

THE HIDDEN GOSPEL

by

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THE HIDDEN GOSPEL

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

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PREFACE

What is wrong? Why is the church today in such a low spiritual state? Why is so much of what is being preached today of so little value or even in error? Why do so few of God's children seem to have victory over sin? Where is the true power of the gospel?

Is it possible that we have been misled? Has the devil succeeded in hiding from God's people the very things that Jesus came to do? Is it conceivable that there is more to the gospel message than we have realized? This small book has been written to address these extremely important questions.

The second coming of Jesus is drawing very near. Many of today's news articles are full of events which presage what the Bible has taught us about the last days. It seems as if we are the generation which will see Jesus' return and the establishing of His kingdom here on this earth.

Therefore, it is time for the restoration of some very important understandings. It is time for the people of God to be brought back to Him and His truth in a life-changing way.

May Jesus graciously grant that this writing could be used for His eternal purposes.

DWD

“For he who walks in the darkness
doesn’t know where he is going.”
(Jn 12:35).

“...be very careful to *keep your
spiritual eyesight clear* so that *what
you think is light* in you does not
turn out to be darkness.”
(Lk 11:35).

1.

THE HIDDEN GOSPEL

*T*he true gospel, brought to us by Jesus Christ and later proclaimed by the apostles who preached His message, was a message of power. It was a message which they claimed would radically change and transform the lives of those who were believing. It was a message which declared that people could be liberated from who and what they were.

They could be freed from their natural human tendencies to sin. They could be unchained from the dominion of evil spirits. They could even be changed "from glory to glory" into the image of Jesus Christ Himself. In short, it was a glorious, powerful message which was meant to effect a fundamental, comprehensive, revolutionary change in men and women.

Around the world today, millions of people are saying that they have been "born again."

Yet, for some reason this complete, radical change is not happening in many of their lives. Very few seem to be experiencing something as powerful and transforming as the scriptures portray. We are not seeing millions of holy people. Instead, very few of them are being radically changed from what they were before their "conversion."

The church today is full of individuals who do not have victory over sin. Their lives are not transformed. They are very easily influenced by evil spirits. They experience very little actual "glory" in their daily lives.

While some may have some "touches" of spiritual reality during times of worship or preaching, most of the time their lives are not filled to overflowing with the presence of God. They are not really holy people. They are not knowing the "well of living water" filling them to the brim with the life which Jesus predicted.

It does not take too much research to discover that today's church is full of sin. Adultery, fornication, lying, lust, envy, lack of love, and division are in full bloom, along with individuals hungry for power over others and those seeking money for themselves, as well as innumerable other human, sinful attributes.

What then is the problem? Where have we gone wrong? How is it that the good news which Jesus preached is "not working" in the lives of so many of those who profess to be Christians?

In this writing, we are going to be taking a look at a few things which seem to be hindering

the work of God and then presenting some solutions which we believe can restore us to a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

DILUTING THE GOSPEL

One thing seems obvious: the devil has succeeded in diluting the gospel, thus weakening its power. Over the years since the early church, he has been successful in subtly altering the good news so that its effectiveness has been lost or greatly diminished.

One of the first things we can notice is that very few of those who “become Christians” are even expecting to experience the extensive, profound change which Jesus preached.

Taking their example from the lives of other Christians around them (which are largely unchanged) and the messages they hear from the pulpits, they have very little, if any, expectation of anything very radical happening in their lives.

In this way, the devil has had a lot of success. If no one else’s life is being revolutionized and the messages from various “men of God” don’t seem to point to this as a possibility, then no one expects much of anything to happen. Since the people then don’t expect a dramatic change or seek for it, they have been neutralized from ever experiencing it for themselves.

How has this happened? What has been changed so that the good news has been so weakened? Here we will be looking at various aspects of this problem. However, this will not be easy. So, please be patient as we carefully go

over various aspects of this situation together. It will take some time to try to untangle some of the clever variations which Satan has succeeded in interweaving into God's truth.

You see, the devil is extremely intelligent. Furthermore, he has had almost 2,000 years to work on his corruption of Jesus' message. His subtle deviations from the truth have been instilled into Christian "theology" over centuries and, therefore, have influenced countless theologians, pastors, preachers, Bible translators, and many others.

The result is that most who are reading this book will already have planted within them, no doubt without realizing it, some wrong or slightly altered understandings of what Jesus came to do. Perhaps without realizing it, they may have accepted some partial truths.

Some of the concepts may be so deeply rooted that it might make the reader angry to hear someone challenging them. For others, it might be very difficult to see something different from what they have thought was true for many years. Please remember that the purpose of this writing is not to offend but to enlighten.

Consequently, I would like to urge all readers here to keep an open mind and heart. When you are finished reading, you don't have to agree with what is being said. However, our prayer is that God could use this message to revolutionize your lives by giving you a completely new vision of what Jesus can and will do for us and in us.

CHANGING THE MESSAGE

One of the devil's tactics has been to substitute partial or incomplete truths for the genuine message of the gospel. He has been crafty enough not to try to change everything. In fact, he hasn't needed to. Instead, he has managed to water down the focus of the gospel, keeping just a little bit of the truth, so that it no longer has the power to radically transform believers.

Of the many ways Satan has succeeded in achieving his ends – perhaps the most pernicious way – is in the subtle deviations or dilutions contained in many translations of the Bible. Since many Christians believe these translations to be “the Word of God,” the subtle alterations are not noticed or questioned.

Once these translations are accepted as “truth,” then what has been written in them influences countless individuals. Furthermore, since many of these dilutions were introduced centuries ago, many modern translations continue propagating the same weakened versions of the truth since the translators themselves have been influenced by their past.

All the translations we have today were done by men. These men, as we all are, were fallible. Therefore, it is a serious mistake to imagine that any translation which we have in our hands is perfect.

Although these individuals may have had the best of intentions when doing their work,

avoiding the influence of human opinion is impossible.

A perfect translation is impossible because, when translating the New Testament, one discovers many Greek words with several possible translations in English. In some cases there are more than twenty possible translations of one Greek word!

Therefore, the translator must choose his word from these several possibilities. It is without doubt that he (or she) will choose words which correspond to his understanding of the gospel. Thus, they may obscure or, in some cases, even go against other possible translations.

Of course, the translation of a word will depend upon the context in which the word is used. But, this too will depend entirely on the translator's *understanding* of the context.

As an example of how many ways one Greek word has been translated, we might choose the simple Greek word "EN" which, according to Thayer, means: "in, by, with, etc."

The King James Bible translates this word like this: "about, after, against, almost, altogether, among, as, at, before, between, (here-)by (all means), for (...sake of), give self wholly to, (here-)in (-to, -wardly), mightily, (because) of, (up-)on, (open-)ly, outwardly, one, quickly, shortly, (speedi-)ly, that, there(-in, -on), through(-out), (un-)to(-ward), under, when, where(-with), while, with(-in)." Wow, that's a lot of variety for one little word!

So it is easy to see that it is impossible for a completely perfect translation of the Bible to be done. How could anyone select the “perfect” translation every time this word EN appears? Human beings, with their own ideas and pre-dispositions concerning the message of Jesus, cannot avoid influencing their translations.

Furthermore, it is very important for the translator of any work to understand what is being said. If they don’t, their translation cannot faithfully transmit the thoughts of the author. I have experienced this many times when having other people translate my books into Portuguese.

It is a good thing that I read Portuguese because quite often, when reviewing the translations done by various people, I realized that the translator did not understand what was being said. So they just wrote down what they thought I had intended to say.

Often, this did not convey the true essence of the sentence or passage. In fact, in some cases it was exactly the *opposite* of what was intended. I shudder to think of having my books translated into languages which I do not speak. How will I ever know if what is being transmitted is what I intended?

In the same way, it is essential for any translator of the Bible to have revelation. He must have had God reveal His mysteries to him and, as a consequence, deeply understand the message. If not, he will put words on paper which do not transmit what God is trying to say and make the message difficult to understand or

even say the wrong thing entirely. A knowledge of the Greek language is not enough.

God's revelation is not based on facts or "knowledge." It is necessary for the Lord to open our spiritual eyes so that we really understand His plans, His purposes, and His will. If not, our translation will be faulty.

Simply stringing "correct" words together in religious-sounding sentences will not arrive at the goal either. Although these words may be "correct," they may not and, probably do not, transmit the intentions of the Author.

Consequently, we cannot, indeed we must not, assume that our present translations are without any subtle deviations inadvertently introduced by translators.

Therefore, as part of our search to arrive at God's truth, it will be necessary for us to look at some common Bible verses which perhaps could have been translated in a clearer manner. We will examine the possible translations of some Greek words, seeking for a clearer or more exact translation.

THE GOSPEL OF FORGIVENESS

One such dilution of the gospel is something we will call "the gospel of forgiveness." Very many Christians think that Jesus' main purpose in coming to this earth was to forgive us. They imagine that He died and rose again to satisfy the Father in such a way that He would forgive us. Their understanding of Jesus' work on our behalf is summed up in the word "forgiveness."

Now it is true that Jesus can and does forgive us. This is a genuine part of the gospel. In no way would this author ever wish to diminish the wonderful blessing of being forgiven by God. But this is only a part of Jesus' message and, as we shall see, it was not the focus of, or the main purpose of, what Jesus came to do.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, speaking to him about God's plan for the child in Mary's womb, he said: "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).

Now, if you think about it, this is a different message from "forgiveness." The angel did not say that He would "forgive His people for their sins." Here we are told that Jesus would "save" or "deliver" His people *from* their sins.

To "forgive" is one thing. To "save from" is another. The forgiven person will possibly keep right on sinning and, therefore, keep right on needing forgiveness. The person who is delivered from their sin has experienced something much more profound. That person actually stops sinning!

The "gospel of forgiveness" seems to assume that Christians will just go on sinning and sinning and Jesus will just continue forgiving until the day He finally comes and puts an end to this vicious cycle. On that day, it is believed, Jesus

will transform us in the blink of an eye, finally and at last putting an end to our sin.

The good news of salvation, on the other hand, is that Jesus can and will actually deliver us from who and what we are. This can be happening right now, today! Through following Him, we can be being changed to be different people – people who no longer sin. This good news includes the idea of “sanctification” – which means “to be made holy.”

The concept that the “gospel of forgiveness” is the main thrust of the biblical message is reinforced by the translation of various verses in the New Testament.

For example, in Matthew 26:28 we read in the New King James Version: “For this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Most versions also say something similar.

How should we understand this word “remission?” In the margin of my New King James Version it reads: “forgiveness.”

This sentence was uttered at the peak of Jesus’ ministry. He was together with His twelve disciples eating what we call “the last supper.” This, of course, was a key event in His life, shortly before His crucifixion. So, through this translation, we are left with the impression that Jesus’ main purpose was to bring us forgiveness.

But the Greek word translated “remission” here is APHESIS which means “freedom,” “deliverance,” or “release from bondage.” Only by implication can it mean “forgiveness.”

Of course, it can be argued that “remission” is a possible “correct” translation. But does it really convey the heart of God? Is forgiveness really the main purpose for which Jesus came? Or should we really understand that He came for our deliverance from, release from bondage to, and freedom from, sin?

To me, there seems no doubt that Jesus’ mission was to accomplish a complete deliverance from sin. As we progress through this writing, I believe you also will come to understand this truth.

So we see that the words chosen in the translation of this verse have a very strong impact on how we understand what was being said.

This same Greek word is repeated in Luke 24:47. We read: “...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (NJKV).

Once again, the time when this was uttered by our Lord – just minutes before His ascension into heaven – places this statement as one of the most important of all His pronouncements.

Consequently, following the common translation of this verse, many have been energetically preaching this gospel of forgiveness. They suppose that since this was Jesus’ final verbal communication to us, it must be the main thrust of His message. But is this really *the* good news which Jesus came to bring? Is this the message which we are supposed to be preaching?

Let us imagine for a moment a prisoner condemned to a lifetime of bondage. Then let us

suppose that one day someone comes to him and says: "Look, you are forgiven," but does not open up the cell where he is confined and let him out.

I'm sure that that prisoner is glad to be forgiven, but I'm even more confident that he would like someone to unlock the door and let him go! He would like to be set free, not just forgiven.

We need to be delivered *from* our sins, not just forgiven for doing them. Any "salvation" which does not include delivering us from who we are *and* what we do is incomplete. It falls drastically short of meeting our greatest need.

Again, in this verse we find that same Greek word – APHESIS – which means "to set free," "deliver," and "release from bondage." By translating it "remission" or "forgiveness," the message becomes altered and weakened.

Also, in the book of Acts chapter 5, verse 31, many of our translations reinforce for us the idea of a gospel of forgiveness. We read about Peter saying: "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (NJKV). Here again we find the same Greek word which could be better translated "freedom from" or "deliverance from" sins.

Can you see how the understanding of the translators here colors the message? Can you see how the gospel can be subtly watered down to leave out the idea that we can actually be set free from sin? Again, perhaps, grammatically speaking, "remission" or "forgiveness" could be

considered a “correct” translation. But is this really transmitting what the Author was saying? Does it reflect the true revelation? Does this really express what is on God’s heart? Is it the powerful, life-changing message which Jesus came to bring? I think not.

Something which reinforces the “gospel of forgiveness” understanding is the very common notion that once we receive Jesus, all our sins are forgiven – the ones in the past, the ones in the present, and even the ones in the future. This idea seems to be almost universally accepted in today’s church. Yet it is not true.

Of course, Jesus *can* forgive any and all sins, yet the teaching that He has already done so does not hold up under careful examination.

For example, Jesus taught us: “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses {sins}, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses {sins}” (Mt 6:15 NJKV). How could it be possible that our Father wouldn’t forgive us if Jesus had already forgiven us? This is just not logical.

Also, Jesus said to the disciples: “Whoever’s sins you forgive, they are forgiven them. Whoever’s *sins* you retain, they are retained” (Jn 20:23). How is it possible that someone’s sins would be “retained” if they had already been forgiven by Jesus? Obviously this cannot be true.

The popular translation of one verse in Colossians is commonly used to justify this “everything’s already forgiven” doctrine.

In the New King James Version, for example, it reads: “And you, being dead in your tres-

passes and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13 NKJV).

But, in the Greek text, this word "forgiven" does not appear. Although forgiveness can be implied, it is not stated. Instead, the Greek word used here primarily means "to grant as a favor," or "to be gracious." It can also mean "to rescue." So this verse could be translated "... graciously rescuing us from the whole of our sins."

Do you see how this kind of translation is different? Can you understand how this is actually a different message entirely? As we mentioned before, to be rescued from sin is much more powerful and complete than just to be forgiven for sin.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

In the past several centuries of the Christian Church, there seems to have been a strong emphasis on forgiveness based on "the blood of Jesus." Many famous hymns were written and many messages preached about this subject.

Today, many Christians are rejoicing in God's grace and Jesus' forgiveness. This is certainly not wrong. Obviously, we all desperately need to be forgiven. Without God's gracious and merciful forgiveness, we would be without hope.

It is clear that forgiveness *is* part of the gospel message. It is an essential experience for every believer. For example, we read in 1 John 2:12, "I write to you little children because your

sins are forgiven for his name's sake." Also, James 5:15 states, "And the prayer of faith will heal the one who is sick and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

Yet the Greek word for "forgiveness" used in these verses and the rest of the New Testament is not APHESIS, which we have seen means "to liberate." Instead, it is APHIEMI which means "to discharge," "to let go," or "to disregard." This is another word entirely. It is this Greek word which appears frequently in the four gospels where Jesus uses it in His teachings to us about forgiveness.

But when speaking about the blood of Jesus, is forgiveness really the central message? Are we supposed to believe that this is the main purpose for which Jesus died? Or is there an even more important truth revealed which should be our focus?

The "forgiveness" emphasis appears to be supported by such verses as Ephesians 1:7 where we read: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace..." (NJKV), and Colossians 1:14 where we are taught "...in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (NKJV).

But here again the word translated "forgiveness" in the NJKV is the Greek word APHESIS which literally means: "freedom" or "release from bondage or imprisonment." Only by implication can it mean "forgiveness." This gives these two verses an entirely different meaning.

Now let's take another look at these two verses we just read. With our new translation, a different picture emerges. We read: "*It is in Him that we have our release by ransom through his blood, even **the release from bondage to our sins** according to the liberality of his grace...*" (Eph 1:7).

And: "*It is in him that we have our release by ransom – **the liberation from our sins** – through his *shedding his blood**" (Col 1:14).

So we see that these two important verses are also not really speaking about forgiveness. They, too, are not referring to being forgiven for sin but to being set free from the bondage to sin which enslaves us. This is a liberation which we all desperately need to experience for ourselves.

Strangely, God forgave people in the Old Testament times. Jesus also forgave several sinners *before* His death on the cross (Mt 9:2; Lk 7:48). Although it is possible that these instances of forgiveness were based upon "looking forward to Jesus' death," this is not clearly stated.

In contrast to this, it is significant that no one was ever "*saved from their sins*" and transformed into Christ's image before Jesus' death and resurrection. No one was ever delivered from sin before Jesus was crucified.

Although forgiveness seems to have been available before the cross, deliverance from sin was not. This, therefore, reinforces the thought that this powerful, liberating work was the central purpose for Jesus' work on the cross. Our deliverance from sin thus stands out as the principle reason for which Christ died.

RELEASED BY RANSOM

Did you notice the phrase “release by ransom” in the previous verses? Many, if not most versions, translate this as “redeemed.” This is a nice, religious sounding word, but what does this Greek word really mean?

In Jesus’ day, when wars were fought and through other circumstances, sometimes people of wealth, value, or influence were captured. Since they or their families had money, they were held for ransom instead of merely kept as slaves. They were held prisoners until this ransom price was paid.

Such a ransom was not paid to forgive these people. This is very significant. Forgiveness had nothing to do with it! It was paid to set them free from their bondage of captivity or slavery. The Greek word which is used in these verses is APOLUTROSIS which literally means: “the act of ransoming,” or “paying a ransom in full.”

Although ransoming people captured in war is not common today, in many countries the need for paying ransoms still exists. This is necessary in the case of people who are kidnapped. The kidnapped person is often held in some secret prison, sometimes under horrible conditions, until someone pays their ransom.

Even though the word “redeem” has a similar meaning, its main use today seems to be in religious or commercial circles and it no longer conveys to us the serious nature of this action.

As a youth, my familiarity with the word “redeem” was to trade in a coupon at the grocery store to get a small discount on some product or other. I never heard it used in the very serious context which fits with the scripture.

Jesus’ did not pay the ransom price to merely forgive us. He paid the highest price to *release us* from the bondage in which we were held.

So what is this bondage from which we are supposed to be delivered since most of us are not in physical prisons?

It is our slavery to sin. It is our inescapable tendency to sin by doing things which are against God’s nature. This is something from which we cannot deliver ourselves. Outside of Jesus, there is no way to freedom.

It is also a slavery to the whims and influences of evil spirits, especially Satan and his hordes of principalities and powers who are cruelly ruling over this earth. These are the bondages from which Jesus died to rescue us. He did not sacrifice Himself merely to forgive us. Our need was much, much greater than that.

Jesus paid the highest possible price to effect this ransom. He gave His own life. Not only did He die, but He died in a most gruesome way, being tortured and crucified. This awesome, terrible price was necessary to set us free.

So, once again, the decision of the translators concerning what word to use and how to translate these verses has a profound effect on the meaning which is conveyed. How the translators have understood the gospel message has gov-

earned their choice of words. Consequently, the message which we have received through our modern translations emphasizes forgiveness but seems to minimize the idea of deliverance.

But now we are seeing that there is a deeper, more powerful gospel message “hidden” in the scriptures. It is truly better “good news” than the news about God’s forgiveness!

Although in no way would we ever want to diminish the value of Jesus’ forgiveness for what we do and have done, it should never be a replacement for His even more astounding work of rescuing us from what we are.

This is what we really need. We need to be saved! We need to be rescued, not only from what we do which is wrong, but even more from what we are which is what produces this sinful behavior. Although we certainly do need forgiveness for our sins, we have an even more desperate need to be delivered *from* our sin. This distinction is extremely important.

EVERYTHING’S FORGIVEN?

You see, one of the major problems with the “everything’s already forgiven” message is that, perhaps without meaning to, it leads people into sin. Although (I hope) no one would openly teach this, it is a logical conclusion. People can and do reason in the following way: If God has already forgiven all my sins, then it doesn’t matter very much if I sin once in a while.

Since it is very hard, if not impossible, to avoid sin and since sin often seems so attractive

and even pleasurable, what harm is there in a “little” sin or an occasional sin? How could one sin more or less make any difference since “they are all already forgiven?”

If we do not expect to be perfected – that is really delivered from sin – and many others seem to be sinning with impunity, why should we be any different? If God has already pre-forgiven us for everything and anything, it is easy to see that this produces a less serious attitude toward sin.

Although certainly most agree that they *shouldn't* sin, most also seem to believe that it doesn't make a lot of difference to God or even that living without sinning is impossible.

The sad condition of today's church testifies to the prevalence of this kind of “forgiveness” gospel. It is a result of a message which has been diluted and, therefore, robbed of its power. This lamentable situation seems to be, at least in part, the product of an inadequate translation of the scriptures.

Throughout hundreds of years, believers have been rejoicing in their forgiveness, but not enjoying a full deliverance. Generations of Christians have been being forgiven but have remained in bondage to their sinful nature.

Often, their expectations have not been that they will be perfected in this lifetime. Instead, this has remained for them as a future hope of something which will happen after they die or are raptured.

2.

THE NEW LIFE

*B*ut if complete deliverance from sin is the message of the gospel, how is it to happen? Why is it that so few seem to be benefitting from this heavenly power? If freedom from sin is the main reason Jesus died for us, how is it that it seems so difficult and so rare?

This discussion is going to be a little complex because many have deeply ingrained concepts of long standing. Many, even though they have become Christians, have never really understood the truth of the gospel. Once again, some important aspects of God's message have been obscured and kept hidden from us.

Consequently, it will take a little time to expose some of the subtle dilutions which the devil has succeeded in implanting to obscure God's message. So please, be patient as you follow along with me in the following discussion. Here again, the best understanding of the good

news has been hidden from us by unclear translation.

The truth is that the deliverance from sin which God has provided for us is accomplished by the introduction of His own life inside of us. However, this wonderful fact is not very clear in our modern translations. Therefore, let us now take some time and explore this important truth together.

In John 3:3 we find still another verse which could have been rendered in a much clearer way where we read: "Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to perceive the kingdom of God." Also in John 3:7 Jesus says: "Don't be surprised that I said to you, you must be born from above."

Now, many translations use the words "born again" instead of "born from above." This is despite the fact that the Greek word *ANOTHEN* clearly indicates "from on high" or "from above."

Only by implication can it mean "anew" or "again." Such translations makes these verses much less clear. Perhaps this is another way in which God's enemy has succeeded in obscuring the truth from us.

The fact is that no one can experience birth a second time. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, He was not referring to entering back into his mother's womb and being "born again." His words "born from above" meant something entirely different. He was saying that a life "from above" could be born inside of us.

What then is this life “from above?” It is the life of God the Father. It is God’s own life which can be born into us through the Holy Spirit. This then is not “us” being born a second time but about something entirely new being born inside of us.

Although we have our participation in this birth, it is not our own life having a new beginning, but the life of Another – the very life of God – being born into us.

This birth is somewhat parallel to a natural birth in the following way: Just as the human egg and sperm unite to form a new life, so the Holy Spirit joins with our human spirit to form this new spiritual life inside of us.

Jesus explains, “That which is born naturally is the physical body, and that which is born of the Spirit is *our human spirit*” (Jn 3:6). Also we read: “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17).

This is what Jesus meant when He used the phrase “born from above.” God is the One “above.” When, through His Spirit which comes down from Him, He generates His own life in us, we have been “regenerated” which is what some call being “born again.”

Peter makes this very clear when he says, “You have been regenerated not by perishable parentage but by immortal parentage: by God’s living word that exists eternally” (1 Pet 1:23).

Further clarifying this we read: “These are not those who were born through bloodlines, or through the choice of the flesh, or by the deci-

sion of men, but who were *actually* born of God" (Jn 1:13). When we are "born from above" by having God's own life generated inside of us, we become the sons and daughters of God Himself.

(Again, this author is not claiming that those who have translated these words as "born again" were grammatically incorrect. Furthermore, he is not accusing any translators of wrong motives or of deliberately doing anything to confuse the readers. No doubt, they have rendered these verses as well as they were able. However, the fact remains that the words "from above" give a much clearer picture of the origin of this holy life than the word "again" does.)

GOD'S OWN LIFE

This fact that we can receive God's own life should be quite clear from the scriptures. Yet, once again our translations of the New Testament have not served us well here. Instead, they have obscured this truth, leaving us in spiritual poverty. You see, in the Greek language, there are actually three different words which are translated "life." They are "BIOS," "PSUCHÊ," and, "ZOË."

Although they have distinctly different meanings in Greek, they are almost always translated for us as one word in English: "life." Even though this may be a "correct" translation, it fails miserably to transmit the thoughts of God given to us in the Greek language.

For example, the word “BIOS” – from where we get our word “biology” – refers to our life in this physical world. It refers to the duration of our life, the means by which we sustain our physical life, and the moral conduct of our physical life.

The word “PSUCHÊ” refers to our psychological life: our feelings, our thinking, and our decision-making process. This word is often also translated “soul” in the Bible. Perhaps using the words “soul life” would have been a better and clearer way to translate this word. As you can see, this is something quite distinct from our physical, biological life.

Now the word “ZOË” has an extremely important meaning. According to W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, this means: “...life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself.”

It is this word ZOË which is used throughout the New Testament to refer to the life of God Himself. It would have been much better, therefore, to translate ZOË as “the Father’s life,” or “God’s life” so that the readers could really understand God’s message.

Without understanding it correctly, not only do we miss important revelation, but we can be led into serious error. In fact, the church of our day is full of very grave errors, many of which are the result of failing to understand this one Greek word correctly. This is a very lamentable situation.

Satan has been successful in obscuring this marvelous truth and leading many into misconceptions and sin through inadequate translations. For example, when we read Jesus saying in John 10:10 that: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (NKJV), what sort of "life" does He mean?

If this word were "BIOS," we could assume that Jesus came prosper us physically and materially with all kinds of health and wealth.

If this word were "PSUCHÊ," we would know that Jesus came to make us happy and well-adjusted emotionally and straighten out all of our problems.

But instead, this word is "ZOË." Jesus came to give us the very life of God and to give us *this* life abundantly! Hallelujah! What a wonderful gift!

This, then, is what Jesus came to bring us: the life of God Himself. This is really good news! We can receive into our beings the very life of God! We can become His children through having His life being born inside of us. Can you see what a difference this makes? This ZOË is very different from either BIOS or PSUCHÊ.

This clearer translation of this Greek word is of the utmost importance! Far too many Christians who have been truly "born from above" have no idea what really happened to them or what they have inside of them. They have received God's supernatural life but are very unclear about what this really means. Yet this an essential part of the gospel message.

As you can see, depending on the translation of this word, we could have very different “gospel” messages. And this is just what has happened! The devil has succeeded in filling today’s church with many aberrant, erroneous, and foolish “gospels” which have led many Christians away from the truth and caused them to stumble into sin in the darkness.

I consider that this failure to translate the word “life” adequately has been one of the greatest, if not the greatest, impediment to the progress of the Christian Church. It has immeasurably hindered believers from understanding the truth of God and, therefore, from obtaining all that He has for them.

It has left believers confused and without any kind of clear understanding of the gospel. It has left them chasing after many other interpretations of the good news message which are not really the truth and which have caused them immeasurable harm.

One of the most destructive of these “gospels” is the gospel of prosperity. This message insists that Jesus wants to improve our life financially. Those preaching this are failing to see that BIOS is not what Jesus came to bring.

Due to inadequate translation and the resulting wrong understanding of what Jesus came to give us, many believers are chasing after the things of this world which are part of the devil’s kingdom.

This failure of the translators to distinguish between these Greek words with distinctly differ-

ent meanings seems to me to be a most serious deficiency resulting in much spiritual darkness.

It seems as if the translators did not understand the message of God's life themselves and so did not think it was necessary to indicate to us readers that these were different Greek words with very different translations. This omission has left many generations of Christians in the dark about such a profound truth.

As an example of how important a clearer translation is, Jesus tells us that we must "lose our life" to get life. But how does this make sense if we don't distinguish between these words translated as "life?" We read in Matthew 16:25: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (NKJV).

But to lose life in order to get life is illogical. It would seem much better to hang onto the life we already have and just add to it by getting more. Why would we want to lose our life?

This is very confusing. But it is only confusing until we realize that we must lose our own soul life (PSUCHÊ) to gain God's life (ZOÊ) (Jn 12:25). You see, the translation makes all the difference. This actually makes sense.

The following may seem like a bold statement, but it is entirely true. Without understanding that the life which Jesus came to bring us is God's own life, it is impossible to clearly understand the gospel.

This one truth is the key to understanding God's purpose and plan for us. Without this key,

many, many things taught to us in the scriptures remain obscure and difficult to understand. This is an absolutely crucial truth for us to comprehend.

Yet, in my experience conversing with thousands of believers over a period of more than forty years, I have found that almost none of them know what eternal life is. This is really sad. The result has been a widespread, profound spiritual poverty among the people of God.

Due to unclear translations of the New Testament, very, very few Christians have any idea that the life which Jesus gives us is the life of God the Father. However, this is the central, fundamental truth of the gospel message. It is the most essential, valuable thing which we could possibly possess.

Yet, most imagine that eternal life is their own life going on forever. Others seem to think that the gospel has to do with a destination, i.e. where they will spend eternity. Still others imagine that they will "return to Eden" and become again like Adam and Eve. Virtually none understand that they have received the life of a Superior Being, the very life of God Himself.

The darkness under which the church labors and the resulting expenditure of vain effort trying to do God's work without a clear understanding of eternal life are truly lamentable.

Thus, through generations of unwitting translators who themselves seem to have failed to understand or clearly translate the message, the devil has succeeded in impoverishing the

church and robbing believers of this crucial insight which is truly “life changing.”

ETERNAL LIFE

Now this life of God which we receive has some very interesting characteristics which are important to understand. First, we notice that this life is eternal. It never began and will never end. It was never born and cannot die. Furthermore, until Jesus died and rose again from the dead, God was the only being in the universe to possess this kind of “eternal” life.

1 Timothy 6:15,16 teaches us that God is (or was) the only immortal being. We read that He is: “...the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality...”

Yet, God has not seen fit to keep this immortal life to Himself. He is offering it to men through the preaching of the good news. We read about: “...our Savior the Anointed One, Jesus, who rendered death ineffective and brought *the eternal life of God* – even immortality – to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10).

By the way, the word “everlasting” which we find in some translations is not accurate. This is because someone who was born today and then never died would “last forever.” Therefore, their life could be considered to be “everlasting.”

However, God’s life is different than this. His life never began. Not only will it never end but it has always existed. This is what the Bible

means when it uses the word “eternal.” We read in Psalms 90:2 “...from eternity to eternity, you are God” (HCSB).

The good news is that God is offering His own eternal life to men. We can have the very life of God born inside of us. His life can be born in our spirit through the action of the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to “be born from above” (Jn 3:3).

BEING SAVED BY HIS LIFE

Now for more good news. It is this holy life that is saving us from what we are. Please allow me to repeat this: It is God’s life inside us which is His instrument for delivering us from self and sin. This amazing truth is shown us in the following verse. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, **we will be being saved by His life...**” (Rm 5:10).

Here we discover the agency through which we will be being delivered and set free. The “agent” which will do this for us and in us is God’s life. It is this life which will save us from and liberate us from sin!

You see, there is an amazing characteristic of God’s life of which we should be aware: It is supremely holy. God never sins; therefore, His life is sinless.

This is *not* because He is trying not to sin. This is not because He is trying to resist temptation. It is because of who He is. His nature is the exact opposite of sin. Not only does God never

sin, but He cannot even be tempted by sin (Js 1:13). This is a very precious truth.

But how does this help us? You see, all the purity, holiness, righteousness, kindness, patience, love, etc. which describe the nature of God is contained in His life. Furthermore, it is this holy life which can be born inside of us.

So, the plan of God is for His life to grow up in us and fill us to such an extent that we express His holy nature. This is the way we can be liberated from our sin. It is to be filled with the life of a holy God!

This wonderful truth bears repeating. God's plan to liberate us from sin is to fill us with Himself. He is a sinless being. His life never sins. Therefore, when we are filled with and led by this life, we too do not sin. In this way, we are freed from our sin. Freedom from sin is not by having our old life changed to be better. Instead, it is by being filled to overflowing with a whole new, sinless life – the life of God Himself.

Still another New Testament verse which relates to this subject but has been poorly translated is found in 1 John 3:9 where we read: "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (NKJV).

Wow, what a verse! It seems from reading this verse literally as if no one has ever been "born of God" except Jesus, since only He never sinned. All of us Christians sin, so logically, we haven't been "born of God." This translation makes for a very confusing situation.

But there is a better translation. We read: "That which is begotten of God [i.e. the new spiritual man] does not sin because it is his {God's supernatural} seed that has come to live in him. In fact, he [the new spiritual man] cannot sin because it is something which is begotten by God [who is perfectly righteous]."

You see, "That which is begotten of God" does not sin and, in fact, cannot sin because it has the life and nature of God Himself.

Consequently, our greatest need is to be filled with the life of God. He is our salvation and deliverance. He is the One who is saving His people *from* their sin. He is doing this by introducing His own sinless life inside of them, filling them with this holy life, and then living His life out through them. What a wonderful salvation!

SO WHY DO WE STILL SIN?

Since then we believers have had a sinless life born into us, why is it that we still sin? Why is it that so many Christians are still dominated by sin? Where is this glorious deliverance which has been promised to us?

It should be clear to us that every variety of life expresses its own nature. The nature of our old, Adamic life is to sin. The nature of God's life is to express righteousness. Therefore, those who have been "born of God" have within them two "lives." They have a human soul life (PSUCHÊ) which sins. They also have a divine life (ZOÊ) which never sins.

The trouble is that the old life is often more mature and developed than the new life. So, it is much “stronger” than the new life. Therefore, the old life and nature dominate and predominate. Even though they have been “born from above,” Christians do not always express the nature of this new life that is within them.

You see, this new life is born in us as every other life is born: an infant. It begins immature. So, just because we have been “born from above” does not mean that we automatically express the nature of our Father all the time.

Although all true believers do express their Father’s nature some of the time, it is also true that their own human nature often finds its expression also. All too frequently, it is the old life which dominates our living.

One solution is that this new divine life must grow. It must mature. It must go beyond being an infant inside of us and grow up to fill us completely. We read that: “...we should grow up in all things into him who is the head, even the Anointed One” (Eph 4:15).

When Jesus was born on this earth, He was born in a lowly, dirty, smelly place – He was placed in a manger in a stable. In the same way, when Jesus is born into us, He is again born into a lowly, dirty, smelly place.

But Jesus did not stay in the manger. He left there and grew up to be a mature man. We read: “And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” (Lk 2:40). In the same way, we too

must grow up spiritually into His fulness. This new birth is just the beginning, the first step in a process called salvation. Although many people equate “being saved” with “being born again,” this is not scripturally accurate. There is much more to our salvation than this.

A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that our salvation does, indeed, begin with the birth of this new life inside of us, but it doesn’t end until our body is glorified at the coming of Jesus Christ.

So we now understand that the “agent” – the substance which saves us from who and what we are – is the very life of God maturing in us.

Just as our first, natural birth was an event, so, too, our new birth in Christ happens only once. But our deliverance from sin is an ongoing process. Our salvation does not stop with the birthing of God’s life in us. This is only logical since no life we know about ends with birth. Instead, birth is just the beginning of a long process of growth and maturity. It is the same with the new spiritual life.

As this life grows, it begins to express itself and its own nature more and more. The more it matures, the more it dominates our old life and nature. As we grow spiritually, our sinful habits and desires change. This is not because of our own efforts or determination or because we are following a new set of rules or principles but because another life with a completely new nature is being seen in us.

This is a wonderful, life-changing salvation. This is a powerful message which can change anyone and everyone. This is not a message of self-effort, but one of an exchanged life.

This is not a gospel of “works” or striving but of being filled with the life of Jesus by His grace. We can be filled with and animated by the life of Another who is 100 percent holy!

Can you see now how it seems that this gospel has been “hidden” because of inadequate translations of the New Testament? The gospel of forgiveness by itself – as precious as forgiveness is – does not convey the message of liberation. But the gospel of salvation shows us clearly how to be filled with God’s own life and, therefore, be completely set free from sin.

Jesus is able to save to the uttermost (completely) those who are coming to Him (Heb 7:25).

3.

MORE TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

*A*s we have been seeing, the reason many do not understand these vital truths is because of some weakened or inadequate translations of the New Testament. As a further example of such difficulties, current translations present much of the gospel to us in the past tense.

This, of course, is based on the verb tenses which are used in each sentence. Many theologians and consequently, many Bible translators, through their rendering of some Greek verbs in the past tense, transmit a kind of gospel which is said and done. It is in the past. It is based on "the finished work of Christ."

Therefore, this seems merely to be a message about something which already happened long ago. What the scriptures appear to say is that all we need to do today is "believe" in many things that have already occurred. The result is a gospel which is a static, finished, "old," distant sort of message.

Of course no one, especially this author, wishes to dispute the “finished work of Christ.” On the cross He said: “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). Yet this must only refer to Christ’s work *for* us, not to His work *in* us. How can we know this?

This must be true because Paul says: “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philip 2:13 NKJV)).

Since God is still working in us, it must be that His work is not finished yet. While Jesus’ work *for* us has been done, the outworking of this finished work— His work in our lives today — is still unfinished and ongoing.

Yet from reading our present translations, we are left with the impression that once we “believe” then we have been saved, we have been justified, we have been sanctified, we have been buried with Christ, we have been raised with Christ, and, amazingly, we have even been “glorified,” and many, many other such things.

The problem is that most believers are not actually experiencing these attributes. They are not real to them. It is not happening in their lives. They don’t seem to be being changed. They aren’t full of the resurrected life.

They don’t feel holy. They especially aren’t shining brilliantly like the glorified Christ. Even though they are trying very hard to “believe” in these “truths,” the experience of these things is not truly real to them.

This leads many Christians into frustration. They try and try. They “believe” as hard as they can, yet their lives are still full of sin. Perhaps

they also try to avoid sin, but they slip up constantly and don't have any complete victory over their natural impulses.

The message of "all we have to do is believe in something which happened in the past" fills the church of our day with a palpable sense of unreality. So many people are worshipping about, praying about, teaching about, and "believing in" things which are not real in their lives. They are not being radically changed. They are not really being delivered from sin.

This makes the gospel into a kind of fairy tale. It has become a message about some wonderful thing which will happen far away in the heavens after we die or are "raptured."

It has become a powerless, ineffective message which does little to impact our daily lives. It is something which produces few changes in the lives of many Christians and, consequently, is not very attractive to outsiders.

As already stated, much of this problem can be laid at the feet of our translations of the New Testament. You see, the Greek language has a verb tense which is not found in most of our modern languages. It is called the "aorist" tense.

The truth is that this verb tense is really not well understood because no one speaks the Greek language of 2,000 years ago. However, most seem to teach that this verb is a form of the past tense.

Since this verb tense is used in many key passages in the New Testament, such a "past

tense” rendering presents a major part of the gospel as something in the past.

But it seems that this may not be the whole story. What if the “aorist” tense is not strictly the past tense? This would make a tremendous difference in our translations of the gospel!

Please bear with me as we investigate this possibility together. I will try to keep this explanation as simple and short as possible so as to not lose the attention of the readers.

We find one expert, Grant R. Osborne, saying the following: “...the aorist does not imply a ‘once for all’ action, as it has commonly been misinterpreted.”* Another author, F. Beetham says: “...use of the aorist indicates that the viewpoint of the speaker or writer is *outside the action being described, while its beginning and end are in view*” (emphasis by this author).** In Bible Hermeneutics Stack Exchange we read: “...the aorist also has several special specialized senses meaning present action.” So you see, the aorist tense is not always limited to the past. It can also have ongoing present and even future aspects.

If we then apply this understanding to the verbs found in the gospel message, a whole new vista of truth opens up before us. In fact, it is almost a different gospel which has been” hidden” by the translation of the verb tenses.

Instead of being something dry, old, past tense, said and done, and “finished,” it becomes something living, active, relevant, experiential,

*The Hermeneutical Spiral, 2nd ed., Inter Varsity Press, 2006, page 69.

**Greece & Rome, Vol. 49, No. 2, October 2002.

and ongoing. Verbs which have been translated as the past tense take on a new meaning when we understand them to also include the present, continuing tense.

Let's look together at some well-known scriptures which use the aorist tense to see how much of a difference a new translation makes. Paul and his companions said to the jailer at Philippi: "Be believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be being saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

What a tremendous difference this makes in our understanding of this verse! Here we see that believing is not something we do once in the past but something we need to keep on doing all the time.

When we understand this verb tense as not only something of the past but something which is continuing today and even on into the future, whole new vistas of revelation open up for us.

Here also, "being saved" is revealed, not as a one-time, past event but an ongoing process. We can "be being saved." (If this thought is new to you, please do not get upset. We will explain more about this process later on in this writing).

This, then, is a dynamic message. It is a living, active gospel which we need to be experiencing in our lives right now!

Another verse which (although it is not in the aorist tense but the future tense) clearly shows that the gospel is really dynamic is found in Romans 5, verse 10 where we read: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to

God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will **be being saved** by His life *growing up in us*." You see, being "reconciled to God" is related to forgiveness. This is a wonderful, precious thing since it brings us back into a relationship with God. But, according to this verse, there is something "much more." There is something much greater and more important than this reconciliation.

As we saw in the previous chapter, that which is "much more" is being saved by (through the agency of) His life maturing in us. This is an active, right-now message. It is something which needs to be occurring in our lives today.

Through our new understanding of the aorist verb tense not being merely confined to the past but also continuing on in the present, many other biblical truths become more comprehensible.

BEING CRUCIFIED

For example, Romans 6:6, read with this "new" verb tense, reads: "We know this: that our 'old man' is being crucified with *him* so that sin in its entirety would be being rendered inoperative, in order that we would no longer be in slavery to sin." Now this is really different than the old, "already finished" version, yet it aligns much more with our experience.

While it is true that "we have been crucified with Christ," which we read about in Galatians 2:20 where it is a true "past tense" Greek verb,

now we discover something even more wonderful and applicable to us.

Here in Romans 6:6 we see that this crucifixion can be applied to us today. We can actually experience it! This then is no longer merely an historical fact which we are trying to "believe." Instead, it is something which can be real to us. It can actually be happening in our lives as we follow Jesus right now!

How much we need to genuinely experience such a crucifixion! It is wonderful that Jesus died for us and we "died with Him." But if it has no impact on our daily lives, if we are not experiencing the reality of that crucifixion right now, is it really doing us any good?

You see, in order to be free from our old life and nature, the old soul life (PSUCHÊ) needs to be crucified. That's right, it needs to die. There is simply no other way to be free from it and its activities. But how can this possibly happen if we are not experiencing the death of Christ in our lives today?

What good is "our death with Jesus" doing us if it is just some distant, theoretical, "spiritual" truth? If it can't be real to us, how are we supposed to be delivered? If our soul life isn't really being put to death every day, how can we be freed from its influence and nature?

Only dead men do not sin. In order for us to be completely free from our sin, our PSUCHÊ life must be eliminated. Our freedom from sin requires not only the new sinless life but the end of our own sinful one. Our soul life must die.

Therefore, the actual *experience* of our co-death with Jesus Christ is essential for all of us.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

When we speak about the blood of Jesus, most believers think about his forgiveness. They understand the blood as a variety of cleanser,* cloak, or mantel which hides their sins from God. It seems to be a quick and easy way to escape any consequences for their errors.

But, biblically “the blood” means something much more serious than this. In the Bible, when it speaks about blood, it means that something or someone has died.

Not long ago I was driving in my car and came across a massive amount of blood on the road. Not much farther along was a motorcyclist lying on the pavement. I could tell from the quantity of blood on the ground that he was dead. He was not just bleeding a little; he had lost his blood and died.

Jesus did not donate blood at the Red Cross. His precious blood is not some cheap, commonplace detergent. Instead, the fact that Jesus’ blood was shed means that He died. He did not just bleed a little for us and then put on a Band-Aid. He died in our place.

Why did Jesus need to die? It was necessary because we are worthy of death. According to

*In many versions of the New Testament, Revelation 1:5 uses the word “wash” as in “washed us from our sins.” But this is probably a copyist error since the spelling of this word is very close to the Greek word for “free” or “liberate” found in other, more trustworthy, translations. According to R. N. Champlin, Ph.D., in his New Testament commentary, the word “wash” is only found in later Greek manuscripts of lesser importance. Therefore, these are less reliable than earlier ones. Such manuscripts seem to be copying a manuscript labeled P.046 since the word “wash” first appears there.

God's righteousness, the individual who sins must die. We read: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:20). Jesus, then, took our place in this execution. We were supposed to be killed for who we are and what we have done. Yet, Jesus was killed instead of us.

However, all this will do us little good if we do not enter into the experience of this death. Our death with Him must become real to us. Since only dead men do not sin, we must, through Christ, also be becoming dead to sin. This is accomplished by actually entering into His death through the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:13).

HOW THIS WORKS

For us to take advantage of this substitute death, there is one requirement. We must recognize and admit before God that we are worthy of death. Reason with me for a moment. If we do not believe that we are worthy to die for what we have done and what we are, then there is no reason for anyone to take our place in this execution. If we are not guilty enough to deserve death, then we don't need Jesus' sacrifice.

In 1 John 1:9 we read: "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."

Many versions use the word "confess" in place of the word which here is translated "agree with *God's judgment*." The Greek word is HOMOLOGEO which means "to speak together" or "to say the same thing as another." What

then is God saying about our sins? We have already read His sentence of death. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:20). Therefore, to "confess" our sins means to agree with or "speak together" with Him. We say what He is saying, agreeing with His judgment upon us.

This, then, is the necessary requirement for God to do two things. He will forgive us *and* He will cleanse us. His forgiving us is a precious thing, yet it is not the end. He then also works to cleanse us from who and what we are.

As we have seen from the previous chapters, this cleansing is done by His own life working inside of us to put to death the old life and nature, substituting it with His own.

So we see that until and unless we agree with the fact that we are worthy of death, we cannot be forgiven. There is no way to receive forgiveness without being willing to experience the subsequent cleansing which means the loss of our soul life (PSUCHÉ).

Just applying the precious blood of Jesus as "soap," "paint," or even "a robe of righteousness," without acknowledging our need for death, is not sufficient to be forgiven. God will not forgive someone who intends to continue sinning. We must also be ready and willing for God's variety of cleansing which involves the end of our soul lives.

When we repent by agreeing with God's sentence of death upon our sinfulness, this opens the way for God to apply Christ's death to us and then fill us with His new life. This is

an absolutely necessary requirement. There is no way we can bypass it.

When we arrive at true repentance, then, through the Holy Spirit, God applies the death of Christ to our lives. In a spiritual way which we humans cannot fathom, Jesus' death becomes a reality in us. This is a work which God does in us by His mercy and grace.

Not only do we desperately need to experience Christ's death today, but we also need to experience the resurrection of Jesus for ourselves. Paul makes an interesting and enlightening statement. He 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*" (Philip 3:10,11).

Yes, we need to experience the resurrection of Jesus too. But there is a problem here. Living people never resurrect. This is only possible for the dead. Therefore, if we are not knowing His death for ourselves – if it is not becoming real in our lives – then we can never know His resurrection.

Consequently, we remain defeated, bound by sin, and powerless. The power of Jesus is in His resurrection. It is not until we daily experience His death that we can daily know the power of His resurrected life (ZOE).

BEING IMMERSSED

Our genuine experience of the death and resurrection of Christ today is intimately related

to our experience of baptism. The word “baptize” means “to immerse.”

It is probable that many of you readers have gone through a ceremony called “baptism” where you were immersed in some water. This is not a bad thing. It is a testimony to the heavenly rulers and others of your having agreed with God to enter into Jesus’ death.

However, with our new understanding of the aorist verb tense, we see that our baptism must not stop with just a dunking. There is a lot more to it than that. Our being immersed into the death of Christ, must be an ongoing, daily experience.

We read: “Or don’t you realize that all who are being immersed {baptized} into the Anointed One Jesus are immersed into his death? Therefore, we are being buried with him into death through immersion *into the Anointed One* so that as the Anointed One was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should be walking in *the newness of the Father’s life* {ZOÊ}” (Rm 6:3,4).

Here we understand baptism in a new light. It is not simply a one-time thing. Being immersed into the death of the Jesus can be and, in fact, must be our daily experience. In Galatians 3:27 we read: “For as many of you as are being immersed into the Anointed One, are putting on the Anointed One.”

Now some may argue here that this “being immersed” is a past event for true believers and that they have already “put on” Christ. But

please allow me ask you a few questions. Are you really “immersed into Christ” as much as you would like to be?

Are you satisfied that you have all of Jesus in your life that you want or need? Have you really been radically changed into His image in a way that is visible to others so that they can see that you have actually “put on Christ?” Are you a completely different person?

If not, then the ongoing, daily experience of being immersed {baptized} into Christ and into His death is for you! You can be experiencing the reality of what your “symbolic” immersion in water was pointing to.

Another verse with the “new” verb rendering reads: “Since you are being buried together with him through [the death which] baptism [symbolizes], you are also being co-resurrected with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12).

What a wonderful thing! By experiencing the reality of baptism – being immersed into His death – we can also experience being co-resurrected with Him by the power of God!

We can be, and indeed we must be, immersed into Jesus day after day. It is this immersion into Christ which is changing us. It is our constant immersion into Him which is transforming us from what we are into what He is. Jesus teaches us: “He who is believing and is being baptized {being immersed} will be being saved, but he who disbelieves will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).

There are some Christians who like to emphasize "being baptized in the Holy Spirit." Some feel that this is "a necessary experience" for being saved. Others think that it is a second step or a second experience after being "born again."

Yet, from our previous discussion of the aorist verb tense, we can now understand something much more profound. Being baptized or immersed in the Holy Spirit is not just a one-time experience. It is not meant to be merely a "second experience" but a daily experience. It needs to happen again and again, over and over until we are saturated with all that He is.

This being immersed into Jesus is intimately related to being filled with the Holy Spirit. This, too, is supposed to be a daily experience for all believers. We are admonished: "And don't be drunk with wine which produces lack of self-control but **be being filled to fulness** with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18).

Here is a wonderful verse. We can *be being* filled with the Holy Spirit! This also is not just a one-time experience. God has not given His Spirit sparingly. He has "poured it out" on us.

Therefore, we can be filled again and again, more and more with Him! We can *be being* filled with all that God is.

BEING CIRCUMCISED

Let me ask you an important question. Have you been circumcised yet? No, I don't mean to ask if you have had pieces of your physical body

cut off. What I mean to ask is if you have experienced the true circumcision of which the physical surgery is a type? Have you had your flesh cut away? Did you even realize that as a Christian you are supposed to be circumcised?

Since most Bible versions translate the key verses about this subject in the past tense, they make it seem to be something which has already happened. This, then, would be a "surgery" which you didn't feel, don't realize happened, and which is doing you little, if any, good. But when we read verses about circumcision with a different rendering of the aorist verb tense, something new and wonderful comes into view.

In Colossians 2:11 we read: "It is also in him that you are being circumcised with a circumcision not done with *human* hands, *but instead* through the stripping off of the entirety of the sins of the flesh by the *spiritual* circumcision *which occurs* in the Anointed One."

The true question then is: Have you experienced having your flesh cut off by the work of the Spirit? Has the spiritual reality of what circumcision symbolizes become real in your life? The above verse makes it clear that this can be happening to us. It can become our experience. Hallelujah, we can be being freed from our flesh!

Paul also teaches us: "...but he is a *true* Jew who is one inwardly and *genuine* circumcision is something which happens not by the letter of the law but in the heart by *the operation of* the Spirit, whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rm 2:29).

The first person in the Bible to be circumcised was Abraham. This rite was prescribed by God as a result of His faith, pointing to something in the future which had to do with his children.

Through our faith, we are today considered “children of Abraham,” the father of faith. Being his spiritual descendants qualifies us for the wonderful, spiritual reality of the circumcision which he only experienced physically.

Paul teaches us: “*Furthermore, it was* so that he could be the father of the cutting away of the flesh {circumcision} not only to those who are *physically* circumcised but also to those who are walking in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised” (Rm 4:12).

So we understand that there is a spiritual experience of circumcision which is for all believers. We all must know for ourselves a divine surgery which has a radical impact on who and what we are.

We need God to cut off the flesh which encompasses us. We desperately need to be rid of this encumbering mass of “flesh,” this burden of the old life and nature, so that we can walk with Him without hindrance. We need to experience the removal of the sinful nature, that “part” of us which identifies us with the ungodly.

BEING SANCTIFIED

Yet another truth which should be becoming real to us is that of being sanctified. Many understand the word “sanctified” as meaning

“being set apart.” Although the word includes this meaning, it falls far short of the total significance of the word. Literally, it means “to be made holy.”

Now being separated from what is common and unclean is certainly part of being made holy. But if we are only “set apart” and never actually changed to be holy, we never experience the fulness of what this word means.

When we rightly understand the verses about this subject in the New Testament, it becomes clear that this, too, is an ongoing process which we should be experiencing. We should be becoming holy. This fits well with what God spoke to us. He said: “Become holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16).

Also we read: “...since his divine power has provided us with everything that is necessary for *the development of his life* {ZOE} within us and the holiness *which it produces*, through fully knowing him who calls us to his own glory and virtuous character” (2 Pet 1:3).

We also are taught: “But now, being set free from sin and being enslaved to God, you have the ‘fruit’ of being made holy as the result of *God’s eternal life*” (Rm 6:22). Also: “For this is the will of God: your being made holy” (2 Thess 4:3).

And: “But we are compelled to always give thanks to God for you brethren who are loved by the Lord because God chose you from the beginning to receive a *complete* salvation through being made holy by the Spirit and *by having* faith in the truth” (1 Thess 2:13).

And finally, "Pursue peace with all men and *pursue* being made holy, *since* without such *holiness* no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). So we understand that being made holy is an experience we should be having right now today. It is a privilege all of us can enjoy.

Of course, this is not a result of self-effort. It is not attained by our "works." It is accomplished by the grace of God through faith. It happens through our being filled, more and more, over and over again, with the life of our holy God.

Such holiness must be real in our lives. It should be happening to us and in us. Holiness must not be just our imagining or pretending to be holy. It is also not our hoping that God thinks we are holy when we realize that actually we are not.

As we have already seen, this holiness is accomplished by being filled with the life of our holy, heavenly Father. It is sealed to us by entering into death and resurrection with our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now dear readers, do you see how there are two "versions" of the gospel? Can you see, depending on how the scriptures are translated, that there are two messages? One is a static, past tense, cut-and-dried-gospel which many are trying very hard to believe. The other is an experiential, ongoing, living, active gospel which is producing real changes in the lives of those who are believing.

4.

TRUE FAITH

*S*ince we know that the true experience of the gospel about which we are speaking is ours through faith, it seems necessary to spend some time to investigate what faith really is.

If, in some way, our understanding of faith is insufficient or even in error, this will limit our experience of the marvelous truths which we have been investigating. Unfortunately, this is another subject which is fraught with misunderstanding.

It is very clear in the scriptures that our salvation is by God's grace through faith. There is no reason for anyone to doubt this precious truth. Yet, what does "faith" mean? How are we to have it or, once we have it, how can we have more of it?

Since, as we have been seeing, salvation is something of which we desperately need more and more, it is important to understand what faith is.

How can we arrive at faith? Obviously it is not something we can generate from within ourselves. It is not a result of our “works” or self-effort. The scriptures teach us: “For by grace you are being saved through faith which is not your own, *but instead* is a gift from God” (Eph 2:8).

So we see that true faith does not originate with us. There is nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. It comes through grace. It is something which God freely gives us.

But how does this work? How does God give us faith? He does it by revealing Himself to us. We read: “...everyone who sees the Son and believes into him, would have *his* eternal life {ZOE}” (Jn 6:40).

Do you understand this? Jesus gives us faith by revealing Himself to us. First, in some way which He chooses, He shows us something about Himself or speaks to us. Then, our reaction to this revelation is called “faith.”

This truth is reaffirmed to us in John’s gospel where we read: “This was the beginning of the signs which Jesus did in Cana of Galilee through which he manifested his glory – and his disciples believed into him” (Jn 2:11). The disciples’ faith was a result of seeing His glory.

Abraham, the “father of faith” came to his faith in exactly the same way. First, “...the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision...” (Gen 15:1). Then, “...he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6). So we see that faith comes from God

revealing Himself to us. Our reaction to His revelation is called "faith." This is why He is called the "...author and finisher of *our* faith" (NKJV).

Another version reads: "...Jesus, the originator and perfecter of *our* faith" (Heb 12:2). Our faith begins with Him and is perfected by Him as He increasingly shows more of Himself to us.

Still another popular verse which confirms this truth is Romans 10:17 where we read: "So faith *comes* through hearing and hearing by the word which is spoken {RHEMA, Gk} by God." Please notice that the Greek word here is not LOGOS, which could mean the Bible, but words which God actually speaks to us.

All true faith is the result of the revelation of God. It is not a mental, intellectual exercise. It is nothing which we can achieve ourselves. It is not the result of Bible study, memorization, or constant repetition of Bible verses.

All these are just the efforts of the flesh through the human mind. Although many Christians are occupied with these things hoping to have more faith, it is a vain effort.

Far too many Christians are trying to arrive at faith in this carnal way. They are trying to "believe" in many scriptural truths, hoping that through this exercise, these precious truths will become real in their lives.

This is just an ineffective, natural attempt to arrive at something spiritual. It is engaging the efforts of the soul (PSUCHÊ) to try and produce something which only happens through the Spirit of life (ZOË).

While some might manage to convince themselves of some biblical truth or other using these methods, this is not true faith. The source of faith is not of this earth. It does not come from ourselves. It is a gift which comes from God.

The truth that it is God who gives us faith is emphasized in the original New Testament language. There are many instances when some translations read "faith in Jesus," but the Greek actually reads: "the faith **of** Jesus." (Rm 3:22,26; Gal 2:16, 3:22; Rev 14:12 for example). This is a different meaning. Truly faith comes from Him and not from ourselves.

As an example of the way many Christians try to "believe" in Bible verses, let us look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. This is one verse which I have found many Christians trying to believe, yet without results. Since this verse is found in the Bible, they are assured that it must be true. They try and try to believe, but their experience is entirely different than what they read.

In the New King James Version we read: "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." When we honestly analyze this verse, it doesn't seem to fit with our experience. The fact is that not all the "old things" have gone away. Many of them are still here. Furthermore, everything has not become new. This is simply not true in our experience.

Yet many, many Christians are trying to "believe" this verse. They are trying desperately to imagine that what still seems to be "old" is

not really real. They are trying to convince themselves that “everything has become new.” They are trying very hard to “believe the Bible.”

Unfortunately, concerning this verse in 2 Corinthians, our New Testament translations have again failed us. Did you notice that the words “he is” in the clause “*he is* a new creation” are in italics? This is because they are not in the original text. There is no personal pronoun “he” in the Greek.

Also, the Greek word translated “passed away” would be much better translated “bypassed” or “superseded.” With this in mind I would like to present an alternative translation which I believe fits better with our experience.

“When anyone is in Christ, *there is* a new creation *inside of him*. The original {natural} man has been superseded {passed by, Gk}; look, a completely new *being* has been generated [the new spiritual man].” This, then, is something which seems more real. It fits much better with our experience as Christians.

The unfortunate truth is that using our mental powers to try and create faith actually harms our faith. When we apply our mind to try and “believe” something and yet it does not become real to us, this makes our spiritual life more and more imaginary and less experiential.

Many, through continued effort with this kind of mental exercise, become discouraged and even lose the faith they had. Since what they are trying to “believe” is not happening for them, they lose hope and begin to doubt the

truth of the gospel. This sad situation is made even worse when they are trying to believe in verses which have not been well translated.

It is also very common for Christians trying to believe in this way to end up in unreality and error. Since what they are trying to believe is not real to them, their spiritual lives become full of imagination.

Therefore, they are easily led to "believe" all sorts of foolish "visions," revelations, teachings, etc. which have little, if any, basis in reality. This common condition is a result of trying to have a mental "faith" in things which are not really real in our experience. Today's churches are full of just such unreality.

So we see that true faith is what God gives to us through revealing Himself to us. It is a spiritual certainty which we receive as we respond positively to all He is showing to us about Himself.

This is made very clear in Hebrews 11:1,2 where we read: "Now faith is *when* what is hoped for is made real to us [in the spirit]. It is when we have a *genuine* inner conviction concerning unseen things. For this is how those of old received God's approval." This is the faith which is given to us by God.

Let us suppose that we have come to faith through Jesus revealing Himself to us. But we find we need more faith. The faith which we have is limited and is not bringing us into the fullness of the salvation which we know we need. How can we have more faith? We can have more faith simply by asking God. Since He

is the source, when we seek Him, He will reveal more of Himself to us. He will show us Himself, His plans, and His purposes (Lk 11:9). Then, our faith will grow as we respond positively to what He is showing us.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

When Jesus first reveals Himself to us and we believe, we become “born from above” (Jn 3:3). We become His children. At that moment because of our faith, God considered us to be just. This means that He overlooks our defects and interacts with us as if we were completely righteous. This is what is called “justification by faith.”

However, after Jesus first reveals Himself, He doesn’t stop there. He keeps on revealing Himself every day in various ways. Then, we can continue reacting to this revelation in faith, that is by believing in what He is showing us and acting upon it.

God’s revealing of Himself to us is meant to be a lifelong, unending process. Each and every day He is leading us more and more into His will. He continues to speak to us. He continues to reveal Himself, His will, and direction. Our part is to believe and follow Him into what He is revealing to us.

But what happens if we stop believing? What happens if we don’t respond in faith to what Jesus is saying to us? What about when we resist His will and do not do what He is asking of us? Can it be that He still considers us righteous?

The answer to this question has a lot to do with our new understanding of the aorist verb tenses in the New Testament. (If you have forgotten, please refer back to our discussion of the aorist tense in chapter 3.)

For example, in Acts 13:39 we read: "...and that by him, everyone who is believing **is being** considered just..." Further, Romans 3:24 teaches us that we are: "...**being** justified freely by His grace..." (NKJV).

As long as we are responding in faith to what Jesus is revealing to us of Himself, He overlooks our sin and considers us to be righteous. We "are being justified" by faith in Him.

But when we do not believe, when we resist His will, when we rebel against what He is showing us, then this justification is no longer in effect. When we stop believing, we stop being justified. This means that God is no longer looking upon us as "just" people.

Does this mean that we are "lost?" In no way! Once we are "born from above," we will always be His children. His eternal life is indeed eternal. Yet, when we resist and rebel, He knows this. It is not hidden from Him. He then no longer deals with us as righteous children but as rebellious sons and daughters.

James, in his epistle, makes this very clear. He says that our faith can die. It can become inactive, not producing results in our lives.

He shows us that our faith, if and when it no longer causes a positive, obedient response within us, has become dead and no longer justi-

fies us. We read: "For as the body separated from the spirit is just a corpse, in the same way faith separated from actions is dead" (Js 2:26).

This sentence was written by him to address the very subject we are investigating: being considered just by faith. He was trying to explain that dead, inactive faith does not justify us. Although we are still God's children and are loved by Him, He is not so blind as to suppose that we are righteous when we are living in rebellion against Him.

In order for us to continue being considered just by our Father in spite of our defects, we need to continue believing. We must continue responding in faith to all that He is revealing to us. Just believing once, a long time ago, is not sufficient to be considered just today. It is our daily faith which results in our daily justification.

If and when we realize that we have been disobeying Him and not responding to what He is revealing to us, then we need to repent. We need to turn around and begin doing His will. We must begin actively believing in all that He is telling us.

For example, we read in Genesis 35:1, "Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God...'" But let us suppose that Jacob didn't go and didn't obey what God told him to do. Would God still be pleased with him?

What if he had reasoned in his heart saying something like this: "What difference does it make where I build an altar? God is every-

where. It's inconvenient to move everything to Bethel. I'll just stay here and serve God where I am. That should be good enough."

Would such a thing satisfy God? Would He be pleased with Jacob? Would He still consider him as being righteous? God will only continue treating us as righteous, justified people when we obey him and respond in faith to all that He is revealing to us.

This truth applies equally to us if we are living in known sin. When we continue in sin, God speaks to us about His displeasure in our spirit. He reveals His will to us concerning our activities. He does not remain silent about such things.

When we respond in faith by repenting, He then considers us just. But when we resist His revelation, stiffening our necks and refusing to respond to what He is saying to us, then He does not consider us to be just. He thinks of us exactly like we are: sinful, rebellious children whom He needs to correct and discipline.

NOT FAITH IN FACTS

Another important aspect of the faith which causes God to consider us as just is that it is *not* faith in facts. It is not our believing in historical truths about Jesus.

For example, we are not justified simply by believing that Jesus died for us, rose from the dead for our sins, etc. Sorry, this is not enough. We must believe in a Person, not merely in facts. Facts cannot save us. Only Jesus can do that.

As we have seen, in order to believe in Jesus, we must first have seen Him. He must have revealed Himself to us in some way. Then, and only then, can we believe in a way which will cause us to be regenerated (be born from above) and be considered just by God. No one can be truly converted without having a personal, real encounter with Jesus Himself. We must actually meet Jesus!

Furthermore, true faith is not believing in biblical truths. It is not sufficient to believe in the Bible. It is not adequate just to be mentally convinced of the truth of some Bible verses. It is not enough to recite creeds and try to convince ourselves of the truth in them.

Facts, even historically verifiable facts, cannot save us. Bible verses also cannot save us unless God reveals Himself to us through them. Only Jesus saves. Once again we read: "...everyone who sees the Son and believes into him, would have *his* eternal life" (Jn 6:40).

INTO HIM

Did you notice the word "into" in this verse which states that we should believe "into" Him? In the Greek language this word is "EIS" which is defined as: "A primary preposition; *to* or *into* (indicating the point reached or entered)." You see, this does not mean "in" as if we were believing in some fact. The ancient Greeks had another word for "in."

This word EIS means "into," indicating a change of position. Our genuine faith causes

movement. We actually enter *into* Jesus. Our faith brings us into Him and Him into us in a way that radically impacts our lives. It changes us. It enables us to receive His own life and be “born from above.” And, it causes the Father to consider us as being just. This is true, biblical faith.

Once again, we can see a “hidden gospel” here. One is a gospel which emphasizes a belief in facts, creeds, doctrines, Bible verses, etc. It is a kind of dry, mental, conceptual message with very little, if any, experience of the risen Jesus. It seems to state that once we “believe,” from then on God considers us just, no matter what we might do, say, or think.

It is a religion similar to the sort which the Pharisees had which was based on their own analysis of the scriptures. It is something which does not seem very real, which does not impact our lives profoundly, and which does not change us very much.

The “other” gospel is one of an intimate, genuine relationship with Jesus through which we understand what He is saying and doing every day and are responding to this revelation through faith. In this way, we are walking with Him and He is considering us just.

This is the result of His loving grace. This is a gospel of life-changing (actually life *exchanging*) power which liberates us from who and what we are. It is a message that actually frees us from sin.

5.

TRANSFORMATION

One of the many benefits of receiving God's life in our spirit is that we now can be being transformed. This is something which all believers need to be experiencing. Biblically, this is an ongoing, lifelong process. It is a privilege which we can and, in fact, must enjoy so that we can fully take advantage of all that Christ did for us.

The meaning of transformation is that we become something different than we were originally. We are changed into a new kind of person. The word "transformation" in Greek is METAMORPHOO from which we get our word metamorphosis. This is the radical change which a butterfly or moth caterpillar experiences as they pass through life.

Initially, after hatching from their eggs, these "worms" crawl along on the ground or on

plants. They are confined to the earth. But, after a while, they spin a cocoon or secrete their chrysalis around themselves. They then stay inside these coffin-like containers for some time, seemingly dormant. In fact, it seems as if they have died. There is no movement or sign of life, yet a significant change is happening there in the dark.

Then, at the right moment, this “shell” begins to break open. When they finally emerge from this “death chamber,” they are new creatures. Instead of being somewhat ugly, earth-bound worms, they have become beautiful creatures of the heavens. They have been “transformed” or metamorphosed. This is a very accurate, biblical word to describe the process of how we, too, can be changed.

Transformation is also something which we need to experience. It is part of the wonderful salvation which Jesus purchased for us by His blood. This is accomplished by our entering into the experience of the death and resurrection of Christ. This process slowly changes us from what we are – natural human beings who are confined to this earth – into glorious, heavenly beings.

Although this glory is hidden for now (2 Cor 4:7) and will only be fully revealed at the coming of Jesus Christ, it is something very real.

We read in Colossians: “For you died {and are dying} *together with the Anointed One*, yet God’s life {ZOE} *within you* is kept hidden for now in God, together with the Anointed One.

"But, when the Anointed One who is that life in us is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in that glory" (Col 3:3,4).

This is a process, something which should be occurring every day. We read: "And don't be conformed to *the patterns of* this age but be being transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you can discern what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rm 12:2).

Also we are encouraged: "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with *our* faces unveiled, *through seeing and then* reflecting the glory of the Lord are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:17,18).

This is truly a wonderful message. It is really good news! We, earthly human beings, can experience a wonderful change. We can be transformed into the image of God! Wow! What a thought. It seems that Jesus really does have a wonderful plan for us. He wants to change us into His own glorious image.

If you are curious about what this might look like, you can read the first part of the book of Revelation. There, Jesus is described in His glorified state (Rev 1:13-16). Here we see Him in shining garments with His whole being radiating unbelievable light. This shining is a result of the tremendous, eternal, unlimited power and virtue which are filling Him.

When John saw this sight, he fell down at Jesus' feet as if he were dead. Now this is the

same John who leaned on Jesus' chest at supper (Jn 13:23). He was the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn 20:2), so he was very familiar with Jesus. Yet, when he saw Him in His glorified condition, his humanity could not hold up under the power and glory which emanated from Him, so he collapsed in front of Him.

This, my dear brothers and sisters, is glory. The "glory" to which we are called is not a place. It is a state of being. To be "glorified" means to be full of and radiating forth God's own power and splendor. This is what Jesus is calling us to. His intention is to change us so radically, so thoroughly, that when He returns, we will be like He is right now.

This is what is called "transformation." We really must be experiencing this change today so that tomorrow it can be seen in us. Jesus teaches us: "Then the righteous will shine brightly like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43).

Yet somehow, this gospel has been mostly hidden. It seems to have been changed. Most Christians think of "glory" as a place, a destination to which they will go, perhaps somewhat similar to a celestial Disney World or Muslim paradise. Instead of a message about our destiny (being changed into the image of Christ) we have heard a message about a destination, somewhere where we might go.

The gospel has been diluted and impoverished through misunderstanding of what God is calling us to. Perhaps since many Christians

have so little experience of changes actually happening in their lives, their “faith” is largely imagination. Therefore, a storybook “glory land” full of physical and soulish pleasures combines with what they picture in their mind.

But let me assure you that when you are glorified with the glory of Christ, where you are will not make any difference to you. When you are sharing in the life, nature, power, and glory of God, destinations will be insignificant.

The true gospel is not about where we will go but about who we will be. It is not a message of a glorious destination but of a glorious state of being to which we are called and for which we must be preparing. It is not a gospel about some glory land but about being glorified.

PHYSICAL REWARDS

As we have seen, having an accurate translation of the scriptures is an important thing. How words are rendered can have an astounding influence on how Christians understand the message of Jesus.

For example, let us look at the translation of just one word of only one verse of the New Testament which has powerfully influenced millions of believers around the world to believe in the fairy tale gospel about which we have been speaking.

Countless English-speaking missionaries have encircled the globe in the past few centuries. In no way would I wish to disparage or denigrate the value of their work. Yet, many of

them carried with them the almost universally popular translation of the Bible called the *King James Version* or the *Authorized Version*.

This translation was made at the directive of King James of England who “authorized” it. He was at the same time king and the “spiritual head” of the Anglican Church. This version was completed and first published in the year 1611.

In this version we find an interesting word. It is the word “mansions.” We read: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn 14:2 KJV).

It is unbelievable how much effect this one word has had on generations of Christians. Many places where these missionaries went were at the time, or still are, poor countries.

Partly for this reason, this verse led countless believers to hope for a mansion and other riches “when they get to heaven.” This is what I would call the “destination-centered” or “physical-rewards” gospel.

I remember preaching to a large congregation in a very poor country more than twenty years ago. I was trying to explain our true rewards which we have in Christ.

I said something like this: “Look, if having a large house with three cars in the garage is heaven, then the United States is heaven.” I was shocked to see virtually the entire group nodding their heads in agreement with me.

But when we take a closer look at the scriptures, we find that there will be no mansions.

That's right! No one will ever get a mansion. They don't exist and never will exist. The Greek word here means "dwelling places;" it does not mean palace or mansion.

Paul, our beloved brother, explains to us just what Jesus was talking about. Jesus was speaking of our new glorified bodies, not mansions. Jesus is right now preparing new heavenly bodies for us to "live" in.

Paul said: "For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling is destroyed [our physical body], we have a building from God, an eternal "house" in the heavens *which is* not made by human hands [our glorified body]. For we truly groan for this, greatly desiring to put on as a garment our habitation which is coming from heaven so that, being so clothed, we will not be found naked.

"For truly we who are in this *earthly* 'tent' groan, being burdened, not simply wanting to put something off, but to put on *our immortal body* so that that which is mortal might be swallowed up by the *eternal life of God*" (2 Cor 5:1-4).

Oh, the songs which have been written and the hymns which have been sung about these "mansions" which are not scriptural, true, or real. Countless Christians for many generations have been misled by this one mistranslated word.

With this inaccurate translation as a basis, many have gone on to believe in "streets of gold" filled with luxury cars, all sorts of physical and soulish pleasures, riches such as piles of gold, etc. Yet all this is just a fairy tale, a fable. It

has nothing to do with the genuine gospel. Therefore, it cannot truly inspire Christians to seek what God has for them in the future. Furthermore, it has no genuine spiritual power to secure a believer's heart in the hour of temptation. How much damage has been done by the erroneous translation of just one word!

This error is so pervasive and pernicious that, even though no modern translations (except the NKJV) that I know of now use this word "mansions," this notion still lives on.

Even in countries which don't speak English and have never used this word "mansions" in any of their translations, believers still have heard about and are expecting to receive mansions. The effect that this one word has had on Christian thinking around the world is almost unbelievable.

I would like to reassure you that you won't need a physical house or mansion when you are in the presence of the Lord. Since there "will be no more night" (Rev 22:5) and no one will get tired, sleepy, or fatigued, there will no need for bedrooms.

Also, there will be no hunger or necessity to prepare food, so there will be no need for kitchens. Of course, there will also be no need for bathrooms.

Furthermore, there are no walls inside the New Jerusalem. We read that it is completely transparent, like crystal (Rev 21:11). There will be no need for privacy, "a time alone," a need to get away from the others, etc. There will be no

part secret, hidden, or dark. For all these reasons, no mansions will be wanted or needed.

Also, there will be no piles of gold. There will be no need for it either. There will be no stores, nothing to buy, or even anything we might need. In fact, there are not even “streets of gold” as so many believe, since in the Greek text this word is singular and, therefore, should be translated “street” or “central square.”

WHAT WILL OUR REWARD BE?

If then there are no mansions, no piles of gold, no expensive cars, and no earthly entertainments, what will our reward be? What do we have to look forward to if it is not these things?

There is one principal reward which we will receive. It will be the same reward for everyone. This reward is God Himself. God said to Abraham, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Gen 15:1).

Are you disappointed by this? Does this seem inadequate or small? If so, then you have not begun to know who God is. He is everything. He is the creator of all that exists. He is all and all. He is so much more than we can even imagine that it is impossible even to speak about with human words. Our God is infinite and eternal. He is without limit. And He is willing to share Himself with us as our reward.

But, even though everyone will get the same reward, it will be different for everyone. Not everyone will be able to enjoy this reward at the

same level. This will be because of the differences in spiritual growth among Christians.

You see, not all Christians grow to spiritual maturity. Not all press on to know the Lord in His fullness. For various reasons, not all take advantage of their time on this earth to grow up spiritually.

Therefore, their capacity to enjoy and participate in the future joys of the Lord will be limited by their maturity.

This fact is no different from how things are on this present earth. A baby cannot even feed itself or walk. A toddler cannot go outside of the house alone. A child cannot marry. There are many, many things younger people cannot do or be because of their immaturity. This same truth will apply to future spiritual things.

Our capacity to enjoy God Himself and all the future things He will newly make will be governed by our spiritual maturity which we attained while living here on earth.

Please allow me to repeat this essential truth. Our capacity to experience and enjoy God Himself and all that He will create in the future will be determined by our spiritual maturity which we realize while here on earth.

There will be no spiritual growth after the rapture or the grave. Today is the day for salvation (2 Cor 6:2). Consequently, our loving of God, our giving ourselves to Him, our faith and obedience, our filling ourselves constantly with Him, will all result in our “greater or lesser” reward which will be our enjoyment of Him Himself.

THAT SAME IMAGE

You may have wondered why 2 Corinthians 3:18, when speaking about our being changed in Jesus' image, uses the word that "same" image. What then does this word "same" mean?

You see, Jesus is actually the image of Someone else – His Father. The scriptures say that: "He {the Son} is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). And: "Who, being the radiance of his glory and the exact image of his essence" (Heb 1:3). 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, speaking about Jesus' glory, calls Him: "...the Anointed One – who is the image of God..."

Therefore, the glory to which Jesus is calling us is even more special than we imagined. It is the glory of the Father Himself! It is Jesus' intention – in fact, it is His fervent prayer – that we enter into and obtain the glory of His Father.

In the gospel of John, while praying to His Father at the moment of greatest trial, Jesus said: "And the glory which you have given me I have given to them so that there would be a *complete* oneness to the degree that we are one: I in them and you in me. *This is so* that they would be perfected into *our* oneness in order that the world would know that you sent me and loved them just as you loved me" (Jn 17:22-23).

This is why we need to experience transformation. The rewards are beyond comprehension, yet they are real. As believers, this is our hope, the hope of being glorified with His glory.

This requires that we be changed into His image today – the image of the invisible God.

There will be no second chance. There is no transformation after death. The only thing which will be changed after we die or are raptured is our body. Our inner parts, our soul and spirit, must be transformed today by the work of the Holy Spirit.

If we neglect to take advantage of this almost unbelievable possibility and fill ourselves daily with all that Jesus is, we are the most foolish of all people (Heb 2:3).

CONCLUSION

Dear friends, what kind of a gospel has been preached? What have we been announcing to the world that is producing so little real fruit? Perhaps we need to prayerfully reconsider our message and seek the face of God until we have something genuine and powerful to say.

We desperately need to experience something real and transforming in our own lives. We should be careful that what we are giving to others is really true and will bring some benefit to them. Only the truth sets people free (Jn 8:32). Any other message can't and won't do the job.

It is small wonder that the gospel which so many have been preaching has had so little effect. It now becomes apparent why the power of Jesus' message seems to have been so diminished. Much of His truth has been lost!

The essence of His message has been diluted or missed and other powerless, human, or

earthly ideas have been substituted in its place. We have been robbed of much of the truth of the scriptures and so our message doesn't have the awesome power that it should have to change the human condition.

May God have mercy upon us so that we could both know His salvation in its fulness ourselves and be His instruments in ministering His truth to the perishing world around us!

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