This is interesting because they already were alive. They possessed a human life, and it even was a life in which there was no death. It was, in fact, a human, “everlasting” life.

Yet another variety of life was being offered to them. We know from other scriptures that this life was the life of God Himself. Now this offer was not just an unending kind of life – an “everlasting” life – since they already had this variety. Instead, they were offered a superior life – the life of the Creator.

Although some Bible versions call God’s life “everlasting life” this seems to be an inaccurate translation. Any life which begins at some point in time and then lasts forever is an “everlasting” life. But God’s life is very different than this! It is eternal. This means that, not only will it never end, it also never had a beginning. God was never born. He always existed. There was never

a time when He was not. In fact, time is just something He created for us to live in.

So we see that only God has true “eternal life,” a life without beginning and without end. We read about God in 1 Timothy 6:16 where it states: “...who alone has immortality, and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen nor can see, to whom belongs honor and eternal power. Amen.”

God is the original immortal being. The only uncreated One. Yet, He made a decision to share this uncreated life with mankind. To Adam and Eve, it was offered in the Garden of Eden in the form of fruit on a tree.

Let us remember that this was not the “jungle of Eden.” It was a garden. While a jungle is full of lush vegetation, it is a random growth which occurs spontaneously. But a garden always has a design. It is planned by someone. So when God planted His garden, He made this life-imparting tree the focal point. In this way, He showed us that the offer of His own life to man is at the very center of all His thoughts and plans.

However, for some strange reason, Adam and Eve never ate of this tree. It was right there in front of them. It was the centerpiece of God’s design. But they chose not to eat it. Why do you suppose this was?

Imagine for a moment that you could ingest into yourself the life of another being who was infinitely superior to yourself. (You don’t have

to just imagine this, you actually can.) What would that mean?

Since this new life would be greater and better than yours in every way, it would tend to dominate. It would tend to take over. It would become your master. It would use you to express itself. You, although being a willing participant, would not be the one leading your own life. Instead, you would have to submit to Another.

Don't you suppose that on some level Adam and Eve sensed this fact? Can't you imagine that they suspected that eating of this tree would mean a radical change inside of them? No doubt they did. So, even though this tree was there in front of them every day, they subtly avoided it. Instead, when "freedom" and independence were explained to them they jumped at the chance.

Here they were in God's garden positioned between two choices: On one hand, freedom and independence to make their own moral decisions and run their own lives or, on the other hand, complete submission to and dependence upon Another. Well, we know from long experience what the consequences of their choice are.

Now here we are today with these same two trees in front of us. God through His mercy has again offered us His life. The cherubim with the flaming sword (Gn 3:24), representing God's judgment on sinful man, has been taken out of

the way by the death of His Son. He is again offering mankind His life.

So this decision concerning independence and self-reliance or total submission to Another are still also here in front of us. In this respect, nothing has changed. To make a decision to receive into ourselves the life of an infinitely superior being still carries with it the same consequences. There is still the question of who will be "the Lord of our lives."

When a person receives Jesus the Anointed One, they must receive Him for who He is. And who is He? He is the Lord. He is God incarnate. Therefore, He must become our Master in every aspect of our being.

If not, then our spiritual progress will be hindered. Our freedom from sin will be curtailed. Our liberty from the evil spirits will be very limited. If we preserve our right to be our own master (and God will always allow us to choose this), then we will never experience the many benefits of His new life.

Far too many men and women are "brought to the Lord Jesus" without this most basic truth being explained to them. They come to Jesus without the "Lord" part.

Perhaps they are drawn to Christianity with the hope of solutions to their problems. Possibly, the hope to be healed from some disease or other draws them. It may be that they hope for success in business or some other kind of "blessing."

When such people receive Jesus, it is only the beginning of a long and painful struggle about who is to run their lives. Until they reach the point of total surrender to the Headship of Jesus, they will make little, if any, spiritual progress.

While they are still seeking their own pleasure and profit, they will not be changed into the image of Jesus. They will remain bound to their sinful thoughts which produce their sinful behavior. Is it any wonder then that the church today is filled with so many unholy people who call themselves "Christians"?

Yet God is offering humanity something much greater than this. He is offering us a deliverance from ourselves. He is offering us freedom from the dominion of the evil invisible forces.

He is offering us all that He is and has. He is so kind that He is even planning to do this wonderful work for us and in us. We don't even have to do it ourselves. All of us should take full advantage of this offer.

It is written: "*It is he* who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in the Anointed One, Jesus, before the ages of time.

"*This purpose* has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior the Anointed One, Jesus, who rendered death ineffective and brought the eternal life of God – even immortal-

ity – to light through the good news message. It is for this message that I was appointed a herald, a sent one, and a teacher” (2 Tim 1:9-11). This is really good news!

I remember many years ago writing a pamphlet about our co-crucifixion with Christ. As I wrote, I saw with ever more clarity how this would mean an end of me: an end to my “self,” to my independence, and to my “self-realization.” I would end up “merely” being an expression of Someone else. Anything I accomplished wouldn’t be credited to me. All the glory would go to Him. I became offended.

It took several weeks of meditating about this to come to the following conclusion. There is no way I will ever be the supreme being. That position is taken. Some other being (Satan) has already tried and still is trying to supplant Him, but it doesn’t seem like he’s having much success. So being independent (I never thought of being as great as God, but just being “my own man”), didn’t seem like a good option.

But there is another exalted position available. We can become an expression of the greatest, most majestic One in the universe. By submitting to Him, He can fill us with Himself and express Himself through us.

No, there is no room for “self” here. Yet could our “self” ever be anything like this amazing possibility? Could whatever we could become on our own be anything alongside being God’s representative and expression? Of

course not! Yet we can be exalted with Him and in Him. All it requires is humility and submitting our entire being to Him. This is a beautiful thing and the only possibility that doesn't involve our ugly ego.

7.

THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

This then brings us back to our first subject which we touched upon in the beginning of this writing where we spoke about a conflict in the spiritual realms of this world. God introduced Adam and Eve into a hostile spiritual environment with instructions to conquer and subdue it. We all know how they failed.

But through Jesus the Anointed One, God is again working to complete this task. He is calling men and women to Himself. He is putting His own life within them and causing them to live righteous lives.

Here, in the middle of Satan's kingdom, there are human beings living under the government of God! He, working in them and through them, is expressing His holiness right here in Satan's kingdom. As His life grows up within them, the influence of the evil spirits grows less and less. God is undoing the devil's programming in their minds. They are no longer his pawns which he used to do his will.

This then becomes a threat to the devil's sovereignty. His kingdom is under attack. He is losing his hold over many human beings which had previously been under his influence and control. These human beings with God inside of them are also being used to help free others from darkness and sin. They are increasingly God's instruments through which He speaks and works here on earth.

Since they are becoming more and more free from Satan's influence, they are defeating him in many ways. This is a great glory to God but a shame to the enemy.

Jesus was a perfect example of a human being over whom the devil had no control. Satan had no beachhead or "ground" in Jesus' mind through which he could influence Him. Jesus stated: "...for the prince of the world is coming, yet he has nothing in me" (Jn 14:30).

Jesus was the forerunner, the One who has gone in front of us to show us the way. In Him, we see the goal, and He is the one who will do the work in us as we open to Him.

Perhaps some believers have supposed that becoming mature spiritually and getting many victories over sin and deception would lead to a more tranquil life. However, many times just the opposite is the case.

Instead of enjoying a blissful existence, we are thrown more into the spiritual battle for the universe. Instead of finding outward peace, we are confronted with many different kinds of

satanic attacks. This is not because we are somehow doing something wrong, but because we are becoming a threat to the kingdom of darkness.

These spiritual attacks can come in many forms. We can be bombarded with discouraging thoughts. We can feel our minds under some kind of pressure that is difficult to describe.

We can be violently accused about something we did which did not offend God, but was in an area where we have a certain weakness. He may arrange some temptations which take all our strength to resist. The devil can arrange circumstances, even using our family and/or people around us to cause us extreme stress.

His purpose in this stress is to push us beyond the limits of our self-control so that we do or say things which are not in harmony with God. We might lose our temper. We might say or do things which are not right. His strategy is to pressure us until we fall in some way.

These trials can become very extreme and the pressure be very great. Sometimes we can be under a kind of spiritual pressure which we don't think we can endure another minute.

Paul describes a little of this kind of experience when he says: "For we don't want you to be unaware, brethren, of the suffering which we experienced in Asia. There we were under extreme pressure, far beyond our strength to withstand, so much so that we despaired even of life itself" (2 Cor 1:8). Although this kind of

pressure is not constant, it can happen from time to time.

Our job as believers is to just keep standing firmly in the Lord. Using His strength and the "armor" which He has given us, we must not succumb to the impulses to do or say something to try to get relief. We must "stand in the evil day" (Eph 6:13). Our part of this battle is to "resist the devil" (Js 4:7). Our victory is in making it through to the end of the trial without sinning in any way, without expressing our flesh.

This is very important. When the devil arranges such trials for us and we fall, he is showing the universe that he is victorious and has power over us.

But when we make it through these tests without expressing the fallen nature, then Jesus' victory over Satan becomes our victory and we are then more prepared to help others through their difficult times.

We read: "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, look, Satan has petitioned *to be permitted* to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you so that your faith doesn't fail. And once you have returned *from this test*, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31,32).

This "sift you like wheat" must have been quite an extreme trial. Satan was going to pass him through a severe process. It is not only Peter that is put to these tests, but we are also. However, in His wisdom, God allows these things for our good. When we fail, it helps us

see our weakness and cry out to God for transformation. When we are victorious, it is a glory to Him.

8.

REBUKING OR “BINDING” THE DEVIL

I realize that some people will advocate solving the problem of attacks by the enemy by just “rebuking the devil” or “binding the devil.” I would very strongly recommend *against* this practice! Don’t engage in such foolish activity! It does no good and will probably make things worse in the long run. Now I’m sure this will surprise or offend some readers, so it is necessary to give a thorough explanation of these assertions.

To begin, we should have the humility to admit that we know very little about the invisible spiritual world around us. God has not seen fit to tell us much and we cannot figure it out on our own. Those who claim to see “angels” everywhere wearing different kinds of clothes fit for movie sets and other such details are either lying, have been badly deceived by these spirits, or have an overactive imagination. Don’t be taken in by them.

One important part of this question which I would call to the reader's attention is that demons are not fallen angels. That's right. We can understand from the scriptures that a demon is not a fallen angel. These are two distinct kinds of beings. How could we come to such a conclusion?

Firstly, we are told that angels are "greater in might and power" than men (2 Pet 2:11). We are taught that they inhabit heavenly places (Eph 6:12). They are often called the stars of heaven (for example Rev 6:13). They do not seem to need physical bodies, but can appear in bodies – to materialize so to speak – when they wish (for example Genesis 18:1,2). They, therefore, have no desire or need to inhabit or take possession of a human body.

Demons on the other hand seem to be a lower order of being. What do we know from the Bible about them? Firstly, we can learn that they have a need for, or an affinity for, water. Jesus reveals this when He says: "But when an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, but cannot find it" (Mt 12:43). For some reason, a demon without water cannot be at rest. This is important. An angel doesn't need water to be at rest.

Secondly, it is significant to note that they seem to want to inhabit a human being or an animal. Such physical bodies consist of more than half water. When Jesus cast out the legion

of demons, where did they plead to go? Into the pigs. And later where did the pigs go? Into the water. This doesn't seem to be the activity of angels, fallen or otherwise.

Thirdly, there is a verse in Job which mentions "the shades (spirits) of the dead" trembling underneath the water (Job 26:5 Amplified). Who are these "shades" if they are not demons? It is impossible that this verse is referring only to the limited number of sailors who had died at sea before the book of Job was written.

All dead humans, whether they drown or die by other means, go to the place God has prepared for them, which would be hades. Those who drown do not get special treatment and have their spirits waiting at the bottom of the sea. Therefore, these "shades" cannot be the spirits of men. These then are probably what we now know as the demons – the unclean spirits – since we know that they prefer to be in water.

Who and what are demons? God has not thought it necessary to enlighten us. But there is a possibility that these unclean spirits are the disembodied spirits of some kind of creatures. That would mean that they are beings which once had physical bodies but lost them.

They have died, but since they are not men, their spirits have not gone to the place which dead men occupy, which is hades. Instead, they are in the depths of the sea or other bodies of water. It is conceivable they are beings which

lived under the fallen domain of Satan somewhere, possibly on this earth, before this present creation.

If these unclean spirits once had bodies and then lost them through God's judgment, this would explain why they seem to be seeking to enter into other bodies or live in the water. Perhaps being surrounded by water gives them the sensation of living in a body. Fallen angels do not live in the water, but in "heavenly places".

So we see that there is a scriptural basis for thinking that demons are not the same thing as fallen angels.

Why is that important to us as believers? It is because of the question of authority. Jesus gave His followers authority over the demons. This is a fact. We read: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons..." (Mt 10:8). However, believers have NOT been given authority over the fallen angels.

Yet, based on this and other verses many Christians are trying to "bind" or rebuke fallen angels, mistaking them for demons. Casting out demons is certainly a Christian responsibility. Rebuking fallen angels is not.

Although we do have the power to defeat the fallen angels in our daily lives, we do not have "authority" over them. These are two completely different things. Why, for example, would we need to "wrestle" against the principalities and powers (Eph 6:12) (read "fallen

angels" here) if we have authority over them? If we already had authority, there would be no struggle at all. To imagine that we have such authority is a serious mistake and the scriptures call this activity so dangerous that even Michael the archangel would not practice it. Furthermore, those who do so are compared to animals without the ability to reason.

In Jude 1:8-10 we read: "Yet in exactly the same way these people also, following their unclean imaginations, defile their bodies *through sexual sins*, reject God's authority, and even insult glorious *heavenly beings*.

"In contrast to this, Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil as he disputed with him about the body of Moses, did not dare to speak slanderously against him but said, 'The Lord rebuke you'. But these *people* speak slanderously of *beings* they really know nothing about and pervert themselves in the *unclean practices* which they know instinctively like animals without the ability to reason."

Also in 2 Peter 2:10-12 we are told: "*This is especially so for those who walk following the flesh, giving themselves over to their cravings for what is sexually impure, who reject the lordship of the Anointed One over them.*

"These do not observe God's limits, are arrogant, and are not even afraid to insult the glorious ones. In contrast to this, angels, though greater in might and power than such carnal men, do not bring slanderous accusations against

them [the fallen angels] before the Lord. But these *men*, like wild animals without *the ability to reason which are* made to be captured and destroyed, shout reproachfully against that which they are *actually ignorant.*"

You see, rebuking or "binding" the devil is a very foolish and dangerous practice. Every group of people or individuals who I have witnessed practicing this kind of thing has ended up very badly.

We should not put ourselves or our mouths in places which we know almost nothing about. We will only end up attracting attention to ourselves from very powerful beings who are not nice. This could be compared to going up to the local bully and shaking your fist in his face. You better be sure you can handle the consequences.

Perhaps some will imagine that since "they are a child of God" they can do such things. It is more likely that they are really a "baby of God" – a very young Christian who will suffer for their foolishness. A mature "son of God" would have more wisdom in his dealings with invisible, spiritual forces.

Let us take a minute and reason a little. If "binding the devil" had any real effect, why isn't he bound?

With millions of unwitting believers praying towards, shouting at, "binding" the devil, and many other such things over so many years, why does he seem as active and powerful as ever? Why isn't he bound? Any honest person

must be forced to admit that all this activity has not diminished Satan's power at all.

Most people know how to tie up their dog near their house. But do you really know how to "bind" one of the most powerful, invisible spiritual beings in the universe? Are mere words sufficient? Are there some imaginary, spiritual chains that you can use? Are you really able to take away his power? If so, you are really amazing!

Or, perhaps you should verify to be sure that you are not just messing with some demons while imagining they are angels, and being made a fool before the watching universe. With all this in mind, let us abandon this futile practice and humble ourselves before God.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS!

No doubt some will argue that we must take authority over these evil forces "in the name of Jesus." They will insist that there is power in this name. Using Jesus' name, we can do anything. We can even move mountains! (By the way, have you moved any mountains recently?)

With this in mind, it might be good to take some time here to discuss what the phrase "in the name of Jesus" means. No doubt, this is the key to our authority over the unseen world. After all, our Lord Himself taught us: "And whatever you ask, being in my name, I will do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If

you ask anything being in my name, I will do it” (Jn 14:13,14). These and many other verses teach us that the power of God is in the name of Jesus. It is in His name that we can do many powerful and wonderful works. This is great! But just what does it mean?

The key here is not in the words we say. Jesus was not teaching us a magic spell. He was not giving us the secret incantation which would enable us to do miraculous things and get what we want from God. To be “in the name of Jesus” does not mean that we say the words: “in the name of Jesus.” It does not refer to the words we utter, but to where we ourselves are. We must be “in the name of Jesus.”

To be “in the name of Jesus” we must be in Him. It means being intimate with Him, submitted to Him, hearing from Him, and doing His will. It means that we are His representative doing and saying what He wishes at any given moment in time.

We are a type of ambassador for Him. As such, we cannot be acting independently from Him doing our own will or saying our own thing. Furthermore, we must not be saying or doing what we *imagine* He might want. To be in Him means that we are being truly guided by Him in all our words and actions.

Our example here is Jesus Himself. We read of Him saying: “I have come in my Father’s name and you don’t receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him”

(Jn 5:43). What did He mean by that? What did He mean by saying He came “in his Father’s name?” Clearly it did not mean that He always repeated the words “in the name of the Father” when he did His miracles.

It meant that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him (Jn 14:10). Then, He explains this further by saying: “The words which I say to you don’t originate with myself but the Father who lives in me, he is the one doing his works *through me*” (Jn 14:10).

You see, Jesus wasn’t living His own life. He was living by the Father’s life (Jn 6:57). He was abiding in the Father and the Father was leading His thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. This means that He was “in the Father’s name.” When He spoke, it was the Father speaking. When He healed, it was the Father who was healing.

He was the Father’s representative because He was in the Father. He was not “in his own name” doing things as He saw fit or as He imagined the Father might do.

Now you can see why “being in Jesus’ name” is so powerful. It’s not the words we say, but Who is saying them. When Jesus says that we will receive “whatever we ask” it is because His Spirit is guiding us to ask. Therefore, He will give it to us.

When we pray for healing in His name, it will happen, because we sense that it is His will. When we are “in His name,” which means being

in Him, we can be powerfully used by God to do His work. But if we are merely spouting the words “in Jesus’ name,” it is likely that we will accomplish very little.

For example, how many billions of prayers have been offered for healings and other things which did not happen? I myself, and perhaps you also, have tacked on the phrase “in Jesus’ name” at the end of a prayer and seen no results.

Let’s be honest about this. Even though countless prayers have been offered ending with the phrase “in Jesus’ name,” in many cases God has not responded accordingly. How can this be? Didn’t Jesus promise that He would give us our requests?

This was because we were acting on our own. We were praying for something which we wanted (or perhaps someone else had requested), but were not speaking the words of Jesus at His time and in His way. Therefore, God did not work. Nothing happened. You cannot force God to act by saying the phrase “in the name of Jesus” at the end of your prayers.

God has His time and His way for everything. Do you remember the account of the lame beggar sitting at a gate of the temple (Acts 3:2)? This was his spot to beg and so he was probably there almost every day.

This was probably one of the main entrances, if not *the* main entrance, to the temple. Therefore, we can deduce that Jesus had

passed by him many times without healing him. Peter and John had probably walked by without stopping also.

So when the day came and Peter noticed him and healed him while proclaiming “the name of Jesus” he was doing the Father’s will. It was God’s time. Peter was being led by the Holy Spirit.

He not only said the words: “in the name of Jesus” but he was in the Name of Jesus himself. It was not some “magic” in the words he used that caused the miracle to occur, but the fact that God’s authority was moving in him and through him. Peter said those words, not because it gave him power, but to announce to everyone that Jesus was healing that man.

REALITY OR IMAGINATION

Far too many “believers” live in an imaginary world. They say that they “believe” in certain scriptural truths, but they don’t seem to experience them. Their lives change very little, if at all. They “practice” a form of Christianity with few results. They attend meetings, perhaps study the Bible, and abstain (in some cases) from some of the more obvious sins.

They say that they are following Jesus, but many have no real relationship with Him. If you talk to them about hearing from God and following His leadership, they don’t seem to know what you are talking about.

When you bring up the subject of actually following the person Jesus, they look at you as if you were from another planet. Their Christianity seems to consist of a feeble human effort to conform to some kind of pattern based upon selected Bible verses, perhaps a pattern which their church promotes. However, very few seem to be intimate with Jesus.

Yet Jesus Himself says: "When his sheep leave *the fold*, he *leads them by* going out in front of *them*. And the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. Yet they won't follow a stranger but will flee from him because they don't recognize the voice of strangers" (Jn 10:4,5). If then we are genuine sheep, we must know and recognize the Master's voice.

I must insist here that our Christianity must be real. The promises of the New Covenant must be our experience! Our Christian life cannot consist of only doctrines, ideas, philosophies, and theories. It must be making a difference in us.

If what we profess to "believe" is not making real changes in our lives, then it is useless. Unless we are actually being changed "from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18) into the image of Jesus the Anointed One, then we are only deceiving ourselves. We are not really following Jesus.

Perhaps what we are doing is following some religious form that is called "Christianity." Maybe we are conforming ourselves to the

expectations of a group that calls themselves “a church.” It may be that we are fulfilling all the expectations of that particular group.

But if we are not being changed, then it is all useless. What we are “believing” and practicing is not working. It is not the real change which the Bible reveals. It is not demonstrating the truth of Jesus’ teachings.

If what we are proclaiming as our “faith” is producing no results, then we have no testimony to others. Everyone around us, including all the invisible spiritual world, is watching. Why would anyone want to receive your message if it is not working for you? Why would anyone want to receive Jesus if His promises are not producing real changes in your life? Who would want what you are only pretending to have?

Our Christianity cannot be imaginary! It must not exist only inside our own mind! It must be real and experiential! Real changes must be happening in our lives. We must be being delivered from sin. We should be experiencing liberation from the powers of darkness. Our character must be changing, from the inside out.

I’m not speaking here about more self-effort or determination. I’m talking about miraculous things. I am speaking about things Jesus actually does within us. His promises must become our experience. If not, then our Christianity is faulty. If what we “believe” is not working, this is a serious problem with eternal consequences.

If this is the case in your life, I would like to recommend a serious reconsideration. Take a moment to stop, reflect honestly about how your life is progressing, and open up to God again, in a new way.

Make Him the Lord of your life. I mean genuinely surrender control of all of your life to Him. Open up completely to Him, for Him to do His work in you. Sincerely give Him permission to do *anything* in your life which needs doing, no matter what the cost. If you can come to Him in this way, He will begin to radically transform your life. This change will probably not be instantaneous but it will be real.

Unfortunately, very few Christians will have interest in pursuing this attitude. Many others will find that, in their attempt to yield totally to Jesus, they encounter serious interior resistance. They find that they just can't do it.

They are filled with fear and resistance. They gulp. They swallow hard and try, but can't find the will to submit completely. Although they profess to know Jesus, they can't even obey His first commandment which is to love Him with everything that is within our being.

If this is your case, only God can change your heart. He is the only one who can unlock your inner self. If you can sincerely cry out to Him, confess your resistance, and plead for His mercy, He can find a way to reveal Himself to you which will melt your resistance and open your heart to His love.

These real changes are not something which will happen after we die. This a great mistake! Jesus' work within us is for today, in this life, not after death. This kind of misunderstanding will blind us from seeking any kind of real progress.

Many Christians are looking to the verse which says: "Look, I will tell you a secret. We will not all sleep {die}, but we will all be changed in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the sounding of the final trumpet. For that trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible and we will be changed together with them" (1 Cor 15:51,52).

From this verse they imagine that it really doesn't matter if they are not being changed now, this will happen later at the coming of Jesus. Therefore, they justify and excuse their present lack of real transformation.

However, this verse does not say that. If we carefully read the context, we will see that it is talking about our physical body, not our inner man.

Our physical body will be changed instantly, but not our soul-life. This transformation of the soul is something which must happen here, in this lifetime. It is for us to experience right now, here, today.

Since we have discussed this thoroughly in other writings, we will not elaborate on this process here. This process is detailed in chapter five of a previous book titled *The Hidden Gospel* for any readers who are interested in pursuing

this further. You can order a physical copy of this book without cost or read it online at: www.agrainofwheat.com

WE ARE IN A BATTLE

Whether we like it or not, we are in a battle. We are involved in the battle for who is going to be Lord of this earth. When we become children of God, this is part of our heritage. Certainly, God has won and is demonstrating His victory in this battle.

But to be a part of this victory, we must open up our heart more and more to Jesus. He will do the rest. He will win the victory over us and through us. Take courage! Be bold. Trust in the Lord and not in your own understanding (Pr 3:5).

I would like to close this writing with the following most encouraging verse. "Now to him who is able to do super abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine according to the power that works in us, to him be the glory in the community of the called-out ones and in the Anointed One, Jesus, for all generations, even for the ages of the ages. Amen (Eph 3:20,21).

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