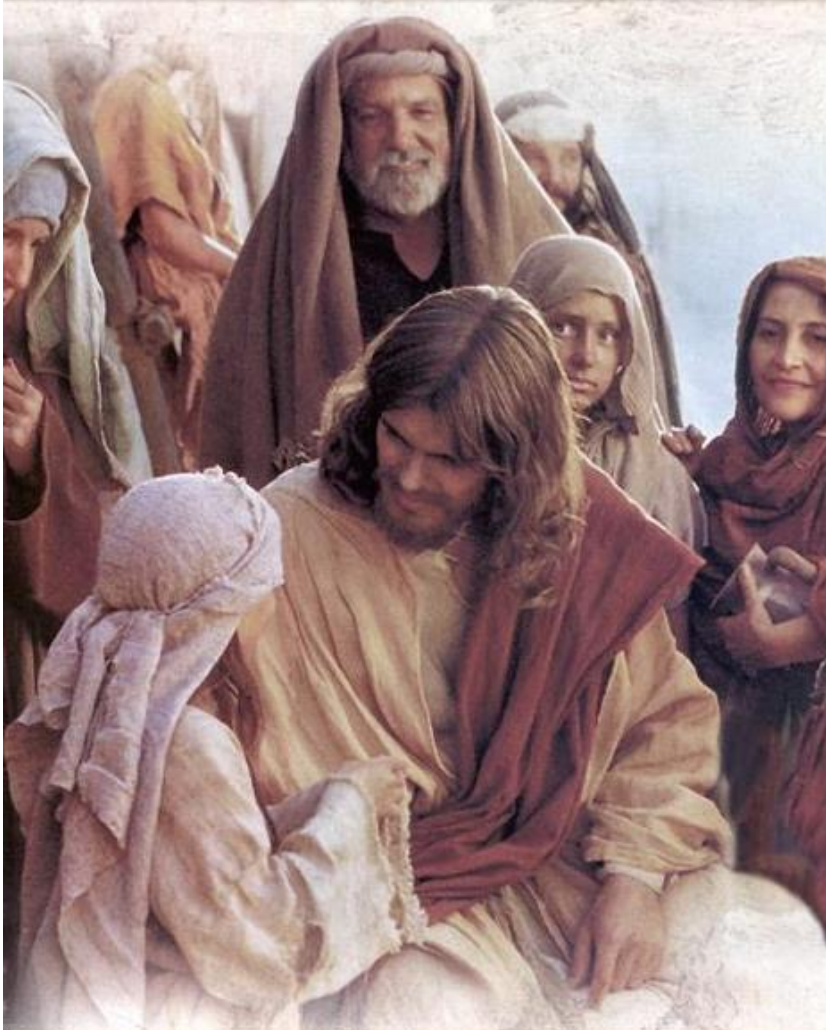


Basic Training Bible Ministries

presents



In the Imitation of Christ To Learn, Do, and Teach

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” 1Co 11:1

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In the Imitation of Christ **To Learn, Do, and Teach**

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Study Format

- I. Introduction: Jesus Christ the Standard for Ministry
- II. Biblical Examples of Christ-Likeness in Ministry
 - A. Moses
 - B. Ezra
 - C. Ruth
 - D. Paul
- III. The Ideal Realized Fully in the Life of our Lord and Savior
- IV. Conclusions and Applications

Aims and Objectives

*“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart,
from a good conscience, and from sincere faith ...” 1Ti 1:5*

In this concise summary of Paul, we find the three elements which are crucial to each and every child of God who desires to be faithful and effective in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul actually works backward, from the outside to the inside, from the visible to the invisible. We will reverse this order, looking instead at the development of the spiritual life along the lines of learning, living, and leading others.

First in the sequence is *“sincere faith,”* which is literally “un-hypocritical faith.” It is evident that we live out what we truly believe. A hypocritical faith is that which claims biblical orthodoxy but denies it in conduct (Tit 1:16). But before anyone can live out God’s Word, it must be learned and received into the regenerate heart by faith. The effect of truth being received by faith is that of spiritual growth in the life of the believer (Heb 4:2–3; 1Pe 2:2; 2Pe 3:18).

Next comes *“a good conscience”*—the inner result of a life lived in accordance to the Word of God. This does not imply sinless perfection, which is found only in Christ Jesus. What it does imply is a growing conformity to His image, and the consistent overcoming of our sins and weaknesses, as we apply the truths of the Bible to our lives.

The final ingredient is the expression of the love of God as the outpouring of the inner well-springs of our spiritual life (Joh 7:37–38). The indwelling Spirit of God becomes the source of this life-giving flow as we grow in our faith (Rom 5:1–5). It is the manifest love of God in all its expressions (1Co 13:4–8; Gal 5:22–23) that convicts and convinces the world of the truth and power of the Gospel message (Joh 13:34–35).

The aim of our study, then, is to first understand this simple precept, and then to incorporate the power of it into our practice in daily living. To explore the truths of Scripture, and to experience the mighty presence of the living Savior in our lives, is the great adventure to which we are called. To learn the truth, then to live it out, and finally to lead others to it, is the very definition of dynamic Christian living.

I. Introduction: Jesus Christ the Standard

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach ...” Act 1:1

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the standard of the ideal life lived in a broken and sinful world. He is *“the author and finisher of faith”* (Heb 12:2) in the fullest sense. He is not only the object of true faith, but the perfect example of how faith conducts one’s life in a fallen world. Luke’s introduction to the Book of Acts is significant to our study, specifically in four points:

1. It points to the Gospel record of the life of Jesus Christ.
2. It links the Book of Acts to the Book of Luke.
3. It defines true ministry as the work of a living Savior.
4. It provides the irrefutable defense for the faith.

First, *“the former account”* can only refer to the Gospel of Luke. In pointing to the record of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Luke is declaring the incarnation of Christ—God coming in human flesh—as the foundation for all true knowledge of God and the only means of deliverance from eternal condemnation.

Second, by saying *“all that Jesus began,”* he indicates that the Book of Acts is the continuation of the story. The resurrected Lord is continuing to live and minister through His people, by means of His indwelling Spirit (Act 1:2, 8). In the Book of Acts, we see the same mighty power at work in the disciples that was first manifested in our Lord, thus confirming His resurrection. Just as God the Father had spoken in the past, and Jesus had spoken in conclusion (cf., Heb 1:1–2), so now, through the Church, the Holy Spirit continues to bear witness to His message.

Third, the phrase *“to do and teach”* implies that the truths presented in His teaching were first demonstrated in His daily life. While it is not included in this verse, there is an implication of the third ingredient, that of learning and growing. We find this in Luke’s account of the boy Jesus:

*“Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but his mother kept all these things in her heart.
And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Luk 2:51–52*

Even the Savior of mankind, the second member of the Godhead, had to learn and grow as a man. It was out of His learning that His doing and teaching came.

Finally, the record of Luke/Acts is being formally presented to one designated as “*O, Theophilus*” for his consideration. Since “*Theophilus*” translates as “lover of God,” we conclude that he is a believer of some status. Whether his actual name, or a title conferred on him by Luke, we cannot say. Note that the Gospel of Luke was also dedicated to this man (Luk 1:1–4). There, the phrase “*most excellent Theophilus*” implies some official position of authority. Some suggest that Luke and Acts were two parts of a legal document presented by Luke the Physician as a defense—not only of Paul, but of the claims of the Christian church.

By taking the record of Luke/Acts together, we have the irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) promised throughout the Old Testament—that He lived, died on the cross, rose again, and continues to live and work through the members of His Body, known collectively as the Church.

And this brings us to the key consideration of our study. What we see of Christ in the Gospel account is what we also see through His apostles and disciples in the Acts account. Therefore, the character and methods used by our Lord are to be the same in the ongoing ministry of every believer. When we depart from the standard set by Christ, we are deprived of His power and effect. The Spirit of God reproduces the life of Christ in those who live by faith (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38; Hab 2:4). As we will see, to live by faith implies learning, living, and leading.

II. Biblical Examples of Christ-Likeness in Ministry

We will look more fully into the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ toward the end of this study. But first, let’s consider a few examples from the Bible of men and women who—though weak, frail, and sinful like we are—reflected the standard of the Man, Christ Jesus. Out of many people we could use, we will select four.

A. Moses

*“He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the children of Israel.” Psa 103:7*

1. Knowing God vs. the Knowledge of God

The man Moses is set in contrast to the children of Israel. While they saw God’s works, Moses was acquainted with God’s ways. He was intimate with Almighty God. Two other passages cement this truth: In Numbers 12, we are given some insight into the amazing relationship between Moses and God.

“Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth ... Then He [God] said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD ...” Num 12:3, 6–8

Contrast this divine evaluation of Moses with God's estimate of the Exodus generation:

"For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.'" Psa 95:10

Unquestionably, Moses had a faithful and powerful ministry, though it was rejected by the majority of his generation. The Exodus generation, with two exceptions (Joshua and Caleb), had no ministry at all. Since Moses had taught them all that he knew about God, what was the missing ingredient? We find the answer in Heb 4:2:

"For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them [i.e., the Exodus Generation]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."

2. Objective Faith

The difference between Moses and his generation is that he received the Word of God by faith, and acted on it. I have often said that faith is an action word. The author of Hebrews seems to see it this way, since his depiction of what it means to *"live by faith"* (Heb 10:38) takes up all of Hebrews 11, and chronicles the deeds of those who believed God.

It goes without saying that it is impossible to receive God's Word by faith and not be changed. The transformation of the life is the fruit of the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). The power for life-change is not in the believer, but in the object of his or her faith. In grammar, to "believe" is a transitive verb, meaning that it requires an object. The power of one's faith depends on the greatness of the object of that faith.

Far too many Christians fail to understand this and, therefore, "have faith in faith." In other words, they think if they "work up enough faith" they will get whatever they are believing for. This is not biblical faith, but wishful thinking. Like the Exodus generation, they hear the teaching of the mighty works of God, but never realize such power in their own lives. Their "faith" is constantly being disappointed, simply because it is not faith at all.

3. Active Faith

It is this very problem James deals with when he says, *"faith without works is dead"* (Jam 2:17, 26). The problem, as introduced in his first chapter, is that too many believers were willing to give God's Word a hearing, but were not willing to act upon it.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Jam 1:22

Biblical faith receives the truth of the Word of God, centered in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. He alone is the “working object” of our faith. In His resurrected and seated position of all power and authority, He is able to fulfill all His promises and accomplish all His will. When we trust Him to do what He has said, in accordance with His character and purpose, we will not be disappointed (Rom 5:1–5). What we believe, we act upon, trusting the Spirit of God to make it a reality in our lives.

4. Decisive Faith

Like all of us, Moses had his doubts, fears, and weaknesses. What made him so great was that he rose above them, all by acting on his faith. In order to better understand the active nature of faith and its impact on those around us, consider the seven great decisions of Moses that changed history in Hebrews 11:23–29:

- a. He took seriously the training of his parents, Heb 11:23.
Amram and Jachobed were entrusted with the care of Moses for the first four to five years of his life (Exo 2:7–10). Perhaps they were permitted some contact with him after that, but whatever time they had, they instilled their faith into the child, and the following events prove it.
- b. His faith determined his identity, Heb 11:24.
Though he was called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses rejected that identification. He was a Hebrew, and his purpose in life was not in the palace, but with his people.
- c. His faith determined his priorities, Heb 11:25.
Taking the eternal view of life, Moses chose the path of present “*light affliction[s]*” (cf., 2Co 4:17–18) instead of that of self-indulgence and ease. Faith believes that “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2Ti 3:12) and willingly accepts that “*if we endure, we shall reign with Him*” (2Ti 2:12).
- d. His faith was fixed on eternal riches, Heb 11:26.
The promise of eternal reward for faithfulness in time runs throughout Scripture. Jesus spoke of laying up treasure in Heaven (Mat 6:19–21). Moses understood the deceptiveness of earthly riches, as later declared by Paul (1Ti 6:17–19). He was not about to sacrifice eternal treasures for temporary trinkets. As the martyr Jim Elliot said, “*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” Moses was no fool!
- e. His faith overcame fear, producing conviction and courage, Heb 11:27.
The visible might of the army of Pharaoh did not blind Moses to the invisible army of God (cf., 2Ki 6:16). His eye was single (Mat 6:22; Luk 11:34), focused on the object of his faith—the Lord God Almighty. His faithful endurance in the face of constant resistance from his own people was the product of his conviction of the faithfulness of God.

- f. His faith produced obedience and reaped blessing, Heb 11:28.
The first Passover was not only the means of Israel's deliverance as a nation. It was a prophetic picture of the deliverance of the world through "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Joh 1:29). By his obedience to the faith (see Rom 1:5, 6:17, 16:26), he brought forth the nation that would give the Savior to the world.
- g. His faith was contagious, infecting his generation, Heb 11:29.
Notice how the author here shifts from "*he*" to "*they*." Moses had great concern that he might leave a spiritual legacy to the next generation. In his prayer recorded in Psalm 90, he ends with these words.

"Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands." Psa 90:16–17

Moses was a man who learned at his parents' knees, lived out his faith in his time and place, and led a nation into the liberation of faith. Is it any wonder that he enjoyed an intimacy with the Almighty that few have ever known?

"So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend ..." Exo 33:11

5. Application

Every child of God by faith in Christ is called into the rich communion of friendship with God. But the only way into that unique fellowship is by faithful obedience to His Word (Joh 15:14).

B. Ezra

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." Ezr 7:10

1. Spiritual Preparation

It would be very difficult to find a better standard for spiritual leadership than that of Ezra, the scribe. The impact of his personal devotion to learning, living, and leading others, had a purifying effect on all the people who returned from the exile.

Ezra returned to Jerusalem at some time after Nehemiah, both in a spiritual and governmental capacity (Ezr 7:6, 11–28). His task was to put Israel's spiritual house in order, according to the Law of Moses (Ezr 7:25).

We are told that Ezra "*prepared his heart*" (Ezr 7:10) with a three-fold goal in mind. The word "prepare" (Heb. *kuwn*: hiphil, perfect) implies "to make ready" in the

completed sense. This indicates a period of prayer and fasting on Ezra's part, humbling himself to "*receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*" (Jam 1:21, with Ezr 8:21–23).

2. Spiritual Pursuit

The goal of this spiritual preparation on his part is expressed in three developing stages:

a. "To seek the Law of the Lord"

This implies the diligent study of the written Word of God. The word translated "*seek*" has a variety of meanings: "To resort to, to inquire of, to consult regularly," all of which suggest the diligent study of the Word as commanded by Paul (2Ti 2:15). It is worth repeating that Ezra "*prepared his heart*" before ever beginning his study. Our approach to the holy ground of God's Word, whether haughty or humble, will determine what we gain from it.

b. "To do," or apply, the truth learned to his life

The word used here means simply "to make, produce," but carries the idea of the efficient exercise of a precept. Ezra wanted his study to be accurate, and his application of truths learned to be faithful. In other words, he wanted his life to reflect the degree of his understanding. To have a deep understanding of God's Word, yet only a faint reflection of it in life, demonstrates a low estimate of the value of God's revealed truth, and of one's relationship to Him. To continue to live contrary to our understanding of Scripture truths is the mark of extreme hypocrisy and arrogance (Mat 23:1–3).

c. "To teach" God's Word to Israel

Once he had learned, and applied, God's Word to his life, Ezra determined to give diligent and detailed instruction to the nation. Having spent 70 years in exile, the nation of Israel had adopted the language and customs of the Babylonians. This led to the crisis of the priests intermarrying with pagan women that both Ezra and Nehemiah had to correct (Ezr 9:1–10:44; Neh 13:1–31). It is important to note that the teaching of Ezra was intended to effect change in the lives of the people. As has often been said, "True teaching does not occur until life changes have been made."

3. Spiritual Worship

That Ezra followed through on his commitment is demonstrated in Neh 8:1–11. Here we see what many scholars believe to be the beginning of the Synagogue form of worship. The people gather at the "*Water Gate*" (Neh 8:1), symbolic of "*the washing of water by the word.*" (Eph 5:26).

Ezra stood on a platform of wood, so as to be visible to all the people, and taught them the things of God. There are five things that stand out in this passage that should be a part of our worship services:

- a. The Guide in our Worship, Neh 8:5
How many times have we all attended a service where the Bible is not given prominence? Not only does the “message” not derive from Scripture, but few if any in the audience have brought a Bible. Pastors are subtly teaching their congregations to disregard the written Word of God. We need to keep the Word of God the central focus of all our worship!
- b. The Content of our Worship, Neh 8:3, 8
Modern Christianity—which is to say Laodicean Christendom—has little time or interest in the Scriptures being read. How many superficial messages would be ruined by simply reading the context of the passage? Instead of taking a single passage out of context, we would do well to read large portions of God’s Word. We need to remember that *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17).
- c. The Object of our Worship, Neh 8:3, 5–6
Those who glorify themselves do not glorify God. In order for the Lord to be exalted, man must be humbled (1Pe 5:5; Jam 4:7–10). Here we see the attentiveness of the multitude (Neh 8:3), and the prayer, praise, and worship that such an attitude produces. Too often today, it seems our church services have been reduced to the Lord being a special guest on some Christian celebrity talk show.
- d. The Aim of our Worship, Neh 8:7–8
The first use of the word *“worship”* in our Bibles is in Gen 22:5, where Abraham is about to offer his son Isaac on the altar. He tells his servants, *“the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”* His worship was a willingness to act on God’s Word to him, trusting that God would keep His Word and provide for Abraham’s need.

To act on God’s Word, it is necessary for us to accurately understand it. For the people standing before Ezra, this required interpretation and explanation.

Due to the adoption of Aramaic over Hebrew, it would have been difficult for the common people to grasp the meaning of the message without interpretation, explanation, and application. These are still needed today. However, the act of interpretation can often devolve into a demonstration of the speaker’s great scholarship. Your doctor may impress you with a long string of medical jargon, but he will not tell you what is wrong with you unless he explains it in your own language. I have noticed through the years that the greatest scholars speak in simplicity of language.

e. The Effect of our Worship, Neh 8:10–12

The conviction brought by the teaching of God’s Word will often result in grief, shame, and sorrow (Neh 8:9). This is only natural if the soul is sensitive to the inner working of the Spirit. However, it is not the goal of the ministry. Beyond the humiliation of the soul is the objective: to bring repentance, correction, and the resulting joy and peace of coming into a right relationship with God. The fact that the Word taught was “understood” is emphasized (Neh 8:7–8, 12) as both the cause of weeping, and that of coming into the “*joy of the Lord [as] your strength*” (Neh 8:10). Again, this is not the false, worked-up “joy” we so often see today. This is the inner healing and release of sins confronted, corrected, and cast off. Such joy exists in our present age only in the soul made right with God, and submitted to the sovereign ministry of the indwelling Spirit (Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22–23; Phi 4:4; 1Th 5:16; Jam 1:2). Spiritual joy is the supernatural result of sins forgiven and souls healed (2Co 2:3–11).

4. A Scribe of Renown

As a result of his faithfulness and diligence, Ezra is highly commended not only by the people of his generation, but by Scripture as well. King Artaxerxes speaks of his “*God-given wisdom*” (Ezr 7:25), and the inspired Word of God says he was “*a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses*” and an “*expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD.*” (Ezr 7:6, 11). Because of his devotion to the cause of truth, he declares repeatedly that “*the good hand of our God*” was ever upon him in all he did (Ezr 7:6, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Would that we had more spiritual leaders like Ezra today. You could be one of them!

5. Application

Each of us is responsible to worship God “*in spirit and [in] truth*” (Joh 4:23–24). It is critical in this Laodicean age that God’s Word become the central focus of all our worship and living. No Christian activity is a substitute for personal spiritual maturity resulting in the ability to discern between good and evil (Heb 5:11–14).

C. Ruth

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” Rut 1:16

1. From Rags to Romance

There are many, many women we could use to illustrate the point of this study. I chose Ruth because of the vast chasm spanned by her faith. In her story, she goes from being a pagan Moabite to an ancestress of the Lord Jesus Christ. Along the way, she had to learn Who was this “God of Abraham,” then to live in light of her new-

found faith, and finally to lead, not only Naomi but all the inhabitants of Bethlehem into the amazement and joy of God's fulfilled plan.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee and others have called the little book of Ruth, with its charming love story, "the Romance of Redemption," and it is a fitting title. It takes only about ten minutes of casual reading to go through the story, and I recommend that you find time to read it straight through.

From the brief quote above, the entire story can be summarized along the lines of our study: learning, living, and leading. For the sake of time and space, we will have to bypass the many appealing side studies in this book.

2. Ruth Comes to Faith in the Living God, Rut 1:1–18

There is no doubt that something in the life of Naomi led to Ruth's coming to know the God of Israel. Elimelech was dead by the time Ruth and Chilion married. By the end of Rut 1:5, all the Jewish husbands are dead (possibly due to discipline for failure to return to Israel), and three widows remain.

In her parting scene from Moab, and presumably from her daughters-in-law (Rut 1:6–13), the LORD is mentioned four times. Though Naomi's perspective of God was distorted by her bitterness, He remained very real to her. There was sufficient faith and witness in her life to appeal to the younger daughter-in-law, Ruth, for she said "*Your God [shall be] my God.*" Her faith was the foundation on which she made her decision to remain with Naomi and return with her to Bethlehem.

3. Ruth Becomes a Servant to Naomi, Rut 1:19–2:23

Not only did Ruth take the Lord as her God, she determined that this faith bound her also to Naomi. Having found the promise of redemption given by the God of Abraham (Gen 12:3, 15:6, 22:18; Gal 3:16), Ruth responded with a self-less commitment to serve the one through whom it had come. She would forsake all hopes of husband and home, and care for the aging Naomi.

Upon their return to Bethlehem, Ruth goes into the fields to claim the right of the poor, as given by God (Lev 19:9–10; Deu 24:19–22)—to glean after the reapers. This was hot, hard work, but she did it gladly, turning her faith into an active service of love.

It is always thrilling to see the "happenstances" of Scripture. There are two in this text that show the Providence of God at work in the lives of these bereaved women. First, it "just so happened" that "*they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest*" (Rut 1:22). It is interesting that "*Bethlehem*" translates as "the house of bread," from which "*the bread of life*" would come (Mic 5:2; Mat 2:6; Joh 6:35, 48).

The next was that *“she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech”* (Rut 2:3). The invisible hand of God was working to orchestrate His amazing plan for this woman, and for the world.

4. Ruth Becomes the Bride of Boaz, Rut 3:1–4:12

In Rut 2:20, Naomi had begun to suspect the guiding hand of God when she said to Ruth, about Boaz, *“Blessed be he of the LORD ... this man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.”* It is here that we first begin to see the effect of Ruth’s faith and service on Naomi. This is the first time in the story she is not bitter and complaining!

The word she uses for *“relation”* is *goel*, which means “guardian, kinsman-redeemer.” The title comes from the provision made in Deu 25:5–10, by which a surviving brother takes his deceased brother’s wife, so as to perpetuate his brother’s name and inheritance. This means that Boaz, and the unnamed *“closer”* brother (Rut 3:12) were under obligations to provide and care for Naomi and Ruth.

Knowing the provisions of the Word of God, Naomi instructs Ruth how she can “propose” to Boaz, and claim her rights as a widow (Rut 3:1–9). It should be pointed out, strange as these customs seem to us, that there was nothing out of order in this. Boaz, and all the reapers and their families, were present at the threshing floor. It was to all those present that Boaz said, *“Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor”* (Rut 3:14). He wanted to spring his trap on the unsuspecting brother without any warning (Rut 4:1–10).

The obvious conclusion is that Boaz acts honorably, giving the nearer relative his due, but he has already shown great interest in Ruth (Rut 2:5–16), and intends to stack the deck in his favor. While the elder brother jumps at the purchase of the land (Rut 4:3–4), when he finds that taking Ruth as his wife is part of the deal, he passes the right to Boaz. In this way, Ruth becomes the bride of Boaz, but she becomes so much more!

5. Ruth Enters into the Messianic Line, Rut 4:13–22

What a marvelous plan of grace that God would take a poor Moabite widow and bring her into the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat 1:5). The story ends with the genealogy that shows her to be the grandmother of David. Also of interest is that the father of Boaz is Salmon, who married Rahab of Jericho (Joshua 2 and 6). The child of Ruth and Boaz is named *“Obed,”* not by Ruth, but by the women of the village. Obed means “servant” and was surely a tribute to Ruth’s humble submission and service.

And in this little book filled with spiritual surprises, there is yet the biggest of all! When all the townspeople want to ask a blessing on the union of Ruth and Boaz, they find a very strange yet wonderful way to express it. First, they ask that Ruth might be *“like Rachel and Leah ... who built the house of Israel”* (Rut 4:11). Then they say,

“May you ... be famous in Bethlehem,” which literally is, “May you call the Name in Bethlehem.” That Name (Jesus) would be above every name (Phi 2:9–11).

Finally, most strange of all, they say *“May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman”* (Rut 4:12). If we read Genesis 38, we have the background. Perez was an illegitimate child born to Judah and his daughter-in-law. Why in the world would anyone expect such a connection to be a blessing? There can be only one explanation, which ties *“Rachel and Leah”* and *“the house of Perez”* together with the “Name in Bethlehem.” That is, that the people living then knew that Perez, by the matchless grace of God, as well as Ruth, would both be included into the lineage of the promised Messiah (again, see Mat 1:3). I am convinced that there were those all throughout Israel’s history, who knew and were following the Messianic lineage—awaiting the coming Savior!

6. Impact out of Obscurity

Thus Ruth, who learned of the Lord God Almighty through Naomi, lived out her faith in service to her mother-in-law. By doing this, she led not only Naomi, but generations of people to look for the coming of the Savior.

Ruth was not a great deliverer, like Moses. Nor was she a great Bible teacher like Ezra. But by putting her faith into practice, she has led many through the ages to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ! God fully intends that you and I, in fulfilling His plan for us, do the same. Not until eternity will we know what a difference it will make if we live our lives by faith!

7. Application

Ruth’s faith translated into personal virtue and service to others (Rut 2:11–12). This pattern is crucial, but often overlooked. We need to permit the Spirit of God to transform our lives first, as the foundation for our witness and service to others. Consistency of inner character and outward actions is the very definition of spiritual integrity.

D. Paul

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” 1Co 11:1

No statement could be simpler, or more powerful, than this challenge of the Apostle Paul. To be molded into the image of the Savior was his life-long goal. He certainly shared in the sufferings of the Lord to a greater degree than anyone of his time. Following are just a few of the qualities of Christ which were reproduced in the life and ministry of Paul:

1. The Love of Christ

*“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus:
that if One died for all, then all died.” 2Co 5:14*

The life and ministry of Paul were driven by the love of Christ. This love was extended to all men, because Christ had died for all men. No one was outside the scope and embrace of that love. It was the force that drove Paul, day and night, to *“seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luk 19:10).

Three things stand out in the opening quote. First, the word *“compels.”* which means “to hold together, to press upon, to control.” The present tense indicates what became a way of life for the apostle—living out the love of Christ. Second, the phrase *“we judge,”* which indicates a firm conclusion reached in the past, by which Paul guided his life. This was the doctrinal conclusion, resulting from revelations made to him that Jesus Christ had died for all men, thus making salvation available to all who would believe.

Finally, the phrase *“all died,”* which could have two possible meanings: That all men had died as the result of the sin of Adam (Rom 5:12; 1Co 15:22) and, therefore, all were in need of salvation. The other possible meaning is that when Christ died, all men were included in that death. The focus in this meaning would be that all mankind’s debt of spiritual death had been paid, and only by rejecting Christ’s payment on their behalf could they forfeit eternal life. This seems to be the meaning of Jesus’ statement in Joh 3:17–19.

2. The Sufferings of Christ

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” 2Ti 3:10–12

The record of the sufferings and afflictions of Paul is astounding, yet it is incomplete! In the long list of 2Co 11:23–33, we have not single incidents of sufferings, but rather categories including multiple occasions. In this passage, he uses the words *“more ... more ... often”* and speaks of *“perils”* in the plural. Though he mentions being shipwrecked three times, this would not include the shipwreck recorded in Acts 27!

When Ananias hesitated to go and confront Saul of Tarsus, God said to him:

“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” Act 9:15–16

3. The Mercy of Christ to Sinners

*“... although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor,
and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because
I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” 1Ti 1:13*

*“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received
mercy, we do not lose heart.” 2Co 4:1*

Paul knew what it meant to be forgiven. He valued the grace of God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, which he knew he did not deserve. In his mind, he owed a debt of mercy, therefore, to all the people around him. As he looked out on a world that was twisted, perverted, and broken by sin, a world that was actively hostile to Jesus Christ, he could feel only deep compassion for them.

Paul never forgot the pit from which he was delivered (Isa 51:1), nor the cost of his deliverance. In the conviction that he was the “*chief*” of sinners (1Ti 1:15), he refused to consider any man or woman beyond hope. In the case of the sinful man in Corinth (1Co 5:1–5), though his sin within the church was such “*sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles*” (2Co 5:1), yet with the man’s eventual repentance, Paul urged the church to show mercy, saying: “*you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow*” (2Co 2:7).

Paul never forgot the mercy given to him. At the same time, he never allowed his compassion to override his sense of truth and justice. Biblical objectivity is crucial, lest the desire to show mercy lead us into subjective sentimentalism. This leads to another Christ-like quality adopted by Paul.

4. The Balance of Grace and Truth

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld
His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,
full of grace and truth.” Joh 1:14*

In the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, a perfect balance existed between grace and truth. In Him, all the truth of God was embodied in every thought, word, and action. In His humanity, He demonstrated the righteousness and justice of God in the midst of a fallen world. And for this, He was (and is) hated as never anyone in history was hated!

But at the same time, and in perfect balance and harmony, our Lord brought to the world the offer of the grace of God. The God “*who is rich in mercy*” (Eph 2:4) was fully manifested in Him. Just as the righteousness of God placed all mankind under condemnation (Rom 3:23), so the grace of God provided the way of escape from that awful curse (Rom 6:23).

Both the truth and the grace met together at the cross of Christ. It was here that, *“Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed”* (Psa 85:10). Here the wrath of God, stemming from His righteousness, was fully poured out. At the same time that His justice was satisfied (called *“propitiation,”* 1Jo 2:2), so His justice was now able to demand full and free forgiveness to all *“who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (Heb 6:18). Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, the truth of God declares all men condemned by His justice for falling short of His righteousness. At the same time, by faith in His finished work on the cross, we are *“justified”* by that very justice, for we have been imputed with the righteousness of Christ Himself (2Co 5:21).

This delicate and exquisite balance was never lost on the Apostle Paul, and was ever at the forefront of his message and ministry. Often, in the same passage, even in the same verse, Paul will speak of the truth of eternal condemnation and the offer of grace and forgiveness (Rom 6:23; 1Co 15:22). No single passage of Scripture demonstrates this balance better Romans 5. In it, Paul contrasts the justification and peace with God of those who believe, versus the condemnation and wrath awaiting those who will not believe. The *“much more”* statements in the chapter (Rom 5:9, 10, 15, 17, 20) follow the same method used by the Lord (Mat 6:30, 7:11), to demonstrate that, while grace and truth are in perfect balance, the benefits and blessings of justification so far outweigh the curse of condemnation as to be *“unsearchable”* and *“past finding out”* (Rom 11:33). This understanding led Paul to another area of the imitation of Christ.

5. The Passion for Obedience

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me ‘... In the volume of the book it is written of Me—I have come to do Your will, O God.’” Heb 10:5, 7

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Phi 1:21

The soul of Paul burned with a sacred flame, and the fuel of that flame was the passionate desire to do the will of God. So often we hear of obedience in terms of obeying the commands of Scripture. This is certainly the beginning of a life of discipleship.

However, for Paul it was never about law-keeping but was ever about Christ-conformity. His goal was to be a child of God *“in the Spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God”* (Rom 2:29). For him, obedience was far more than just the doing, it was all about being.

Beyond this, Paul grasped the fact that while all Scripture applies to all believers, yet there was for him (and for each of us) a specific plan, designed by God before the world began (Rom 8:28–30; Gal 1:15). Whatever obedience we may give to the

general commands of Scripture, if we fail to seek, find, and fulfill our personal destiny set by God, we have not “*finished the race ... [or] kept the faith*” (2Ti 4:7).

6. Application

While it requires diligent study to learn the precepts of the written Word of God (2Ti 2:15), it takes far greater devotion and discernment to identify the gift and calling of God on our own life (Rom 11:29; Heb 5:13–14).

It is imperative that we know the Word of God in order to obey it. But equally essential is the ability to discern His will for us personally—what the author of Hebrews calls “*the race that is set before us*” (Heb 12:1).

III. The Ideal Reached in the Life of Jesus Christ

“And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” Joh 8:29

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” 1Pe 2:21

I find it most difficult to write about the perfections of our Lord. On the one hand, who can begin to grasp the “*beauty of holiness*” (Psa 96:9) that marked His every word and deed? Also, the life He led is so high above any we have ever known, how can words do Him justice?

Another reason I tremble to put down my feeble thoughts on His unexcelled life is that I desire only to glorify Him, but see my own failure to rise to a worthy reflection of Him in my own life. But as the “chief of sinners” said, “*For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ...*” (2Cor 4:5). He also said, “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*” (1Co 9:16), and the Gospel is all about Jesus Christ and His perfection.

My prayer is that the following principles and passages, with a few brief comments, will provide illumination resulting in transformation for each of us who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus:

A. He Gave our Conception of God a Face

“But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live.’” Exo 33:20

1. God’s Glory Veiled

Moses was one of the greatest figures of the Old Testament record—perhaps second only to Abraham. So intimate was Moses with God, and so unique among all the prophets, that of Him the Lord said, “*He is faithful in all My house, I speak with him*

face to face.” (Num 12:7–8). Also, in Exodus we read, “*So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” (Exo 33:11). His relationship to God was one of utmost intimacy.

Moses’ greatest desire was to see the face of God. However, the fact was that the barrier of sin remained between God and man until the cross of Christ. This truth was illustrated both by the veil worn by Moses (Exo 34:29–35) and by the veil in the Tabernacle (Exo 26:31–33), both of which hid the glory of God from sinful men.

2. The Veil Removed

With the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the veil was removed, specifically for those who believed in Him (2Co 3:14, 16). Of Him, John writes:

“We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Joh 1:14

By “*glory*,” John speaks of the visible manifestation of invisible characteristics or qualities—what we would call the essence or nature of God. As the author of Hebrews writes:

“[He is] the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person ...” Heb 1:3

Or as Paul declares:

“He is the image of the invisible God ...” Col 1:15

Therefore, the “*face*” of God was revealed in Christ, as He said to Philip:

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Joh 14:9

With the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, a new revelation of the glory of God was given in human frame (Joh 1:18). Christ Himself became the living “*exegete*” of God to men. To see Him was to view the invisible heavenly Father in action in the common round of daily activities.

Then, at the conclusion of the crucifixion, the literal veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Mat 27:51). This signified that the way into the presence of God was open to all who believe in Christ. His glory was now approachable by faith.

3. Greater Revelation

But this was only the beginning of that revelation, which would not be fully realized until the New Covenant was inaugurated among men on the day of Pentecost.

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2Co 4:6

Many believers today seem to think that the disciples who walked with Jesus had an advantage over us, for they saw Him with their own eyes and heard Him with their own ears. With this, the Apostle Paul would heartily disagree!

Not until Pentecost was the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, given to those who believed in Him (Joh 14:16–18, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15; Act 1:8). This was the inauguration of the Church Age, and *“a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh”* (Heb 10:20).

4. Better Promises

Jesus Christ, now resurrected and ascended, provides for believers far greater powers and provisions than experienced by the children of God in any other age.

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” Heb 8:6

This means that we who live today have far greater advantages than anyone living before, and spiritual perception coming from the Holy Spirit that those early disciples never had. Just consider the transformation in the original apostles after the Day of Pentecost had come.

If we who live in the Church Age, with the indwelling Spirit, and the completed Canon of Scripture, fail to see the glory of His face or hear His voice, it is only due to the sluggishness and dullness of our own hearts (Heb 5:11–14).

In fact, it was most likely the greatest promise Jesus ever made that those who learned His Word, and lived it by faith, would see His hand and sense His presence—and that of the Father—in ways more real than physical sight could ever give (Joh 14:21–23). It can only be our disobedience that deprives us of this ineffable experience.

5. Application

In the life of Jesus, the invisible heavenly Father was made visible to mankind. In the same way, the resurrected Savior should be visible to the world through the Body of Christ. Each of us, as members of His Body, should be a living example of His resurrection power (Gal 2:20; Phi 1:21; Col 3:1–3).

B. He Revealed the Heart Behind the Tables of Stone

“Go and do likewise.” Luk 10:37

1. The Law in a Nutshell

The incident that gave occasion for the story of the Good Samaritan was that of a “lawyer,” that is a scribe considered to be an expert in the Law of Moses, asking Him a common question, “*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” In response, Jesus asked the scribe to summarize the meaning of the Law, which he rightly did by giving the two greatest commandments (Luk 10:27). In his response, we find agreement with Jesus’ own summary of the Law:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Mat 22:37–40

When the lawyer asked, “*And who is my neighbor?*” (Luk 10:29), Jesus told the story of the compassionate Samaritan, and said, “*Go and do likewise*” (Luk 10:37). In other words, the Law of Moses, written on tablets of stone, had behind it the heart of God. Each command, rightly obeyed, demonstrated love to God, to men, or both.

2. The Crux of the Cross

These two commands reveal the spiritual significance of the structure of the cross, with its vertical beam pointing from man to God, and its horizontal beam pointing from man to man. However, no one will ever be able to “*go and do likewise*” among men, until first the right relationship is established with God, by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus brought this new conception of the Law to light by a new way of seeing God. Search the Bible through, and not until Mat 5:16 will you read the words “*your Father in heaven,*” which immediately precedes “*the Law [and] the Prophets*” (Mat 5:17). But this was addressed to His disciples, reminding us that not until we believe in Him does God become our heavenly Father.

The cross of Christ is the only bridge between sinful men and a holy God. It is also the key to right attitude and conduct between men. Apart from the substitutionary death of Christ, the kind of love God offers is unattainable. By trusting Jesus Christ as Savior, we receive God’s love to us, resulting in eternal life. We also receive the empowerment to express this love, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for, “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” (Rom 5:5).

3. Militant Love

Contrary to the thinking of many, the love espoused and practiced by Jesus was not pacifism. The love of Christ was, and is, a fighting love. A love that will not fight against evil is mere sentimental nonsense.

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us,
that we should be called the children of God ...
For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that
He might destroy the works of the devil.” 1Jo 3:1, 8*

The militant aspects of the love of God are seen in Jesus’ routing of the moneychangers (Mat 21:12), and His fearless denunciation of the evils of the religious leaders (Mat 23:1–36). The apostles followed His example in their resistance to and refusal of the self-assumed authority of their leaders (Act 4:19; 5:29).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood that it was unspiritual to remain passive in the face of the evil of Nazism and, therefore, joined the resistance and died for his attempt to destroy Hitler. He was but one of a multitude of Christians in Germany, France, and other countries, who resisted Hitler’s evil, delivered Jews from death, and even fought in the underground army.

We must not forget that the same Almighty God, who gave Moses the commandments, led Joshua and the children of Israel to victory in the land of Canaan. The same God brought deliverance from Antiochus by the warrior spirit of Judas Maccabeus.

Scripture makes it clear that when Jesus returns, He comes as *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”* (Rev 5:5). It will be an act of love, for His beloved people, when He wages just war against the forces of Antichrist, and the world sees Him as *“The LORD of Sabaoth,”* the Lord of armies (Rom 9:29; Jam 5:4). A love that will not fight against evil is nothing more than a devilish deception.

4. Paul’s Summary

Paul grasped the truth of the love of God behind every commandment. Truly the Law of Moses is summarized by one word, when rightly understood in a biblical context—that of spiritual love.

*“For the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying,
namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Rom 13:9*

Jesus was able to encompass all commandments for the child of God into one. What is often called the eleventh commandment is for those who believe in Jesus Christ:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another
as I have loved you ... By this all will know that you are My
disciples, if you have love for one another.” Joh 13:34–35*

Only He who gave the Law through Moses could comprehend it in its purest form. Only He who was God in the flesh could “fulfill the law and the prophets” (Mat

5:17). And only by His Spirit are we who trust in Him enabled to fulfill the righteousness of the law as we walk by the power of His Spirit (Rom 8:1–4).

5. Application

In an age when the power of biblical Christianity is being neutralized by political correctness and tolerance of evil, we must revive the ancient chivalry of the Apostle Paul (Eph 6:10–18). We need to recover the qualities of vigilance, faithfulness, courage, spiritual strength, and discerning love (1Co 16:13–14).

C. He Personified Grace and Truth

“And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” Joh 8:11

1. The Theological Crossroads

We have already noted that Jesus came into the world “*full of grace and truth*” (Joh 1:14). In fact, it was this perfect balance by which the glory of the Father was revealed in Him. He embodied the truth to which no man could attain, and a grace that reached to each and every one.

In these two elements, there appears to be a paradox, or a tension, which is difficult for us to reconcile. Truth upholds righteousness and, therefore, demands judgment on all that falls short of that standard. Grace, on the other hand, cries out for forgiveness, and is the fountain of mercy.

Grace and Truth are reconciled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and nowhere else. It is due to who He is, and what He has done, that “*Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed*” (Psa 85:10).

2. Judgment or Mercy?

The Pharisees were entirely right, based on the truth of the Law of Moses (see Lev 20:10), to demand the stoning of the woman. However, they had forgotten other provisions for showing mercy (Mic 6:8), which Jesus often spoke of, saying, “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice*” (Hos 6:6; Mat 9:13, 12:7). They had also let the man go, which makes the whole case suspicious.

Jesus had declared Himself committed to the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (Mat 5:17). In effect, He declared that the woman was guilty and deserving of punishment, but only by a sinless judge. Since He was the only One present who was without sin, He alone could judge her—or forgive her. But on what grounds? He must be willing to bear the judgment for her sins! Many suggestions have been given on what He wrote in the dust. The most relevant is that offered by Randolph O. Yeager, author of *The Renaissance New Testament*. Mr. Yeager suggests that Jesus wrote God an I.O.U.

for the woman's debt. He states, "*The same finger that wrote upon the stone at Mount Sinai the words of her condemnation now wrote upon the stone the legal arrangements for her salvation*" (Vol. 6, pg.161). Perhaps He wrote Psa 40:6–8:

*"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire ... I come ...
to do Your will, O my God ..."* (cf., Heb 10:5–14)

By His death on the cross He not only fulfills the demands of the Law for judgment, but at the same time provides the only basis for forgiveness.

3. Grace Never Diminishes Truth

In His statement to the woman, Jesus strikes a perfect balance between grace and truth. "*Neither do I condemn you,*" here is forgiveness directly from God. "*Go and sin no more.*" There is the inflexible standard of God's righteousness upheld. His forgiveness did not exempt her from the only standard acceptable to God. Because of what Christ accomplished on the cross, His truth never bends to accommodate grace, nor is grace ever hindered by truth.

This command begs the question: Did the woman sin again? Knowing human nature, we could be sure she did. So where did that leave her? In light of her calling Jesus "*Lord*" (Joh 8:11), I would suggest that it would bring her right back to the feet of the only One who is righteous, and the only One who could forgive her—on the basis of His own sacrifice on her behalf!

4. Application

It is difficult, but necessary, to attain spiritual balance. Grace without truth is mere sentimentalism. Truth without grace becomes heartless legalism. The key is an equal focus on the written Word of God and the indwelling Spirit of God. The point of balance between Bible study and faithful living is in developing a vital, effective, prayer life (Mat 26:41; Joh 4:23–24; Eph 3:14–21, 6:18).

D. He Demonstrated the Manliness of Godliness

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, received up in glory." 1Ti 3:16

1. The Mystery of the Son of Man

There is a great mystery bound up in the manhood of Christ Jesus. It is a mystery that will never be fully explained this side of eternity, and probably not even then. While there are many angles to this mystery, perhaps the simplest, yet the most powerful for us, is the simple manliness of the Savior.

2. The Mystery in Six Parts

In the above passage, Paul cites six aspects of the mystery of godliness. The word “*godliness*” comes from two Greek words: *eu* which means “good,” and *sebeia* meaning “reverence, devotion, and proper attitude toward God.” In all its uses, the word combines the idea of right doctrine (1Ti 6:3; Tit 1:1) and the right conduct (1Ti 2:2, 4:7, 6:6).

In the following six points, we have truths concerning the humanity of Jesus Christ. They take us from the time Christ stepped down into history at the virgin birth to His return to His throne via the ascension (see Phi 2:5–11):

- a. “*God was manifested in the flesh*”
We call this the incarnation, by means of the virgin birth.
- b. “*Justified in the Spirit*”
A better rendering of this phrase would be “by means of the Spirit,” speaking of His constant dependence upon the Spirit of God.
- c. “*Seen by angels*”
He was the object of amazed angelic observation.
- d. “*Preached among the Gentiles*”
This task was largely carried out by Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles.
- e. “*Believed on in the world*”
This is the response of faith in those who hear the Gospel message.
- f. “*Received up in glory*”
Here we have the resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right hand.

3. The Power of Godliness

Of these six, it is the second one that is most often misunderstood. To be “*justified*” means “to be declared righteous, or shown to be righteous.” This one aspect of this “mystery” encompasses the entire life of our Lord.

In becoming a man, as we will see in our next topic, Jesus willingly accepted the limitations inherent in manhood. In other words, by “emptying Himself,” He had to rely, not on His inherent Godhood, but as a man He must trust in God’s Word and Spirit just as other men.

By His constant reliance upon the Spirit of God for strength, and His faith in the Father, He lived an obedient life from infancy to death. Thus He was “justified by means of the Spirit,” that is declared and proven to be righteous in all His ways. He alone could say to His critics, “*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*” (Joh 8:46). And, though they hated Him, they could not.

4. The Manliness of God

His was the manliest of lives, because it was the godliest life. In Him, the ideal of the Father for mankind, even in a sinful and broken world, was fully realized. He revealed to the world, with all our false conceptions of manliness, that to be a Man, was to be a godly man.

It may be for this reason that Jesus' favorite title for Himself was "the Son of Man." He laid the emphasis on His humanity. In His life, all the aspirations of the heavenly Father for mankind were realized. He alone was truly, "In the world, but not of the world." In Him, the fullness of God was made visible to man.

Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote about godliness. In his epistles, he mentions "godly" or "godliness" about twenty times. In every reference, what he is speaking of is a reflection of the character of Jesus Christ.

In Paul's theology, all sound doctrine led to godliness (1Ti 6:3; Tit 1:1, 2:11–12). Bear in mind that by "*godliness*," Paul meant "Christ-likeness."

5. Application

To grow in godliness is to develop in Christ-likeness. As we permit God's purpose to be fulfilled in our lives, we begin to reap His spiritual blessings. This brings the assurance that we will also receive eternal rewards in His kingdom. In His first public message—the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus mentions eternal reward eight times (cf., Matthew 5–6). Perhaps this is why Paul tells us, "*godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1Ti 6:6). As missionary/martyr Jim Elliot said, "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*"

E. In Him We See the Humility of God, and the Godliness of Humility

"Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." Phi 2:6–7 (NASB)

1. The Stooping Savior

To state that humility is a quality of the character of God seems at first to be strange. We tend to think of God in terms such as sovereign, almighty, transcendent and so on. Yet, in Christ, we see His amazing humility displayed again and again. In the above passage, which looks at the mind, or attitude, of Christ prior to His virgin birth, we see not only humility, but the glorious condescension resulting from it. Jesus was willing to "stoop" to human status.

The phrase “*He existed*” refers to His eternal existence as the second member of the Godhead. The “*form of God*” speaks of the very essence of Deity, manifested in a glory unseen by human eye (Joh 1:18; 1Ti 6:16). Although eternally coexisting with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus was willing to make “*Himself of no reputation*” (Phi 2:7), or better “to empty Himself.” This is called the doctrine of Kenosis, from the verb *kenoo*, by which Jesus was able to “lay aside” the use of His divine powers to truly experience life as a man—from infancy to death—yet apart from sin.

2. The Power of the Spirit

All the amazing powers demonstrated by Him during His earthly life were due, not to the exercise of His own inherent abilities, but to His reliance upon the Spirit of God. In this way, He is “the Son of Man” in the fullest sense, demonstrating what man was designed to be before the entrance of sin into the world.

Though He was God in the flesh, He was willing to be scorned, mocked, abused, and ultimately crucified (compare Isa 52:13–53:12 and 1Pe 2:21–25). In His confrontations with the arrogant Pharisees, He displayed amazing restraint in His words and actions. The true majesty of His humanity was magnified by the fact that, though He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (Joh 1:3; Col 1:16–17), He yet reasoned and pleaded with His enemies.

3. The Incomparable Christ

No man in history compares to Him! He alone is One who it is impossible to over-estimate or over-magnify. All the hymns ever written, all the theological works ever produced, will never encompass the greatness of His person. And yet, He took a little child on His knee to illustrate the nature of true greatness (Mat 18:4). He who alone was without sin, could forgive sinful men and women (Joh 8:11; Mar 2:5), declaring that His mission was not to condemn the world, but to save it (Joh 3:17).

The Lord Jesus is the only truly incomparable Man who ever lived. And yet, it is due to His humility, to His condescension, to His gracious restraint, that we find in Him the most lovely and winsome and heroic life ever lived. He is the very epitome of the word “gentleman,” even defining Himself as such when He said:

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will
give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”* Mat 11:28–29

No man will ever be more manly, or more courageous. Speaking of Him, Albert Einstein said, “*I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene ... No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.*”

According to Jesus' own words, humility is the first step of the human soul toward godliness:

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit.
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Mat 5:3

4. Application

Genuine humility is submission to God. It is the recognition that we are spiritually bankrupt apart from His grace. We must always bear in mind that all our service, anything we have to offer to Him, was first given to us by Him. God gives grace to the humble, that they might serve Him without fear (1Pe 5:5–6; Luk 1:74–75).

F. His Credentials Were His Life

“For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” Mat 7:29
(cf., Joh 7:26; Luk 4:36, 20:2; Mar 11:28; Mat 8:9)

When the Lord Jesus spoke the Word of God, He had an authority no other man could possess. Certainly, this was due to the fact that He was the author of the Scriptures. But it came from much more than this. He was the living embodiment of everything He taught. He was the “living Word” (Joh 1:14).

The Jewish Scribes and Pharisees were impressed with titles and credentials. In this, they were much like people of our own time, who think education automatically equates to intelligence or, worse yet, wisdom. And yet the contrary is shown in the common usage of the term “educated fools.”

1. Wisdom for Dummies

Jesus demolished the academic and scholastic pretensions of the religious leaders of His day. He did it, not by being more academic or more technical, but by His ability to communicate the deepest truth about God in terms a child could understand. It was because of this that *“the common people heard Him gladly”* (Mar 12:37). Yet, His appeal and popularity were a threat and an offense to those who considered themselves to be the guardians of the truth. They tried to undermine His message by pointing to His lack of formal training:

“And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’” Joh 7:15

But the secret of His wisdom and ability to communicate is found in His response to their scorn.

“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Joh 7:16–17

Not only does Jesus declare that His obedience to God’s Word is the key to His authority, but also that only they who desire to live it can ever understand it. In other words, He is saying that His life **is** His credentials.

2. The Power of Example

We who are teachers of God’s Word, and witnesses to the truth of the Gospel message should weigh His words carefully. We are accountable to God not only to know the truth, but also to practice it in our own lives. We will always be an imperfect reflection of the Lord we serve. Our authority rests in the fact that we speak the Word of God in truth. But the impact of our words on the souls of men will be determined—to a great degree—on how much those truths have affected and transformed our own lives. We will do well to heed the words of Paul to Timothy:

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” 1Ti 6:11–12

3. Application

Jesus often said that *“wisdom is justified by her children”* (Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35). The point is that knowledge without life-change is not wisdom. It is when Christ lives through us that true wisdom is attained (1Co 1:30–31). We are justified by faith, and that faith is justified as we demonstrate its power to the world.

G. He Established that the Key to Learning is the Will to Obey

“If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Joh 7:17

In this same verse, Jesus makes the most astounding declaration regarding His identity and how anyone, regardless of training or social status, can be absolutely sure of it.

1. Christ, the Living Word

In the context, Jesus had been teaching in the Temple. The multitude were amazed at His teaching, asking, *“How does this man know letters, having never studied?”* (Joh 7:15). What they were really asking was, “Who was this man’s teacher?” In the Jewish rabbinic system, much of one’s credibility depended upon where and under whom he had studied. When Paul said, for example, *“I am indeed a Jew ... brought*

up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel” (Act 22:3), this would carry much weight among the Jews.

Jesus here is making a two-fold point. “First, either I am speaking for God, or I am speaking on My own authority. The only way to know from what authority I speak is to surrender unconditionally to the will of God, then you will know.”

“Secondly, I have wisdom no man who came before has ever had, because *‘I always do those things that please Him’* (Joh 8:29). In other words, My Teacher is Him who sent Me, and I am the full and final expression of His will (cf., Heb 1:1–3).”

This is also why the people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus, *“for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes”* (Mat 7:29). He spoke, not as a student of the Law, but as the Giver of it—which He was!

The Pharisees, who claimed to know the will of God as contained in the Law, were committed to His death. While they claimed devotion to God’s will, they could not recognize in Him the embodiment of God’s will.

2. Wisdom Begins with Reverence

We have shown earlier that Jesus so limited Himself as a man (Phi 2:6–7) that He had to learn and grow as a normal person does (Luk 2:51–52). This present passage explains how, at the age of 12, He could baffle the scholars of the Law (Luk 2:46–47). His explanation of this total grasp of divine truth lay in His unconditional commitment to do the will of God.

His declaration that the will to do precedes the power to know is simply a restatement of an old truth, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”* (Pro 1:7). As was illustrated by Ezra, if we want to gain a deep understanding in the things of God, we must prepare **our** hearts, not only to seek the truth, but also to do it (Ezr 7:10).

What Jesus says here has great implications for every child of God. Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ are born again by the wisdom of faith, and *“wisdom is justified by her children”* (said by Jesus, Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35).

3. The Treasury of God

Since we know that *“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:3) are hidden in Christ, we conclude that to be *“in Christ”* is to have access to those treasures. The purpose of this amazing “access” (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18, 3:12) to the treasury of Heaven is that we might share the riches of God with the world (Eph 3:8–9).

Here is the spiritual conundrum of the Christian: We cannot share what we do not know, and we cannot know if we will not do, as the author of Pro 16:3 suggests,

“commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established.” This is the very point attacked by James, when he says, *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (Jam 1:22). It is easy to hear only, and deceive ourselves into thinking that we know the truth, when we do not.

But it is important to note that Jesus conditions knowing on the will to do. The truly humble person acknowledges that “[what] *I will to do, I do not do*” (Rom 7:19). The desire is present but the power is not. This is where prayer is so crucial. Two passages help explain:

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” Joh 15:7

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” 1Jo 5:14–15

4. Preparing the Heart

Remember that Ezra *“prepared his heart”* both to seek and to do (Ezr 7:10). If we truly desire to do God’s will, our prayers will center on the wisdom to know it and the power to do it. Instead of praying for things or circumstances, we will be praying for His will to be done in our lives. And such prayers will be supernaturally answered!

Consider the extended prayer of Paul for the Ephesians. First, he prays that *“the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling; what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ...”* (Eph 1:18), and then concludes *“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ...”* (Eph 3:16–17). First comes enlightenment and then enablement. The prayer for both is born out of the genuine desire to know and to do the will of God.

5. Application

True reverence for God is both humbling and empowering. In the Old Testament, we often read of those *“who tremble[d] at His word”* (Isa 66:5; Ezr 9:4; Hab 3:16). We can never rightly confront the Word of God without being made aware of our spiritual nakedness and His awesome glory. It is the desire to be changed by His power that takes the fearfulness out of “the fear of the Lord.”

H. He Declared that the Power of Teaching Lies in Doing

“All that Jesus began both to do and teach ...” Act 1:1

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Mat 5:19

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do ...” Mat 23:2–3

Jesus called the religious leaders of Israel *“blind leaders of the blind”* (Mat 15:14). They loved to pontificate, but they did not know where they were going. They loved to impose heavy religious obligations on men, but made no effort to do those things themselves (Mat 23:4).

1. In Word and in Deed

By contrast, Jesus was the living example of everything that He taught. In His life, men could see the reality and power of those truths. This was the secret of His magnetism and impact. He taught about the grace of God, and also demonstrated it (Joh 8:11–12; Luk 7:48). He spoke of God as a loving, heavenly Father, and the people saw that love and care in Him (Joh 6:1–14). All that He did was a picture of all that He taught.

This is the great dilemma for all who are gifted and called to teach. None of us will ever attain to His standard. As James put it so well, *“for we all stumble in many things”* (Jam 3:2). And remember that this was James, the half-brother of our Lord, who was called “James, the Just.”

Yet even our human frailty provides a means of demonstrating the truths we teach. Consider the Apostle Paul, who could say of himself, *“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells”* (Rom 7:18), and *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”* (1Ti 1:15). Yet, at the same time, he could say, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1Co 11:1).

It has often been said that people are not looking for a perfect leader, but they are looking for a faithful leader. If we are faithful to the Word that we teach, we become an example to others who struggle with sins and failings of their own.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Heb 2:9

*“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” Joh 14:6*

2. The Hero of History

In all the records of the history of the world, with all the wars fought, and all the heroes cited, not one—nor all of them together—could equal the courage or heroism of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His mission to this earth was a one-Man rescue mission for all of humanity. We cannot calculate what it cost Him, for we have no capacity to comprehend what He left behind in His heavenly kingdom! We are incapable to gauge the depth of His sacrifice, because we have no frame of reference for the agony of a sinless soul bearing the sins and shame of the entire world.

In His great compassion and condescension, He entered into the world as a helpless infant in order to take on all the forces of Satan’s realm, combined with the hatred of an unbelieving world. Yet, He was armed with a bold confidence born of His assurance that no power could withstand His Father’s will. His impregnable armor was the prototype of that with we are exhorted to put on (Eph 6:10–18), and consisted of absolute conviction of divine truth.

3. Jesus Knew from Whence He Had Come

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Man who ever lived that was never conflicted regarding His identity or purpose. That He knew His origin, purpose, and destiny is clearly stated (Joh 13:1–3). From the words of conviction He spoke at birth (Heb 10:5–7), to His words at the age of twelve (Luk 2:49), to His final words on the cross (Luk 23:43), He was certain of the path He trod and its conclusion.

4. His Descent Was Deliberate

Paul summarizes the **deliberate** work of Christ by saying, “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*” (1Ti 1:15). This was an echo of our Lord’s own words, “*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luk 19:10). For Him who held such great love for His own creatures, the price was small. In His eyes, the company of those who would believe was the treasure hidden in the field for which He would joyfully sell all that He had (Mat 13:44). His self-emptying (Phi 2:6–7) and His descent to earth had in view His ascension—leading a host of liberated captives (Eph 4:8–10).

5. His Aim Was the Cross

The crucifixion was no accident! It was planned in Heaven before time began, and its effects were announced to angels before man was created (Rev 13:8; Tit 1:2). All through the Old Testament record, from the offering of Abel, to the Passover Lamb—

in a multitude of ways—the crucifixion was anticipated and portrayed. It was the single stroke of divine genius by which—at one and the same moment—Satan could appear victorious, and be forever defeated.

6. His Death Bought Life

Although He was born to die, Jesus was never preoccupied with death. His focus was on life—both eternal and abundant—and always in that order. The Scriptures assure us that His life was joy-filled (Psa 21:1, 40:8; Pro 8:30; Mat 18:13; Heb 12:2). The only reason we do not see His joy in the Gospel records is that the grim and sober shroud imposed on us by joyless expositors has blinded us to it. Can you catch His exultant joy over the faith of the Centurion, when He said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”* (Mat 8:10). Or when He took a child in His arms, as an example of humble faith (Mat 18:1–4). If we can’t imagine the smile on His face at these times, we are insensitive to His joy!

7. The Simplicity of Salvation

The way of salvation is just too simple for most—even believers—to accept. How often do we hear the naysayers declaring some man-made obstacle to the simplicity of faith. Whether they require works before or after salvation, this is **not** the salvation Jesus offered.

He declared that it was simple enough to be understood and received as a little child, and **no other way** (Mat 18:1–4). Furthermore, it is something that a man (the thief) hanging on a cross is able to do (Luk 23:42–43). In neither case is anything added beforehand to gain life, nor afterward to assure that one has it.

Today the world is filled with “preachers of insecurity,” who cast doubts on everyone who does not live up to their exalted idea of what a “true Christian” must look like. The problem is that neither did the disciples. Neither do such preachers live up to their own claims. As James declares, *“for we all stumble in many things”* (Jam 3:2).

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Joh 1:12

To cast doubts on such a simple message is to deny His Word, and to denigrate the Son of God. Don’t balk at the simplicity of salvation—rejoice in it!

8. Application

We are only fit to lead if we learn to follow. Those who are most qualified for the ministry are they who are most fearful of its responsibilities. For this reason, James warns us not to rush to be teachers (Jam 3:1–2). Fortunately, in the same text, he reminds us that even the best of us will often fail. We will often do our best teaching

when we deal with our own failures with honest confession, earnest correction, and hard-won victory.

I. He Brought the Joy of Heaven to a Sorrowing World

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” Joh 15:11

1. The Smiling Savior

Have you ever considered that the one thing the Gospel accounts cannot convey to us is Jesus’ facial expressions? Where do we find Him speaking with a twinkle in His eye? I have to believe it was there, when He spoke to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mat 15:21–28). Where do we find a passage that records “Jesus laughed”? Yet He surely did, and most likely in what appeared to be the most hostile confrontations with His enemies (see Psa 2:1–4).

When Jesus says to His intimate disciples “*My joy*,” I have to believe He was speaking of a quality of His life they had observed and marveled at repeatedly. The Scriptures assure us that His life was filled with a heavenly delight and joy (Psa 40:6–8; Heb 10:5–7, 12:2). It was something unique about His life that they had observed, pondered, and hungered for.

2. Things Old and New

“Behold, I make all things new.” Rev 21:5

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is the bridge between Old and New Testament truth. In His first major discourse, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), the Lord interpreted all the Law, and brought all previous revelation to its original intent and meaning.

Then, in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25), He confirms the prophecies of His Second Advent, and the conditions of the Tribulation leading up to it. This message is a link between the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Finally, in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17), the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for His coming departure. But, much more than this, in these five chapters, He laid the groundwork for the remainder of the New Testament record. Every doctrine of the epistles is grounded in this last message of Jesus.

3. New Provision for a New People

As indicated above, every truth contained in the epistles is anticipated, and given in seed form, in the Upper Room. The promise of the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Joh 14:16–18, 26–27, 15:26–27, 16:7–14), making possible the

fulfillment of the “*new commandment*” (Joh 13:34–35), is all new revelation—for a new age. Not only will the Lord’s departure bring the coming of the Holy Spirit, but the day of Pentecost would usher in the Church Age.

The identifying mark of the Church, made up of every believer in Jesus Christ, would be the fruit of the Spirit, “*Love, joy, peace ...*” (Gal 5:22–23). These are the qualities we find in the record of the early church in the Book of Acts. In these gifts brought by His Spirit, we see the fulfillment of the longing of the prophets:

*“The Spirit of the LORD GOD is upon Me ...
“To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isa 61:1, 3*

With the virgin birth and the coming of the Savior, the joy of Heaven invaded a dark and mournful world. It was joy—the unique possession of God Himself, not judgment—that Jesus brought into this world. Consider the angelic announcement to the shepherds:

*“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.
For there is born to you this day in the city of David
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luk 2:10–11*

The “*good tidings*” is what we call “the Gospel,” the “good news.” And the effect of the good news, received and believed, is “*great joy*.” One cannot help but wonder what has happened to the people of God since that announcement was made. There seems to be little of either “good news” or “*great joy*” among those who profess to believe in Him! Perhaps this explains why the impact of the Church of Jesus Christ on our world is so minimal.

“For the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Neh 8:10

4. Spiritual Sickness and Pseudo-Joy

If spiritual strength is the product of “*the joy of the Lord*,” then it follows that the joyless believer is spiritually anemic. Just as bad as the lack of joy, is the phony hyped-up emotionalism of the modern church. Such superficial and entertainment-induced euphoria will never stand the test of afflictions and persecutions. Biblical joy is a deep-rooted optimism and anticipation based on the conviction that God is at work in this evil world to bring all things to the fulfillment of His wise and perfect plan (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28; Eph 1:9–11).

To the child of God who lives by the conviction of God’s Word, and in the power of His Spirit, there is a powerful and abiding assurance that the “*all things*” from which God will bring “*the good*” includes even the evils, trials, and heartaches of life. Knowing the end of the story lets us in on the great secret of God’s joy. All things, both good and bad will, in the end, work for His glory and for our eternal blessing

and reward in His kingdom. The very worst the world has to throw at us only enhances the very best He has waiting for us. Surely this was what Jesus hinted at, when He said to His disciples on that last night together:

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.” Joh 16:20

The author of Psalm 126 spoke of the return from the exile, saying, *“Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing”* (Psa 126:2). If the return from Babylon was such a joyful event, what do you suppose our entrance into His eternal kingdom will be? And since we are already citizens of that kingdom (Phi 3:20), shouldn't we now bear the banner of that heavenly homeland before this tear-stained world?

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Rom 14:17

5. Application

We have all seen the damage done by those who follow a joyless religion. I cannot call it faith, for true faith brings spiritual joy (Rom 5:11; Gal 5:22). The absence of joy is often the indicator that we have ceased trusting and started trying in our own strength. In the same way, when we are consciously living in His presence, there will be an undertone of joy—even in times of trial (Rom 5:3; Phi 4:4; 1Th 1:6, 5:16; Jam 1:2)!

IV. Conclusions and Applications

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong, Let all that you do be done with love.” 1Co 16:13–14

This wonderful passage gives us five commands by which to reach the objectives of this study:

1. Vigilance. We must not only be alert to error and evil, but must preempt the wiles of the devil by being alert to our daily intake and application of the Word of God. The word *gregoreo* speaks of habitual alertness. Vigilance suggests the knowledge that there is an active resistance in the spiritual realm to knowing and doing the will of God; and this expectation gives rise to diligent preparation.
2. Steadfastness. Here we have a word used by the Roman military, *histemi/steko*, that indicated a refusal to retreat. Spiritual retreat is one of the greatest threats to every believer (see Gal 3:1–3, 5:1–7; Heb 3:12–14, 5:11–14, 10:38–39). We must adopt a “no retreat/no surrender” mentality, determining to “*stand fast*” for the duration of the fight.

3. Spiritual Courage. Actually, the phrase “*be brave*” in the original, *andrizomai*, means “be manly/play the man.” In the ancient world, the chief virtue connected with this word was courage. In the Greek version of the Old Testament (called *LXX*, or *Septuagint*), the word occurs in Jos 1:6, 7, and 9. The unique quality of spiritual courage is that it is not based on confidence in our ability, but rather conviction of God’s almighty power and faithfulness. Consider Heb 13:5–6.
4. Strength. The root of the word *kratos* is related to the verb to “*hold fast*” (see Rev 3:11). However, here it is in the passive voice, meaning that we are to “receive strength/be made strong.” The indwelling Spirit of God is the source of our strength, using God’s Word in our souls to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:1–2; 2Co 3:17–18). This requires our submission to and dependence on the Spirit to work, in and through us, what is pleasing to the Father (Phi 2:12–13).
5. Love. Here we come to the epitome of spiritual development, and the most misunderstood and misrepresented facet of the spiritual life. Most often presented in terms of maudlin sentimentality or pacifism, spiritual love, as produced by the Spirit (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22), is neither. To be compelled by the love of Christ (2Co 5:14–15) produces a Christ-like life of courage, sacrifice, and forceful combat against evil.

Such was the life of the Apostle Paul (2Co 11:23–33). The phrase “*let ... be done*” comes from one word *ginomai*, which speaks of a process, the middle voice implying that this is cooperative between the believer and the Spirit. While the first four commands all speak of what the Spirit of God does within us by way of preparation, this last command indicates the external effect.

Inner transformation leads to outer influence and impact. The love of Christ always exalts the will and Word of the Father against all opposition—often to the offense of well-meaning but misguided friends and family (Mat 12:46–50; Mar 5:17–20; Joh 13:36–38, 21:20–23).

Living in the power of the love of God is the most difficult, misunderstood, and courageous thing any man can do. Strange as it seems, love of this kind comes only through sufferings, and it is the cause and nature of the sufferings that make it genuine.

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1Pe 5:10–11