

THE WORD MADE FLESH

Vincent Cheung

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Author's web site: <http://www.faithstudio.com>

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PREFACE

This book is a collection of articles I had written during the earlier years of my Christian life. For example, the first three chapters were originally published as a book entitled, *Praying with Power*, written for the audience of my radio program, *The Voice of God*.

Since these articles were written a number of years ago, they no longer represent my best work, and some of the statements no longer represent my current doctrinal position and understanding. Although in the process of revision, I have tried to make the appropriate changes, sufficient alterations were not possible without substantially changing the structure and content of the text.

However, do not misunderstand – the contents of these pages are still valuable. Many who have read these articles have found them helpful and edifying. More than a few discovered insights in them that they had not seen in other places. This is why I have decided to publish them in this present volume.

Another revision is expected to be made later this year in 2002, which should further improve the contents of this book.

I pray that these articles will bring you encouragement, joy, peace, and understanding from the Word of God.

1. PRAYING WITH POWER (1)

There are a number of reasons for unanswered prayers. In these chapters, I am only going to discuss two of them. The first one is a lack of knowledge of the Word of God and the second is unbelief. We will see that these two are in fact related to each other.

With so many ministers putting great emphasis on prayer, there are many believers nowadays who go into prayer immediately when being confronted with a need or an emergency; however, this same group of Christians fail to receive answers to their prayers because they do not know what the Bible has to say concerning their need.

Proverbs 28:9 says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Prayer will not work without the Word of God. The prayer of a person who does not hear the Word of God is an abomination. This is because without the proper biblical understanding, one is bound to say the wrong things in prayer. The more he or she prays, the more he or she becomes oppressed because of this principle in Proverbs 28:9. On the other hand, "If ye abide in [Jesus], and [His] words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

Do not misunderstand me – I am not belittling prayer at all. Prayer is communication with God, and is of utmost importance in the Christian's life. I spend much time in prayer everyday. However, the Word of God must come before prayer every time. I will give you some illustrations.

When the prophet Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, he was full of confidence and courage. Some may theorize that he must have spent hours in prayer to gain such peace from God. This may have been so, but notice what was on Elijah's thinking as he prayed for God's fire to consume his offering: "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at they word" (v. 36). His faith and courage came from hearing the Word of the Lord. The Apostle Paul recognizes this fact and says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

In Acts 4, Peter and John were persecuted for a healing that they had done on a crippled man in the previous chapter. When they had returned to "their own company" (Acts 4:23), and told the other disciples what had transpired, "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord" (Acts 4:24) in prayer. They began their prayer by quoting from the Word of God (Acts 4:25-26; Psalm 2:1-2). They then ended the prayer honoring the Word of God: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal;

and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy hold child Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30).

Notice that signs and wonders follow the Word of God: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). God does not confirm your prayers; He confirms His Word. Look what can happen when believers pray in line with the scriptures: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). They received exactly what they asked for. The key is to pray according to the Word of God. The believers here already knew what the Bible has to say on the matter before they even prayed.

The same thing can happen today if we will pray the same way they did. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Your prayers and your faith in God cannot be shaken if your heart is established on the Word of God. Hebrews 1:3 says that God is "upholding all things by the word of his power." If you will base your faith on the promises of God in the Bible, it will uphold you, and you will never fail.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:5-7).

Although this passage is specifically referring to praying for wisdom, it can be applied to any kind of prayer requests. Notice that it says for the person who does not pray in faith, "let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (v. 7). Not only will the person fail to receive wisdom, but he or she will not receive anything from God without faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Notice that it is impossible to please God without faith. This verse lists two things that you must believe when you come to God. First, you must believe that God exists. If you are a Christian, you already believe that. Secondly, you must believe that God will reward those who diligently seek Him. The Bible clearly teaches us to expect our reward. Paul's epistles are full of descriptions of our present and future rewards. False religious traditions have robbed many Christians from their due reward in this life. Jesus says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38).

"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

This verse is specifically talking about eating, yet it can apply to every area of life because it says, "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Doubt is sin. If you are doubting God, you should repent of your unbelief right now. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confessing your sins will open up your life for God to bless you again. Do it now.

Let us further examine the nature of unbelief and its ill effects. In Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, the writer is using the account of Israel's entrance into the promised land of Canaan to teach his readers some spiritual truths. The earlier generation – the generation that was led out of Egypt by Moses – failed to enter the promised land because of their unbelief.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God...But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter because of their unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12, 17-19).

Notice that in verse 12, a heart full of unbelief is labeled "an evil heart." In verses 18 and 19, it is pointed out that they could not receive God's promise because of unbelief.

And so it is with us: if we fail to receive answers to our prayers, it is not because of a lack of God's willingness to give, but because of our lack of faith to receive.

"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:22-31).

Jesus gave Peter a word promising him the ability to walk on water. Jesus said, "Come." He would never have told Peter to go to Him if He had planned on Peter to fail. Jesus was not trying to trick Peter. Peter was able to walk on the water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus; however, he began to waver "when he saw the wind boisterous" (v. 30). The Bible says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). When you begin to believe your circumstances instead of the Word of God, you may sink. That is what happened to Peter. Then, Jesus said to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou

doubt?" Jesus did His part of the miracle by giving Peter the word, "Come." The problem was Peter's lack of faith.

"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world...Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief...Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief...Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession...Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:2-3, 6, 11, 14, 16).

Verse 2 says that the word preached did not do them any good because they did not mix the Word of God with their faith. When you hear the word of God it will not take effect in you if you do not believe it. For example, someone shows you the scripture: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). Hearing this scripture would not automatically get you saved. You must believe it and act upon it. You must believe that it is the truth, and then do what it tells you to do in order to obtain the promised results.

God had promised the Israelites the land of Canaan. All they had to do was to go get it. Yet, they did not believe God's promise and therefore did not act upon it. They died in their unbelief.

On the other hand, there is a good promise to those who have faith in God: "For we which have believed do enter into rest" (Hebrew 4:3). God promises you salvation, healing, prosperity, peace of mind, and many other things in the Bible. The only way to enter into this place of "rest" is by faith, because "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

You do not have to follow their "example of unbelief." You can choose to believe God right now and receive the promise. To do that you must "hold fast [to your] profession" (Hebrews 4:14). What does that mean? The word "profession" in this verse means "confession." The word "confession" does not always refer to the acknowledgment of sins. It simply means to speak in agreement with God. The writer of Hebrews is trying to get a point across here. The Bible teaches us that, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Standing in faith involves holding fast or maintaining what you say with your mouth. What you say with your mouth must be in line with God's promises. In the area of healing, the words "I am sick" are not in line with God's Word. The Bible says, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). If you will speak in line with God's Word, your physical condition will change. Believe God's Word instead of your circumstances. This is not to deny that the circumstances are real, but only that the promises of God can overcome them.

Hebrews 4:14 is saying that in a case such as healing, you should keep speaking verses such as Matthew 8:17 and not waver. Hold fast to that confession. Remember that, "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6-7).

Finally, Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come boldly before God in prayer. Many Christians approach God with a great deal of uncertainty. Failure to stand firm on the promises of God in the Bible causes them to miss out on God's blessings.

2. PRAYING WITH POWER (2)

Unbelief and a lack of knowledge in the Word of God can hinder your prayers. Without the Word of God, there can be no faith because, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Without knowing what the Bible has to say concerning your needs, you will not have the faith that it takes to obtain answers to your prayers. For example, how are you going to pray with absolute confidence for healing when you do not even know if it is God's will to heal you? There are many Christians today praying the unscriptural prayer of, "God, heal me if it be your will." They pray this way because they are ignorant of what God has to say concerning the subject. Those who pray, "if it be your will" seldom receive what they want from God. As a result, they are deceived into thinking that it is not God's will to grant their requests when the true reason for failure is their unbelief.

To pray in a way that produces positive results, we must first answer the question: if unbelieving prayers do not get results, then what kind of prayers will God answer?

"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

Faith is what causes God to answer prayers. God will not answer your prayer just because you have a need. God does not act on the basis of needs alone, but on that of faith. Faith is what overcomes your problems: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). How does faith come? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Again, the answer is the Word of God.

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

This passage of scripture says that we will have faith in prayer if we know what we are praying for is in line with God's will; moreover, this passage promises that if we are praying according to God's will, then we will receive what we ask. Many people misunderstand this and try to ascertain God's will while they pray by saying, "if it be your will." What this passage teaches is that we must discover what God's will is from the Bible before we even pray.

So, it is clear that the key issue here is the will of God. Each time we pray, we must know that what we are praying for is indeed the will of God in order to have the faith it takes to have our prayers answered. How, then, can we know the will of God?

God's Word is God's will. The Bible reveals the will of God on every issue. If God promises you something, then it is His will that you have it. For example, take a look at this familiar scripture: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Now, in the light of this scripture, can you say that it is not God's will to save you? No, indeed the Bible says that God "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Here, it is clearly stated that God is "not willing that any should perish." In the light of this scripture, nobody can say that it is not God's will to save him or her.

In the area of healing, there is much controversy over whether it is God's will to heal everyone. As a result, those who are sick in body often pray for healing with the faith-destroying phrase, "if it be your will." Read 1 John 5:14-15 again. The passage says that we will have confidence in prayer if we know the will of God. When a person prays, "if it be your will," it indicates that the he or she does not know the will of God on the matter. According to 1 John 5:14-15, such a person does not have confidence in prayer. James says concerning this person: "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:7).

On the other hand, when we pray knowing that it is God's will to heal, "we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:15). When a person reads in the Bible, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17), faith comes alive on the inside. That person immediately realizes that God wants to heal him or her. Faith then becomes easy.

If you have a sickness in your body, I can show you how to receive healing. There are two main principles that you must learn. Although I am specifically referring to healing, these principles can be applied to any need that you may have.

As we have discussed, we must first find out if it is God's will to heal you. We must find out what the Bible has to say concerning the subject. What does the Bible have to say concerning healing?

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies: Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5).

Most people have no trouble believing the first part of verse 3, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities." God's willingness to forgive has been preached strongly for such a long period that most people are established in this area. Peter says that repetition will cause people to be established in the truth: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance" (2 Peter 1:12-13).

This passage in Psalm 103 says that just as God will forgive "all thine iniquities, He will heal "all thy diseases." Psalm 107:20 says that His word has healing power: "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."

When we turn over to the book of Proverbs, once again we find healing in His word: "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh" (Proverbs 4:20-22).

When Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah, he said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus took upon Himself our sicknesses, and "with His stripes we are healed."

Peter declares the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in 1 Peter 2:24: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." Notice that instead of saying "we are healed," Peter changes the words into the past tense, saying, "we were healed." This signifies that the verse is no longer a prophecy, but an accomplished fact. Your healing is already bought and paid for by Jesus Christ Himself. In order to receive your healing, all you have to do is to believe it, and receive it.

Let us read again the passage from Matthew 8: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (v. 16, 17).

I have gone through all of the above passages in order to establish that it is the will of God for you to be healed. There are many other passages in the Bible that promise your complete deliverance from sickness, but the above will suffice. If you are praying for something other than healing, you should go through the same process of looking up several passages that promise you what you desire from God. Then, you can be sure that you will receive what you ask.

The second step is the prayer itself. Just exactly how should you pray for healing? I repeat that under no circumstances should you use the faith-destroying phrase, "if it be your will" concerning healing or any other matter concerning which the will of God is has already been revealed in the pages of the Bible.

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

One very important point about this verse – notice those words, "when ye pray, believe that ye receive them." One translation says, "So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." The key to answered prayer is to

first find the promise of God. Then, pray and believe that you have already received what you asked for, and then you will have it as you continue to maintain your faith.

You might say, "Well, if I believe I have already received something before I see it, or if I say that I have received something before I have it in my hands, wouldn't I be lying about it?" No. You see, words have two main functions. The first one is communication. The second function of words is seldom considered valid by Christians – that is, words can be used to change things.

God is our example in using words to change things. At the beginning of Genesis 1, "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (v. 2). God changed this situation by speaking a command: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (v. 3). He continued speaking His desires until the earth was rearranged to His liking.

Would you like to rearrange your life? Some say, "Yes, God could do that, but I am not God!" Although you are not God, Jesus says in Mark 11:23 that you have the power to change things with your words: "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23).

Do you believe the Bible? The Bible that you believe in says that you will have whatever you say when you speak by faith.

Let us look at an example of how Jesus used the principle of Mark 11:24 – that is, Jesus believed that something is done before it actually manifests. In John 11, Jesus was informed that Lazarus was sick and near death (v. 1-3). Let us skip to verse 11. Here, it gets really interesting where our study is concerned. By the spiritual gift called the word of knowledge, Jesus knew that Lazarus had died (1 Corinthians 12:8), and He says, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

Jesus said that knowing Lazarus had already died (John 11:14). Like many Christians nowadays, the disciples around Jesus did not understand that Jesus was speaking the end result of faith instead of the physical fact (John 11:12-13). This is not the first time Jesus used this principle of speaking the end result in raising the dead. He did it when He was asked to heal a girl in Mark 5. While He was on His way, the girl died. However, when Jesus entered the room where the girl lied, He said, "Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth" (Mark 5:39). Again, the people in the household could not comprehend the principle of "[calling] those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). The people around the little girl knew that the girl was dead and "they laughed him to scorn" (Mark 5:40). Jesus put these mockers out of the room and successfully raised the girl from the dead. He was calling those things which be not as though they were, because that is how faith is expressed. The only condition is you must see to it that what you are believing for is in line with the Word and the will of God.

Jesus Himself worked miracles by the words of His mouth. If you want to pray with power, you must learn this.

Jesus used this principle in John 11:41. Before He even prayed, He said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." Jesus is doing here what He tells you to do in Mark 11:24. He believed that it was already done before He even prayed. This is true faith at work. Jesus tells you to do the same.

After that, the Lord Jesus released God's power by commanding, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). Here, He was using the principle taught in Mark 11:23: "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

Jesus says, "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain." Anyone can do it! That means you can speak to your circumstances the end result of faith based on God's promises and see them changed. Jesus says you can do this and He does not lie.

Remember that in order to pray with power, you must put the Word of God into your heart. Jesus Himself says in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Whatever your need is, find scriptures that will cover your case. For example, if it is finances that you need, the following three verses will help you know that it is God's will to grant you financial abundance: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18); "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8); "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

In addition, always pray in the name of Jesus. God will hear you when you pray in the name of Jesus. It is unscriptural to pray for Jesus' sake. Whatever you are asking for is for your sake, not His. Does Jesus need healing? Then, why should you pray for healing for His sake? This is a religious but unscriptural tradition that has been robbing the Church of its prayer power for a long time. Of course, we should live our lives for His glory, and in that sense, even our prayers are for His sake. However, the Bible teaches you to "let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:5), for "the Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27). You can be sure that God is interested in issues that are important to you.

"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24).

Jesus clearly states that we should pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus. We should never address our prayers to any human or angelic beings. Jesus Himself said to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus. If you do this, God will accept your prayers.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

In the area of healing, we can be confident that the name of Jesus is above any sickness and disease, even cancer or AIDS. Say, "In the name of Jesus, cancer, I command you to get out of my body. I resist you in the name of Jesus!" God has given you the authority through Jesus Christ, and you can get healed if you will do this.

3. PRAYING WITH POWER (3)

"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23).

Few Christians realize how much the words of their mouth affect their lives. Your words rule and control your life. What you say with your mouth can even affect the way God treats you: "As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as you have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you" (Numbers 14:28). If you keep on talking death, sickness, worry, and poverty all the time, your life may be characterized by these things. However, if you will honor God with your thoughts and your speech, it will not go unnoticed by Him: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). Your beliefs and your words have greatly contributed to your present environment, and will continue to have numerous ramifications for the future.

"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:34-37).

This passage says that you will be judged for every idle word you speak. Your words are important. God takes your words so seriously that He says by your words you will be justified or condemned.

God had given King Solomon great wisdom and insight into spiritual things. The value and the power of words are repeatedly emphasized in the book of Proverbs. Remember that Solomon was a successful man. He was the richest man in the world. Look at what this man had to say about words: "A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Proverbs 18:20-21).

Now, I am going to show you several scriptures on what Paul and Jesus have to say about the words of your mouth.

"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13).

Paul calls this the "spirit of faith." This is how faith is expressed. You believe a promise of God in your heart, and then your speech conforms to what you believe. In another place, Paul says: "But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Romans 10:8).

In connection to this scripture, I would like you to look at the instructions that Joshua received from God when he took his position as the successor of Moses: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:7-8).

Meditating, or thinking on the words in the Bible, will get the Word of God into your heart. When the Word of God has taken root in your heart, let your speech reflect the Word of God within you. Then you will "make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

In Psalm 107:2, David says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." If you are redeemed, say it with your mouth. Let your speech be consistent with the reality of redemption. Instead of speaking defeat and doubt all the time, say, "Christ has redeemed me from the curse of the law, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Galatians 3:13 and Romans 8:2).

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matthew 21:21).

Jesus said that if you will have faith, you can command a mountain to move and it will obey you. Let us look at two more instances where Jesus emphasizes the importance of your words: "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6); "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23).

What you say does matter. The Bible says that, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Do you hope for healing, finance, and the salvation of your relatives? Then, you need to put some faith in that hope.

Hope is a goal setter. Hope is a inner picture or concept of the things or situations that you want in your life. An inner picture is an internal reality and not an external reality. In order for what is real on the inside to manifest in the material world, you must express your faith through your words and actions. When you learn to do that proficiently, all things will be possible to you.

"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:19-20).

Let us now look at a biblical example of this principle being used in releasing the power of God: "And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, if I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (Mark 5:25-34).

Notice that verse 30 says, "And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?" Although it seems like it was the power flowing out of Jesus that healed the woman, Jesus Himself says in verse 34, "And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace and be whole of thy plague." Jesus said that it was the woman's faith that received the benefit of God's power.

Look at verse 28, "For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." She said it to herself. On the inside, she could see herself healed by touching the clothes of Jesus. There was no question about what she wanted from God. After that, she said it, and verbally affirmed her trust. Then, she actually did it. As a result, she was healed completely.

Some time ago, I was teaching at a Bible study. When I finished speaking, a lady raised her hand and said that she had a growth on her left shoulder for at least 18 months. Moreover, the growth was pressing on some nerves and the pain went from her left shoulder all the way down to her hip.

She went on to say that while I was speaking, the pain left her. This is the power of God's Word. I asked her to come up to the podium and invited another lady to examine

her shoulder. We found out that although the pain was gone, the growth was still there. I remembered that, "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). So, I read to her Mark 11:23: "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

I pointed to the woman's left shoulder and said, "In the name of Jesus, I command this abnormal growth in the shoulder to get out of her body. In the name of Jesus, I command the growth to disappear." The entire growth disappeared instantly. That is the power of God released through the mouth of a Christian in the name of Jesus.

The following example shows that the apostle Peter was doing the same thing to release God's healing power: "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him...And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (Acts 3:1-10, 16). "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:10).

At the end of another Bible study session, a lady came to the front for healing. She told me that she had an abnormal curvature of the spine. Her spine was bent in a way that it was in the shape of an "S." Although it had not yet developed into a paralysis, it was causing tremendous pain for her. I put my hand on her and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command this spine to be healed and be straight!" The power of God came on her so strong that she fell down on the floor. I knelt down beside her and asked her what was happening to her. She said that she could feel her back straightening out. God was pulling the spine straight again. After a few minutes, she stood up, bent down, and touched her toes. She did so without experiencing any pain.

In another service, a woman was brought to me who had a misplaced pelvis. The pelvis was pushed to the left as a result of a car accident. It was pressing on some nerves on the left side of her back, causing intense pain from the base of her spine to her left shoulder and left arm. Again, I spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit according to Mark 11:23: "In

the name of Jesus, I command this pelvis to rotate back to its normal position." Instantly, her pelvis rotated into its proper place. Another lady had her hands on the woman's pelvis as I gave the command, and both of them exclaimed that they could feel the pelvis moving. This is the reality of the power of God.

You, too, can pray with power. As Jesus said in John 11:41, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" You must believe before you will see the power of God in your life. God's glorious power will be released as you pray in faith according to the Word of God.

I admonish you to remember the words of Jesus, that "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). All things will be possible to you, when you believe.

4. WAS PAUL SICK?

The Scriptures reveal to us that physical healing has been provided for the believer through the atoning work of Christ; however, there are those who reject this view and contend that it is not God's will to heal everyone, even those who come to Him in faith. One argument these people use is that the apostle Paul himself had suffered numerous illnesses, implying that if such a one as the apostle Paul failed to receive healing, then it is only normal for many ordinary believers to remain ill. If it was not God's will to heal the apostle Paul, then it may not be God's will to heal us.

In this chapter, I will present some of the biblical passages often used to "prove" that Paul was a sick man. I will argue that these passages in fact demonstrate the tremendous healing power of God at work in Paul's life. His life and experiences provide us with reasons to believe God for healing, not the other way around.

Paul's infirmities. "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it has been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Galatians 4:13-15).

This biblical passage is often quoted as a proof that Paul was sick and that healing is not for everyone (or for nobody at all). Even if Paul was sick (which he was not, as we shall see), that does not prove anything about God's will in the area of healing until we also take into the account the direct statements in the Bible concerning healing. Abraham, David, Solomon, and other righteous characters in the Bible had more than one wife, and from these examples, some have concluded that God allows a man to have more than one wife at the same time. However, when we take into account the direct statements from the Bible (as oppose to the implications derived from people's actions and experiences), we understand that God's will is for a man to have only one wife. In the same way, Paul's experiences prove nothing unless it is consistent with the direct statements of the Bible.

Verse 13 says, "ye know how through the infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first." Paul visited Galatia "at the first" in Acts 14. The Bible says Paul went into Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The province of Galatia contained Pisidia and Lycaonia, and therefore the towns of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

So Paul first visited Galatia in Acts 14. What happened to Paul in Acts 14? He was stoned: "And there came thither, certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he has been dead."

In those days, they dug holes in the ground outside of the city. Whenever they were to stone someone, they would push the victim into the hole. Then, a crowd would gather around the hole and throw big rocks at the person's head, until they were certain that it was completely crushed.

From biblical evidence, it seems that Paul was actually dead. The timing would be about 14 years before he was to write 2 Corinthians, which would make Acts 14 the time when he died and temporarily went to heaven to see the visions mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.

Then what happened? God raised Paul from the dead right on the spot and Paul marched right back into the same city! This is why Paul had an "infirmity of the flesh" – His skull had been crushed and he was walking around looking like that.

So, instead of disproving the biblical teaching on healing, this passage in Galatians demonstrates God's supernatural healing and resurrection power. Paul was walking around supernaturally with this and many other injuries.

I still have to explain the phrase "you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (v.15). From these words, people have concluded that Paul had an eye disease. This interpretation is both irresponsible and dishonest – it had extinguished many people's hope for receiving healing from God. "Would have plucked out your own eyes" is simply an expression! Just like a "thorn in the flesh" is an expression equivalent to a "pain in the neck."

You want to know what Paul believed? He believed this: "But if the Spirit of him that raised Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

It happened to him time and time again. It can happen to you, if you believe.

Paul's injuries. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned..." (2 Corinthians 11:24-25).

It would be enlightening to study all of 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, but I will only point out three types of physical attacks that Paul suffered, and after which Paul was still able to travel and preach the gospel.

1. "Once was I stoned" – Paul was stoned and killed in Acts 14. Then God raised him from the dead.

2. "Five times received I forty stripes save one" – In those days, the Romans used a leather whip with three extensions. The end of each extension had three barbs or claw-like nail. This whip has the nickname "cat of nine tails" for this reason. A Roman soldier would take the clothes off of the offender and whip his back so that the claws sunk into

the back. Then, the soldier would pull the whip so that the claws would pull the skin off from the victim's back. The soldier would do this 39 times.

This is the same procedure that Jesus went through, and the Bible says, "by [his] stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). By going through this, Jesus took away our sicknesses.

The amazing fact is that Paul went through this ordeal 5 times. This means $5 \times 39 = 195$ stripes. And remember there are nine nails at the end of the whip – so it is actually $195 \times 9 = 1755$ stripes. For 1755 times, nails punctured Paul's back and ripped it from top to bottom. As you can imagine, many people died before the 39 stripes were completed. Those who survived may have never recovered from such an experience. But Paul was still able to travel and preach! Was Paul a sickly man? No, God's power made him a superman.

3. "Thrice was I beaten with rods" – No, they did not tap Paul's behind lightly with soft plastic rods, nor did they slap his hands with plastic rulers. The way they beat people with rods in those days was to make the person lay on his stomach, pick up his legs and beat his feet with iron rods until they knew all the bones are shattered. Most would be maimed for life. Paul went through this three times and was still walking around!

This is why Paul could "glory in his infirmity" when talking about the power of God. Paul survived and overcame his suffering by the supernatural power of God. Nowadays, whether people have the slightest bit of discomfort or something like terminal cancer, they would think that they are suffering for Jesus and that they are just like the apostle Paul. No, these are suffering for themselves and they are no where near like the apostle Paul. I am not trying to be hard on these people, but I want them to know that much of their suffering is pointless and should be (and can be) stopped. If they enjoy suffering so much, they should suffer for preaching the gospel. It is certainly immoral to twist the Scriptures to excuse their lack of initiative in overcoming their suffering.

Paul's thorn. "...There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me..." (2 Corinthians 12:7).

This verse is frequently used by ministers to prove that sickness can be the will of God, and that Paul was sick. First of all, even if Paul was sick, it is no proof that it was the will of God. David committed murder and adultery – was that the will of God? Judas betrayed Jesus – was that a moral act? Just because someone in the Bible did something does not automatically make it right. Even Satan is in the Bible. You have to read the implied principles from the experiences of biblical character as well as the directly stated principles in the Bible. Nevertheless, Paul was really a solid proof of the supernatural healing power of God – even in his experience. Many Christians have been deceived in this area.

Notice Paul says he had "a thorn in the flesh." The words "scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes" in Joshua 23:13 are used to describe people; the words "thorns in your sides" in Judges 2:3 are also used the same way. Since when did it become a

sickness? Paul was simply using an expression commonly used in those days. When you say, "Tom is a pain in the neck," you are talking about a person that bothers or annoys you, not a sickness.

To further confirm that, Paul says the thorn was "a messenger of Satan." This tells us it was a person or demon, and that he was from Satan, not God.

What Paul experienced was most likely persecution from people (inspired by Satan). Most of them followed Paul around to preach circumcision to the people right after Paul leaves a city. Some even reacted to Paul's preaching with physical violence. This is why the evil spirit or "messenger" was a "thorn in the flesh," or a "pain in the neck."

You need to know the truth about the biblical passages that have been used to preach sickness. Many times those passages are some of the greatest proofs for healing. Some of them prove neither healing or sickness – just the need for wisdom. For example, if the Bible says that someone accidentally fell off a building and died, does that prove sickness, or that it is not God's will to heal and protect? No, it proves the need for wisdom and caution. By the way, this happened and Paul resurrected the dead man by the power of God (Acts 20:9-12).

Sick nigh unto death. "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death. . ." (Philippians 2:27).

Paul here refers to a Christian named Epaphroditus. Some "scholars" of the Bible read verses 25-27 and then teach "See, see! Paul left somebody sick. He failed to heal somebody." The implication is that it is not God's will to heal everyone, and therefore if you pray for healing, do not be too expectant since it may not be God's will to heal you.

Just because someone was sick does not mean you have to be. Epaphroditus was not the "Word made flesh." If those "scholars" had read just a few verses down, they would have seen the reason for Epaphroditus' sickness:

Verse 30 says, "Because of the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." Epaphroditus overworked! See those words "not regarding his life"? Epaphroditus made a choice to continue to work when he should have stopped. There were not many people helping Paul at this time so Epaphroditus pushed himself to "supply your lack of service" (or, "take up the slack," "make up the difference"). Epaphroditus pushed himself too far – that is all there is to it. If he had rested and then got back to work, he would have stayed well. He did not even have to overwork – he made that decision himself.

5. DOING THE WORKS OF GOD

"Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (John 6:28). This is a question that many Christians ask, yet they find the answer that came from Jesus unacceptable, as did those who were present in this situation.

Jesus answered them and said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (v. 29). Although this is not all that God requires of us, many fail to realize that the foundation of all valid good works rests on one's faith in the person and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Good works should never be an effort to relieve a guilty conscience or a basis for self-righteousness, but an expression of genuine faith. The issue of justification or condemnation is settled by one's faith, not one's behavior.

Indeed, it may have been more acceptable to the crowd if Jesus had said for them to do certain kinds of charity or strenuous religious rituals. Rather, Jesus told them the foundation of working for God hinges on faith. The same ones who posed the original question, seemingly in a humble manner, now began to challenge Jesus: "So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" (v. 30). God has called us to live in the realm of the spirit, and not to remain in the fleshly realm. Even if we perform all kinds of charitable deeds, if they were produced out of the flesh, they are nothing but "dead works" (Hebrews 6:1) that demand repentance rather than rewards. As Christians, we should realize that only good works produced by faith are acceptable to God (Hebrews 11:6). I have extracted several lessons from John 6:28, of which we should regularly remind ourselves.

Build on faith and not good works. The Bible says that "the just shall live by faith" and that the righteousness we have received from God is "revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17). All Christian activities, no matter how valid or noble, must originate and be based on our faith in Jesus Christ.

Many who have been Christians for a period of time gradually slip into a dependence on the good works that they have accumulated in order to maintain their self-esteem, their sense of righteousness, or the idea that their relationship with God remains intact.

This is a dangerous attitude to have. As the apostle Paul questioned the Christians at Galatia, "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). Indeed, we were not saved by the works of human effort, and one can be certain that it is impossible to maintain one's status in Christ through fleshly endeavors. It is impossible for human achievements to earn the measureless grace of God.

We have faith in a person. Jesus Christ is a person. He does not represent a concept, system, or ideology. He represents the Almighty God, whom we were made qualified to address as "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15) when we accepted the work of Jesus Christ on the cross personally. The Almighty God is Himself a person, not a concept.

Many people's image of Jesus is nothing more than a construction of their own imagination – a representation of what they think Christianity should be like. However, if they see Jesus as a person, as it is in reality, then the facts about Jesus should be apparent. Among other things, a person consists of their essence, thoughts, speech, and actions – the significant parts of these aspects of Jesus Christ are recorded in the gospels, the Old Testament prophecies, and the New Testament epistles. There needs to be no speculation as to what Jesus stands for or believes. Unless one refuses to submit to Jesus, there is no need to change Him into a religious system. We have faith in a person called Jesus the Son of God, not a set of ideas, rules, and regulations.

Many think of their spiritual lives in terms of their churches and social circles. Others perceive Christianity as only a set of doctrines – although accurate doctrines are extremely important, when discussed void of a relationship with Jesus Christ, they may amount to nothing more than materials for intellectual stimulation.

Having said that, be reminded that doctrine is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. Many today prefer to compromise doctrine to maintain unity, but certain doctrines simply cannot be compromised if the resulting set of beliefs were to retain the name of Christianity. If the doctrines about Christ are inaccurate, the beliefs about Christ will be inaccurate – and faith founded upon false beliefs, needless to say, is unacceptable.

There is no substitute for faith. People attempt to replace faith with other things when they fail to have the kind of faith that the Bible requires. The Bible states that we are to have the kind of faith that does not depend on sight, or more broadly, does not depend on the physical senses. This is not because we are required to have "blind faith." True faith is not "blind." True faith is not forcing oneself to believe something known to be false as true – that would be "blind" faith or plain foolishness.

Physical operations require evidence and information that relates to the physical senses. Somehow, when many individuals attempt to function in the spirit, they try to bring the same mode of operation to this higher dimension. Then, upon their failure, they will question the validity of a certain doctrine or the reality of the spiritual world altogether.

For example, some have difficulty understanding the Bible's teachings on having faith before the physical manifestation. In the area of healing, they refuse to believe that they are healed before their body shows signs of recovery. However, remember that the spiritual world functions by belief – if they refuse to believe before the healing, then what is it that will cause their recovery? If it takes money to buy a certain product, and you refuse to pay until the product is given to you, then what is it that will cause the ownership of the product to be transferred to you? If a person doubts, "let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:7).

Instead of seeking to replace faith with works and excuses, let us yield to the laws of the Spirit of God and live by faith (Heb. 11:6; Heb. 3:12; Romans 14:23).

Pure good works follow a heart made holy by faith. Although any charitable deeds produced out of fleshly efforts are unacceptable to God (Isaiah 64:6), good works that come forth as a natural expression of faith are acceptable.

First of all, understand that faith purifies one's heart. Jesus said to Paul in Acts 26:18, that Christians are "sanctified by faith that is in [Him]." Having faith or putting your trust in Jesus Christ cleanses your inner man and causes the subsequent good works that come forth from this reborn spirit to be meaningful. Good works produced any other way, no matter how commendable on a human level, are rejected by God.

We have emphasized that good works produced by human efforts are unacceptable; yet, let us also remind ourselves that genuine faith will produce good works. Faith that does not result in good works is false, incomplete, and misguided. James teaches that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26; also see Eph. 2:10).

Faith involves the heart. When you work for someone, you temporarily give him your physical and mental energy. However, when you trust someone, you give him your heart. God wants you to trust Him and have faith in the Person whom He has sent, the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. FAITH, WORDS, AND ACTION

For many years, a certain part of the Body of Christ has been taught that faith is a powerful force. Faith can heal sicknesses, receive answers to prayer, and work miracles. For example, one popular verse for teaching this aspect of faith is Mark 11:23: "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him."

Also, in Matthew 21:21 we read, "And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen."

Notice that you will be able to do this "if you have faith and do not doubt." Apparently, faith has an inseparable connection with the release of God's power. If you have faith, you will be able to release the power of God in your life and in the life of others. Bible teachings that focus on this aspect of faith show Christians how to release healing, prosperity, and deliverance into their lives. Consequently, the entire Body of Christ is strengthened and made more effective.

This type of teaching is true and is important in empowering the Body of Christ for the advance of the gospel. It takes money, healthy bodies, strong minds, and liberated spirits to establish a strong Christian witness on this earth and to preach the gospel to sinners. However, this is only one facet of the subject of faith. We must learn all the facets of faith to have a strong Christian life. In this chapter, we will be studying faith as a godly character. This perspective is more general and is able to embrace more aspects of this subject.

The Greek word translated "faith" in our English Bible is the word "*pistis*," or in another form "*pisteuo*." We will not spend any time discussing the technicalities of this word, but at the same time, we do not want to deviate from how this word is used in the Scriptures. Not every virtuous characteristic in the Bible can be classified under faith. For example, humility is different from faith. We want to ensure that we are being true to the meaning of this word as used in the Bible.

The word "faith" does have a range of meanings in the Bible. For our purposes, we will loosely define this word and what we will mean when we use it in this chapter with the following:

(1) Faith believes what God says, and it believes what God says because it has established trust in God's character and integrity. Therefore, faith implies a relationship with the object of faith, which is God.

(2) Faith implies a set of beliefs. This set of beliefs is both doctrinal and experiential – this means that the set of beliefs contains intelligible contents, which have created a definite transformation in the life of the person who has it.

(3) Faith is a strong confidence, a strong attitude toward life and the situations we face. This confidence originates and is based on the first two points.

I do not claim that this is a complete definition of faith in the theological or technical sense, but I trust that it is accurate enough for our discussion.

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:14-17).

At first glance, this passage seems to contradict a verse such as Mark 11:23. James says that it is not enough to say to someone who is "without clothing and in need of daily food," "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled." Does not Mark 11:23 say that all we have to do is speak the word and it will be done? Without involving you in a technical explanation, I will simply point out that we can perceive Mark 11:23 as primarily addressing the power of faith and James 2 here as primarily addressing the character of faith.

That is why those who have been taught Mark 11:23 also need to be taught James 2. There are those who have faith in their hearts, but refuse to put action to their faith.

Imagine a person who is extremely concerned with litter. This person is disturbed at the sight of trash being left on the streets and pavements. He sees gum wrappers, soda cans, shattered beer bottles, and all sorts of materials that belong in the public trash cans rather than on the streets themselves. He becomes fed up with the lack of cooperation and consideration of his fellow citizens and decided to take action. He wrote a thorough petition, collected several hundred signatures, and brought them before the relevant authorities requesting stricter laws and enforcement of these laws. As he leaves the building, and down the steps, he walks right pass an empty soda can that someone had left.

If you confront this person, he may say that although he is an activist against littering, picking up a small piece of trash would not solve the problem, but it is the petition and the signatures that he just handed to the authorities that will really make a difference. Some may agree with his argument, and others may think that he is a hypocrite. When we are discussing the kind of faith that a Christian should have, James states that we are to act on our faith statements. If we say to a person, "Be warmed and be filled," we are also to do something to begin the fulfillment of this statement. But what good will it do? Will the person not be hungry again after the food we have given him is consumed?

Definitely. That is why this is called faith! We are not expecting our action to solve the problem completely. We have made a prayer of faith, "Be warmed and be filled," but then we give action to that statement by actually giving the person something toward the fulfillment of this statement, expecting God's power to do the rest.

Some of you have seen people come to me with stiff necks and back pains. What did I do? I laid hands on their necks and backs and commanded healing to take place in the name of Jesus. I probably said something like, "In the name of Jesus, I command the nerves, ligaments, tendons, and bones in this part of your body to be healed. I command the discs in your back to be in their normal position. I command all the pain to go." However, I did not stop there. For those with stiff necks, I moved their heads to the left and right; for those with back pains or injuries I had them bend down, stand straight up, and bend down again.

If a person with a stiff arm comes to me, I will lay hands on it and speak healing to it, but after that I will move the arm. That way, I am doing something about the situation. Of course, moving the injured body parts will not in itself heal them. We know that the people with the injuries must have moved their afflicted body parts many, many times – possibly hundreds of time. This again goes to show that I am talking about a faith that takes action, not simply actions as natural solutions to problems. In this case, you see that the actions are not even always directly related to the problem, but the point is that faith does something against the problems.

Sometimes the action that one can take is limited. For example, if someone comes to me with a sickness that cannot usually be demonstrated outwardly, such as a stomach condition, by laying my hands on that person, I am doing something about it. Then, I will probably tell that person to return to the doctor for an examination.

By using such illustrations, we are still stuck with discussing faith as a powerful force. We want to see faith as a godly character. I want to show you that a person of faith has a godly character that does something about the problems he or she perceives. When faith sees sickness, it does something against the sickness, even though the action may not seem to have a direct relationship with healing the person. What does laying on of hands have to do with healing a person? Is taking medicine not the correct action for fighting sickness? Taking medicine can certainly be considered an action performed against the sickness, but remember that medicine cannot cure every disease, and even though God's supernatural power can certainly come on the scene, it is a lower form of faith taking action against the problems. Many faith actions literally require the power of God to fulfill it. Remember that we are talking about faith as a character, not as a force. In this context, if one takes medicine, he or she is at least doing something against the problem, but if the person does not expect God's power to be involved, then although it is still an active and aggressive attitude, it does not have the biblical level of faith behind it. Faith without action leaves faith ineffective; on the other hand, action without faith renders the action ineffective.

Are you praying for a spiritual revival in your city? Then add some action to your faith and do something to take a step toward the direction of your faith. Give some money to the evangelism program of your church. Begin to speak to people about Jesus. Faith is many times stifled by a lack of expression. Many people pray, but very few will do something to see their prayers answered. It is unlikely that giving some money to your church will start a citywide revival, and it is equally unlikely that talking to several people about Jesus will get the job done. But if you can answer your own prayer, why pray in the first place? You are not expected to evangelize the entire city, but if you are concerned enough to pray about the situation, do something about the situation and expect God's power to get involved.

"Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest"" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Jesus saw a need. The need was that there are many people ready to hear the gospel, but there were very few preaching it. As Paul says in Romans 10:14-15, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!""

People who are ready to be saved still need preachers to tell them how. Jesus saw the problem – that is, there were not enough preachers to reach the number of people who are ready to hear the gospel.

Then, like so many Christians nowadays, Jesus said that they should pray about the situation. The obvious prayer solution to a lack of preachers was to pray for more preachers. So Jesus said, "Beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Most Christians would stop here and think that they have done all that they could toward solving the problem. After all, what is greater than prayer? And what is left to do after praying but wait?

Jesus knew better. Look what He did next: "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness..."And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give." (Matthew 10:1, 7-8).

After telling them to pray, Jesus called the twelve disciples and sent them out to preach – thus, making them a part of the answer to their own prayer.

Many people, even Christians, whine, complain, and blame, saying, "Why does God allow all these people to starve in India?" If you can ask this question, give some money

to good Christian organizations that will bring them some food and preach the gospel to them. If you are really so concerned, join one of these organizations and fly to India to distribute the food yourself. These organizations will gladly accept you as a volunteer. Now that you have to give away your money and fly to India to do the dirty work yourself, are you still so concerned? Faith without action is not only ineffective, but also hypocritical.

I have witnessed to several people about Jesus who protested with the over-used objection, "If God exists, why are there so many people starving in this world?" In the first place, this argument demonstrates poor logic, since it assumes that the number of empty stomachs in the world can disprove the existence of God. In any case, during those occasions when I did not have the time to provide them with a thorough theological and philosophical answer, I simply asked, "Maybe He wants to make you part of the answer to this problem. Accept Jesus Christ and if that is what He has called you to do, He will enable you to do it."

Those of you who are students, are you getting bad grades in school? Pray, and then study! You may ask, if you will need to study after you pray, then why pray at all? You need to pray because God can give you a level of intelligence, creativity, and comprehension that you have never had before. This will still be of no benefit to you if you do not study after you pray. In other words, prayer is not an excuse for laziness, or hypocrisy.

In the area of ministry, do you want God to heal the sick through you? Great, stop praying for the power and start laying hands on the sick. God heard your prayer the first time. You need to start putting some action to your faith. The point is to do something against the problem, do something toward the fulfillment of your faith.

Right after I became a Christian, I desired to operate in the healing power of God. I would read book after book on the healing ministry. To my disappointment, nobody had been healed through my prayer even after I had read a number of books and heard a number of audio tapes on the subject. Every time I picked up a new book, I thought it would finally bring me the answer of how to lay hands on the sick and see them recover. I was disappointed that after reading many books, everyone of which I thought was the turning point for me, I still had no success.

One day, the truth came to me that after having read all of these books, I still had not laid hands on one person! My heart was full of faith, but I never reached out to place my hand against a sickness to cast it out of a person. You may question how a person can be so deceived. The Bible says in James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Those who have faith but no action are in a state of self-deception, thinking that they have done what is necessary for God's Word to become reality when all the while their faith is allowed no expression, and therefore no completion. Many Christians are in such a situation today.

Sure enough, when I finally put action to my faith, God powerfully healed the first person I ever laid my hands on for healing, and He has done a number of healing miracles through my hands since that time.

In this chapter, I have addressed those who have faith without action, but as I briefly mentioned before, there are those who have action and no faith. For example, you can lay hands on the sick many times with no results if you do not have faith in your heart.

I trust that I have convinced you of the necessity of putting action to your faith. Have you been praying about your finances, yet you are holding on to your wallet and afraid to give to the church? Have you been praying about your grades in school, yet you are too lazy to study? Have you been expressing your concern about certain people who are in need, yet in hypocrisy you have never done anything financially or physically for them? Fear, laziness, and hypocrisy tend to hinder people from expressing their faith in godly actions. I urge you to break through these hindrances today, and step up to a higher level of your spiritual life by putting action to your faith.

7. THE LYING PEN OF THE SCRIBES

"I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD. "How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have? Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 8:6-12).

In every generation, there are those who defy the spiritual and moral standards of God, while justifying their thoughts and actions in an attitude of self-righteousness. This present generation is no exception. How many times have you seen people violate principles clearly revealed in the Scriptures and yet put on a puzzled look on their faces when you confront them? Verse 6 above was penned many hundreds of years ago, yet it is an appropriate description of these days. God shows us that He is listening "attentively." He very much wants us to have the right attitude toward Him and toward spiritual things; yet, we "do not say what is right." No one "repents of his wickedness" because they do not think they have done anything wrong. Each person is as "a horse charging into battle." What an accurate way of describing the attitudes and actions of people in our present day. It is not only a case of "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," but these individuals actively pursue wickedness as horses charging into battle. Then, they turn around and say, "I have done nothing wrong." The fact is that the dark side of human nature has never changed. It has remained the same in both quality and measure of wickedness since the day of Jeremiah. It was this same prophet who observed that, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

It is the nature of "the stork in the sky" to know her "appointed seasons," and the nature of the dove to "observe the time of their migration." Strangely, the people of God do not know "the requirements of the Lord." How can this be? Is it because human beings are less intelligent than "the stork in the sky" or the dove? Is it because God has not clearly revealed His requirements to us? By our own admission, these are not the reasons, for we say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord." Verse 7 in this passage then shows us that the problem lies in the fact that "the lying pen of the scribes has handled it (the law of the Lord) falsely."

In the days of Jeremiah, they had the same type of problems that we see all around us today. That is, many who claim to be scholars or theologians, who supposedly are responsible to assist the people of God in achieving an academic and spiritual accuracy in their relationship with God, had "rejected the word of the Lord" (v. 9). As a result, there has been an unhealthy trend in the Christian world to reject anything that seems to be academic or theological. Some Christians tend to think that the greatest attestations to the reality of their beliefs are blind faith and subjective experience. This unfortunate attitude is partly due to what has been called the "treason of the intellectuals," where the educated community has betrayed the Christians by rejecting the word of God, instead of teaching it, confirming it, and defending it.

If Christianity can be proven to be false, then indeed there would be valid reasons to reject its claims. It would be pointless to submit oneself under the spiritual and moral standards of a God who does not exist (or at least, whose primary form of revelation, the Bible, contains numerous mistakes). However, as many competent and honest theologians, scientists, philosophers, and historians know, the claims of Christianity have never been proven false and those who attempted to find evidence to discredit them often, to their own amazement, found evidence in support of them.

I would like to encourage the reader to learn to love God with their minds, as well as with other parts of his being. After all, Jesus stated that one's love toward God is really not complete without the mind: "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"" (Matthew 22:37).

Those who have seriously studied the Scriptures can say that there is nothing like the beauty of the mind of God as expressed in the Scriptures. Reading it superficially as most Christians do is simply not sufficient to appreciate the full depths of God's wisdom and beauty. Do not let the "treason of the intellectuals" discourage you from the more academic and theological study of God's Word. A spiritual person does not have to be intellectually feeble. In fact, the more spiritual you become, the more the life of God will enlighten your mind; the more your intellectual strength increase, the more you are able to perceive brilliant truths from God's Word that will stir your faith and spirit.

One example of the "treason of the intellectuals" is how many "Christian" intellectuals tend to be more concerned about political correctness than righteousness. In fact, in recent years, the concerns and priorities of many intellectual and non-intellectual Christians tend to be influenced heavily by animal rights activists, feminists, gay rights activists, and environmentalists rather than the Scriptures. The "treason" continues when these intellectuals, claiming to represent the more knowledgeable and authoritative group of God's people, succumb to the demands and claims of these groups even when they are in direct violation of the Scriptures. The present passage yet again demonstrates its relevance here in verse 11-12, saying, "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush."

The Christian should be confident that, unless Christianity is merely a big lie, sound reason and legitimate scientific discoveries will only confirm the reliability of the Bible, and can by no means threaten it. It is with this understanding that I encourage the reader, especially those who previously equate ignorance with spirituality, to actively pursue this important and necessary aspect of their Christian life. Not all theologians write with a "lying pen" and are eager to reject the word of the Lord. Quite a few capable individuals are truly able to correctly handle the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We should devote ourselves to become part of this latter group, encouraging Christians to be confident in the integrity and undeniable accuracy of God's Word. At the same time, the theological, academic, and yet spiritual presentation of God's Word can and should be accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles, with the result of many changed lives. It would truly be a shame for Christians to continue abandoning the arena of reason and mental soundness to those who claim to be Christians, but who reject the word of the Lord. Technically speaking, the term "treason of the intellectuals" is inaccurate, since upon careful examination, all intellectuals who had denied the Word of God must allow the subjective preferences of their own minds to suppress the clear writings of the Scriptures, sound reason, or scientific evidence. These, then, should no longer be considered true intellectuals, since they have abandoned sound reason and committed treason against the intellect itself.

8. READING THE BIBLE IN CONTEXT

We have all heard of the importance of reading Bible in context. You may have been involved in discussions where one person quotes a passage from the Bible, and the other countered by saying, "No, you are reading that out of context!" Let me give you a brief example to show you what context is and why it is important.

Imagine being in the locker room of a baseball team. They are in a tournament and a game is about to begin. You overhear one player saying to another, "We can't lose!" This statement can represent two extremely different ideas, depending on the context.

If the team had lost several games in the tournament already, and needed to win this one to stay in the tournament, then the statement meant, "We need to win this one to stay in the tournament. We cannot afford to lose!" On the other hand, if the speaker is so confident in his team's ability to win this upcoming game, the statement would mean, "We are so much better than the other team. I am sure we will win!"

The same words, "We can't lose!" can represent two opposite ideas, depending on the context and background of the situation. Without knowing the context, a person overhearing this statement may unconsciously assume something about the context, then form a conclusion as to what the statement means. Either interpretation would seem to be correct until proven otherwise by exposing the context of the situation.

Context is not the only issue important to accurate Bible interpretation, but because it is the most damaging to ignore, the area where most errors occur, and one of the easiest to correct, most believers should begin learning proper Bible interpretation by starting here. There are other things to be aware of when interpreting the Bible. One of these is the literary form of the passage. Prose is interpreted differently than poems, which in turn should be interpreted differently than parables.

To cite an example from the Bible itself, please take a look at 1 John 5:7-8 in the King James Version: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

(I am aware of the textual problems with these verses. Since the use of this verse is simply intended to illustrate how to read a passage within its context, the following discussion will assume that this verse should be included in its current form in the KJV).

From verse 7, some have made the conclusion that there is really no Trinity in the Godhead, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are really all Jesus. This is part of the "Jesus Only" doctrine. Since this verse says, "these three are one," they read it as a direct biblical assertion that the Godhead consists of "one" (as in $2 - 1 = 1$) person. Let

me raise two points that challenge this interpretation without even trying to read this verse in context:

1. The passage says that, "There are three." If their interpretation is correct, they need to explain clearly why the Bible says "there are three." If I say, "There are three apples, and these three apples are one." If I mean that there is really only one apple, I will need to explain what I meant by saying "there are three apples" in the first place.
2. The word "one" can mean several things. It can represent the numerical value of one, as in $2 - 1 = 1$." Therefore, the Jesus Only interpretation says, $3 = 1$," which is impossible. Either the three is not a numerical three, or the one is not a numerical one.

The word "one" can also mean "one in agreement," as in "we are of one mind." This is certainly a common use of this word. How then, can the Jesus Only interpretation assume that the verse refers to the numerical value of one?

If you will recall the "We can't lose!" example, where we have seen that one must assume a context if it is not given to come up with a suggested interpretation of a statement. If the person who has overheard the baseball players assume that the team was winning, he would interpret "We can't lose!" to mean that they will win; if he assumes that the team in question was losing, he would interpret the statement as, "We cannot afford to lose!" The Jesus Only interpretation has assumed a context that permits them to read this verse the way they prefer.

There is an immediate context, and then there is a general context. Without investigating the context at all, I have managed to raise questions concerning the Jesus Only interpretation of this verse. Now let us look at the immediate context of this verse by paying attention to verse 8.

This verse refers to the three witnesses on earth and says that "these three agree in one." Even if the verse says, "these three are one," we know for certain that the Spirit, the water, and the blood are not numerically one. These are three substances representing three events. But the verse makes this unmistakably clear by saying, "these three agree in one."

Note that verse 7 and 8 are parallel verses. Verse 7 refers to the three witnesses in Heaven, and verse 8 refers to the three witnesses on the earth. So the word "one" is likely to mean the same thing in both verses. The word "one" in verse 8 cannot mean anything except "one" in agreement since that is what it says directly. Having this context, we can say that the word "one" in verse 7 also means one in agreement, and not one in number.

That is what the immediate context of the verse shows us. Now let us look the general context of this verse by reading 1 John 5:1-13:

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the

children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

Notice that the passage is primarily interested in asserting Jesus Christ as the Son of God. John writes as if to set up a scene in a court of law where the evidence and witnesses are presented. Therefore, the point is to provide as many witnesses as possible, and how they all agree, and not to reduce the number of witnesses.

To expand the context even more, we can turn to John 8:17-18, where the Bible says: "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."

The word "two" in verse 17 obviously represents the numerical value of two (as in $1 + 1 = 2$). Then, Jesus starts counting in verse 18, "I am one. . .," then "and the Father. . ." ($1 + 1 = 2$). It passage would show itself to be self-contradicting if Jesus had said that two witnesses are needed and then produced only one witness for Himself.

Since my purpose is not to discuss the Jesus Only heresy, but to demonstrate the importance and techniques of reading the Bible in context, we will not go any further with the passage in 1 John 5. I also realize that the Jesus Only doctrine does not only use the above passage in attempting to prove their ideas; however, I have noticed that they treat all the passages they use as proofs out of their proper context in a similar way illustrated above.

Most readers would dismiss the Jesus Only doctrine even without the above discussion; however, I would like to challenge you to examine other beliefs that you may have embraced with the assumption that they are biblically based.

9. SCARED OF ISHMAEL

"And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers"" (Genesis 16:8-12).

The above passage from Genesis has often been used to warn Christians against launching various projects that are "of the flesh." In other words, the work of our hands will only produce "Isaacs" if they are based on the promises of God and the power of the Spirit. Many impatient Christians, because of their attempts to rush the fulfillment of God's promises by their own fleshly efforts and resources, had produced many "Ishmaels" that haunted them for years. Some Bible teachers insist that Ishmaels never disappear from one's life, and therefore it is imperative that one exercises faith and patience toward the promises of God and trusts His timing for their fulfillment. The Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, are still causing problems for the Israelites, who are the descendants of Isaac.

While I agree with the general principle of the above teaching, at times it is helpful to look at things from a different, yet biblical, perspective. Not everyone errs in the same way that Abraham did in the above passage. Some fail to receive the promises of God because they never take the step of faith to reach out for it. Allow me to speak plainly: No matter how much Abraham had trusted in God's power and timing, he still had to sleep with Sarah to produce Isaac!

Some have been taught so much about Ishmael and the ill results of fleshly efforts that they are afraid of "Ishmaels." This unhealthy fear suppresses the aggressiveness that every Christian should have toward spiritual matters: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12).

The aggressiveness that comes from hearing the promises of God helps propel the Christian toward valid goals. As proper as it sounds, it is not always correct to wait for God to act. An example from the life of Moses should help illustrate this: "As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to

die in the desert!" Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground"" (Exodus 14:10-16).

Notice what Moses said to the Israelites in verses 13 and 14: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Usually, we would consider such words as originating from a heart full of faith. We may also assume that God will respond favorably to such words of great confidence in Him. Quite the contrary, God answers, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground." To paraphrase, God said, "Why are you even talking to me? Move forward!"

God had already instructed them to move out of Egypt, and they were doing it. Facing an obstacle in our journey to our God-given goals does not mean that we should stop or even wait for God to remove it. Sure, we should wait on God and hear His instructions. We should trust God's timing and His power. However, after God has spoken and the way has been pointed out to us, we should move forward by faith and not be scared of producing Ishmaels.

It is not my purpose to examine the subject in detail here, but I do want to point out that being scared of Ishmaels will hinder the promises of God from being fulfilled in your life just as seeking to produce the promises of God through fleshly efforts will produce Ishmaels.

For example, if God has instructed you to go into business with the promise that He will prosper you, eventually you will have to go through the procedures of taking the steps to begin the enterprise. Just because you desire to depend on God's power and timing does not mean that the company will appear out of nowhere and fall on your lap. Starting a business in this case is not out of the will of God since that is what He told you to do. However, to use dishonest means to gain prosperity while operating this business would produce an Ishmael since you are using a method completely foreign to God's plan just as using Hagar to produce a son for Abraham was not God's intended method for fulfilling His promise.

10. WHO KILLED JESUS?

"So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.' But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered. 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!' 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!' All the people answered, 'Let his blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matthew 26:17-25).

In some circles there has been, and still is, a strong interest in debating the question, "Who killed Jesus?" Typically, there are only two possible answers to this question – that is, either the Jews or the Romans. The significance of the question hinges on the idea that many Christians had been anti-Semites due to the belief that it was the Jews who killed Jesus Christ. In fact, many Jews had been subjected to harsh attitudes and acts of violence from those who claimed to be Christians. Nowadays when a Christian tries to evangelize his neighbors and friends, it is not surprising that one issue he may encounter from them is that for them, Christian anti-Semitism had made Christianity as a whole unattractive to them.

The question is, who is ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus? Before I offer an answer to this, let me briefly explore the ramifications of the answers. Many people would assert that it was the Romans who had killed Jesus, and therefore the anti-Semitism clearly demonstrated by some Christians throughout history was unjustified, to say the least. My response to this is to ask whether Christians would have been justified in holding hostile attitudes toward the Jews, if it was somehow proven that they were ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus. How about the Romans? If Christians throughout history had thought that the Romans were ultimately responsible for Christ's death, and as a result were strongly anti-Roman, would people nowadays try to prove that it was the Jews who were in fact responsible? It is unreasonable to form our knowledge of history with the intention of correcting wrong attitudes. Many would object to the idea that Christians would have been justified in persecuting the Jews even if they were ultimately responsible for Christ's death. The same would be true for the Romans. The issue is that these people are against the Christians being hostile to any group, and not just the Jews. Jesus Himself had prayed for the forgiveness of those who killed Him as He was dying on the cross. The problem may be that Christians did not forgive as Christ did and that they failed to clearly see God's plans, and not that they were holding the

wrong party responsible. Whether it was the Jews or the Romans who had killed Jesus, it should have given no excuse for Christians to employ violence and take revenge against either group. Christ's purpose was fulfilled in His death and resurrection. The proper response is to direct our energy toward evangelism, and not into exacting vengeance on those who were responsible.

I must also introduce another important point here. In every discussion that I have heard on this matter, no one had mentioned the fact that both the Jews and the Romans severely persecuted and murdered numerous Christians. To cite an example of persecution from the Romans, one only has to mention the Emperor Nero, and for an example out of the many Jews who had persecuted Christians, one can readily find such in the early life of Saul of Tarsus, who later became the Apostle Paul. I am by no means saying that Christians were somehow justified in whatever violent deeds they had committed later in history. What I am bringing out here is that if the outsider is so indignant against unjustified persecution as to question the violent acts done by some professing Christians, then I would also like to hear a defense for or attack of the actions of the Jews and the Romans, who persecuted the Christians before any of them had the power to act against the Jews, and before Rome eventually became a Christian nation. I have heard of several instances of Jews and non-Jews pushing for official apologies from Christians, but (to my knowledge) we have received no apology from the Jews for the death of Jesus and numerous Christians. Again, I am not expecting an apology from the Jews toward the Christians, but my point is that if Jews deserve one from the Christians, then unless proven otherwise, the Christians also deserve one from the Jews.

My position on this issue is that, as far as I can determine based on known historical facts, the Jews and Romans were wrong in their violence against Christians, and the Christians likewise were inexcusable in their violent actions against the Jews. However, we should not correct the Christians by showing that it was the Romans who killed Christ, but that even if the Jews had killed Christ, it should not have been used as a basis for anti-Semitism. The matter of who killed Christ is a matter of historical fact, independent of how this fact would affect the attitudes of Christians. According to the New Testament, the facts are straightforward - the Jews insisted on Christ's death through the means of crucifixion, and then it was the Romans who physically brought this about. Both Jews and Gentiles, therefore, contributed to the death of Christ, but the Jews did not concede when Pilate wanted to release Jesus, which in a sense confirmed the guilt of the Jews regarding this incident. Any objections against this view must first show that the New Testament documents are historically unreliable, and proceed to demonstrate an alternate view using evidence that is more reliable. This, nobody has yet been able to do. As for the Christians, our mandate is to recognize and proclaim the significance of the death of Christ, and not to punish those whom we think were responsible for it.

As for those who are being prevented from trusting in Jesus Christ due to the alleged and actual misdeeds of Christians, whether in history or in recent times, I ask them to look at the evidence for the claims of Christianity and not only to those who subscribe to those claims. Look at the founder of Christianity and not only at the Christians. The deficiencies of the members of a group do not necessarily reflect any weaknesses in the

values and claims that formed the group – sometimes they do, but not always. If one insists on examining the adherents of a system of beliefs in the process of evaluating it, which is not altogether an unreasonable thing to do, then it is wise to pay attention at the positive evidence as well, and not only to the negative evidence. It may be unavoidable for Christianity to have a number of "black sheep," seeing how it has a large number of followers, how most churches easily accept people as new members, and the sinful nature of humanity. The positive evidence can be seen in the lives of those who allowed themselves to be genuinely transformed through the Spirit into new men and women. Jesus Himself spoke of separating the sheep from the goats in the last day. Therefore, although it is not always easy for everyone to do, the wisest way to evaluate truth-claims is to examine the merits of the claims themselves as well as the positive and negative evidence for those claims. As for us Christians, although God is fully able to vindicate Himself, let us begin to live in a way worthy of the gospel and help build for it the strong reputation that we know it deserves.

11. THE WORD MADE FLESH

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-5, 14).

When the Apostle John wrote the gospel that bears his name, Christianity had already existed for a number of years. Although the original body of believers was composed of mostly Jewish individuals, by this time the Greek Christians had far out-numbered the Jewish Christians. By this time, the other three gospels had already been written. Although John had been used to relating his account of the life and teachings of Jesus orally, it was time for him to set to writing an official account of what transpired while Christ was on the earth.

Unlike the writers of the previous gospels, John was faced with the fact that most of the Christians were now Greeks and not Jews. Matthew was able to write a convincing account of the life of Jesus by showing how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament messianic prophecies. Greeks who read the Gospel of Matthew would not have had the same appreciation and comprehension that the Jews would have had. In the first place, the genealogy which begins the Gospel of Matthew would have meant much less to a Greek than to a Jew. In addition, a Greek would have hardly appreciated the implication of Jesus being the Son of David. In fact, the Greeks had no concept of the Messiah. They were not expecting a Messiah, while this concept consumed the thinking and activities of the Jewish people.

Granted, whether a person was Jew or Greek, he should have sought to understand whatever background information necessary to fully comprehend the Gospel of Matthew and any true account of the life of Jesus. In fact, most of us have neither a Jewish nor Greek background, and that is the reason for extensive study and research if we desire to accurately grasp certain portions of Scriptures.

The problem remained that John needed to introduce Jesus Christ to the Greeks in a way to which they could best relate. Preferably, John could write in such a way as to impact both the Jewish and Greek communities. Here is where the concept of "the Word" comes on the scene.

To the Jews, a word is not merely a sound, nor is its function limited to the idea it represents. A word is a living thing, existing independently from its speaker and capable of effecting changes in the material and immaterial worlds. To the Jews, a word possesses

inherent power and is very much alive. Christians should not dismiss this as Jewish superstitions, but should realize that this concept is an integral part of the Scriptures.

For example, the Old Testament records God as one who created "the heaven and the earth" through speaking (Genesis 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). A similar quality, but certainly not the same degree, of power seems to exist in words spoken by human beings, so much so that the blessing of a father was cause for blatant deception, as in the case of Jacob, who pretended to be Esau in order to obtain the verbal blessing of Isaac (Genesis 27:1-40). Far from merely a means of communication, words are believed to possess creative and miraculous powers. Following are several more examples of this: "By the word of the Lord were heavens made" (Psalm 33:6); "He sent his word, and healed them" (Psalm 107:20); "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly" (Psalm 147:15); "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29); "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Finally, the Jews often equated the Word of God to God Himself. A number of years before the birth of Jesus, Hebrew was becoming almost a forgotten language. Although the official Scriptures were written in Hebrew, which the scholars knew, the common people spoke Aramaic. Translations of the Hebrew Scriptures were produced to make them understandable to everyone. At those times, the Jews thought it difficult to accept human characteristics as applied to God. Although the Hebrew Scriptures contain numerous references of these (as in God having hands and feet, or having other human characteristics), the translations called the Targums, often referred to God as the "Word of God" in order to avoid what the Jewish people thought were instances of reducing God too much to a level of human existence. Note that there were no mistakes in the original Hebrew Scriptures, but the Jewish people began to mentally equate God to the Word of God.

In the same way, the Jewish people also find a close relationship between the wisdom of God and the Word of God. In the Old Testament as well as many Jewish texts, one may notice that they are even used interchangeably at times. That is, the Word of God is the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is said to have been the instrument of God in the creation and sustenance of the universe. Thus, the term "the Word" would invoke in the Jewish minds the ideas of power, life, reason, wisdom, and God Himself.

"The Word" also contains rich meanings for the Greeks. The Greeks had always delighted in philosophical discussions. The Bible says that, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22). It is common knowledge that many renowned philosophers were Greeks. One of these was named Heraclitus. One of his main ideas was that everything is constantly changing. Everything around us is in continuous motion and change. One prominent metaphor of this is that if you step into a river and then step out, then if you were to step into the river a second time, you would be stepping into a different river. Although it seems to be the same river, it is still different based on the fact that the water and other elements in the river have been moving, and the

river you step into the second time is not really identical with the first one. The question is then raised – if everything is in a state of change, then why is not the entire universe in chaos? Why does the world exist in apparent order? Why do biological, ecological, cosmological, and other cycles continue without fail? Where does this order come from? The universe seems to reflect the works of intelligence. Where is the reasoning power that controls the universe? Heraclitus concluded that Logos, or "the Word" is what is governing the entire universe. This concept is further developed so that Logos is what is behind a person's sense of right and wrong. Logos is what is behind a person's reason. Logos is the mind of God, and the reason of God.

This concept of the Logos was perfect for the purpose of John the apostle. He introduces Jesus to the Greeks by saying, in effect, "The Logos, the mind of God, the reason of God, the intelligence behind the creation of the universe, the very power that is holding the world together – is Jesus Christ." It is important to notice that John was not merely attempting to use a philosophical concept prominent in Greek thought to introduce Jesus Christ. The concept of Logos is indeed accurate in describing Him. The Word does contain the power and characteristics which the Jews and Greeks attributed to it.

What must have been shocking to both the Jews and Greeks was when John claimed that, "This concept which you have so worshipped and admired, this concept which for so long had represented the height of wisdom, which you have so pursued, this concept which stood for nothing less than perfection in your eyes – has become a person and lived in our midst! He is Jesus Christ." The acceptance or rejection of this claim can make the difference between salvation or eternal condemnation for an individual. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 says, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." This is an accurate description of the situation.

Jesus Christ is perfection personified. He is perfection in the form of flesh and blood. He is everything we have dreamed of, everything we have hoped for, everything we have pursued – in the form of a human being. Even more than that, He is God personified. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus on the earth, was God in the flesh. To reject Him is to reject perfection. To reject Him is to reject the power behind all of creation. To reject Him is to reject reason and wisdom. Since He is God in the flesh, and all that God stands for in the form of human flesh, to reject Him is to reject God Himself. You do not need to be perfect to be saved, but you do need to receive the one who is perfect; otherwise, you have just taken a stance against perfection. You do not need to have all the attributes of God to go to Heaven, but you do need to receive Him in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; otherwise, you have just taken a stance against God. If you claim to be one who upholds the virtues of love and justice, then turn around and rejects the one who represents these perfectly, you are a hypocrite and a liar; in your heart, you have rejected love and justice. If you claim to love God, yet reject the one who perfectly represents Him, no, the one who is actually God in human flesh, you have rejected God and there is no salvation for you.

12. ON TRANSUBSTANTIATION

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28).

The meaning of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the teaching that the bread and wine administered in the Lord's Supper are literally the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine are not taken as symbolic of the flesh and blood of Jesus, but literally the flesh and blood of Jesus. Although the bread and wine were ordinary substances during the entire process of production and preparation, a miracle occurs as the Lord's Supper is administered, miraculously transforming the bread and wine into the literal flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

Regarding this topic, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1374 states that, "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained."

The Merriam-Webster dictionary summarizes this teaching as, "the miraculous change by which according to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox dogma the eucharistic elements at their consecration become the body and blood of Christ while keeping only the appearances of bread and wine."

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines transubstantiation as, "the change by which the substance (though not the appearance) of the bread and wine in the Eucharist becomes Christ's Real Presence – that is, His body and blood. In Roman Catholicism and some other Christian churches the doctrine, which was first called transubstantiation in the 12th century, aims at safeguarding the literal truth of Christ's Presence while emphasizing the fact that there is no change in the empirical appearances of the bread and wine...In the mid-20th century some Roman Catholic theologians were restating the doctrine of Christ's eucharistic presence. Shifting the emphasis from a change of substance to a change of meaning, they coined the terms transsignification and transfinalization to be used in preference to transubstantiation. But...in 1965, Pope Paul VI called for a retention of the dogma of transubstantiation together with the terminology in which it has been expressed."

One Catholic Systematic Theology text, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, explains that, "Christ becomes present in the Sacrament of the Altar by the transformation of the whole substance of the bread into His Body and of the whole substance of the wine into His Blood...This transformation is called Transubstantiation" (p. 379).

There are those who disagree with this belief, stating that the bread and wine are symbolically the flesh and blood of Jesus, not literally the flesh and blood of Jesus. In the following analysis, I will present some reasons in support of this second view.

"This is my body." One argument for transubstantiation is that when referring to the bread, Jesus directly stated, "This is my body," and when referring to the wine, He directly stated, "This is my blood." It is argued that the word "is" exactly and literally identified one item with another. Therefore, when Jesus said that the bread "is" His body within the context of the Lord's Supper, then the bread "is" literally His body.

Even a casual reading of the Scriptures will uncover a number of passages where this type of language is used without literally identifying one item with another. For example, Jesus Himself said in John 15:1, "I am the true vine," and in John 10:9, "I am the door"; yet, no intelligent person would assert that because of these statements, Jesus is literally a vine or a door. The context in which these passages appear as well as the account of the Scriptures will often tell us that a statement should be taken symbolically and not literally. In the same way, the fact that Jesus said the bread, "is my body" makes a literal interpretation possible, but not necessary.

There would be no argument, of course, if after the alleged miraculous transformation, the "bread" tastes like flesh and the "wine" tastes like blood. One can then claim that it is a miracle that occurs in the taste buds and not a miracle that occurs in the substances of the bread and the wine. In that case, one only has to examine the bread and the wine under a microscope after the alleged miracle has occurred. If the substances had indeed transformed into flesh and blood according to such observation, one can then claim that the miracle causes all the perception of the substances to change, yet the substances themselves remain the same. In other words, this is a claim that says the Lord's Supper creates an illusion of transubstantiation, and not a physical miracle of transubstantiation. However, we would not even get to this because as it turns out, the bread does not taste like flesh, and the wine does not taste like blood.

Since this is the case, one must allow for the possibility that the language of "X is Y" ("This is my body") is symbolic and not literal.

Supporters for the teaching of transubstantiation will then argue that although the substances taste and look as they did before the alleged miracle, in reality they have been transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus. We will now attempt to answer this.

On contradictions. First, let us consider the concept of a contradiction. The following are three brief illustrations:

(1) Is it possible for you to be 50 years old and 49 years old at the same time? Yes, if you are using two different calendars (e.g. Western and Chinese), it is possible for you to be 50 according to one and 49 according to the other. Is it possible for you to be 50 years old and 49 years old at the same time and in the same sense? Or, is it possible for you to be 50 years old and 49 years old at the same time, using the same calendar, within same time

zone? No, that would be a contradiction and an impossibility. Contradictions are simply concepts, and cannot be found in reality, for a true contradiction cannot exist. If we use the letter X to represent an idea, it would be a contradiction to say that X exists, and X does not exist at the same time and in the same sense.

(2) A triangle has some observable properties: it has three sides, forming three angles, with the sum of the angles being 180 degrees. A square has four sides, forming four angles, with the sum of the angles being 360 degrees. If I now show you a shape that has three sides, forming three angles, with the sum of the angles being 180 degrees, will you have any reason to call it a square? If you do call it a square, you will simply be using another word to describe a triangle, but the shape is still a triangle in reality. If God somehow makes a triangle into a square, the shape will now have the observable properties of a square – that is, the shape will now have four sides, forming four angles, with the sum of the angles being 360 degrees. In other words, even God cannot make a "square triangle," for that would be a contradiction, which is only possible in concept (yet it is meaningless) and not possible in reality. God is not a contradiction and cannot produce contradictions.

(3) If you say, "X = 5," and then you say, "X = 10," you have not changed the meaning of 5, but the meaning of X. If you say, "X = an apple," and then you say, "X = a chicken," you have not changed the meaning or the substance of the apple from that of the apple to the chicken, but you have simply redefined X from representing an apple to a chicken. An apple is still an apple, and a chicken is still a chicken. Remember what a contradiction is: "X = Y" and "X does not = Y" cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense.

Transubstantiation is a contradiction. What transubstantiation teaches is that God transforms the triangle into a square, but the observable properties of the shape is that it has three sides, forming three angles, with the sum of the angles being 180 degrees. In this case, God did not change the triangle into a square; rather, the shape was simply given a different name.

Recall that the Catholic Catechism says that in the Lord's Supper, "the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained."

Transubstantiation, then, teaches that although after the alleged miracle, the bread still tastes like and looks like bread, having all the observable properties of bread, it is flesh. Although after the alleged miracle, the wine still tastes like and looks like wine, having all the observable properties of wine, it is blood. In other words, transubstantiation claims that the "is," or the true form of existence of a physical substance, may alter without affecting the observable properties of that same physical substance.

It is an accepted fact by both sides of the argument that a substance such as wood has a certain molecular structure that makes it wood; gold has a certain molecular structure that makes it gold; water has a certain molecular structure that makes it water. A substance with the molecular structure of water can never be gold. In other words, the statement, "Water is gold" can never be true. If you encounter a substance with the molecular

structure of water and call it gold, you are simply giving the name "gold" to the substance of water. Gold is gold, and water is water; one can never be another. If water changes into gold, then it will no longer have the observable properties of water.

In the same way, bread has a certain molecular structure that makes it bread and causes it to taste a certain way. The same is true with wine, flesh, and blood. Transubstantiation teaches that after the alleged miracle, the bread still tastes like bread, but it is the flesh of Jesus. However, if the molecular structure of the substance remains unchanged after the alleged miracle, then the substance is bread, not flesh. You may not use the word "is" to equate that bread with flesh, except in a symbolic way.

The only way that the substance of bread can be literally the flesh of Jesus, then, is that the flesh of Jesus was actually bread. Even if the supporters of transubstantiation is prepared to assert this, they will then have the problem of explaining how the body of Jesus, which was composed of bread, was able to maintain its structural integrity (did not disintegrate) for more than 30 years with blood (or, by the same logic, wine!) flowing through it.

To repeat, it is impossible that God can or will, by an act of miracle, transform a piece of bread into the literal body of Jesus, yet causes the piece of bread to retain the same molecular structure. If the piece of bread retains the same molecular structure, then it is a piece of bread, and not anything else. Calling it something else is simply to play a word game that one cannot win.

Of course, different people may have slightly different definitions of transubstantiation, but if we are to take the words, "the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained" seriously, then the above logic would apply as showing that this teaching asserts a contradiction which can never occur in reality. If one affirms that the presence of Christ is present in the sacraments in a spiritual, mystical, or symbolic sense, then there is no contradiction.

To those who object that the above logic seems to say that everything that God does must be physically observable, this is not my claim. The claim of transubstantiation is that the bread has become literally (not symbolically) flesh. Since bread is a physical substance, characterized by certain physical and molecular properties, then a literal change from bread to flesh must be a change on the physical and molecular level, which then must be physically observable. Any claim, then, that the literal transformation of the substance of the bread without any physically observable changes is merely an admission that the bread is symbolic of flesh, not literal flesh.

True miracles are not illusions. Physical substances have observable properties. If a miracle claims to alter a physical substance drastically, then the changes will be observable. If the miracle claims to alter a physical substance without changing its physical, observable properties, then again we have an admission that the event is in fact symbolic.

There are other arguments against transubstantiation, and I have only offered one that I have formulated in this chapter. The important issue is that if the "is" in "This is my body" is meant to be taken literally, then it should be taken literally; however, it is not agreed among honest and intelligent Christians that the word "is" should indeed be taken literally here. Therefore, those who do take it literally should attempt to produce good reasons for doing so, and they should have no problems doing this if they are on the side of truth. Of course, those who favor the symbolic interpretation should also be able to produce good arguments for their view.

Additional notes. Articles of Religion (1571: Church of England), Article XXVIII: "Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith."

Westminster Confession of Faith (1643-46), Chapter 29: "5. The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that, truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain only bread and wine, as they were before. 6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense, and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions; yea, of gross idolatries."

Baptist Faith and Message, Southern Baptist Convention (1925, revised 1963), VII: "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."

13. THE LAWS OF LOGIC

Meaningful communication requires some common factors between the parties involved. For example, they may need to know the same language and be in agreement on what constitutes a good argument. Usually, all the parties involved will agree that rationality is necessary to form acceptable and persuasive statements. In this appendix, I will attempt to formulate a brief explanation of the nature of logic, and justify its use.

Defining the Issue. When one tries to apply the rules of logic to a theological, philosophical, or any kind of rational discussion, or, when logic is being taught in a class or in another setting, one question that sometimes arises is why we should allow our thoughts and arguments to be governed by these rules of logic. The unstated assumption (sometimes even unknown to the objector) is that the rules of logic were invented, not discovered. They were created by somebody (Aristotle?), and another person may come up with a different set of equally valid logical rules.

For example, if one side of a debate claims that an argument from the other side violates the law of noncontradiction, can the other side validly say that the law of noncontradiction is only integral to Aristotelian logic and that his argument is not subject to his logical rules? Is the law of noncontradiction true for one only because the person subscribes to it, or is the law of noncontradiction true for everyone? How about the other rules of logic?

In the area of simple mathematical addition, is it possible that $1 + 1 = 2$ is true for me because I subscribe to the commonly acknowledged laws of mathematics, and that the same is false for another person if he refuses to subscribe to these same mathematical laws? If a person indeed thinks like this, is this person more correct, equally correct, or is he just denying reality? The truth of $1 + 1 = 2$ seems to be self-evident.

The following is one possible justification for the use of logical rules in rational discussions. I will attempt to show that the logical rules as taught in standard logic texts (consistent with the Aristotelian system) are self-evident, and were not invented by men, but rather discovered by men. The names for each rule may have been invented, and thus could have been otherwise, but the rules themselves are self-evident, and therefore will apply and must remain the same within all rational discussions and arguments.

The following justification for the rules of logic is not comprehensive or irresistible. This is not an attempt to arrive at a flawless proof. However, the following will be sufficient to demonstrate that the rules of logic indeed are not based on one's preference or independent reasoning, but they in fact correspond to reality and are true for everyone. To be sure, if my claims are true (if they correspond to reality, the way things really are), then more compelling arguments can be formulated. The following does not attempt to convince highly knowledgeable and critical individuals such as philosophers and

mathematicians (many of them agree with my position on this issue anyway), but not that it cannot be done. The following is only intended to demonstrate to the general audience that logical rules and their use are indeed justified.

This justification for the rules of logic is formulated for at least two reasons: (1) To eliminate one obstacle that may prevent the reader from learning the rules of logic. Under this reason, the following justification also serves to assure the readers of the usefulness of logic, and the great force of the arguments that are consistent with logical rules, and (2) To establish logical rules as a valid common ground (a common ground that cannot be different from the way it is, since the rules correspond to reality, and were not determined subjectively), to which two sides of a debate must adhere in forming their arguments, and that either side may challenge the truth of the other's arguments if they violate the rules of logic.

Finally, note that my aim here is not to teach logic itself, but to justify the use of logical rules (which in turn will justify the need for teaching logic).

Defining "Self-evident." Since my claim is that the rules of logic are self-evident, we must first define it. The rules of logic are not self-evident to everyone; however, they are indeed self-evident in themselves (they are not based on preferences or human decisions, but based on facts and how the world, language, abstract ideas, and reality work), and should be self-evident to everyone who studies them carefully. They are self-evidently true once they are understood.

For example, the law of noncontradiction states that "X is not non-X" – that is, something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. I cannot exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense. If two people are having a discussion about my existence, one holding to the view that I exist, and the other holding to the view that I do not exist, they cannot both be correct. If one of these two suddenly state that both of them are correct, that I indeed exist and that I indeed do not exist at the same time and in the same sense, then the other one, even if he has never heard of the law of noncontradiction, should insist that since the two views are mutually exclusive opposites, they cannot be both correct at the same time and in the same sense. In this case, this person appeals to the law of noncontradiction without officially being aware of it; thus, the law of noncontradiction is self-evident to this individual, and he expects the other side to recognize the same truth. Assuming that the other individual is rational, he must then concede that his assertion is contradictory, and must choose to side with either view, and that he may not side with both views without abandoning correct thinking.

All logical rules, and especially the first principles on which they are based, such as the law of noncontradiction, are self-evident in the same sense as illustrated in the above example. Every rational person, provided that he has a certain level of intelligence should be able to arrive at the same rules independently if given enough time.

To illustrate even further, consider the mathematical statement, $3 \times 5 = 15$. This statement may be considered self-evident. Nobody invented it, and it would be true even if no one

knows about it. The statement corresponds to reality and was discovered, not invented – it was then articulated so that it can be communicated and applied in a consistent manner.

If there are a number of apples on a table, placed neatly in 3 rows and 5 columns, one should be able to determine with absolute certainty that the number of apples on the table is 15 without having to count every apple, due to the fact that $3 \times 5 = 15$. The statement $3 \times 5 = 15$ is universally true in our daily lives or when describing simple objects such as apples, people, and cars. 3 cars times 5 cars (adding groups of 3 cars 5 times or adding groups of 5 cars 3 times) will always be 15 cars. Nobody invented this rule, but the rule $3 \times 5 = 15$ was discovered, articulated, and applied. In this sense, and to this extent, the rules of arithmetic are self-evident. They are not subjective, and they are non-negotiable. Only an irrational person will say that $3 \times 5 = 15$ is true for you, but it is not true for him.

Let me clarify what I mean by the rules of logic having been "discovered" rather than "invented." An "invented" rule implies that it could be otherwise, such as the rules of chess. A "discovered" rule is a rule that corresponds to reality regardless of its discovery – it refers to "the way things are." The rules of chess were invented, not discovered. The game provides rules on how the queen chess piece should move, its powers, and its limitations; likewise, the rules of chess govern how the king chess piece should move, its powers, and its limitations. Whether it is desirable or not, it is possible to change the rules so that the king chess piece is governed by the same rules as the queen chess piece, so that the king chess piece is now able to do everything that the queen chess piece can do.

The same cannot be done with discovered rules. These rules correspond to reality and cannot be changed (unless one is able to change reality, in which case the rules will change accordingly). The rules and laws that govern gravity cannot be changed based on our preferences – the rules describe gravity as it works, not the way we would like it to be. In a similar way, the rules that govern valid arguments are discovered, not invented. You cannot change the law of noncontradiction just like you can change the rules of chess. We discovered that a contradiction cannot exist in reality, not that we have decided that a contradiction cannot exist in reality. In a similar way that the rules of gravity are universal, the rules of logic are universal. The rules of logic, like the laws of gravity, communicate what is already true in reality. If a comet is named after the person who first discovered it, then it follows that if another person had first discovered the comet, it would have been given a different name than the one it currently has; however, the person who discovered the comet did not invent or create the comet – it was there whether anyone saw it or not.

The objection is sometimes raised that it was Aristotle who formulated the rules of logic, and we should not allow what seemed to him as correct reasoning to govern our thinking. However, just because Aristotle was the one who exerted the care and effort to articulate these rules does not mean that they were invented by him. Someone else could have articulated these rules and put them into writing, and if the rules of logic indeed correspond to reality (or the way things are), then the rules should be the same, even if they may have been given different names. This is another way of saying that the rules are self-evident, or consistently obvious to all who would observe and think with care.

Theoretically, given enough intelligence and time, anyone could have discovered the rules of mathematics and physics. Maybe different names and symbols would have been used to articulate them, but they remain the same rules and principles. On the other hand, nobody could simply look at the chess board and the chess pieces to discover the rules of the game as they presently exist. The rules of chess are not self-evident.

However, this does not mean that everyone automatically knows every self-evident principle. It is theoretically possible, but not everyone has the same level of intelligence, depth of thought, and interest in discovering the rules of thinking. Therefore, the rules of logic, although self-evident, must be taught.

Examples with "If / Then" Arguments. The following arguments provide a non-technical way of showing how the rules of logic are self-evident and universal. Needless to say, much time and space will be required to demonstrate every logical rule as being self-evident and universal. The following, then, is only to show how this can be done, and not to actually perform the task comprehensively.

First, take a look at this argument: (a) If I hit Tom, then he will be injured; (b) Tom is injured; (c) Therefore, I hit Tom.

Assuming that statements (a) and (b) are true, some may then think that (c) is also true. The argument has a certain logical structure to it, and it may seem to make sense to some. Does not the argument state that if I hit Tom, he will be injured? Does it not also say that Tom is injured? Then, is it not logical to think that I had hit Tom and injured him? Upon more careful examination, we must conclude that (c) is possibly true, but not necessarily true, and even if it is true, it is certainly not true based on statements (a) and (b). Here is why: it is true that if I hit Tom, he will indeed be injured. Statement (a) leaves no possibility for me to hit Tom without him being injured; however, it does not eliminate the possibility of Tom being injured for another reason. Therefore, although statement (b) says that Tom is injured, it does not follow that I am necessarily the one who caused the injury. Tom could have fallen down the stairs, walked into a wall, or somebody else could have hit him instead of me. The study of logic calls the above argument (where one argues from the effect in an "If / Then" argument) "affirming the consequent." We may say that "affirming the consequent" in this type of "If / Then" arguments are always invalid.

Note that if I change statement (a) to "If and only if I hit Tom, then he will be injured," this will mean that only I have the ability to injure Tom. The argument will then become valid. However, the argument as it appears above is invalid. In other words, affirming the consequent is invalid in an "If / Then" argument, but valid in an "If and only if / Then" argument.

Now, please look at the following: (a) If I hit Tom, then he will be injured; (b) I hit Tom; (c) Therefore, Tom is injured.

This argument is "affirming the antecedent." Instead of affirming the consequent in statement (b), I affirmed the first part of statement (a). According to statement (a), if the first part ("If I hit Tom") is true, then the second part ("he will be injured") must be true. Statement (b) then affirms that I had indeed hit Tom. Assuming that statements (a) and (b) are true, then anyone can say with absolute certainty that Tom is now injured without having to examine Tom at all. Affirming the antecedent produces valid arguments in "If / Then" situations.

What happens if, instead of affirming either the antecedent or the consequent, I deny the consequent? The argument would become: (a) If I hit Tom, then he will be injured; (b) Tom is not injured; (c) Therefore, I did not hit Tom.

Remember that when I affirmed the consequent in this argument, it does not follow that I had hit Tom, since Tom could have been injured through other ways. Therefore, as we have seen, affirming the consequent is invalid. However, when we deny the consequent, it eliminates any possibility of any of the possible ways of how Tom could be injured from ever having occurred, including my hitting him. Assuming that statements (a) and (b) are true, then anyone can say with absolute certainty that I did not hit Tom. Denying the consequent, then, produces a valid argument.

Finally, let us look at what happens when I deny the antecedent: (a) If I hit Tom, then he will be injured; (b) I did not hit Tom; (c) Therefore, Tom is not injured.

It should be obvious that this argument is invalid. Even though I did not hit Tom, statement (a) does not eliminate the possibility of Tom being injured through other ways. Tom could have fallen down the stairs and injured himself. The only thing that one can say with certainty is that if Tom is injured, I am not the one who had injured him. We cannot know for certain whether Tom is injured until we examine him.

Through the above process, we have "discovered" some rules for reasoning (of course, if we were to start from scratch, a much more detailed and complex process may be needed). Simply stated, in an "If / Then" argument, the following applies: Affirming the antecedent and denying the consequent are valid; affirming the consequent and denying the antecedent are invalid.

These rules will apply to all "If / Then" arguments provided that statements (a) and (b) are true, or at least assumed to be true. With these rules in mind, let us examine several similar arguments below.

Argument (1): (a) If it rains, then the ground will get wet; (b) It rained; (c) Therefore, the ground is wet. This argument affirms the antecedent – it is valid. If (a) and (b) are true, then (c) must be true.

Argument (2): (a) If it rains, then the ground will get wet; (b) It did not rain; (c) Therefore, the ground is not wet. This argument denies the antecedent – it is invalid. The

ground could have become wet for reasons other than raining. For example, I could have sprayed water on to the ground with a garden hose.

Argument (3): (a) If it rains, then the ground will get wet; (b) The ground is wet; (c) Therefore, it rained. This argument affirms the consequent – it is invalid. Once again, the ground could have become wet for reasons other than raining.

Argument (4): (a) If it rains, then the ground will get wet; (b) The ground is not wet; (c) Therefore, it did not rain. This argument denies the consequent – it is valid. If the ground is not wet, it could not have rained.

You may also try forming and evaluating arguments based on this premise: "If Tom exercises everyday, he will lose weight."

Most readers may already see the usefulness of the logical rules I have presented, but some may object that no formal logical rules are necessary to discuss the examples that I have listed so far. This may be true, although not entirely – for example, not everyone will automatically see that affirming the consequent produces an invalid argument in our examples. The more complex and abstract the arguments are, the more important the logical rules become. Take the following as an example: (a) If X, then Y; (b) Not X; (c) Therefore, not Y.

Without even knowing what X and Y represent, we can tell that since (b) denies the antecedent, this is an invalid argument. It should be obvious, then, that logical rules provide us with a way to consistently and reliably produce and evaluate arguments, which in turn makes meaningful and intelligent discussion and debate possible. Logical rules enable us to discuss concepts that are difficult to visualize, as well as abstract and scientific concepts. Although these rules should be self-evident, their application may be inconsistent (due to human error) unless the rules are clearly articulated. On this basis, we can see that the use of the rules of logic for reasoning and argumentation is justified.