

Temples and Tithing

A Look At Old Testament Practices Today

By John Edmiston

Introduction

When I was studying my Bachelor of Divinity we were set the essay question "What is the authority of the laws, precepts and principles of the Old Testament in the life of the Spirit-filled believer" (or words to that effect). That question was a time bomb! It got me researching and thinking and asking questions and years later I too have set it to my students. Now I am writing a book about it.

This actually started out as a book on tithing - because of my grave concern at the way tithing sermons regularly misuse Scripture. The book soon expanded as I realized that the problem was more than just tithing. Similar errors were being committed in a wholesale manner in many other areas of church life. I'll still be using tithing as my starting point partly because as soon as I talk on this topic someone soon asks "but what about tithing". Also because it focuses the argument around a practical and controversial point just as Martin Luther used the sale of indulgences as a springboard into Romans and justification by faith.

I am deeply troubled by the way the distinction between law and gospel has been blurred by so many of today's preachers. Proper systematic interpretation of the Scriptures has been replaced by a homogenizing of the OT and NT. The sharp differences between the two covenants and why there was a need for a New Covenant in the first place seems lost in much pulpit preaching and church practice. There seems to be a prevailing cynicism towards theology, commentaries and good hermeneutics and a feeling that "if it's in the Bible I can preach it".

Preachers are imposing rules on their congregations without regard to what the rest of Scripture, particularly the gospels and the epistles reveal about that topic. Along with this we have seen a resurrection of what can only be called "Christian superstition". A revived concern with holy days, vegetarianism, curses and blessings and even "Christian astrology" and numerology. Much of this comes from still thinking that we are in the OT era with its very different way of spiritual operation. However I don't want this book to be all negative. As well as demonstrating the folly and perils of imposing the Old on the New I would like to point out the wisdom, glory and wonder of what God has done in Christ.

Now I'd like to say straight out that I value the Old Testament. It's "the Bible Jesus read" as Phillip Yancey says. I also want to say that I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture in the original manuscripts and its authority and inspiration for the Christian. That's my starting point. However I believe that Scripture contains within it some very valuable clues about how it should be interpreted and how much of the Old Testament - if any - is binding on Christians today.

So yes, this is a book about tithing and Christian finances but it's also a book about circumcision, diets, the Sabbath, festivals and rules in general. Above all it's a book about Jesus and what He has done for us on the cross. You should come out of it with a very clear understanding of the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament, law and

grace, faith and works and a powerful appreciation of the amazing yet radical nature of the gospel.

The Relationship Of The Spirit-Filled Believer To The Old Covenant And Its Laws and Practices.

This chapter is a very brief tour of the topic that takes up the rest of the book and lays some foundations for all that follows

The Spirit-filled believer is not under the Law

The terms used are absolute. The New Testament is unequivocal about it. We have been separated from the authority of the Old Covenant in the most radical of ways. The believer has died to the Law (Romans 7:4) is discharged from the Law (Romans 7:6) and is set free from the Law - (Romans 8:1-6). The Law and its demands have been nailed to the cross and taken out of the way. (Colossians 2:13-15)

(Rom 7:6 NRSV) But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

The Law does not make us righteous but serves to convict us of sin. It is, at best a tutor to lead us to Christ. Once it has done its job of convicting us of sin and leading us to Christ it is finished with.

(Rom 3:20 NKJV) Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

(Rom 7:7 NRSV) What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

(Gal 3:19 NRSV) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

(Gal 3:24-26 NRSV) Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

Observance of the Law cannot perfect the Spirit-filled believer in holiness. It is never faith + law but from faith to faith.

(Heb 7:19 NRSV) (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God.

(Gal 3:1-5 NKJV) O foolish Galatians!... This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?..Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?;

(Gal 2:16 NRSV) yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

(Gal 5:4-6 NRSV) You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

We are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus and as sons and heirs we enjoy a freedom that is based on direct relationship with our heavenly Father and not on religious fear and punctilious observance of detailed religious regulations.

We are not given a spirit of fear and slavery but of freedom - (Romans 8:14-21) and are not to live in fear and dread of spirits, taboos and legal observances but rather to live in joyous relationship with our "Abba Father". This freedom is an essential part of the gospel and is not to be compromised as Paul says it is for freedom that Christ has set us free, we are not to be subject again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1-11)

This freedom is the responsible freedom of sons. We sons of God through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26) and we are also sons of Abraham through faith. (Galatians 3:6-9) as sons we are disciplined for righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-13). We do not live under a yoke of fear as slaves do but in a disciplined but essentially loving Father-Son relationship of great freedom.

The Law as a system of religious observances required for righteousness has been torn down by Christ and if we rebuild it we are labeled transgressors. (Galatians 2:15-21) Some of the things (both Jewish and Gentile) that are no longer required or effective for righteousness include:

The entire burden of the law of Moses including circumcision, diet and all the miscellaneous Laws. (Acts 15: 5-29, 1 Corinthians 7:17-19, Galatians 5:1-11). Observance of days, months, seasons and years (Gal 4:9-11). New moons, festivals, or Sabbaths. (Gal 2:16, Heb 4:1-11). Matters of food or drink (Galatians 2:16, Rom 14:1-6, Mk 7:18-23). Paying religious taxes (Matthew 17:24-28). The offering of animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:12-18). The Aaronic priesthood / human mediators (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). Ritual washings and cleansings. (Matthew 15:1-20). Categories of clean and unclean foods and clean and unclean persons. (Acts chapters 10,11 and 15) Taboos such as don't handle, don't taste, don't touch! (Col 2:20-23) Severe treatment of the body (Colossians 2:20-23) Worship of angels, mysticism, visions (Colossians 2:18) Self-abasement, self-imposed piety, an exaggerated humility (Col 2:18-20) Imposed celibacy - forbidding marriage (1 Timothy 4:3) Compulsory abstaining from foods (1 Timothy 4:3)

We will spend most of this book looking at the outworking of these practical details in the Christian life.

Those who seek to reinstate the Law or even some of its more major observances as means of attaining righteousness are in big trouble they are:

Transgressors (Galatians 2:15-21)

Under a curse. (Galatians 3:10)

In danger of losing their salvation (Galatians 4:9-11)

Cut off from Christ and have fallen from grace. (Gal 5:1-11)

Preaching another gospel and anathema (Gal 1:6-9)

Some of the most severe language in the New testament is used here and the chapter on holiness will explore why Paul was so concerned about a little bit of circumcision and a few feast days.

We are under a new agreement with a holy God who places His laws in our hearts and we are to be holy as He is holy. Our obedience is not to of the letter but of the Spirit. We are not in obedience to laws on stone tablets but to the Holy Spirit who writes the law on our hearts. We are to use grace as a means of attaining perfection and holiness, not as a license to sin. We fulfill the law by obeying the royal law of love in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(2 Cor 3:6 NRSV) who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The new covenant is more glorious than the old - (2 Cor 3:16-18)and brings life and liberty (2 Corinthians 3:16-18). It operates through personal knowledge of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and transforms the believer from glory to glory - (2 Corinthians 3:17,18).

The new covenant is written on our hearts - (Hebrews 8:10-12)and in contrast to the performance based Old Covenant it is a covenant of forgiveness of sins.(Hebrews 8:12). However this does not allow us to be slack. The new covenant is holier in that is made in the blood of Jesus Christ - not the blood of bulls and goats and therefore it must be treated much more carefully - (Hebrews 10:29) Grace is given to lead us to righteousness not to allow us to sin - (Romans 6:1-23, 8:1-14)

The Holy Spirit is our teacher under the new covenant - (1 John 2:20,27, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, John 14:26, Matthew 23:8) and if we love one another in the power of the Holy Spirit we will fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law. (Romans 13:8-10, Matt 22:37-40)

The new covenant is superior to the old conferring upon Spirit-filled believers far greater privileges, status and responsibilities. (Matthew 11:11-13, Eph 2:4-10, Heb 12:18-29)

The Law is holy, righteous and good and useful for instruction in righteousness provided we use a Christo-centric hermeneutic. It is useful for unbelievers to convict them.

We can't just throw the Old Testament away. It is still useful for teaching and for instruction in righteousness (1 Timothy 1:8-11, Matthew 5:17, Romans 7:12, 2 Timothy 3:16). However it is primarily a tool for evangelism to convict unbelievers of God's standards and how far they fall short. It is a tutor to lead us to Christ. It is useful for "murderers and slave-traders" as Paul tells Timothy. It is also "the Bible Jesus read" and Paul uses it constantly in his epistles however he interprets it according to the gospel revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore we must pass the OT through the cross and not impose its observances on Spirit-filled believers but learn its principles.

However this chapter probably raises as many "but what about" questions as it has just answered and the rest of the book will seek to answer them. First of all we have to look at how the Old Covenant operated using blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. To bring it to a point of understanding I will use tithing as the practical example as we often hear it preached as a source of blessing. Please read on..

Tithes, Curses and Blessings.

This chapter addresses the questions - "Do blessings and curses from God operate in the lives of Spirit-filled believers today? And are Christians blessed if they do tithe and cursed if they do not tithe?"

The simple answer is "No". Curses finished at the cross and we have all the blessings we want "In Christ" - not through tithing. Now for the explanation.

Firstly - what is a curse or a blessing? Blessings are a lot more than "nice words" and curses are a lot more than mere angry outbursts. Blessings and curses affect the very fabric of life itself. They can and do last for centuries. A "curse" is a lot more than a natural consequence. When Canaan was cursed as a result of Ham's sin it was not just an insult he received - it meant a destiny of national annihilation and the Canaanites were later totally wiped out. Curses and blessings result from the fact that the material realm has as its substrate the spiritual realm and a small change in the spiritual has massive consequences in the material. If you look at Genesis 1-3 you see the beginnings of blessings and curses

Blessings

Blessings are God tilting the order of Creation in our favor. This is illustrated in the very first blessing in the Bible when God blesses the fish and the birds on the fifth day of Creation:

(Genesis 1:22 NKJV) And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

Be fruitful means that your efforts produce good desired outcomes. It is the opposite of barrenness and sterility. Fruitfulness is being able to produce, being able to perform as you desire and to bring forth that which is within you in a pleasing and satisfying way.

And multiply means that the outcomes are exponential not additive- It is like reproduction where 2 give birth to 4 which then create 8 then 16 then 32 then 64 then 128 etc. Each stage multiplying the next by a factor of two. It is constant exponential growth.

Later on the Lord blessed Mankind:

(Genesis 1:28 NKJV) Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

To mankind God adds the blessing of dominion over "every living thing that moves on the earth" on top of the basic blessing of "be fruitful and multiply". This is to be supernaturally placed at the head of others like Adam was over the animals. Adam wasn't stronger than the lions or the dinosaurs but he was made their Head. When Israel obeyed God it would be "the

head and not the tail" and when it disobeyed it would be "the tail and not the head". (Deut 28). Daniel 4&5 show that God gives dominion to whoever he chooses.

(Daniel 4:17, 25 NKJV) 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'....They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

Dominion is the highest of the blessings and the blessing "you shall possess the gates of your enemies" was only given to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac. (Gen 22) The opposite of dominion is humiliation and oppression which was particularly the fate of nations that oppressed or betrayed Israel e.g the Amalekites, Babylon and Moab.

So we see that "blessing" in its basic form contains three elements:

Be Fruitful: not barren, be able to produce good and perfect things, the ability to be a blessing to others. To bear fruit that is good .. Joy, Hope.

Multiply: grow exponentially, don't be static or grow by mere addition, explode into the world.

Have Dominion Over: have authority, be in control and command, rule over, be at the top.

Let's see how this is reflected in God's blessings to Abraham in Genesis 17 &22:

(Genesis 17:3-8 NKJV) Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: {4} "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. {5} "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. {6} "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. {7} "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. {8} "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Here Abraham is told of great fruitfulness. "I will make you exceedingly fruitful". Abraham would produce great things. He would be a "father of many nations", nations and kings would come from him. He would also be given a land - which by implication would be a source of fruitfulness.

Then in Chapter 22

(Genesis 22:15-18 NKJV) Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, {16} and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; {17} "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. {18} "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Abraham is told that his descendants will be multiplied as the stars of the heaven they shall possess the gates of their enemies - they would have dominion. So we see the three elements of great blessing are fruitfulness, multiplication and dominion.

Curses

Curses involve almost the exact reverse of blessings. Curses involve barrenness, futility and difficulty in conception instead of fruitfulness, limits and frustration instead of multiplication and humiliation and insignificance instead of dominion. , Let's look at Genesis and study the first curses uttered by God.

(Genesis 3:14-19 NKJV) So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. {15} And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." {16} To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." {17} Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. {18} Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. {19} In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

Satan is humiliated, the woman is afflicted with difficulty in conception and Adam is subjected to limits and frustration.

Curses are judgments of God that affect the future of the person (or animal - such as the serpent) in an ongoing way until they are revoked or lifted . They dramatically affect conditions and lower productivity dooming the person cursed to toil, pain, defeat, humiliation and frustration.

Thus we see that blessings lead to "be fruitful and multiply" while cursing leads to situations of toil, pain and a meaningless existence. Cain is cursed by being made a wanderer on the earth while Jacob is blessed with the fat of the land.

Because God is Spirit and His Word upholds Creation then what He says in the spiritual realm affects the whole fabric of the material realm which depends on the spiritual for its very existence. The utter dependence of Creation on God is beautifully illustrated in Psalm 104 - here are just a few verses:

(Psalms 104:28-30 NKJV) What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. {29} You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. {30} You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

The Blessings and Curses Of The Law

The Jews "signed off" on the Old Covenant at Mt. Sinai - they undertook an agreement with God which stipulated great blessings for obedience and terrible curses for disobedience. These blessings and curses are listed in Deuteronomy chapters 26-28. The blessings and curses were

material and included things such as wealth and health and possession of the land of Israel.

The prophet Haggai shows us how this affected human affairs when the Jews became slack and self-centered in their faith and chose to build their own houses rather than rebuild the temple and how obedience moved them from a situation of cursing to a situation of blessing

(Haggai 1:3-12 NKJV) Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, {4} "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" {5} Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! {6} "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." {7} Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! {8} "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. {9} "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. {10} "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. {11} "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

The people listened to Haggai and began to obey and when the foundation of the Temple was laid then the curse was lifted.

(Haggai 2:15-19 NKJV) 'And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD; {16} 'since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. {17} 'I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the LORD. {18} 'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid; consider it: {19} 'Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.'"

So we see that throughout the Old Testament the system was that God would bless us - that is tilt Creation in our favor so that life became easy and fruitful - if we obeyed and curse us - so that life became miserable and woeful and plagued and meaningless - if we disobeyed. It was like He was training a child with a very direct series of rewards and punishments.

The "training" culminated not in an age of blessing but with famine and sword and expulsion to Babylon. The experiment failed. Human nature was found to be so deeply sinful that the best laws, good kings, powerful prophets and a direct system of curses and blessings failed to keep it in line.

Tithing, Curses and Blessings

Part of this failed Old Covenant was tithing and the blessings and curses associated with it are explained in Malachi - a prophet who came along after Haggai to address the same problem of spiritual lethargy.

(Malachi 3:8-13 NKJV) "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. {9} You are cursed with a curse, For you

have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. {10} Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. {11} "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; {12} "And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

Thus there was a curse for "robbing God" breaking the covenant stipulations which they had signed off on. This curse involved lower agricultural production (verse 11) and the blessing was unfailing fruitfulness. The end result was that the physical land of Israel would be a "delightful land". However does this contract, this arrangement of blessings and curses for tithing, still apply to Christians?

The New Contract

There has been a change of covenant or agreement with God. The Old Covenant was physical, material and performance based. The New Covenant is spiritual and based on grace received through faith. There are no curses stipulated in the New Covenant. It is a covenant for the "forgiveness of sins" - not their direct punishment. It is a covenant where all the curses due to us have been borne by Jesus Christ on the cross.

(Galatians 3:10-15 NKJV) For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." {11} But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." {12} Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." {13} Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), {14} that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

We are redeemed from the curse of the Law. The curses that came for not following what the Law says (verse 10 above). We are redeemed from all these curses including the curses for not tithing. If we are redeemed from it then Jesus Christ has paid the price, there is absolutely NO ground for any curse to alight. We are free. There are no curses on Christians if they do not tithe.

What about blessings for tithing? Why did Christ become a curse for us "that the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". Blessings in the New Covenant are not received through law-keeping but through faith. As we saw earlier, because of our sinful nature law-keeping does not work, we only end up under the curse for law-breaking "for as many as are the works of the law are under a curse". Works of law only end up in condemnation not justification. A new way to be blessed had to be found - the way of Abraham - the way of faith.

Ephesians 1:3 is an astonishing and mind-boggling verse:

(Ephesians 1:3 NKJV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

It's past tense- we already have received "every spiritual blessing"! It's total "EVERY spiritual blessing". Its exalted" in the heavenly places". It's Christ-centered" in Christ". We have the blessings of Abraham through faith and all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms through being in Christ Jesus.

Tithing simply cannot add to those blessings. Law-keeping such as tithing cannot reach half-way. Performance and sacrifices are out as means of blessing. Tithing, sacrificing, law-keeping and spiritual performances in the Temple are Old Covenant and no longer apply for attaining righteousness which is the source of all true blessing. Let me explain that last phrase a bit more.

Blessing is God's favor resting on your life. To have God's favor you have to be in right standing with God. You have to be righteous. The Jews valued righteousness because it brought blessing from a holy God. "According to my righteousness you have rewarded me" is a common theme in Psalms for instance. (Psalms 18:20 NKJV) The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.

Under the Old Covenant blessings would come to the righteous and punishment and cursing to the wicked. A God who blessed the wicked or who failed to reward the righteous was unthinkable. Tithing was a righteous act which brought favor and blessing. This is still taught in Judaism today.

In Christ however we receive our righteousness - in fact we receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself - through faith, and not through the performing of righteous acts such as tithing. Because we have the very righteousness of Christ we also receive the blessings appropriate to that level of righteousness - "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms". We have Christ's righteousness and Christ's blessings through faith and therefore we do not need to tithe in order to be blessed.

The Christian life is "from faith to faith" we are blessed because of our faith and we appropriate those blessings by faith - no by performing works of merit such as tithing. The Galatians tried to add works of merit (in this case circumcision) to faith and this is the response they got from the apostle Paul.

(Galatians 3:1-5 NKJV) O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? {2} This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? {3} Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? {4} Have you suffered so many things in vain; if indeed it was in vain? {5} Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?;

Paul's challenge to the Galatians "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" is very appropriate to tithing. We don't go up a notch as a Christian by tithing. We are not perfected by the flesh - by works of merit, by works of the law. Miracles do not occur by works of the law - but by "hearing with faith". Hebrews says' for the law made nothing perfect". (Hebrews 7:19) So if the entire law made nothing perfect, one segment of it, - tithing certainly will not perfect you!

Righteousness is from God , in Christ, through faith. Therefore blessing, which in a just world

must be based on righteousness, is from God, in Christ, through faith.

Magical Tithing

Tithing is practiced by groups such as the Mormons, followers of Maitreya, and most New Age cults. Just do a search under "tithing" on the Google search engine and you will find DOZENS of cults sites listing tithing as a way of manipulating spiritual forces to give the person wealth and happiness. Tithing is taught as a mechanism that "releases blessings" to the giver. The money is sometimes called "seed money" and as this is "sown" financial prosperity grows and funds are eventually "harvested". Mostly tithing is seen as a "law" that operates like karma. You do good and good will come back to you. You give to the cult and you will be made wealthy by the Universe, God, or Life Force.

Such false teachers use a principle sometimes called "ex opere operato". This means that the mechanism works by itself. The operation is efficacious whether or not the person doing it has any righteousness whatsoever. By this principle tithing is a "law" and will work for everyone independent of their character. Tithe and the windows of heaven will be opened automatically and the finances you give away will be a seed of great prosperity to follow. This causes people to say things like "I believe in tithing.." with great passion. They are believing in a mechanism, a law. Give some away and more will come back. However they are not necessarily believing in a personal God. While they are "believing in tithing" they are not necessarily believing in Jesus. They are believing in a law or a principle not in a Person who loves them and is providing for them. This is not Christ, it is karma. It is not God, it is Mammon.

Manipulating spiritual forces to give you financial blessing without accompanying personal righteousness, or the imputed righteousness that comes from Christ, is evil and magical. It is rewarding the wicked and blessing the unrepentant. Godless people can become blessed and wealthy simply through tithing, no repentance required, no Christ-likeness needed - just money. It is a systematic denial of God's pathway to blessing through faith in Jesus Christ. Blessing that is attained apart from righteousness is attained through magic not through God. God is resolutely opposed to magic in all forms. In the end such "blessing" will bring a judgment on the person that will far outweigh any temporary financial gains.

What About The Terrific Testimonies?

Tithing websites often feature amazing testimonies of how Joe Smith started tithing and then became rich and famous. These testimonies simply say that "for them" tithing appeared to "work". Here are six reasons why you need to take such testimonies with a "grain of salt".

1. The testimonies of the people who DIDN'T see any prosperity despite faithful tithing over many years are never published.
2. Testimonies are not the same as "clinical trials" or a properly run research experiment. They are indications at best.
3. It may be an exception. To establish a principle you have to look at many cases and average them out. Look around your local church at the faithful tithing Christians. How many of them are experiencing way above average prosperity for their level of gifts and intelligence? Most Christians that tithe seem to be living average normal lives. On average the blessing from tithing seems to be about the same as that for not tithing. It's a plain fact that tithing Christians are not living in exceptional prosperity compared to

non-tithing Christians of the same ability level.

4. Testimonies may be false or exaggerated or solicited in a way that indicates that giving to "ministry X" is the sure road to blessing. Be cautious of any testimony that does not indicate that the person can be contacted for comment.

5. What else did Joe Smith do that may more rationally account for his becoming rich and famous?

6. Testimonies may be the result of personal self-delusion. This is very common with people starting a new business who see prosperity everywhere when in fact their debts and taxes are piling up. They are also common in the "I believe I am healed" testimony when in fact the person is still unwell. People are so unprepared to believe they have been ripped off that they will believe they are more prosperous than ever when in fact they are pretty average in prosperity.

Reminder

There is no blessing for tithing and no cursing for not tithing. Blessings are obtained by having faith in Christ Jesus. Curses were taken by Christ on the cross. Tithing is not magical and does not lead to prosperity in an *ex opere operato* fashion. Neither does it justify us before God. The terrific testimonies about tithing need to be taken with a grain of salt.

Curses and Blessings and OT Practices

What applies to tithing applies to the other OT practices. There are no curses for eating pork for instance and no blessing for being circumcised - which was a big issue in the early church. Let's hear what Paul said about people who tried to add OT practices onto faith in order to be blessed. It's in chapter 3 of Galatians:

(Galatians 3:1-5 NKJV) O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? {2} This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? {3} Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? {4} Have you suffered so many things in vain; if indeed it was in vain? {5} Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?;

(Galatians 3:10-14 NKJV) For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." {11} But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." {12} Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." {13} Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), {14} that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Thus Paul is saying that OT practices CANNOT add anything to faith. Having begun in the Spirit we cannot be perfected by the flesh - that is by rituals such as Sabbath keeping, circumcision or tithing. Not only that but the law places under the curses of Deuteronomy 28 and makes us live a "performance-based" spiritual life in which we are sure to fail. In fact

striving to be blessed by the law places us under a curse! Paul gets even more vehement a few chapters later:

(Galatians 5:1-4 NKJV) Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. {2} Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. {3} And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. {4} You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

In this very blunt warning to the Galatian Christians Paul spells out the danger of trying to get right with God by performing OT practices. You can't just take one practice in isolation Paul says - if you get circumcised you have to keep the whole law - and you can't do that - you will fall under its curses! Not only that but Christ will profit you nothing, you will be estranged from Christ and you will have fallen from grace. Paul calls such compulsory OT practices a "yoke of bondage".

The Paradox

So here is the paradox - if we seek to gain blessing by external actions such as Sabbath keeping, circumcision, keeping feast days, or tithing we are estranged from Christ and under a curse!

The Stoichea (Measured Out Things)

The key concept in this chapter is the "stoichea" often translated as the "elemental things" in modern translations but probably better translated 'the measured out things'. This latter usage is retained in Chemistry where "stoichiometry" is the ratio between elements in compounds - the art of balancing equations. The stoichea are the measured out "abc" building blocks of the spiritual realm.

The BIG difference between OT and NT is the end of the "stoichea". The end of having to have a faith that is measured out, regulated and precise. In the OT everything was precisely allocated. Judah lived in this bit of land, Simeon over there, only people from Levi could be priests, this bit of temple furniture went here, the other over there, behind the curtain was certain death, this food was clean, that was unclean etc.

The cross ended that "measured -out-ness" and we can now move the church furniture and eat pork and lobster. To us that seems very ordinary but it was a revolution back then. In fact it was one of the hardest lessons the early church had to learn. There were no more add-ons, no circumcision, no taboos, no lists, no 613 laws.

The "stoichea" - the taboo things, the measured out things, were spiritually enforced and a certain dread and awe accompanied them. People had fear and trembling about them and would say "You CAN'T do that." The stoichea were enforced by angelic beings in Judaism and demonic beings in Gentile religions (more on that soon). For instance if you intruded on the temple of Diana of the Ephesians and broke her taboos you were in great danger. For a fascinating read try the Idylls of Theocritus which is filled with the dread of breaking minor taboos e.g a shepherd would never play his pan-pipes at noon as Pan rested then and to wake him would arouse the god's wrath and cause great harm.

Taboos ruled the life of Jews and Gentiles alike. Quite a few times in the NT we hear the

phrase about "the law that came through angels" e.g.

(Acts 7:53 NRSV) You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."

(Galatians 3:19 NRSV) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. The role of angels in enforcing the taboos is shown in:

(Exodus 23:20-21 NKJV) "Behold, I send an angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. {21} "Beware of him and obey his voice; do not provoke him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in him.

This even applied to where they should go to the toilet!

(Deuteronomy 23:12-15 NKJV) "Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; {13} "and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse. {14} "For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.

These verses imply that God would turn away from them if they did not cover up their excreta! Full relationship was very conditional. It was a world of regulations, taboos, and limitations.

The main religious systems are "angelic" in origin. Both angels and demons operate in similar ways because, before the Fall, they were the same category of creature. The pagan religions had temples, and priests and tithes and taboos, and festivals and laws and ceremonies etc - and so did the Jewish religion. They had very similar modus operandi because they were both under the angelic (good or fallen) realm and its dominion. Everyone was a slave of the system from the High Priest to a commoner and the system was run by spiritual beings who inspired dread and awe. In the New Testament the authority of the angelic and demonic realm over human beings is broken. A key concept here is the "heavenly realms" and our new place in them so I will take a paragraph or two to explain that.

Heaven is a plural word in fact it should be "heavens" because there are at least three levels to Heaven. Paul in 2 Cor 12 ascends to the "third heaven" and heard mysteries from God. The angels in Revelation fly in mid-heaven or the Second Heaven which is also where the great battle with Satan takes place. The first heaven is where the "birds of the heaven" fly . Satan started out in the Third Heaven as a guardian cherub then was "cast down" to the second heaven (Isaiah 28). During the ministry of the disciples Jesus saw another fall "Satan fell from heaven like lightning" this was further enforced by the cross and resurrection and by the time Ephesians was written Satan was now "prince of the power of the air" down another notch. Satan tries to move up back from the first to the second heavens and a great battle against Michael and the angels takes place in Revelation 12 . Satan loses his place in the first heaven and is "cast down to earth" where he incarnates as the Anti-Christ in Revelation 13. After Christ returns he is taken down a notch further and cast into the Pit. After 1000 years Satan again tries to claw his way back into the heavenly realms and comes to earth to deceive the nations and Armageddon takes place then Satan has his final downfall into the lake of fire. So we see that there are multiple levels to the spiritual realms and spiritual beings can move up and down between them but God is ultimately in charge of who goes where.

After His resurrection Christ ascended "through the heavenly realms" and we ascended with Him and are placed in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6) and there we receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3) and can wrestle against the very same powers and principalities that once dominated life (Ephesians 6:10-18). Captivity (domination by spirits and their taboos) is taken captive and spiritual gifts are lavishly distributed (Ephesians 4:10-12). A clear sign of the change in status is the common casting out of demons by Christians. This did not happen in the OT because we were under the angelic realms. We can do it easily in the NT because we are over the angelic and demonic realm. One day we shall judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3) and they are our servants now (Heb 1:14). Their power over us has been broken.

Along comes Jesus and breaks the power of the spiritual beings on the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). He introduces a new way of being where no-one is a slave of the system any more. Taboos are gone and so is fear and dread. Our position in the spiritual realms is so high and the power of taboos so completely broken that we are "dead" to any requirements to live by superstition and taboo.

(Colossians 2:20-23 NKJV) {20} Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world (the stoichea), why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; {21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," {22} which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? {23} These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Attempts to reintroduce the stoichea aroused such great concern in Paul that it caused him to accuse people of apostasy over things that at first may seem to us to be minor such as observing a religious calendar. He saw such things as placing us back under the authority of minor spiritual beings such as angels and demons.

(Galatians 4:8-11 NKJV) But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. {9} But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements (the stoichea), to which you desire again to be in bondage? {10} You observe days and months and seasons and years. {11} I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

We can see that Paul saw "observing days and months and years" as so grievous that it involved enslavement to "those who are not gods" and "bondage" and he was "afraid for them" lest they had become apostate. Letting traditions and ceremonies and Sabbaths and diets govern life was a huge backward step.

It was stepping out from the heavenly realms where we were placed in Christ and back under angelic or demonic dominion. It was spiritual disaster. In Colossians when Paul writes of Christ's triumph over the demonic powers he notes that it had, as its first and foremost outcome, release from having to observe dietary regulations and feast days!

(Colossians 2:15-17 NKJV) Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. {16} So let no-one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, {17} which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

We are not to live in the "shadows" - of ritual observances but in the reality which is Christ. To the Greeks this was a striking analogy to Plato's cave illustration where a person chained (for life) to a cave wall and looking away from the entrance saw all reality as shadows cast upon the wall by the fire. Pagan or Jewish religion is just these shadows - the substance is Christ. Thus Paul pits stoichea-enslaved religion against Spirit-empowered Christianity.

This even applies to the "good bits" of the Old Covenant. As we saw in the last chapter to observe ANY of the practices of the Old Covenant was to place one's self under a curse and cut oneself off from Christ. (Galatians 3:10-14, 5:1-4) The old religious system of stoichea operated via "curses" for disobedience and "blessings" for obedience. When the Jews agreed to the Law at Sinai they also agreed to the curses and blessings that were listed in Deut 26-28. However Christ put an end to curses for disobedience (Galatians 3:10-14) and gave us every spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3, Romans 8:31-32). Therefore under the new Way in Christ there are no taboos, no curses and no striving for blessings. The old religious system is killed stone dead.

The New Way is not the way of effort and earning but the way of faith and trusting. It is no longer "if I am good and keep the rules God will bless me" but it becomes "as long as I abide in His love I am abundantly blessed".

To summarize :Religion is bondage to the stoichea and systems. It's being a servant of a system ruled by a spirit. Christianity is sonship, freedom and Spirit-led and joyous. There is NO system. There is only faith worked out in love. Praise the Lord!

To wind up this chapter let's look at a few observations and questions for further discussion.

1. When we create taboos in church we are re-instituting the yoke of bondage of the stoichea. According to Galatians that seriously imperils the salvation of people. It is in fact "anathema".
2. When we teach that ANY part of the old Jewish law is binding on believers we imperil them - and that includes Sabbath keeping, tithing and religious festivals.
3. Christmas, Easter and Sunday worship are not required of believers in fact their current form is a carry-over from the stoichea. All feasts days, religious calendars, days, months, seasons and years -not just those on the dates of ancient pagan festivals - are "stoichea".
4. Church formalism with spiritual overtones is "stoichea". This includes robes, furnishings etc where such formalities are given clear spiritual overtones. If you like robes - wear them, there is nothing wrong with that per se. However if you have to have a robe on before you can minister - then that is "stoichea" - subjecting yourself to elemental things. That would be going back to the days of Aaron, high priestly garments and immovable furnishings. It is nothing like Jesus ministering to a hill full of people or Phillip sharing the gospel in a moving chariot in the desert.
5. There is no blessing for tithing or cursing for not tithing. We give freely as God leads. If you have a release of conscience when the coin drops into the bag or plate you have put yourself under the stoichea and enslaved yourself to a ritual. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses your conscience not a gold coin. God's

pleasure cannot be bought, it is given freely in Christ. The fear and dread that some people experience regarding their giving is thus sub-Christian.

6. Alcohol and tobacco may be foolish, unwise and addictive but they are not spiritually unclean or taboo. This calls for wisdom. Paul told the Corinthians to be cautious around idols temples not because they were in danger spiritually but because it could mislead people into idolatry. Even the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth was not taboo and off limits spiritually - it was just the wrong place to be seen! It could hurt someone's faith. I live in a house with a recovering alcoholic therefore I do not drink. Not because it is "unclean" , taboo or unspiritual or because I will incur the wrath of some minor deity but because it would harm my house-mate and not be an act of Christian love.

7. Don't import superstitious "second heaven" principles into the Christian life which is lived above that. Some Christians read books about pagan religions and spells etc and become enamored of things like holy water and things to repel demons and sometimes make statements like "drums attract evil spirits". This may or may not be true. However it is living in fear when we have all the power we need to deal with those things in the name of Jesus Christ. We have left those pagan concepts behind. "God has not given us a spirit of fear". Canberra, the capital city of Australia was planned and laid out by Masons - yet I visit there and enjoy my visits. We don't need to run around fearing a pagan symbol on every corner. We can be grieved by it as Paul was in Athens but we do not need to be fearful of it.

8. There are no "six keys to blessing in the Christian life" - practices we have to do in order to be victorious. There is only one - faith in Jesus Christ outworked in love. We have the blessings in Him already. We have EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms (and by implication the earthly blessings that are subsumed under that) simply because we are "in Christ", "in the beloved" and with Him God freely gives us all things. In Christ we have them, by faith we appropriate them, in love we live them out. There are no "keys", no technique we must follow, no teacher that we must slavishly imitate, no denomination or particular church we must join, in order to be blessed. We are blessed, already, and completely, in Christ. Mind you it will take all eternity to plumb the depths of those wonderful blessings!

The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Part of the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is the new exalted status of the Christian saint. God has quite literally taken us "from the guttermost to the uttermost" as an act of amazing grace. We will see that many OT practices are actually inappropriate for our new status. This status came about in three stages:

1. After God forgave our sins through Christ's death on the cross. Then we died "in Him" to sin and the Law.
2. Three days later Christ rose from the dead and "in Him" we rose also to a new life available through the resurrection.
3. Forty days later Jesus ascended into the heavenly realms and we "in Him" took our places as citizens of Heaven with a new divine status granted to us by grace alone (Ephesians 2:6,7).

The consequences of the ascension of Jesus Christ are so amazing that they changed the

whole way that people prayed and worshipped God and participated in Him. Jesus took apart the heavenly realm when He ascended and removed the power of the evil principalities and powers to dominate the life of those who believed in Him (Ephesians 4:8-13, Col 2:13-13).

Furthermore He took us with Him on His journey into the heavenly realms so that the believer in Jesus Christ is now a citizen of heaven (Phillipians 3:20), a resident of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12: 22-24) and is seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) with a graciously given heavenly status that was previously impossible for any human to achieve under the Law (Matthew 11:11-13, Ephesians 2:4-10). Jesus ascension also resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39, 16:7, Acts 2:33) and the giving of spiritual gifts to the church (Ephesians 4:8-13).

Perhaps the best starting point is the purpose statement given in Ephesians by Paul. This is the "why" of the Ascension and of Pentecost.

(Eph 4:8-13 NKJV) Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." {9} (Now this, "He ascended"; what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? {10} He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) {11} And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, {13} till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Now Paul's purpose statement lists a number of reasons behind the ascension-outpouring. The ultimate reason for the ascension is that "He might fill all things"(Eph 4:10). What does he want to fill all things with? Himself! What then is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit about - filling ALL believers with Jesus! Being filled with the Spirit of Jesus is the purpose of Pentecost and the ascension.

This connects with the other great purpose expressed in this passage. That believers may come to a unity of faith and become "a perfect man" in the stature and fullness' of Christ. That is the objective we see most clearly now. To build up Christians God sovereignly gives the ability to edify His body to certain people as a gift.

On the way to do this Jesus takes "captivity captive" spoiling the demonic world of its spiritual powers. Like the conqueror He is He then distributes spiritual gifts to men. They include the five-fold ministries and the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost and the various spiritual manifestations necessary for the building up of the body of Christ. So we see that the purposes behind the ascension and Pentecost are :

- That Christ might fill all things
- That captivity would be captured.
- That spiritual gifts might be given to the church.
- Which would then become like Christ.

The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ.

Taking Captivity Captive

The following is a schematic diagram of how things were in Old Testament times. It shows how

much both Jews and Gentiles were captives. The Jews were captives under the Law and the Gentiles captives under their demonic religions. Quite obviously not everything can be fitted onto a single diagram and it is not to scale or meant to be theologically normative but it will, I hope, help us to grasp what the state of things was.

Let's look at what it is trying to tell us. There are four levels - God, the angelic realm (inhabited by both good and evil angels), mankind and creation in general. Mankind rules creation, the angelic realm is more powerful than mankind and God rules over all. It is the middle portion of the diagram that is the most interesting. We can see from Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19 that the Law was given through angels. 1 Corinthians 10:20 also tells us that the Gentile religions were the work of demons and that the worshippers worshipped demons and not God.

So we see that before Christ both Jewish and Gentile religion was under the direct control of the angelic realm. The good angels mediated the Jewish religion and the demons mediated the innumerable Gentile religions. Both systems were somewhat similar(though the Law was vastly superior) and listed in the middle of the diagram are some of the similarities. Both Jewish and Gentile religions had temples and priests and sacrifices and tithes and offerings and dietary restrictions and special days and festivals and various taboos and categories of clean and unclean things. Though the Jewish religion was much holier and more moral it operated with much the same basic external structure as the Gentile religions. They had the same externals - though the internals were very different. Judaism however did not resort to witchcraft, divination, sorcery or magic which are exclusively in the domain of Satan.

In both Colossians and Galatians Paul calls these external things - the taboos, festivals etc the "elementary principles of this world" or the "stoichea". Thus mankind in the Old Testament was ruled by religions based on the exact performance of rituals and the keeping of numerous laws and taboos. Relationship to God was through a priestly caste and involved sacrifices. Except for a very few individuals there was no ongoing relationship with God. Sin led to death which, at that stage, was under the power of the Devil (Hebrews 2:14,15). The general experience of both Jewish and Gentile believers was one of fear and bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15). All this was to change with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus' Work On The Cross, Resurrection and Ascension

Again we have a diagram - the main change being the creation of the Church and its high status in the heavenly realms.

Let's look at some of the changes and seek to explain them. Death moves out of Satan's control (Hebrews 2:14,15) into that of Jesus Christ who now has the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). The accusing power of the law over us is broken (Colossians 2:13-15) because it is nailed to the cross. Jesus has been raised up above every power and principality in the heavenly realms and we - who are "in Him" - are of course seated where He is.

(Eph 1:20-23 NKJV) which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. {22} And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, {23} which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Church contains you and I so the exaltation of the Church is the exaltation of the

believer. Thus the fact that the Church has been made to be the "fullness of Him who fills all in all" has amazing consequences for the believer. Paul continues to show how we have been raised "from the guttermost to the uttermost" ...

(Eph 2:6-7 NIV) {6} And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, {7} in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Thus we see that we have (past tense) been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (verse 6 above). This was done not because we were good but because of God's great grace which Paul calls "the incomparable riches of His grace..". Thus we have been taken from being sinners (Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-4) and made into people who are "seated in the heavenly realms". We are now given a status and authority far beyond anything we deserve so that God may show just how gracious He can be.

The new spiritual status of members of the Kingdom of God is described by Jesus as he contrasts the two eras - that of John the Baptist, the Law and the prophets and that of the Kingdom.

(Matthew 11:11-14 NASB) "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. {12} "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. {13} "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. {14} "And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.

The Law and the Prophets prophesied up until John the Baptist who was the greatest of "those born of women". Yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist! (not better than, greater than - an act of amazing grace has GIVEN us this authority) and thus greater than all the OT saints, the Law and the prophets. This makes sense if, in the OT they were "below the angelic realm" as in the diagram above and now, in Christ the Church is above the angelic realm. Consider this - in the OT no-one cast out demons. In the NT every born-again believer has that power and it is commonly reported in the gospels and Acts. Something has changed in the believer's relationship with the spirit world since Christ.

This new spiritual status of the believer, this citizenship of heaven, is absolutely central to Paul's teaching. So much so that Paul is quite astonished when Christians do not grasp that we are to rule the world and judge the angelic realm.

(1 Cor 6:2-3 NKJV) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

To Paul it is just a gospel basic that Christ has triumphed and that we share His triumph and rulership as inheritors of the Kingdom. Christ has ascended above the angelic realm and we have also done this "in Him" therefore we have been invested with an authority greater than that of the angels and will one day judge them. (Note: Authority is different from strength, Napoleon was probably not the physically strongest member of his army but he had authority. So Christians do not have the power of angels yet but we do have position and authority and the right to be in command.) Thus Christians can exorcise demons because we are now at a higher level of authority than that of the fallen angels.

Since we are above the angels we are above their systems or the "stoichea" of the last chapter. Thus Christians are not to observe taboos, festivals, days, months, years, Sabbaths, make sacrifices, or worry about tithes, offerings or priests.

In Colossians 2 the radical nature of our freedom from these "basic principles of the world" is described as a "death". Just how many responsibilities does a dead person have? None! So the Christian no longer has any obligatory responsibilities to cultural taboos, festivals, Sabbaths or dietary regulations. Paul continues..

Colossians 2:20-23 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; {21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," {22} which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? {23} These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

To put it simply all "religiosity" has been put behind us when we enter into the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Freedom

We have freedom, we do not have to live in fear as if we serve a God who will be angry over the smallest error. It's a bit like sending someone to mow the lawn and they come back nervously asking "Which blade of grass do I mow first?" and you say "Start anywhere as long as it gets done". God has given us tremendous freedom and we don't have to live in a spirit of slavery worried about getting everything "just right" - about which blade of grass to mow first. Such is the spirit of religious fear. It is akin to the pagan dread of the spirits - if the ceremony is not done "just so" then curses would come forth. The "spirit of fear" produces people who cringe before God over every tiny detail.

However with the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ that is done away with. The situation now is one of love and sonship.

(Rom 8:15-17 NKJV) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." {16} The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

We are beloved sons of God living in freedom. As sons of God, above the angels, we are going to inherit a kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world. We are heirs. In that Kingdom we will be seated on thrones with Jesus (Revelation 3:21), we will rule over the nations (Revelation 2:26,27), we will judge the world and even angels (1 Corinthians 6:2,3), we will become beings with immortal and imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:45-55) and dwell safely in amazing wealth, peace and freedom (Revelation 21 & 22). When this occurs what it means to be a "son of God" will be revealed.

At the moment it is, at best, vaguely understood. When this occurs the meaning of our being seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus will become absolutely clear. Christ will take up His authority over all creation through us and amazing changes will occur. The whole world will be

set free! Paul continues on in Romans 8 to say...

(Rom 8:18-22 NKJV) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. {19} For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. {20} For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; {21} because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Thus the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ was the critical turning point that has ensured the total freedom of all creation! Creation, now in bondage, will move into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God". God is in the business of setting all things free. He desires liberty - not cringing enslavement, for all!

However it is a two-step movement firstly there is freedom from the old religious system, our coming out from domination by the elementary principles of this world and from sin and death. Then step two is not anarchy - but having God's moral code written on our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (Hebrews 8:10) We are freed to become who we were always meant to be - righteous, holy, spirit-filled beings of love.(Galatians 5:16-24) This is the work of the Holy Spirit and why the ascension of Jesus Christ is also strongly associated with the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Ascension of Jesus Christ

(John 14:12 NKJV) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

(John 16:7 NRSV) Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

(Acts 1:4-5 NKJV) And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; {5}"for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

(Acts 2:31-33 NRSV) Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' {32} This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. {33} Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

(Acts 11:15-16 NKJV) "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. {16} "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

During the Last Supper Jesus clearly indicates that when He "went to the Father" something would happen to the disciples would enable them to do great works of power equivalent to His own (John 14:12). Later on in the upper room discourse He reveals this to be the sending of the Helper, the Holy Spirit which could only be sent after His departure.(John 16:7) In his last conversation with His disciples He termed this empowerment the baptism in the Holy Spirit

(Acts 1:4,5) and promised them they would receive it soon and that it would make them powerful international witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost it was poured out in a manner that was both visible and audible (Acts 2:32-33) and likewise during the Gentile Pentecost at Cornelius' place where it is also referred to as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit". (Acts 11:15,16)

The heavenly realms are now occupied by Jesus and since we are in Him, we have been seated with Him in these realms (Eph 2:6). Therefore we can have confident access to God and unhindered participation in the things of the Spirit with Whom we have been baptized (1 Cor 12:13). This does not mean that we all have all gifts or that all will have one particular gift. God is sovereign in how He distributes the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Cor 12:7-11) Within His sovereignty there is evidently some room for us to ask for particular manifestations of the Spirit. (Luke 11:13, 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1)

To sum up.... The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ. The Pentecost event is known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit which was received by the Jews (Acts 2:32,33), the Gentiles (Acts 11:15,16) and the Christians at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6) and Corinth (1 Cor 12:13). It is for all the Church. The outcome of the Pentecost event is power for ministry (Acts 1:8) through the Holy Spirit "coming upon" people (Acts 2:32,33) and sovereignly giving spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-7). The Holy Spirit is not a mere "experience". He is Christ coming to fill all things. (Eph 4:10,5:18) He wants to fill you with Jesus and transform you into His image. (Eph 4:8-13, Rom 8:29-31) He also wants to empower you to be a witness for God. (Acts 1:8) You may ask for Him and God will gladly give the Holy Spirit to you (Luke 11:13) (in new ways..it's a puzzle, we have Him but we can still receive His power) though you should ask for "the greater gifts" to be used in love for the edification of the church. (1Cor 12:31, 14:1)

Conclusion

The ascension of Jesus Christ to "fill all things" was the end of religion as it is generally conceived and the beginning of a Spirit-filled and joyous relationship with God. The main thing that Jesus wants to fill is you! To that end He has sent His Holy Spirit into this world to dwell in the hearts of believers sanctifying them to be like Him and empowering them to do good works. He has also created a new thing - the Church, which is distinct from the world and angels and which will rule over both. He has placed believers in the heavenly realms with Him and freed them from the innumerable fear-filled obligations of the old religious systems. He has brought us into sonship and membership of the household of God.

This church is to consist of "images of Jesus Christ" indwelt by His Spirit and living in direct personal relationship with God. Therefore there is no longer any need to observe new moons, Sabbaths, tithing, religious festivals, to have a church building, a priest, or to abstain from alcohol, red meat, pork or certain types of seafood. There is no need to be celibate, be involved in rituals of self-abasement or penance or to punish oneself. That is all gone. What has replaced it is a life that flows from being indwelt by God, a life that is characterized not by solemnity and punctilious observation of fearful rituals but by freedom and love and joy and peace.

(Gal 5:22-23 NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Sacrifices and Offerings

This chapter addresses the question "But aren't we supposed to give regular financial sacrifices and offerings to God?". The short answer to that is "No" because:

Jesus was sacrificed on our behalf as the "once for all time" sacrifice.

(Hebrews 10:12-14 NKJV) But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, {13} from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. {14} For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

The New Testament clearly indicates that the Old Testament system of sacrifices and offerings was temporary, ineffective and unsatisfactory.

(Hebrews 9:9-10 NKJV) It (the OT system) was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfecting regard to the conscience; {10} concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.(until the cross).

(Hebrews 10:1-4 NKJV) For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. {2} For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. {3} But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. {4} For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

No system of sacrifices is ever imposed on believers in the NT. The five references to sacrifices by Christian in the NT are nothing like the OT sacrificial system at all. The NT sacrifices did not involve the shedding of blood or high financial costs. The references tend to center around commitment of self to God. The things offered were:

Praise, thanksgiving, good works and sharing. (Hebrews 13:15-16 NKJV) Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. {16} But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Personal Holiness(Romans 12:1 NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Dedication To Ministry(Philippians 2:17 NKJV) Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

A One-Off Gift To Paul(Philippians 4:18 NKJV) Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Spiritual Sacrifices/Worship(1 Peter 2:5 NKJV) you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We have misunderstood the term sacrifice. In English it has two meanings (a) a holy offering to God, an act of worship (b) a costly act of renunciation. This second meaning now predominates in our language but the first meaning is far closer to what the Bible teaches. A sacrifice was primarily an act of worship just as "bringing a plate" is an act of fellowship at a pot luck supper. It's the involvement that counts more than the cost. It need not cost a great deal but it must be clean, pure and offered correctly. In the OT the Law was such that sacrifices were kept within the means of the worshipper. The poor were allowed to sacrifice just a couple of pigeons. Many of the sacrifices were quite trivial such as a cup of wine poured out for a libation or some grain. (See any good Bible Dictionary for further detail).

It's not the cost that matters to God but the quality and the purity and the obedience that is involved. The sacrifice of Christ was effective because He was sinless and because of His quality as God's Son. Certainly it was costly and precious but it would have been totally ineffective if Jesus had sinned even once. The purity was the priority. The Lamb must be without spot or blemish. The cost was appreciated but was secondary (in a sense). There have been thousands upon thousands of heart-wrenching human sacrifices in the history of the religions of the world and equally as many victims of crucifixion but only One pleased God - the one that was pure and innocent. This concern with offering it rightly and with a pure heart is behind Jesus' insistence on reconciliation with an offended brother preceding the offering of a sacrifice.

The prophets never complain about "not enough" being offered in the way of sacrifices. The quantity of worship is hardly a concern - but the quality is. Similarly it's no use giving a million dollars to the church if you are inwardly at war with everyone there!

(Micah 6:7-8 NKJV) Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? {8} He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

As we see from the above verses there are much higher spiritual priorities than sacrifice. The first words of Jesus on the subject are stern indeed and He constantly puts ritual in its place as ineffective in earning God's favor.

(Matthew 9:13 NKJV) "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

(Mark 12:32-35 NKJV) So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. {33} "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." {34} Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

An overemphasis on sacrifice often produces bitter and disillusioned Christians. As a bible college lecturer and missionary I have seen this often. At the start of the year there is testimony time and someone inevitably says something like "I sold my precious Harley-Davidson motorbike to come to college.." with a spiritually smug smile. Then after the first couple of clashes with a lecturer it becomes " I SOLD my" and the smile is gone, eventually, six months later you can feel the bitterness in it. I had a personal experience with this when a Christian

worker decided to personally buy carpet for the office he was working in because the organization could not afford it. His means were modest but his zeal was high and despite my advice he went ahead with it. A few months later the "cost of the carpet" was among the factors that led to his resignation. I call this "sacrificing" beyond your emotional means so you feel good before God "putting dynamite on the altar" because when the fire gets lit it always blows up!

Sacrifices, Tithes, Offerings and Christian Giving

The concept of sacrifice is often used to encourage Christians to give generously. Preachers say things like "you have to give until it hurts or it's not a sacrifice", or "tithing is just your duty to God, if you want blessing you have to give freewill offerings on top of that". (which is often inconsistent with last week's sermon where tithing did bring blessing). Some of this is misunderstanding and poor theology but a lot is just plain manipulation. The Old Testament sacrificial system is turned around and made to be monetary gifts to the local church and re-imposed on New Testament believers. This is rebuilding what Christ has torn down and is transgression. (Galatians 2:18) We have "died to the Law" (Galatians 2:19, Romans 7:6) with all its commandments and observances including the requirement for Christians to offer sacrifices, tithes or offerings in order to atone for sin or to receive blessing from God.

The OT sacrificial system was quite complex and involved whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings. They were offered for a host of reasons such as national sin, giving thanks at harvest time, reconciliation and various acts of personal cleansing and forgiveness. They were nothing like the weekly collection to fund the ongoing ministry of a local church. To turn this national system of offerings into what we have today in most churches is simply a devious exercise in exegetical gymnastics. It cannot and should not be done.

At this point we strike a difficult verse where Paul calls a financial gift from the Philippians "an acceptable sacrifice".

(Philippians 4:18-19 NKJV) Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. {19} And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Paul is using the term to say that the Christians in Philippi were giving not just to Paul but to God and that it was a holy and acceptable offering. Paul was using the spiritual language of his day to recognize the generosity of these Christians. He was definitely not imposing the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law back on Christians in a slightly altered form.

If we are to use the terms "sacrifice" or "offering" in connection with financial giving we must be very careful how we do this in order not to create compulsion and spiritual confusion. Some guidelines, that I think are wise, are that such a sermon:

1. Should not create the impression that giving was required to please God or atone for sin or to receive blessing.
2. Should not make out of the "sacrifice or offering" a ritual with spiritual overtones and with some of the connotations of the OT sacrificial system.
3. Should avoid directly connecting financial giving with the sacrifices the Mosaic Law for instance by preaching from a passage on the "whole burnt offering" or "broken-necked

things". This gives the impression to Christians that we still obey "some bits" of the Law and can cause very real confusion when they try to interpret Scripture for themselves.

4. Should make clear the two meanings of sacrifice that are found in English and the meaning as it is found in the Bible that it is a holy offering (not a severe act of renunciation).

Be Ye Holy As I Am Holy

This chapter deals with issues of practical holiness now that we are free from the Law and under the direction of the Spirit. It deals with the question: "If I don't have these external things such as giving, church attendance, circumcision, feast days and dietary taboos to tell me how to be holy how do I be holy?"

There are two answers here that seem to be a paradox. Firstly you are already holy because you have been made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ. Secondly you become holy by obeying the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ by faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now for the explanation. I'll take the second aspect first.

The commandments of Jesus are impossible for the "natural man" to follow you need to be "born again" to obey them. They are not like a ritual or a gift that anyone can bring, they require us to be a DIFFERENT KIND OF PERSON. However we can be that kind of person by believing that we can and asking God for the strength to be it. For instance Jesus commands us to "Love your enemies.."

(Matthew 5:44-45 NKJV) "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, {45} "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

This is impossible for the natural man but Christians can do it by acting out of their new nature. When the situation arises where we need to love our enemies we just screw our courage to the sticking point, ask God for help, and "just do it" and behold we do! We do manage to love our enemy and afterwards we have a wonderful warm glow of rejoicing that we have obeyed the Lord. So here is the "method" we use, often without knowing it!

We read the command of Jesus and agree that we will obey it should the circumstance arise.

When the moment comes we choose, by faith, to be holy often wondering how on earth we are going to manage to obey Jesus.

God supplies the strength through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. On the day we do what we were supposed to do as Christians.

We go away rejoicing.

That's it. We obey the commands of Jesus, day by day, one at a time, by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit. As this happens our new nature is strengthened and we become holy as He is holy. We make the choices that separate us from sin and which dedicate us to God.

The other bit I promised to discuss is that we already made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This sort of holiness allows us to be present in the courts of heaven and to boldly approach the throne of grace. Unholy people cannot be citizens of heaven or have access to God or be called sons and daughters of the living God. We are holy from the moment of our conversion. We are acceptable in the heavenly realms. We are new creatures, with a new and holy status and a new nature. Let's look at this a bit further -

All Born-Again Christians Are Saints!

Christians are never called "sinners" but they are often called saints (though it is obvious from the NT that Christians sin). Paul even called the Corinthians "saints" even though they were a very mixed up church! This is his way of acknowledging their new nature in Christ. "Saint" means "holy one". When we come to Jesus we are made a "holy one" and a participant in the heavenly realms where we are seated with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). Here are a couple of uses of the word "saints" in 1 Corinthians.

(1 Corinthians 1:2-3 NKJV) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: {3} Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 6:1-3 NKJV) Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? {2} Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

We Receive A New Nature That Is Christ In Us And Is Therefore Sinless

There are two of you and two of me. There is the John who I see in the mirror when I shave - this John is not sinless. Then there is the John in the heavenly realms, the true John who will be revealed when Christ returns, the John who is hidden in Christ with God. This John is the Real Me and is sinless. Let's take three verses in the NT that make no sense at all unless this is true.

(Romans 7:17 NKJV) But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

(Romans 7:20 NKJV) Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

(1 John 3:9 NKJV) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

Now Paul makes this amazing comment "it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells in me..." if I was caught speeding and I said to the policemen "it wasn't me it was sin that dwells in me" the policeman would still write me a ticket! He (or she) would think I was just trying a "cop out" (no pun intended). But Paul writes this as Scripture. That's because there are two people called "I". One person is "born of woman" and does sin. The other person is "born of God" and cannot sin because he has been born of God. When I die or Christ returns the "born of woman" John will pass away and be no more. I will be left with my true eternal self and I will have absolutely no desire to sin and I will not sin and neither will you if you are also born of God.

One way to get hold of this truth that helps me is to ask the question "Is there a part of me that absolutely hates sin and sees it as an unwelcome intruder and wishes it was never there". There certainly is if you are born of God and you will hate sin and regret sinning. Its "not you". That is the new nature which is born of God. Then there is another part of you that seems sold into sin. That's the old "born of woman" natural man sometimes called "the flesh".

(Romans 7:18-19 NKJV) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. {19} For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Paul then goes on to show how a perfect nature incarnated in sinful flesh faces a dreadful and ongoing struggle. The inward man delights in the law of God. The flesh ensnares and corrupts that good intent.

(Romans 7:20-25 NKJV) Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. {21} I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. {22} For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. {23} But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. {24} O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? {25} I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

So we see that we are saints, holy ones, with new Christ-like and sinless natures seated in the heavenly realms but battling against sinful flesh which so often thwarts our best intentions.

The Expression of Our New Nature In Holy Living Is Not Through Works Of The Law But Through Walking In The Spirit.

Though the OT Law was holy and righteous and good it was flogging a dead horse. Our old corrupt fleshly nature was "dead in trespasses and sins". It was unresponsive to righteousness and actually managed to twist the Law into an opportunity to sin.

(Romans 7:7-13 NKJV) What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." {8} But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. {9} I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. {10} And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. {11} For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. {12} Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. {13} Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

To take a modern example: Before I went to school I was blissfully unaware of the law "thou shalt do thy homework". I was alive apart from the law. Not doing homework was not a worry for my conscience. But when the commandment came - the commandment meant for my good produced all sorts of desires NOT to do my homework. I rebelled and came into judgment and the wrath of my teachers and parents descended on me. Now that's a trivial example of how the commandment brings forth rebellion in the "old nature". A more frightening fact is that

children whose parents are in teetotal denominations are three times more likely to be alcoholics. The commandment they hear so often produces rebellion and in their rebellion they drink to excess. As a student counselor I can tell you the worst wreckage of life, the most dissipated students often come from strict Christian or Catholic backgrounds. The commandment produces rebellion in the old nature. So the old nature cannot be improved by the law, it is only corrupted by it. Paul says that this is a clear demonstration of how utterly sinful sin is and our desperate need for a new nature. (Romans 7:13 above).

The law is holy and righteous and good but it is dreadfully weak because of our natures.

(Romans 8:3-4 NKJV) For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, {4} that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(Galatians 3:21-22 NKJV) Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. {22} But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

(Hebrews 7:18-19 NKJV) For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, {19} for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

The "former commandment" all the things in the OT Law have been annulled because they were weak and unprofitable and unable to bring about righteousness in the old nature. If they were able to bring about righteousness in the old nature then Christ would not have had to come and we could have established our own righteousness rather than receiving the righteousness that is by faith.

The Law is gone, we have died to it, we are no longer bound to it or any of its requirements. Righteousness comes through the Spirit and not by obeying a written code.

(Romans 7:4-6 NKJV) Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another; to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. {5} For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. {6} But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Our new inner nature, which is holy, does not need an external written code in order to be holy. It just IS holy. Your new inner self, is by its very nature holy and pure and sinless and is perfectly happy never to sin, indeed it cannot sin nor does it desire to sin because it is born of God. It does not need a written law code to know what is right any more than a dog needs a book on how to bark or a baby needs a book on how to smile at its mother. The new nature is instinctively and naturally righteous. Paul says it is "enslaved to God". (Romans 6:19-23).

Because the new nature is like this it does not need rituals to make it holy - it already is holy. Neither does it need tithing or circumcision to make it holy - as it is holy by nature. Neither does it need Sabbath-keeping, church attendance, religious festivals or bible-reading to make

it holy - it is holy. It doesn't even need prayer to make it holy (though the new man prays!) it already is holy. We don't extract holiness from outside us and become holy by sort of "sucking it in" from holy people and holy books. We are sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ at conversion, made holy and good new creations and we live out what Christ has created within us.

The new nature is expressed in a holy life of good works as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Yet we are confident that God is working in us, not through our conforming to new laws but through living in union with His Spirit.

The new creation is holy and good and born of God and therefore wants to do good works. Paul describes it thus:

(Ephesians 2:8-10 NASB) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; {9} not as a result of works, that no one should boast. {10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We are saved by grace through faith without any works on our part but the result of our grace-filled salvation is a new person, a new creature, born of God. This new person is "His workmanship created in Christ Jesus" it is formed of God with a unique nature and destiny. This destiny is that the new person is made "for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them". Good works do not get us saved but they are what we are saved to do. They are the job description for the new humanity.

Christians are to be characterized by a holy life of good works done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are not characterized by a host of dead religious observances done slavishly to please God, by the flesh. To turn it around another way the purpose of the Abrahamic blessing is that "all the nations will be blessed.." (Galatians 3:14) Christians, as sons of Abraham are to bring blessing to others through the good works they do. If we are focused on earning merit points from God then the focus is on self. Religion in this sense is self-centered and does not bless the nations. A Spirit-filled existence gives from the still center that is the new creation in Christ Jesus. Blessing flows from the inner man like "rivers of living water". The new humanity is a Spirit-filled humanity that flows in good works and holy deeds and lives in purity and truth.

The calling to purity and truth and holiness is not a calling to ever stricter laws and more and more restrictions. Rather it is a calling to a higher way of being rather than a more restrictive way of doing. It is a calling to be a new person who is in very nature like Jesus Christ. We work out our salvation in fear and trembling not because we have so many laws to obey but because of the height from which we can fall. We can easily lose the sense of our new humanity and bury it under legalism, doubt it to death with human philosophies or choke it with worldliness and anxiety just like the thorn-choked growth in the parable of the sower. There is a very real need to "put to death" the deeds of the flesh and to be severe on sin. Not out of legalism but because we cherish that which God has put within us.

The fear and trembling comes because we have such a precious and holy deposit placed within us through the Holy Spirit. We are guarding a spiritual treasure. We have been made new people and placed in a Kingdom where only holiness is appropriate. We have what the apostles call " a holy calling".

(2 Timothy 1:8-9 NASB) Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, {9} who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

We thus live up to a call rather than under a law. The difference is like that between someone who does their homework because they want to become a doctor and someone who does it because they will get in trouble if they don't. In fact the difference is far greater than even that. We are new creatures with a new vision for life and that vision is high and holy and compels us to higher and higher living in our desire to be like Jesus.

This high calling can make us nervous and we need the confidence and assurance that Scripture provides and the assurance of a "throne of Grace" in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). God provides much grace, kindness, forgiveness and love as we respond to His call to live a holy life. God does not leave us to pursue holiness alone. It is actually His work within us. A work he has predestined us to (Romans 8:28-31). He will ensure it is completed on the day of Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 1:6 NASB) For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Thus our holiness does not come from conformity with human rules and regulations, tithes and offerings, diets, new moons and Sabbaths or even church attendance but from God and is expressed in good works done to bless others and performed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How then can we be holy without tithing and Sabbaths and religious festivals and circumcision and dietary laws and various taboos?.

We live up to a high calling not under a law.

Holiness does not consist of obeying more and more laws but being a better and different kind of person, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Law cannot effect the making of a new person. All the law does is make the old nature more sinful. Only faith in Christ Jesus can make us a new person who is by very nature holy.

We do good works because God has made us new creatures and the new humanity naturally wants to do good works.

God has a personal program of good works that He has prepared before-hand for us to do.

The good works are not works of merit that earn salvation or self-centered rituals and religious observances of personal piety that Scripture calls "dead works". Rather they express God's desire to bless the nations in many different ways through us the sons of Abraham.

We take on board the commandments of Jesus by faith and we "just do them" knowing He will supply the strength on a day by day moment by moment basis.

We are holy, from the moment of our conversion, and all our holy deeds are just a natural outworking of this. We do not "get holiness" from external observances or rules rather we express it out of our new humanity.

The Temple, The Church and The Believer

Most of the practices we have been looking at are associated with a "temple" structure. Tithes were to be brought into the temple storehouse, sacrifices and offerings took place there, children were circumcised by the priests there as Jesus was, and the various festivals, new moons and Sabbaths were associated with a temple and a system of priests. If a temple structure is still valid today and has passed on to the church then many of the practices or their "Christianized" replacements will pass on as well. This has huge implications for organized religion so it will help us no end if we have a look at the temple and the church in the New Testament and its relevance to the modern-day believer.

In the New Testament the term "temple" has a number of meanings:

The physical temple building in Jerusalem.

(Matthew 4:5 NASB) Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,

Idols temples in Ephesus, Corinth and other pagan cities

(Acts 19:35 NASB) And after quieting the multitude, the town clerk said^, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of the image which fell down from heaven?"

The physical body of Jesus Christ.

(John 2:20-21 NASB) The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" {21} But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

The local church as an organisation/organism not as a building.

(1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NASB) Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? {17} If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

(Ephesians 2:21 NASB) in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

The physical body of the Christian which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 6:19 NASB) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

(2 Corinthians 6:16 NASB) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

The tabernacle and temple that is in Heaven.

(Revelation 15:5-8 NASB) After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, {6} and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. {7} And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. {8} And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The Earthly Temple And The Heavenly Tabernacle

Of these the basic "pattern" stems from the last one - the temple in Heaven. The earthly temple was a copy and a shadow of this.

(Hebrews 8:5 NASB) who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

(Hebrews 9:23-24 NASB) Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. {24} For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Christ has entered into the true temple on our behalf so the old temple is obsolete and was demolished by Titus in 70AD. It has not yet been rebuilt though according to some it will be rebuilt as part of the end times.

Therefore we are residents of the heavenly realms, citizens of Heaven who can come before the throne of grace. Our High Priest has passed through the heavenlies and now ministers in a temple made without hands that is situated in the heavenly realms.

(Hebrews 9:11-14 NASB) But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; {12} and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. {13} For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, {14} how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

So we have moved from the copy and the shadow to the real thing. We do not need to go back to the shadows.

What Is A Temple?

From the verses at the start of this chapter a pattern begins to emerge as we look at a working definition of what a temple is and what that means for us now.

1. A temple is a sacred site run by a priest.

2. A temple is often associated with an image or representation of the deity.

3. A temple is indwelt by the spiritual presence of the deity.

4. A temple is where people go to meet the deity and to partake in rituals and other spiritual transactions.

The Temple Today

There is no suggestion in the NT that you had to go to a certain building to meet God or get the anointing. The early church did not have buildings. It certainly did not have a central building you had to go to in order to meet God.

So where do people go to meet God in the New Testament? They go to an apostle or to an evangelist or a Christian believer. You met God in the face of Jesus Christ. You got the anointing through the laying on of hands. The apostles proclaimed the gospel in markets, synagogues, and in chariots on desert roads. The gospel went out to the people. The people did not go in to a temple. The church was in mission mode and the temple was where the images of God were - that's us. Everywhere there was a Christian - there was a temple - a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, an image of Jesus Christ.

The earthly temple in Jerusalem has been replaced theologically and demolished physically. When Jesus died the curtain dividing the Holy of Holies off from view was torn in two from top to bottom. This indicated that God was now accessible to His people. It also indicated the tearing of Christ's flesh and the making of a new way to God. (Hebrews 10:20) The old temple system with its High Priest was now superseded by the temple in Heaven with Jesus Christ as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (see Hebrews chapters 5-10)

People no longer meet God in a special physical location. People meet God through the ministries of the Church and through each individual Spirit-filled believer.

Priests In The New Testament

Temples are run by priests (that's part of the difference between a temple and a shrine). So who runs the temples in the New Testament church? We have seen that each believer is a temple, now we will discover that each believer is also a priest!

(Revelation 1:5-6 NASB) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, {6} and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Lets dig into this a bit more adding in some things we have learned in the earlier chapters.. We are vessels indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are both temple and priest. We offer up sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, doing good and sharing and our bodies are the living sacrifice.

Thus our bodies are sacred to God and are "sacred sites"! A temple is a sacred site and that is what you are. That body you see in the mirror is a temple, it is indwelt by God and sacred to Him. He does not want it used in sexual immorality or joined in marriage to unbelievers.

As priests we are to care for the temple and make sure that it is not defiled or unclean in any way - especially any defilement by sin! As priests we also represent the deity to a world that comes to us in its weakness needing mercy and help. We show Jesus to the world. There is a poem that goes "He has no hands but ours...". We bind the wounds of the world in the name of Jesus Christ with our sacrifice of "doing good and sharing". We also minister to God in praise and worship with our "sacrifice of praise".

Priests and Prophets

If we are all priests then who leads? The style of Christian leadership changes dramatically between the Testaments. From central to dispersed, from ceremonial and physical to charismatic and spiritual, from institutional leadership to network maintenance and from top-down leadership to servant leadership. Let's look at some of these changes.

Servant Leadership

Priests in the Temple were organized into various castes and did various duties in a very organized and hierarchical fashion. The High Priest was an important political and religious figure. The scribes wore tasseled robes and loved respectful greetings in the market-places. It was top-down leadership. But Jesus said:

(Matthew 20:25-28 NASB) But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. {26} "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, {27} and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; {28} just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

After Pentecost the apostles were not power bureaucrats with desks piled high with papers and a huge staff and efficient secretaries guarding them from intrusions, The reality was quite different and the startling fulfillment of what Jesus said above.

(1 Corinthians 4:9-13 NASB) For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. {10} We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. {11} To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; {12} and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; {13} when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

From Physical To Spiritual

The Aaronic (descended from Aaron) priesthood had purely physical qualifications as Barclay points out in his commentary on Hebrews.

"Every single regulation that governed the old priesthood had to do with the priests physical body, To be a priest he must be a pure descendant of Aaron. Even then there were one hundred and forty-two physical blemishes that might disqualify him. (Leviticus 21:16-23). The ordination ceremony is outlined in Leviticus 8. He was (i) bathed in water (ii) he was clothed in four priestly garments (iii) he was anointed with oil (iv) he was touched on the tip of the right

ear, his right thumb and his right toe with the blood....Every single item in the ceremony affects the priests body---- From beginning to end the Jewish priesthood was dependent on physical things. Character, ability and personality had nothing to do with it."

The OT priests could be thieves or liars and still be priests. Being a criminal a philanderer or a drunkard was not a disqualification but a missing finger was. We might say that "oh we are not like that today" however famous sportspersons who are newly converted are often given ministry positions while more spiritually qualified people are left on the shelf. Worship leading in some churches goes to the good looking and most presentable. Tall pastors are often more respected. The dominance of physical qualifications is still with us in some areas of church life. Also worldly qualifications - wealth, many degrees and secular status influence perhaps a majority of churches.

However in the New Covenant physical and worldly qualifications are totally absent from the required qualities of a leader. New Testament leadership was on the basis of a real encounter with Jesus, a good character and demonstration of the Spirit and of wisdom. They should be of good character, able to teach, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, and so forth in the various lists in Acts, Timothy and Titus. Leadership was not a popularity contest but rather given to those who had the character to happily be a servant of all.

From Central To Dispersed

The top leadership of the church - the apostles, the prophets and the evangelists were highly itinerant in their ministry. An early church document, one of those that almost made it into the Bible, called the Didache, says that a sign of a false apostle was that he stayed more than three days in the one place! We should take such extra-biblical documents as the Didache simply as historical sources, but it does tell us that the church expectation and experience of apostles was that they were itinerant leaders. Unlike the top priests they did not have offices in the Temple and could not be reliably found in the one place. They traversed Europe, the Middle East and the apostle Thomas may have gone to India.

Spirit-filled New Testament leadership looked nothing like a corporate executive yet it did an amazing job of changing the world. Clothed in rags, going hungry, imprisoned, beaten and poor they wandered the world as the scum of the earth and the off-scouring of the world with nothing but Christ in their hearts and the power of the Holy Spirit backing their message (see 1 Cor 4:9-13 above). Whether you were in Corinth, Ephesus or Rome one day Paul would appear, half-sick, perhaps a bit the worse for wear with his unimpressive appearance and speech that was contemptible (2 Cor 10:10) and talk until you fell out the window (Acts 20:9). But he would change your life and the life of your church. He would heal the sick, raise the dead and explain the gospel. (Romans 15:18,19, 2 Corinthians 12:12)

Denominational leaders in gray suits with large cars and air-conditioned offices are a far cry from this. We admire those who move at the impulse of the Holy Spirit yet in time we seem to always go back the Temple precincts and establish ourselves. The Franciscans were at first itinerant poor and joyous now they have a massive bureaucratic headquarters in Assisi that I have heard described as looking like the Empire State building lying on its side. We celebrate these brave itinerant leaders and decorate their tombs but promptly build offices for ourselves. This is not Christianity, it is temple religion, worldliness and pompous egotistical nonsense. We need to get back on the trail. Denominational leaders should be on the move and out there with the people and the churches.

From Institutional Leadership To Network Maintenance

Peter and Paul and Timothy and Titus and James did not sit in various offices in Rome or Corinth and issue order to subordinates who came in with Gantt charts of the latest Kingdom building project. They didn't run the show or exert much hands on day to day detailed control at all. They preached Christ and they build believers into effective and connected networks. I have done some very interesting study on how Paul used his greetings at the end of his epistles and how they are far from random at all. That is for another book though. They were concerned with the spiritual condition of a fairly loosely woven network of believers not the operational details of a massive organization. This may at first seem a subtle distinction but it has huge ramifications which I will explain further.

A network leader operates on the "nodes" in this case the networks of churches. The "church that was in Corinth" was probably itself a local network of house churches. So we have the house church (Romans 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19) which belonged to a local area network of churches "the church in X" (1 Corinthians 1:2) which belonged to a regional network such as "the churches in Asia" (1 Corinthians 16:19) and finally to the body of Christ as a whole.

(1 Corinthians 16:19 NASB) The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

The basic unit seems to have been the house church. Apart from the above verse we have the following references

(Acts 8:3 NASB) But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

(Romans 16:5 NASB) also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

(Colossians 4:15 NASB) Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

(Philemon 1:2 NASB) and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

(Acts 20:20 NASB) how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly [when he was at the school of Tyrannus] and from house to house,

and so forth. Churches as major buildings did not appear for a century or so afterward and did not become common until after the Edict of Milan in 313AD. The house churches were not isolated however from the mainstream. Today some house churches can be small groups of grumpy and disaffected believers who have abandoned the mainstream church and decided to lick their wounds together. They can get quite eccentric. That was not the case in the NT. Now and then an apostle, prophet or evangelist would drop by and give some teaching, correct the errors, pass on greetings and even take up a collection for some starving Jewish believers in Jerusalem. There was real life and common teaching in the network. The little I have seen of YWAM bases and their connected communities makes me think that it is not too dissimilar to the NT model .

In a network of communities and house churches leadership is personal and charismatic and

dependent on the ministry being real and potent. Stagecraft and crowd manipulation are less effective in the intimacy of a living room. You are there in real relationship and part of the community, you are seen close up.

Apostles kept these communities to a common doctrine and a common lifestyle and encouraged real relationships between believers building unity between factions in the one city, and even internationally. There were no manuals, it was incredibly personal. They tended to operate face to face and few left any writings that have survived.

(3 John 1:13-14 NASB) I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; {14} but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

What I am trying to say is that the apostles were not bureaucrats and that bureaucracy is not Christian and that ecclesiastical structures and bureaucracy is sub-Christian. Never do we see apostles worrying over church finances or launching funding drives or micro-managing church affairs or designing logos for the pew bulletins. Leadership was not about that - it was about people and churches and networks and the truth of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit and LOVE.

What It Looks Like

Instead of a big shiny building, full of priests that quite literally "put God in a box". [The Ark of the Covenant was a large wooden box covered in gold] we have a dispersed collection of called out ones meeting from house to house, breaking bread and listening to the teaching of the apostles.

What does this new reality look like? If there is no building. If it's always in mission mode. If its sharing Jesus on the streets, binding up the wounds of lepers, praising God in the bathroom and interceding for the lost. What does it look like? And who's in charge? And how can I know whether I am up or down, important or unimportant? Now don't get me wrong there is nothing intrinsically wrong with church buildings - we do have to meet somewhere out of the rain! Though as you can guess I am very sympathetic to home churches and renting school halls. But how do we escape becoming an institution? After all no-one wants to live in an institution!

Let's start with a central tenet - it DOES NOT look like the temple in Jerusalem. It's not run by a human high priest with a host of priests and acolytes and altars and incense and animal sacrifices and rituals and robes (see Hebrews chapters 5-10). Neither does it look like the temples of idols. It is it not a mad pagan frenzy. A Bacchanalian orgy of rolling around drunk and unrestrained. Nor is it run by young girls in white singing in ecstatic possession. No, God is a God of order! (1 Cor 10-14). The new temple is neither Jewish nor Greek -it is Christian and heavenly.

The new temple looks like the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the pattern of what a temple of the Holy Spirit looks like and acts like. We don't find Him setting up an institution or expecting everyone to come to Him (though they did). We find a huge variety in His pattern of ministry. Sometimes solitary, often in home fellowships, now and then in large gatherings. A mixture of teaching and healing, training and prayer. A mixture of apologetics against the Sadducees and miracles with madmen. There is an enormous sense of freedom and healing and life in the gospels and that is part of the operation of the temple of the Holy Spirit - "for where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty". The temple of the Holy Spirit should be a place of liberty and

personal transformation.

(2 Corinthians 3:17-18 NASB) Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. {18} But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Where you go, as a temple of the Holy Spirit, there should be liberty, healing and personal transformation. There should be a sense of freedom and joy not legalism and oppression. A temple of the Holy Spirit does not look anything like a Pharisee. Similarly where you as a church impact your community there should be increased liberty, healing and personal transformation not just a railing against "those worldly sinners" - who Jesus befriended! (Luke 7:34)

When we are so transformed that out of our innermost beings flow rivers of living water - then we will be like Ezekiel's temple out of which the river of life flowed. We will look and act like the ministry of Jesus. We will minister on hillsides and in the wilderness and everywhere the Lord sends us. When Jesus was a temple He was a very mobile temple - more like tabernacle! Perhaps we should be like that too!

The new temple is also a BODY. The temple is now the body of Christ and the body of the Christian. As a body it is a picture of co-ordination, of unity and diversity, of life and action. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) It is primarily a living thing. It feels, it rejoices, it is filled with the very life of God. It is filled with prophets and even the servants prophesy and speak in tongues (Acts 2:17,18, 1 Cor 14:31,32). Dead works and cold formality and inappropriate. New wineskins are needed to contain the new wine of the Holy Spirit.

(Luke 5:37-38 NASB) "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. {38} "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

In a living organism there are no spectator parts. All parts of the body contribute to the whole. The liver is not a spectator to the ministry of the brain! So in the church there should be no spectators unlike in the old temples where there were priests and laity, performers and spectators. This distinction is gone in a body. Everyone has a function. Indeed everyone must function in their role whether it be great or small. Current large church, building centered structures simply cannot do this. There is only so much room "on stage". Only one or two people can preach each week. A few give items. The rest must watch on. This is not the new temple. It is the old temple. And it is thoroughly unbiblical. NT worship was participatory (1 Corinthians 14) and all brought a psalm or a prophecy, a tongue or a teaching. It was not left to a few experts.

So the new temple is a Spirit-filled, sacred body that reflects the ministry of Jesus Christ and brings liberty, love and personal transformation to the world as it befriends sinners and moves out into wherever the Lord sends it to minister the living waters of God. That doesn't sound like bricks and mortar to me!

The Anti-Christ and the Temple

The Anti-Christ seems to be at home with "temple structures" and indeed he eventually makes his home there.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NASB) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, {4} who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Let's be clear here, I am not saying that temple-structure churches are the Anti-Christ or that any structure is the Anti-Christ. God is more interested in people and hearts than structures. What I am saying is that Temple structures suit the Devil. That is where he wants to be. His ego loves the pomp, the ceremony, the exaltation. Mustard seed groups of meek believers are not his style at all.

Temple structures are pyramidal with a single individual at the peak of them and such structures promote envy and selfish ambition as people jockey to be as close to the top as possible.

(James 3:15-16 NASB) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. {16} For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

According to James jealousy and selfish ambition are demonic wisdom from below. They result in disorder and every evil thing. If Satan can get jealousy and selfish ambition going in a church through their competitive structure then he can generate "disorder and every evil thing". This is why humility and unity are such potent spiritual weapons. Pyramidal, hierarchical temple structures naturally tend to generate politics in the church and thus serve Satan's purposes well indeed. He sometimes comes into such structures and "takes his seat" at the top of a "priest eat priest" pecking order. The history of the medieval papacy is a striking example of this.

Now, let me very quickly say that providing that there is unity and humility ANY structure can potentially be used by God - even very hierarchical ones. Small groups and "brotherhoods" can go seriously off the rails. Even they are not perfect. There is no perfect structure that ensures that everyone will be absolutely holy. However I feel that some structures create more trouble than others. Temple structures were demolished by Jesus for a good reason and will be inhabited by Satan in the end times - also for a good reason. Temple structures are not the Anti-Christ but he is often happy to dwell in them.

What are the consequences for today?

1. New Testament temples are bodies not buildings. They are not bricks and mortar structures.
2. Therefore there are no temple storehouses to bring tithes into.
3. We don't have to go into a building to meet God or get an anointing.
4. There are no special people called priests who run the physical sacred sites.
5. We are all priests and we all run our own temples - our body.
6. We are all part of a larger temple called the body of Christ.

7. The paraphernalia of the Temple - altars, incense, robes and sacrifices and offerings and all the rest - goes the way of the Temple. We have no mandate at all to reconstruct the old temple worship, Jewish or pagan, in an effort to bring structure to what we do.
8. The NT temples are dwelling places of the Holy Spirit and where the Holy Spirit is there is liberty therefore they should be characterized by freedom and grace.
9. The perfect dwelling place of the Holy Spirit is Jesus and the perfect temple (church or individual) should reflect His earthly ministry.
10. The temple is a body, a Spirit-filled, well coordinated by Christ, participatory community of various spiritual gifts that brings glory to God..

Matters of Food and Drink

There were HUGE debates in the NT church over food and drink and chapter after chapter alludes to them or is directly concerned with them. (Acts 10,11,15, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8,10, Colossians 2 etc). The Jews still really believed in the kosher diet. The Gentiles ate pork. Some Gentiles were such zealous converts from idolatry that they would not touch food in the meat market that had been offered to idols. Others, a bit stronger in the faith said "idols have been defeated, don't worry about it". Others came back and said "that is participation with demons". Others said "you can eat food sacrificed to idols - but not actually in the idol's temple". These debates still continue in many places today with common and not so common questions being:

Does drinking alcohol defile me spiritually?

Should I follow the Jewish dietary regulations and eat kosher food?

Are vegetarians more spiritual?

The Bible forbids eating food "with the blood" but I enjoy black pudding - can I still eat it?

I am a Chinese Christian but my parents are Buddhist and offer food to a Buddhist shrine in the kitchen - should I eat it?

Can I eat the vegetarian food in a Hare Krishna temple?

I go to James Cook University in Australia that is trying to attract Muslim students from overseas. JCU has instructed the Refectory to ensure that all meat is "hallal" - that is killed in accordance with Muslim law - facing the shrine in Mecca. Should I eat such meat?

Are certain diets better for spiritual warriors?

What is the value of fasting?

Is there any point in "saying grace"? (Yes there is).

I am a missionary and I am very uncertain about the spiritual rites that food placed before me has been through, what should I do?

Matters of food and drink are "where the rubber hits the road" for millions of Christians around the world. Those from cultures where there are a mixture of traditions face the problem daily and it is increasingly relevant in the Western world with the pressure toward vegetarianism as being "more spiritual". A lot of the case studies can be solved through about twenty or so passages in Scripture that give us clear guidelines (there are at least 271 verses referring to food and drink and allied concepts in the NT)..

Foundational Scriptures

John the Baptist - the Old Covenant Nazirite

The Old Covenant has the ascetic Nazirite vow that John the Baptist was under. This represents the very best that the "old nature" can do. Jesus calls John the Baptist "the greatest of those born of women" and the last of the OT saints (see Matthew 11:11-13) but in the same passage says he is less than the least of those in the Kingdom of God (because they are "born of God"). John's asceticism resulted in a strict prophetic diet and included no creature comforts.

(Matthew 3:4 NASB) Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

(Luke 1:15-16 NASB) "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb. {16} "And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

Jesus and New Covenant Freedom

Jesus was an at times shocking contrast to this. He didn't dwell in the wilderness, seemed to enjoy a party and ate the normal Jewish food of His day - apparently with some relish!

(Luke 7:33-35 NASB) "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon!' {34} "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!' {35} "Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

He also pronounced the end of the ritual categories of clean and unclean saying that defilement was inward - not from outside the person in terms of what they ate or drank but came from the thoughts and intentions of their heart.

(Mark 7:18-23 NASB) And He said[^] to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; {19} because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) {20} And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. {21} "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, {22} deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. {23} "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Hid death on the cross broke the power of the accusations against us and "disarmed" the "rulers and authorities" taking away their ability to enforce their taboos. Taboos that the ancient world was in dread of. Because of what Jesus did on the cross they no longer have the weaponry with which to punish the Christian who breaks their food regulations. They are toothless tigers Therefore no-one can act as our judge compelling us to observe regulations regarding food and drink and new moons and Sabbaths.

(Colossians 2:15-23 NASB) {15} When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. {16} Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- {17} things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ...{20} If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, {21} "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" {22} (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? {23} These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

The Missionary's Diet

The missionary is thus free from having to worry about the taboos in the culture that he or she enters. The injunction "eat what is set before you" is not an invitation to spiritual disaster . We are free in Christ. However one condition does apply - eating meat that your hosts says has been sacrificed to idols. Not that it will spiritually defile the missionary but because it may cause the host to see idols as acceptable and stumble them in their transition to accepting Christ. More on that later...

(Luke 10:7-9 NASB) "And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. {8} "And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you; {9} and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.

1 Corinthians 10:25-31 (NASB) {25} Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience' sake; {26} FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. {27} If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake. {28} But if anyone should say to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; {29} I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? {30} If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? {31} Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Giving Thanks

Giving thanks is a very important spiritual act. It sanctifies the food (1 Tim 4:5) and demonstrates gratitude to God. (1 Tim 4:4) A glance in a concordance under "thanks" finds Jesus "saying grace" nine times in the NT. Those who receive good things from God should praise Him for them. Paul sees everything created by God as good and nothing is to be rejected if received with gratitude. Creation is to be celebrated with gratitude (1 Tim 4:4). Those who "advocate abstaining from foods" are seen as teaching the 'doctrines of demons'. (

1 Timothy 4:1-3)

(Mark 6:41-42 NASB) And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. {42} And they all ate and were satisfied.

(1 Timothy 4:1-5 NASB) But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, {2} by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, {3} men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. {4} For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; {5} for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

Coping With Freedom

Freedom creates confusion for many people and here is a what the problem may have sounded like in NT times. "OK, the earth is the Lord and all it contains. I can eat anything in Creation providing I do so with gratitude. Food is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Jesus drank wine and ate heartily. He pronounced all foods clean. His death on the cross removed the power the spiritual realm had to enforce their dietary regulations. There are no more taboo foods. Theologically speaking I have complete freedom and I understand this - but some of my fellow Christians are absolutely horrified at this. What should I do?" Let's take a look at how confused people got and some of the solutions proposed to build unity.

The first totally confused person was Peter the apostle! After a lifetime of observing ritual purity he just could not break the habit even at God's command.

(Acts 10:13-16 NASB) And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" {14} But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." {15} And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." {16} And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

A bit later we find the whole early church in confusion on the issue. A conference was called in Jerusalem and like a lot of negotiations in that city a compromise was reached (and it seems it was also soon ignored!)

(Acts 21:25 NASB) "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

The meat sacrificed to idols issue was going to explode and still be around 50 or so years later when Revelation was written. "Blood" goes back to Noah and Creation and to the Levitical teaching that "the life was in the blood" which was literally "the soul is in the blood".

(Genesis 9:4 NASB) "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

(Leviticus 17:14 NASB) "For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'

As a direct command of God for all humanity since Noah it was seen as binding on the Gentiles and the principle of the soul being in the blood seemed to be bigger than mere taboos about clean and unclean. For a similar reason "things strangled" were not to be eaten as the life breath was trapped within them and this was abhorrent to the Jews and would have divisive consequences. Fornication is added as a basic moral requirement that may have had special reference to certain pagan religious practices. I personally find the arguments about not eating blood quite convincing and would rather not eat blood pudding. However I leave the conclusions up to you.

The divisions about how to interpret these conclusions went on for quite some time. One of the central issues became the issue of faith lived out in community. Not so much "what do others think" but "Am I building others up or am I causing them to stumble and fall?". Paul takes the whole of Romans 14 to address this issue and here are some excerpts.

(Romans 14:1-4 NASB) Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. {2} One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. {3} Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. {4} Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Paul sees the believer as being judged by God alone - not by other believers. He or she will account to God for "disputable matters" and God is able to make that person stand. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are "servants of another" and we are not to judge them harshly on disputable matters like food. We are not to think of "are they right or wrong?" but rather "how can I help them to grow?"

(Romans 14:13-23 NASB) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. {14} I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. {15} For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

The primary question for us is "Am I a blessing to my brother? Am I walking in love? Paul goes on to rearrange our priorities about food, personal 'rights and freedoms' and he Kingdom.

{16} Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; {17} for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. {18} For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. {19} So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. {20} Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. {21} It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. {22} The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. {23} But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Ultimately if we "eat meat or drink wine" we must be able to do so with a clear conscience knowing that we will not cause someone to stumble. Neither should we act from personal

doubt . If it is doubtful for you - then don't. It's simply not worth injuring your conscience.

Meat Sacrificed To Idols

The above principles of acting from faith and for the edification of other believers are later applied to the ongoing problem of food sacrificed to idols. Paul's fundamental perspective statement is that idols don't matter and don't contaminate the food in any way. It's not a problem of you being defiled but your neighbor being stumbled.

1 Corinthians 8:4-7 NASB) Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. {5} For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, {6} yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. {7} However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

He then goes on to address the problem in stages, from the most serious violations of conscience to the least. First of all the problem of actually going into the idols temple and having a meal like many people do at Hare Krishna temples today

(1 Corinthians 8:7-13 NASB) However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. {8} But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. {9} But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. {10} For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? {11} For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. {12} And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. {13} Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

Later Paul goes on to lambaste them for being so ignorant of the spiritual alliance they are demonstrating by eating in an idols temple. He contrasts eating food in a temple to eating the Lord's Supper at church. Going into an idols temple and eating their equivalent of the Love Feast is to participate with demons.

(1 Corinthians 10:16-33 NASB) Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? {17} Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. {18} Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? {19} What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? {20} No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. {21} You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. {22} Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we? {23} All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. {24} Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

Immediately after these verses Paul treats the more everyday questions of food in the meat market and having dinner in the home of an unbeliever and he almost seems to contradict himself - or rather he applies the same principles in a new context.

{25} Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience' sake; {26} FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. {27} If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake.

It's quite clear that Paul does not consider the food to be actually spiritually contaminated by being sacrificed to idols. For Paul the idol was "nothing" . The food was not affected in any way and in contexts where no-one was being offended or harmed and where you were not in a temple participating with demons - go ahead and eat whatever is set before you. However if there is a chance of someone being offended - then don't. Not for your sake, but for theirs.

{28} But if anyone should say to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; {29} I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? {30} If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?

Finally Paul sums up the meat sacrificed to idols issue as one of being interested primarily in the glory of God and the welfare of others.

{31} Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. {32} Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; {33} just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.

Lets apply this to some of the situations listed at the start of this chapter. The University student eating at the refectory whether the food is "hallal" are not dining in an idols temple and there is little chance they causing anyone to stumble. She should give thanks and eat. It is a "meat-market" situation.

The Chinese student with Buddhist parents should weigh up whether it will spiritually affect his family. If the family are devout in their Buddhism and look upon his eating the food that is sacrificed to idols as his participating with them in adoration of household gods then he should not eat the food . Rather he should tactfully ask for it to be put aside. If it is just a family habit with no real religious overtones then he perhaps may eat of it. If in doubt don't is the motto here.

Lastly having lunch in a Hare Krishna temple is quite clearly wrong and is a participation with demons. There is no room for doubt here. Christians must not eat in idol's temples.

Drinking Wine

Christians are not to be drunk and church leaders must not be "addicted to much wine" as in alcoholism. (Ephesians 5:18-19 , 1 Timothy 3:3, 1 Peter 4:3) NASB) However it is clear that Jesus drank and was even accused of being a drunkard (Luke 7:33-35) He supplied the wine at the wedding at Cana which was adjudged to be "good wine" by the head-waiter and thus must have contained alcohol.

(John 2:9-10 NASB) And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, {10} and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now."

Finally Timothy is TOLD to drink wine in moderation. If alcohol was spiritually defiling by nature Paul would not have given Timothy this instruction.

(1 Timothy 5:23 NASB) No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

Thus there are no taboo or defiling foods or drinks. What matters is the use we put them to, how they affect our life and the consequences for others who may observe our conduct.

Let's now go on to another controversial topic - that of tithing.

Tithing

This chapter traces the tithe from its patriarchal origins through the Mosaic Law to the New Testament and early church history and explains why the tithe disappeared and the consequences of its revival under Charlemagne in 585AD. The chapter then goes on to look at New Testament principles for giving. It concludes with exhortations on handling differences in belief about finances and a brief paragraph on the biblical perspective on wisdom with money.

The Practice Of The Patriarchs Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek and Jacob promised God a tenth. It was a personal practice of honoring God and there is tantalizingly little to go on. (Genesis 14:20, 28:22) It is an example not a commandment. As a practice it was "a tenth of everything ". It is clear from the NT that the festivals, sacrifices and practices of the Mosaic Law are not binding on Spirit-filled believers. (Romans 7:4-6). However tithing was practiced before the law by Abraham. This raises the question of whether practices prior to the Law are binding on Spirit-filled believers today. Patriarchal and Noahic practices such as keeping the Sabbath, building altars, animal sacrifices, clean and unclean animals (Genesis 2:2, 4:1-4 and 8:20) have been replaced in the New Covenant (Colossians 2:16-23) and the most significant Abrahamic practice - circumcision is clearly not required of believers now (Galatians 5:1-11) so it can I think be rightly inferred that the other Abrahamic practice - tithing has passed away also.

Tithing - In The Mosaic Law And The Old Covenant

The formalized tithe was a part of the Jewish system of festivals and differs markedly from patriarchal practice. The best explanation I have heard says the tithe operated on a 7 year cycle with year 3 being the year when it was given to the poor. As a practice it often lapsed, and was reinstated in the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:1-7), Nehemiah (Neh 10:35-39) and Malachi (Malachi 3:8-12). In the inter-testamental period the tithe became a major practice of Pharisaism. Working on what we can clearly understand in this complex area it seems that:

1. The tithe was to be eaten in Jerusalem with rejoicing. ((Dt 12:17f.)
2. The tithe involved food and was to be eaten. Money was only involved when the tithe had to be transported a great distance and would perish. The tithe was first converted to cash

then converted back into food. Only food could be presented as a tithe. (Deut 14:22-29)

3. The tithe could be spent on wine or strong drink. (Deut 14:24-26)

4. The tithe was holy to God and to help support the Levites as they had no land to inherit. (Num 18:20-32) They were about 1/10 of the population. They also seem to have worked as artisans and traders.

5. The food was consumed partly during the festival and also later stored in storehouses or granaries for the use of the poor, the Levites, the widows and the orphans. It thus acted as basic social security for those without land or family protection. (Deut 26:12,13 Malachi 3:8-12)

6. A tithe of the tithe went directly to the High Priest (Num 18:26,27)

7. The tithe was levied on the produce of the land which was seen as God's direct gift. One-tenth of cattle, grain, olive oil, wine etc.(Leviticus 27:32, 2 Chr 31:1-7) Notably absent from the levy are silver, gold, money and the profits of merchants and artisans. An artisan does not seem to be required to tithe a tenth of their tables if they were a carpenter etc. It seems to have been a tax solely on primary producers - which were the bulk and backbone of the economy. This was even so in Nehemiah's day when a money economy was very much in force. (Nehemiah 10:35-39) Jesus mentions it being applied to herbs. (Matt 23:23)

The Tithe In The New Testament

The following 4 sets of verses are the only NT mentions of tithing. The first three are in a negative context two are where Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are overemphasizing tithing and undercapitalizing justice. The third is of a Pharisee trying to justify himself before God by tithing. Tithing is still a proper duty not to be neglected by those trying to fulfill the Mosaic Law as the Pharisees were (and as Jesus did before the cross when He abolished the Law). The last reference is to Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek. The point is that the Levitical priesthood descended from Abraham honored the priesthood according to Melchizedek - a type of Christ and thus Christ's priesthood is superior to Aaron's. Neither passage implies that the tithe is binding on NT believers.

(Mat 23:23 & Luke 11:42) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.

(Luke 18:12-14 NRSV)... I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

(Heb 7:2-9 NRSV) (Heb 7:2 NRSV) and to him Abraham apportioned "one-tenth of everything." His name, in the first place, means "king of righteousness"; next he is also king of Salem, that is, "king of peace."...And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man, who does not belong to their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. In the one

case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham,

Religious Taxes

Jesus saw religious taxes as no longer appropriate for believers (Matthew 17:24-27) and the principle of the sons of the Kingdom not being levied on seems to apply to compulsory tithing also.

Timing of NT Giving

Giving seems not to have been regulated to a particular percentage or a particular annual event. Giving seems just to have part of the natural life of the Church so that when needs arose such as widows in their midst or a famine in Judea then the apostles undertook the task of collecting what was needed to meet that need within the body of Christ. There is only one NT reference requiring weekly giving when Paul recommended to the Corinthians that they save up week by week for their giving to the poor in Jerusalem - much as a Sunday School saves up to give to the missionary.

(1 Cor 16:2,3 NRSV) On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem.

Why The Tithe Disappeared

The actual practice of the tithe disappears from the Bible after the gospels and is not reinstated as a practice binding on Gentile believers in any of the epistles or by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Reasons for the disappearance of the tithe may include:

1. The tithe was a highly organized nation-wide event requiring a stable theocratic nation and considerable infra-structure. This was obviously not the case for the early church which was an often persecuted minority group. When the Middle Ages came and Europe was a generally stable theocratic society the tithe would reappear again in 585 under the Emperor Charlemagne and unfortunately lead to the financial corruption of the Church which came to control one-tenth of the GDP of Europe and over a third of the lands.
2. It seems to have been replaced by Spirit-led community based giving in the revival in the Jerusalem church and this model of continual giving led by God seems to have predominated in the NT church with giving being based on pneumatic events such as Agabus' prophecy.
3. Many Gentile believers were slaves and most slaves were without possessions or land or produce from which to tithe at least in the manner of the OT practice. (Plus it would have been cruel to ask it of those who could not give.)
4. It was a Jewish festival and went the way of the other Jewish festivals as far as observance among the Gentiles goes.
5. The lack of buildings in the early church would have included a lack of storehouses and granaries.

6. Crime and persecution would have made it unwise to store large amounts of wealth in a local church.

7. Most NT fellowships seem to have been house churches with bi-vocational pastors and it was only later on in the NT that the right for these to have proper financial support was vigorously addressed.

Giving Does Not Achieve Righteousness in God Or Justify Us Before Him - That is 100% Christ's Work. Neither Does It Add To Our Spiritual Blessings Rather It Is A Response To Them.

(Luke 18:12 NRSV) I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' (The Pharisee who Jesus said was not justified).

(Rom 3:20 NRSV) For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

(Eph 1:3 NRSV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

(Eph 2:8 NRSV) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works,(including generous giving)which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Giving in The New Testament Has Three Main Groups of People in Mind - The Poor in The Body of Christ, Teaching Elders, and Itinerant Ministers Of The Gospel e.g. Apostles.

(Acts 4:34,35 NRSV) There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

(Gal 2:10 NRSV) They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

(James 1:27 NRSV) Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

(2 Cor 8:13-15 NRSV) I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

(1 Tim 5:17,18 NRSV) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves to be paid."

(1 Cor 9:13,14 NRSV) Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

The Only Restriction Placed On Giving Is That It Should Not Replace Taking Care of Aged Parents Or Immediate Family.

(Mat 15:4-6 NRSV) For God said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that whoever tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,' then that person need not honor the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God.

(1 Tim 5:8 NRSV) And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (In the context of widows in the church).

Our Giving Is To Be Focused on God's Kingdom And His Righteousness and Then He Will Provide So That Our Needs Are Met.

(Mat 6:33 NRSV) But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

(2 Cor 9:7-10 NRSV) Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Some Christians Have The Special Grace Gift Of A Giving.

(Rom 12:6-8 NRSV) We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

We Should Not Try To Bribe God By Giving - He Is Above Our Manipulation And All Things Are His Anyway.

(Rom 11:33-36 NRSV) O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Giving Is A Loving Expression Of Our Relationship To God And Others Flowing From Our Awareness of God's Gift To Us In Christ.

(2 Cor 8:9 NRSV) For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

(2 Cor 9:11-15 NRSV) You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God Thanks be to God

for his indescribable gift.

Giving Is To Come From Relationship And Not Be Under Compulsion - Like All NT Ministries It Is A Ministry of The Spirit, Not Of The Letter.

(2 Cor 9:5 NRSV) So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

(2 Cor 9:7 NRSV) Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(2 Cor 8:12 NRSV) For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has--not according to what one does not have.

(2 Cor 3:6 NRSV) who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

There Are Many Areas of Christian Practice in Which Christians Differ Markedly e.g. Sabbath-keeping and Matters of Food and Drink in Such Areas We Are Not to Judge Each Other - Giving May Be One Such Area.

(Rom 14:1-6 NRSV) Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

General Wisdom On Finances

Proverbs gives much sound advice on finances and it is characteristics such as thrift, prudence and wise investing that are admired as well as giving to the poor and lending freely without charging interest. Practices that are condemned include giving to those already rich, the love of "little luxuries" and hard-hearted stinginess. It gives us a picture of steady, faithful, wise planned giving that joyfully sees needs and meets them and which has nothing to do with selfishness on one hand or folly on the other. (Prov 11:24-26, 12:24-27, 21:5-6, 22:16, 25:21-22 28:27)

Summary And Conclusion

"Let each be convinced in their own mind.. It is to their own Master that they stand or fall." There are those that find 10% a useful percentage in planning their giving and they do so unto God. There are those who give differently - also unto the Lord. No-one should feel that they are under a law or being judged by others.. Rather we should see giving as an exciting ministry that proceeds under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the miracle-working providing power of God. Giving can greatly honor God, support Kingdom work and provided much needed relief to

the poor. Giving should be planned, faithful and reliable so that the recipients can depend on it. Above all giving should proceed from a grateful and thankful heart that cries out "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift."

The Sabbath

Sabbath-keeping is an Old Testament practice that has whole denominations (Seventh-Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists etc) lined up behind it. Its perhaps one of the most pervasive of the OT practices that born-again Christians feel compelled to follow. However it is something that Jesus spoke quite strongly about and which was never placed on believers in the NT.

There are four main (and somewhat separate) errors concerning the Sabbath, in order of gravity they are:

1. That you must observe the Sabbath to be saved.
2. That observance of the Sabbath is compulsory (but perhaps not essential for salvation).
3. That the Jewish Saturday Sabbath is still the Sabbath for Christians.
4. That the Sabbath is now on Sunday and Christians must observe Sunday as a day of rest.

Proponents of the Sabbath (Sabbatarians) argue that:

- A. Sabbath was ordained at Creation (Genesis 2:2)
- B. The Sabbath was part of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11)
- C. Observing the Sabbath in a consecrated way brings blessing. (Isaiah 58:13,14)
- D. Not one jot or tittle will pass away from the Law until all is fulfilled. (Matthew 5:17)
- E. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9)
- F. John the apostle was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10)

At first glance this seems quite convincing so let's look at those arguments a bit more deeply. Arguments B,C and D depend on the Law still being in force in some way and their being blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. I hope that by now you will be able to see that is no longer the case. The Law has been fulfilled in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Argument A rests on God hallowing that day at Creation. While God did make the Sabbath holy He did not make it compulsory. Besides we have no idea on what day that was, if we are to believe Archbishop Usher (the biblical chronologist who said that Creation was on a Wednesday at 9:00am in the morning in 4004BC) it was a Wednesday!

Hebrews 4:9 "there remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" is in the midst of a section that shows that the true Sabbath is not the Sabbath instituted under Joshua that the Jews observed but rather was the Sabbath rest from dead works that we find in Christ and

which reaches its fulfillment when we find our rest in Heaven.

(Hebrews 4:8-11 NASB) For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. {9} There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. {10} For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. {11} Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience.

The last reference to being "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" is very enigmatic. It may have referred to Sunday by then. It certainly does not suggest it was compulsory. Believers seemed to meet "on the first day of the week" and that may have been all there was to it. (1 Corinthians 16:2, Acts 20:7) There is no direct NT pronouncement saying "Sunday is now the Sabbath and you must keep it holy.". Most Christians were slaves and had no power to take a day off anyway!

Direct Teaching On The Sabbath.

Jesus And The Sabbath

Part of the reason for the intense hostility towards Jesus was His attitude towards the Sabbath. The Sabbath had become one of the chief spiritual control tools of the Pharisees. Hundreds of rabbinical regulations added to the Law made the Sabbath a very complex and burdensome issue for the average Jew. It had turned from being a joyous day of rest and celebration into yet another device for proving how spiritual one was.

Jesus was not tactful. In fact he just charged through the mass of rabbinical red tape like a cavalier with a sword. Culturally He would have come across as very undiplomatic, a sort of spiritual "bull in a china shop". We will see why in the next few verses where Jesus moves to combat the narrow cruel Sabbatarian legalism of the Pharisees. In an astonishing display of heartlessness they would not let the hungry disciples pick a few heads of grain to eat or approve a man being healed on the Sabbath. Their vicious cruelty reached its natural conclusion as they plot to destroy Jesus. The questions of the Sabbatarians are in blue and the main points Jesus makes are in red..

(Matthew 12:1-14 NASB) At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grain fields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. {2} But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

{3} But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; {4} how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? {5} "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? {6} "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here.

{7} "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. {8} "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

{9} And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. {10} And behold, there was a

man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"-- in order that they might accuse Him. {11} And He said to them, "What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? {12} "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." {13} Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. {14} But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

(Mark 2:27-28 NASB) And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. {28} "Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Jesus points are:

1. Human needs over-ride religious protocol. (David and the bread)
2. That the priests in the Temple break the Sabbath with impunity.
3. That He was greater than the Temple or its priests and therefore can break the Sabbath.
4. That God desires mercy (in this case for hungry disciples) not sacrifice. Kindness has a higher priority than sacrifices, religion and Sabbath-keeping.
5. That Sabbatarian legalism just ends up condemning the innocent.
6. That the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.
7. That natural common sense, even for animals would tell people to show compassion on the Sabbath.
8. That it is permissible to do good on the Sabbath.
9. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It is there to serve our need for rest and relaxation not to be an onerous religious burden.

Jesus was not abolishing the Sabbath (that would happen on the cross) rather He was fulfilling its purpose as a day for freeing people, healing them and restoring them and as a day for showing kindness and compassion. The Sabbath was not just a day for being religious. It was a day for being loving. It was not just a day for going to church. It was a day for feeding the hungry and healing the sick. God's Sabbath was not just a day for demonstrating your holiness and your zeal but for showing your concern for your neighbor and even your animals. It was who you were on the Sabbath not what you did on the Sabbath that was Jesus' chief concern. If you were as hard-hearted, cruel and vindictive as these Pharisees who ended up plotting murder on the Sabbath - then no matter what you "do" in terms of religious acts you are NOT keeping the Sabbath as God intended. (see Isaiah 58 which applies the same principles to fasting).

Don't Be Judgmental About The Sabbath

Paul lists Sabbath-keeping among the disputable things in Romans 14. Thus Sabbath-keeping

was not an issue of first importance and certainly not essential for salvation. Good Christians could be on both sides of the issue. Many people who believe in keeping one day aside for God do so out of very real reverence for Him and not out of legalism or bondage to elemental spirits. They do so "unto the Lord" and they are not to be judged by those who see "all days alike" - and of course vice-versa. It is not an issue we are to judge one another on.

(Romans 14:1-6 NASB) Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. {2} ...{5} One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. {6} He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

We are not to let people "act as our judge" on the issue. However if we do keep a Sabbath it should be as Jesus wanted it kept - as a day of compassion not of legalism. Personally I keep Sunday as a day of rest and of visiting friends and I try to make it a "computer free day" so I live in the real world in real relationships - not virtual ones. I see Sunday as a "day of personal restoration and reflection" and do not feel under any obligation to go to two services but I will normally go to one. I make sure there is plenty of space on Sunday for "being human". I run around a lot during the week and it's great to crash out and snooze on Sunday afternoon. Sunday should be a day you look forward to with joy in anticipation of refreshment - not a day of even more busyness. I think that is catching the true Creation intent of a Sabbath.

Sabbaths Are Shadows

(Colossians 2:16-17 NASB) Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- {17} things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ

(Galatians 4:9-11 NASB) But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? {10} You observe days and months and seasons and years. {11} I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

The Sabbath is a mere shadow. The substance - the real rest we have, is in Christ. It's simply not worth making a big deal over a shadow! Paul goes on to call these things "weak and worthless elemental things". In other words the Sabbath is a shadowy, weak, worthless, elemental thing. It is therefore NOT to be the major issue for believers that it often is. It is certainly not something we should feel enslaved to. (Gal 4:9) It is the "things to come" and the "substance" that is important - not Sabbaths, new moons, festivals etc. Christ is far above all this and it is Him we should seek.

Therefore answering the four main errors listed at the top of this chapter.

1. There are no binding Sabbaths on Christians therefore you do not have to obey the Sabbath to be saved.

2. There are no binding Sabbaths on Christians therefore the Sabbath is not compulsory.

1. The Jewish Sabbath is still Saturday but the Christian Sabbath is in Christ - not on Saturday or Sunday.

2. Sunday is the traditional day of worship for Christians but it is not a binding Sabbath that we must observe on that particular day. Days are shadows - the substance is Christ.

The Ten Commandments

Once you say the Sabbath is not binding on Christians you run into the problem of the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments so if we can break that commandment - what about the rest? Surely we still have to "obey the Ten Commandments"?

The chapter entitled "Be Ye Holy..." deals with this at considerable length and I will not repeat those arguments here. We are no longer "under a law code" of any sort. But we should be righteous and holy and live lives of good deeds done in the power of the Holy Spirit. We live as people "led by the Spirit" who have new natures. The law is now written on our hearts not on tablets of stone as the Ten Commandments were. We fulfill the Law by living a life of love in the Spirit.

Love Is The Fulfillment Of The Law

Jesus

Jesus sees the whole law and all the prophets summed up in the commands to love God and neighbor. They are the "meta-commandments" under which all the other commandments are subsumed. If these two things are done then everything else is included.

(Matthew 22:36-40 NASB) "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" {37} And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'" {38} "This is the great and foremost commandment. {39} "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" {40} "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Paul

Paul directly deals with the Ten Commandments problem in Romans 13. He has just spent chapters 3-8 explaining that we are no longer under the Law and chapters 9-11 explaining the place of Israel and the Jews now that Christ, not the Law, is the only means of salvation. Now Paul fires some very big guns and speaks directly about the moral law of the OT saying it is all subsumed under the command to love one's neighbor.

(Romans 13:8-10 NASB) Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. {9} For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." {10} Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Notice how Paul explicitly mentions four of the Ten Commandments (relating to adultery, murder, stealing and coveting) and then adds "and if there is any other commandment" to cover the rest and to be all inclusive. Paul is not just attacking the "ceremonial law" here. He is going right to the core of the OT Law and the moral law as expressed in the Ten

Commandments. It is all summed up under the command to love our neighbor as ourselves which is the distinctly Christian commandment. Paul is NOT saying we can all run out and commit adultery. What he is saying is that we are not living up to a law code in a book any more but rather living a life of love in the Spirit and if we do live a life of love in the Spirit then we definitely won't commit adultery.

James

(James 2:8 NASB) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well

Even the very Jewish James, who Luther said wrote a "right strawy epistle" , does not advocate a return to the Ten Commandments. For him the Royal Law is to love your neighbor as yourself and if you do this alone "you are doing well".

Love Does Not Give Us A License To Sin Or To Be Carnal

Paul was under no illusions about how the flesh could try to take advantage of the tremendous freedom we have in Christ. Like many people who hear about grace he trembled a bit when faced with human nature under grace. It could go so wrong. Surely we need a few more rules. However Paul does not add "a few more rules". Rather to keep the flesh from rising up in carnality and division the Galatians were to do two simple things - love one another and walk in the Spirit. Life under the Holy Spirit cannot be carnal and a life of love simply cannot be divisive and hateful. These two provisions would keep them safe as they pursued true Christian liberty without the Ten Commandments.

(Galatians 5:13-16 NASB) For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. {14} For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." {15} But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. {16} But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

The Goal of Christian Instruction Is Love From A Pure Heart (in Contrast To Law-Keeping)

Paul was instructing his disciple Timothy on what to aim for as a pastor and leader. He did not say "be sure to keep them in line" or "Be strict and make sure they keep the Ten Commandments" or "accountability, it's all a matter of accountability". Paul's goal was loving people who were Christlike in understanding, nature and actions (See Ephesians 4:11 and following). Paul summed up the aim of all Christian ministry as "the goal of our instruction is love". That is beautiful!

(1 Timothy 1:5 NASB) But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The Ten Commandments Are For Sinners To Convict Them Of Sin

Shall we just rip the Old Testament out of our Bibles and throw it in the rubbish bin? By no means! It is full of inspiration and truth and revelation. Our faith is unthinkable without it. After Paul talks to Timothy about the goal of Christian ministry he goes on to discuss the proper use

of the law - to convict sinners of sin and reveal the righteousness of God.

(1 Timothy 1:5-11 NASB) But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. {6} For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, {7} wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. {8} But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, {9} realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers {10} and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, {11} according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

The Law does not help righteous people become loving and thus fulfill the goal of the Christian life. The law is thus not for the righteous. The Law will however help sinners to realize they are sinning and that they need to repent. In his book "Hell's Best Kept Secret" the New Zealand evangelist Ray Comfort shows how the Ten Commandments can be effectively used to convict unbelievers of the fact that they actually are "sinners in need of a Savior". There is an urgent need for this today when so many think they are "OK" and a very limited sense of sin pervades our culture.

(Romans 3:20 NASB) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

People need to know about their sin and the Ten Commandments will help them do that especially when explained with Jesus interpretations of adultery of the heart and anger being murder. Soon anyone stands convicted. Paul calls the Law a wonderful tutor that leads us to Christ but which we no longer need once we have found Christ.

(Galatians 3:22-26 NASB) But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. {23} But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. {24} Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. {25} But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. {26} For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

Christians live by the two commandments not the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath is no longer binding and the other commandments are subsumed under the commands to love God and neighbor. We live a life of loving one another while walking in the ethical control of the Holy Spirit. The Ten Commandments are still very useful in evangelism for convicting sinners of their sinfulness and their need for a Savior. However they cannot produce love in the heart which is the goal of the Christian life.

Israel And The Church

The miraculous rebuilding of the state of Israel after almost 2000 years of dispersion and its preservation in the face of great hostility has led to many people searching the Bible for answers to what God is doing. Common questions are "Are the end times near?" "Are Jews

saved simply by virtue of being Jews and worshipping "the same God as we do"? "Does God still have a purpose for the Jewish nation?"

With the emergence of Messianic Jews as a segment within the Christian church again some theological issues that have lain dormant for 1900 years are re-emerging such as: Are the Jews spiritually superior as a race? Should Gentile Christians be in awe of them? Should we adopt their culture and sing their songs? Should all Christians observe Rosh Hashanah, eat kosher food, be circumcised or use the Hebrew names for God?

This chapter will attempt to answer these and similar questions in four sections - "the Times of the Gentiles", "the Salvation of the Jews", "the Holy City" and "Israel and the Church".

The Times of The Gentiles

(Luke 21:24 NKJV) "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

(Romans 11:25-27 NKJV) For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. {26} And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; {27} For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

There is a time for the Gentiles believers described in both of the above passages. This time is characterized by two things 1) Jerusalem will be occupied by Gentiles with the Jews dispersed through all the nations 2) The Jews will be hard in heart towards the gospel. Both these things have begun to change in recent years. In 1948 Israel became a nation and Jews began to return to the Promised Land. In 1967 Jerusalem was taken back from the Arabs. The Temple Mount (at the time of writing) is still under Arab control and this is the last and most important bit of Jerusalem to be "trodden underfoot by the Gentiles". When that is finally in Jewish control then the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.

Since 1967 increasing number of Jews have begun to turn to Christ and there has been an explosion of evangelical ministry to Jews and to Israel. This indicates that the times of the Gentiles are coming to an end.

Many of today's "unreached" people groups are in fact "once -reached" people groups. This especially applies to the Arab nations and Russia which were among the first to hear the Good News however they have since turned away. Except for tribal groups in a few nations and in remote areas of India and China there are few "never reached" Gentiles left. Our God is working out His program for the salvation of the world which started with the Jews and which will end with the Jews. The completion of the Great Commission will be followed by the renewal of Israel. This is indicated in the Romans passage above which states that after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled that all Israel will be saved. This transformation of Israel will probably be part of "the end" which quickly follows the completion of the task of world evangelization

(Matthew 24:14 NKJV) "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Paul sees the spiritual revival of Israel as being even more glorious than the salvation of the

world! Or rather it adds great glory to it.

(Romans 11:15 NKJV) For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

The revival in Israel will be "life from the dead" for the world and while I can only guess at the meaning of this phrase it seems to mean that either the resurrection will take place shortly afterward or that some great spiritual life will flow across the earth and the glory of the Lord will be evident 'as the waters cover the sea'. I look forward to it whatever it is!

How should we then pray? We should pray recognizing the times we are in and we should pray for the salvation of the Jews and the completion of God's purposes for Israel at the same time as we pray for the completion of the task of world evangelization. Pray that God may use you to bring "life from the dead".

The Salvation of Israel

(Romans 11:12-32 NKJV) Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! {15} For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?... Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear... {23} And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again... {25} For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. {26} And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; {27} For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." {30} For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, {31} even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. {32} For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

The above verses (highly edited because of space) clearly show that Paul expected all Israel to be saved and to be "grafted in" to the place from which they had been "broken off".

In the first part I looked at "the time of the Gentiles" and showed it was characterized by the Jews in dispersion, their hardness of heart toward the gospel, and the occupation of Jerusalem by Gentiles. This was certainly the condition of the Jewish people until 1967. Since then the "times of the Gentiles" have been coming to an end and the time for the salvation of the Jews has begun. I believe we are on the verge of the next great move of God and that it will be His work amongst the Jews.

Satan is raising up strong opposition to this in the following ways:

- a. Through the Jewish religious leaders who are strongly opposed to any attempts to evangelize the Jews.
- b. Through strongly anti-Christian Islamic forces surrounding Israel.
- c. By portraying Christians as hostile to the Jewish people.

d. By inducing the Church to neglect God's agenda for the Jews. For instance if people are taught that God has abandoned the Jews for crucifying Christ and that the Church has replaced Israel in God's purposes. Nowhere is this taught in Scripture.

Paul teaches a "hardening" but not an abandonment. God will eventually cause all Israel to be gloriously saved. There are not two structures for redemption. God is not working through the Church and through Israel. He is only working through the Church. However eventually the Church will be based in Jerusalem and all Israel will be a part of the Church. There is only "one new man".

(Ephesians 2:11-17 NKJV) Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh; who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands; {12} that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. {13} But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. {14} For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, {15} having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, {16} and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. {17} And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

Through Christ both Jew and Gentile have been merged together into "one new man" which is the church, and in the church both Jew and Gentile stand by faith alone. See the immediately preceding verses which are Eph 2:8-10.

The Jews will not all be saved simply because they are Jews - they will all be saved because they will all at last believe. Jews are not saved by virtue of being Jews.. Paul's cry for the salvation of his countrymen is totally void if they were already saved by virtue of "worshipping the same God as we do". They worshipped the right God, the wrong way, and "not according to knowledge". The Jewish religion does not provide the righteousness that is from God. To receive the righteousness from God they must believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

(Romans 10:1-4 NASB) Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. {2} For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. {3} For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. {4} For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

However Paul does go on to say that they will be saved because they will give up their unbelief and be made part of God's "olive tree" once again.

(Romans 11:23 NKJV) And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

This revival of the Jewish nation is partly described by the prophet Zechariah. The prophecy was not totally fulfilled at Christ's first coming and, in its context in Zechariah, seems to be just before events associated with the return of the Lord (remainder of chapter 13).

(Zechariah 12:10-13:2 NKJV) "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.

Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn... "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. {2} "It shall be in that day," says the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.

Israel will repent as a whole nation and be cleansed from sin. This will be a major step forward in God's purposes for Israel being a "holy nation". Israel will finally become a part of His church and He will again be truly worshipped in Jerusalem. Satan will try to stop this by bringing many nations against Jerusalem but he shall be defeated.

(Zechariah 14:16 NKJV) And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

The salvation of all Israel is a fascinating study in how God will accomplish "the impossible" in taking a dispersed and unbelieving people and making them into a secure and holy nation. Praise be to God whose plans can never be thwarted and whose gifts and callings are irrevocable.

(Romans 11:28-29 NKJV) Concerning the gospel they (the Jews) are (presently) enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. {29} For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

The Holy City After all Israel has been saved Jerusalem will be a holy city to which all nations will come.

(Micah 4:1-3 NKJV) Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. {2} Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. {3} He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more.

This seems to be different from the "New Jerusalem" of Revelation in that it is clearly on earth and nations still need to be rebuked. War is given up by the nations but agriculture is still common and ordinary life seems to be going on. It is not yet the eternal state but a vast improvement on our present condition. The full renewal has not yet come when this is fulfilled. It seems to be an intermediate stage between what we see at present and the new heavens and the new earth This may well be the time when Satan is bound for a while.

(Revelation 20:1-3 NKJV) Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. {2} He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; {3} and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.

Other prophecies that point out a renewed role for Jerusalem in world affairs include:

(Jeremiah 3:16-17 NKJV) "Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. {17} "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.

This central role of Jerusalem will be as the worship center of the world. The people of the world or at least of Jerusalem shall no longer follow the dictates of their evil hearts. This implies they are all partakers in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. The law is powerless to effect such a moral change (Romans 7) only the Spirit can give this sort of strength (Galatians 5:16-18). Some sort of spiritual revival has come to large portions of the world.

It is not the law or the old Jewish temple system that will attract the nations though some vestiges of it, such as the Feast of Tabernacles will remain. The ark of the covenant, which was central to the old worship system, will be remembered no more.(Jeremiah 3:16,17) The worship will be centered on Christ.

Israel will be a nation of believers in Jesus Christ and Jerusalem will be a glorious city with the presence of God manifest in it so that all nations will stream to it.

(Isaiah 60:1,2,10,11,12 NKJV) Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. {2} For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you... "The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, And their kings shall minister to you; For in My wrath I struck you, But in My favor I have had mercy on you. {11} Therefore your gates shall be open continually; They shall not be shut day or night, That men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, And their kings in procession. {12} For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, And those nations shall be utterly ruined..

Yet it is not a perfect world for there will be those that resist going up to Jerusalem perhaps out of jealousy or resentment. The hostile nations that refuse to worship will not receive any rain that year.

(Zechariah 14:16-17 NKJV) And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. {17} And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.

Satan constantly attacks our ability to perceive and to receive the goodness and power of God. He will be so defeated by a revival of the Jews that the goodness, power and glory of God will be clearly manifest at last including God's protection of His people.

(Zechariah 2:4-5 NKJV) who said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying: 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. {5} 'For I,' says the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

Israel and The Church

How then can we mesh God's purposes for the Jews and for Jerusalem with His purposes for the Church? Both Israel and the Gentiles are made one through the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:11-17). Both enter into salvation through faith or are denied salvation through unbelief. Christ has only one body, not two. Believing Jews are now part of the Church which is God's redemptive structure. Thus there is a complex relationship between the Jewish nation and the Christian church. "Salvation is from the Jews" said Jesus (John 4:22) and our Savior and our Scriptures are Jewish. The root of Christianity is Jewish and we Gentiles have been grafted in. (Romans 11:16-24)

Does this mean that the Jews are racially superior and that we should adopt their culture and sing their songs? Should all Christians eat kosher food, be circumcised or use the Hebrew names for God? That question was firmly settled by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) - Jews are entitled to their culture and so are Gentiles. Jewish Christians may do all of the above things but they are not obligatory for Gentiles. Christianity transcends culture. There is no one "right culture" to be adopted by all who name Christ Jesus.

"(Galatians 3:26-29 NKJV) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. {27} For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. {28} There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. {29} And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Messianic Jews (Jews who believe in Jesus) are not a superior form of Christianity. They are not closer to God because they are Jewish. We are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

Then are Jewish believers "just like other Christians" and has God forgotten His plans for national Israel or transferred them to the Church? Certainly God has made the Church, not a particular nation, the vehicle for salvation. But God does have plans for Israel and very glorious ones if Isaiah 60-66 is to be believed.

God will achieve all the objectives of the Abrahamic covenant. The nations will be blessed, the descendants of Abraham will be as numerous as the stars of the sky and land of Israel shall belong to God's people.

(Genesis 17:4-8 , 22: 17,18) e.g. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

In the end Israel will be God's land and the Jews will all be saved (Romans 11) Jews and Gentiles will together make up the body of Christ as one "new man in Christ Jesus". Satan will not be able to steal one square inch of Israel from God or stop Him from making Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Neither can Israel's own stubbornness prevent God's purposes being fulfilled for our unfaithfulness does not invalidate God's faithfulness to His promises.

(2 Timothy 2:13 NKJV) If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

And (Romans 11:2 NKJV) God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. We have not

seen all these things happen yet, but they will happen - because we have a mighty God.

(Jeremiah 33:23-26 NKJV) Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, {24} "Have you not considered what these people have spoken, saying, 'The two families which the LORD has chosen, He has also cast them off'? Thus they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation before them. {25} "Thus says the LORD: 'If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, {26} 'then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them.'"

Application To Understanding the OT Today

The two essential truths I want you to grasp are a) the Church is God's only redemptive structure in the heavenly realms and b) God has plans for Israel on earth as a nation.

We can only be saved through believing the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jews are not spiritually superior or special in fact they have experienced a partial hardening. Their culture is not to be adopted as a superior culture by God's people. We are to treasure the Jews because Jesus was a Jew and they had the promises and the Scriptures and they still have a place in God's heart. Christianity must never be anti-Semitic.

Righteousness only comes through faith in Jesus Christ not through a particular nation no matter how involved it has been in God's purposes. Jewishness is good for Jews but heaven is of "all tribes and nations" and we can be sure that God loves Gentile cultures as well.

Many of the OT prophecies about Israel seem to be on their way to fulfillment today. . Israel is the clue to God's prophetic calendar. Which leads us on to our next chapter - OT prophecy and NT prophecy and the difference in practice and expectations in the life of the Church today.

Prophecy, Prophets and the Holy Spirit Lifestyle

One of the great changes that came about in the new Christian community on the day of Pentecost was the emergence of prophecy as a common Christian experience. After 400 years of prophetic silence (until John the Baptist) a new phenomenon emerged after Pentecost. Now that all believers had access to God through the one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18) we can receive inspiration and revelation from God. We have received the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him". (Eph 1:17, 1 Cor 2:9-16). The sheer largesse and abundance of this is almost too much to comprehend. It all starts with Peter's bold interpretation of a prophecy of Joel.

(Acts 2:16-18 NASB) but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: {17} 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT UPON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESEY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; {18} EVEN UPON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy.

Prophecy would now be abundant. Their sons and daughters (verse 17) and their men-servants and maidservants (verse 18) would prophesy. Prophecy did indeed become

common so that when Paul was writing to the church in Corinth (and we need to remember these were house churches) he wrote:

(1 Corinthians 14:29-33 NASB) And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. {30} But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. {31} For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; {32} and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; {33} for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Here Paul was saying that only two or three prophets should speak at one time, and that one at a time and everyone can wait their turn to prophesy. Wait a minute - two or three prophets, at least, in every house church! This is astonishing! This is a massive outbreak of prophecy. Paul even tells the Corinthian believers to seek the spiritual gift of prophecy as if it was fairly commonly available, in the process he contrasts it with the gift of tongues.

(1 Corinthians 14:1-5 NASB) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. {2} For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. {3} But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. {5} Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

Abundant Prophecy And Abundant Problems

This outbreak of prophecy soon had its problems and discernment was needed so that Paul would write phrases like "let the others weigh what is said", 'don't despise prophetic utterances' and "hold to what is good, reject what is evil" in regard to NT prophecy. (1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:20,21). Prophecy is not without its problems today especially if we try to use an OT model as the standard for NT prophecy. We soon end up with questions like:

Are NT and OT prophets the same or different?

Are NT prophets adding to Scripture?

Can NT prophets say "Thus said the Lord"?

If everyone can prophesy are we all prophets like Isaiah was?

Do NT prophets predict long-range futures such as the return of the Lord or national destinies?

What is the role of the prophet in a local congregation and how is it different from the forceful prophetic leadership of national Israel?

Many of the abuses of prophecy today flow from importing an OT idea of prophecy into the NT idea of the prophetic. They are indeed similar but there are some HUGE differences. In the NT all things are made new - including the prophetic.

OT and NT Prophecy

We saw earlier that the Law and the prophets prophesied until John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11-13). Whatever OT prophets were - they ceased then. There are no more OT style prophets today. Who then prophesies in the NT? If "the prophets" ceased with John the Baptist - who was Agabus and what shall we make of Revelation? I will have to take you into a very little bit of Greek and Hebrew and semantics so hold tight.

John the Baptist was the last of the Scripture writing prophets, the OT "nabi". The OT prophet was a very different figure to the NT prophet and perhaps we should not even be using the same English word for them. No-one can go around doing a "thus said the Lord" today or coming up with a new book of the Bible. No NT prophet wrote Scripture. Let's see why.

The NT prophet uses the Greek word "prophetess" a prophetess was an "inspired person" much as we might see a poet or an inventor as being inspired. Inspiration with a small "i" not the big "I" of the inspiration of Scripture. For instance Pythagorus the mathematician was called a "prophet" and Paul calls the Cretan poet Epiminedes a prophet when he quotes him in the first chapter of Titus. (Titus 1:12) . The word is a very general use of the term prophet.

One sub-set of the prophetess was the nabi - the OT prophet who spoke infallible words from God. If you think of the term prophetess as a very big circle with a wide range of meanings then right in the center is a very small circle containing the inspired, authoritative and inerrant ""nabi" of the OT. The term prophetess covers the "nabi" and a lot more besides. All nabi are prophetess but not all prophetess are nabi.

None of the NT prophets wrote Scripture. Not one word of it.(Agabus is reported in Scripture but he didn't write it) All writing of Scripture was done by the apostles. The prophets encouraged and exhorted the local congregations, predicted famines and tried to keep Paul in line unsuccessfully.

National vs. Congregational Prophets

In the OT the national prophet was part of the system of prophet, priest and king and had a recognized role in anointing and appointing national leadership. The prophet prophesied the rise and fall of national groups (Jer 1:10) and was a political figure. When Samuel turned up there was fear and trembling. The prophets were given awe and respect and were not evaluated first. When they spoke you simply did what you were told.

In stark contrast the NT prophet is generally an apolitical person. She ministers in the local congregation and is judged by her peers. The NT prophet is not concerned with appointing national leadership, anointing Emperors or tackling the political reforms of the day. The nature of the Kingdom has changed. It is no longer a political Kingdom we belong to but a spiritual one and the prophet's role has changed accordingly. The NT prophet is concerned with God's people, generally in a local congregation of which they are part and in which they operate under submission and review (see the latter part of 1 Cor 14). Two mysterious prophets will rise up at the end time (Rev 11:3-6) with national and international significance but they are a rarity. The NT prophets of Acts, Corinthians and most renewal congregations today are not national or international prophets but congregational prophets and it is deeply risky for them to borrow the mantle of Elijah.

The NT Congregational Prophet

The effects of prophecy on the unbeliever are perhaps a good place to start.

(1 Corinthians 14:24-25 NASB) But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; {25} the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

The prophet, inspired by God, uncovers the secrets of the unbelievers heart so that he falls on his face in repentance and worships God. Here we see NT prophecy operating in a ministry of conviction.

Earlier in that chapter Paul speaks of the general role of prophecy in the congregation. The role of the prophet is to edify the church with words of exhortation and consolation.

(1 Corinthians 14:3-4 NASB) But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

In contrast to tongues prophecy ministers to people generally. It is other-centered. It builds up the body of Christ which is why Paul valued it so highly.

(Acts 15:32-33 NASB) And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. {33} And after they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.

NT Prophecy And Predicting The Future

Prophecy can also be used to predict the future. Agabus is the best known example for his two prophecies in Acts. Such prophecies of the future seem to be mainly a) personal destinies or b) short-term futures only. There is no example of them prophesying the future hundreds of years in advance as Isaiah or Daniel did.

(Acts 11:27-28 NASB) Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. {28} And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

(Acts 21:10-11 NASB) And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. {11} And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

These predictions of the future are delivered in situations where they are immediately relevant. They are not stored up for many years hence. The future predictions of a famine was so the church could prepare in the present and Agabus' prediction of Paul's fate was an attempt to get Paul to see reason at that point in time. Both future prophecies were relevant to the congregation or individual at the moment in time when they were delivered.

We have no examples of NT prophets predicting national destinies or giving new light on the

return of the Lord - that is always done by the major apostles. Congregational prophets do not establish new doctrine concerning Christ and when they do predict the future it is relevant to the life of the church at that point in time.

Imparting Spiritual Gifts/Ordination

Just as the prophets were involved with sending out Paul and Barnabas they were involved with imparting a spiritual gift to Timothy. Notice also the plurality of prophets in the Acts reference which is also implied in 1 Timothy.

(Acts 13:1-4 NASB) Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. {2} And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. {4} So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus

(1 Timothy 4:14 NASB) Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

Bearers of Inspiration From God

In the light of the above, the NT prophets can perhaps best be described as "bearers of inspiration from God for the need of the moment". They bring inspiration from God into the center of the congregation of believers which then works out as a prophetic utterance that convicts, exhorts, and consoles. The NT prophet also sees personal destinies and short-term futures and imparts spiritual gifts to those set aside for the work of the gospel.

The clearest examples of this "bearing of inspiration from God for the need of the moment" can be found in the "Pentecosts" in Acts, the Jewish one in Jerusalem and the Gentile one at Cornelius' house and the mysterious one with John's disciples in Ephesus.

(Acts 2:3-11 NASB) And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. {4} And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance... we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

(Acts 10:44-48 NASB) While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. {45} And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. {46} For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, {47} "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" {48} And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

(Acts 19:6 NASB) And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

When the new Christian community is created it is created as a Spirit-filled community that receives inspiration from God that results in the new believers bursting out in praise and

glorifying God. This is seen as a prophetic act in that Peter stands up as says of this activity "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel you sons and daughters shall prophesy.." while the speaking in tongues and praising God was going on all around him. By the time we get to Acts 19 Luke is directly describing it as prophesy. It fits the Jewish tradition of prophesy in that it is similar to quite a few prophetic incidents in the OT such as:

(Numbers 11:25 NASB) Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again.

(1 Samuel 10:5-7 NASB) "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. {6} "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. {7} "And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you.

This informal definition of prophesying seems much closer to what happened in the NT church.

Thus congregational prophets are bearers of inspiration from God and form part of the spiritual heart of the new community called the Church. They glorify God in the Spirit and bring conviction, exhortation and consolation. They are the Holy Spirit speaking through Christians to the present needs of the moment.

Prophetic Abuse

If someone says "I prophesied, therefore I am a prophet, therefore I am infallible and I can tell you what to do with your life with a "thus said the Lord" then that person is in serious error. Prophetic abuse is common today as the revival of prophecy combined with the homogenizing of OT and NT that is common in so many pulpits leads to disaster. I'll get to the point here and perhaps be a bit blunt.

You cannot say "thus saith the Lord", the closest the NT comes is "thus saith the Holy Spirit" (Acts 21:11) and that was from a tried and tested prophet.

Not all who prophesy are prophets. Many Christians prophesied but the office of prophet was next to that of apostle and was an itinerant and probably full-time ministry. Paul says bluntly "not all are prophets" (1 Cor 12:28-31) yet seems to imply that the gift of prophecy can be sought by most Christians. (1 Cor 14:1-5) Phillip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesied but they are not called prophets. (Acts 21:9) Women prophesied in Corinthians but were explicitly not to be given authority in the Corinthian church. (1 Corinthians 11:3-5, 14:34,35) Thus for some reason these women who prophesied in that church were not given the office of prophet in that church. The gift and the office are different.

NT prophecy was not infallible but had to be judged by others (1 Cor 14:29) was sometimes a mixture of good and bad (1 Thess 5:21) and was such that it could even be despised - presumably because of its eccentricity (1 Thess 5:20).

Prophecy is for the building up of the church not for the personal domination of individual believers by the "prophet". You have freedom to disregard even the best prophets as Paul disregarded Agabus and went on to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:10-14)

NT prophecy seems mainly to have been bringing God's inspiration, through the Holy

Spirit to people at a particular place and point in time. It was very much grounded in edifying God's people for the immediate task at hand and imparting wisdom and spiritual gifts so it was achieved. Perhaps a bit like Haggai prophesying about the rebuilding of the Temple. Day by day prophecy to get the job done. Prophecies which purport to give the fate of America or the nature of the end times are, in my view, highly suspect - that is unless the person or group receiving the prophecy is somehow directly connected with these things and needs that word. We have enough in Scripture to give us a good idea of such things, let us turn to that instead. We cannot take the OT national prophet model and impose it on the NT congregational prophet.

Conclusion

In the NT God has created His church to be a Spirit-indwelt community that directly receives revelation from Him (1 Cor 2:9-16, 1 John 2:10,27). The receiving of such revelation and passing it on to the community is the role of those who prophesy. Such revelation needs to be properly discerned and tested. Prophecy is now generalized and no longer the province of national prophets of immense status who spoke the infallible words of God. NT prophecy has more to do with God's will in the present moment and glorifying Him in worship. There are very significant differences between OT prophecy and NT prophecy and we cannot use the OT model as normative for the NT phenomena.

Moving Ahead

Sometimes I can see some fairly extreme reactions to this teaching from "We've been lied to all these years" to "I'm leaving my church it's all wrong" or "This is the biggest load of rubbish I've ever heard I don't want to listen to any more of your teaching". These reactions are NOT what this book is aiming at. With the exceptions of Catholics and Seventh-Day Adventists I don't want you to leave your church. If you are a Catholic or an SDA please find another church graciously. I do regard the teaching of those two denominations as seriously off-center regarding the gospel.

For the rest of you - every church has its faults. I don't know of any denomination that perfectly conforms to the NT pattern or has got the "new wineskins" worked out. While I do want to point out a better way, I do not want, in the process, to plunge Christians into deep and bitter disillusionment with their churches. This book is a deeply radical look at what it means to be a NT Christian. Radical but I hope loving. I do not want you to march off in an angry storm of protest because you have discovered an error or three in your church and its theology and practice. Neither you or the church will grow if that happens.

This book does say that when Jesus talked about the need for new wineskins He wasn't just tacking patches on the old ones. He was very serious when He used the organic metaphors of leaven in the loaf and mustard seeds. It's a big change, a living revolution. How will we cope? Slowly as usual I suspect!

Were you lied to? Probably not. While I think many of the televangelists are con-artists, most pastors are real and genuine people who love you and the Lord and the Word of God. However they, like many others, have fallen for mixing in the old with the new. It's a continual process of reformation and it is not easy for anyone. Reaching these conclusions has taken me twenty years!

Many of you will be uneasy with some of the theological stances taken in this book.

Pentecostals will probably think I am being too much of a conservative evangelical and conservative evangelicals will think that I am way too charismatic. Like any good conservative evangelical (and that is my roots as a Baptist) I start with the inerrancy of the Scriptures and a concern for sound exegesis, logic and system. Contradictions must be explained. I do not believe there is any virtue in an inconsistent and incoherent theology. God is ultimately very rational and orderly and truth-full. On the other hand I am passionate about receiving the fullness of Christian experience and not setting limits on God and I believe that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into our midst to bring us life and to lead us into real and tangible intimacy with Himself. If you haven't experienced that yet -please seek it.

Should you go and give your beloved pastor a copy of this with a smug "read this you guardian of the Temple" type comment. No, please don't. We are called to love one another, so please love your pastor. Pastors do their best. If you think that your pastor may be receptive, if there is an interest there in new ways of doing church - then by all means pass the book on. Just don't do it out of hostility or in a "I'm going to change you" kind of way.

One of my big concerns is that we get back to the Sermon On The Mount and start living out our Christian faith with integrity, love and lots of good works done in real and sincere fellowship. I can only see this happening in home fellowships whether those fellowships are house churches or are cell groups of a larger local church. The NT lifestyle advocated in these pages is not the sort you can live as a mere spectator or as a board member of an institution. I have been on so many committees that I now seriously question them. We need a better way.

We need a Christian life that tenaciously grabs hold of all that we are "in Christ". In His death, in His life, in His ascended glory and in His Church. Sometimes we tack "Jesus died for your sins" onto the old Temple structures and call that Christianity. This is terribly inadequate as we have seen. It leaves so much out and leaves the believer in the grip of much that is legalistic or defective. It often leads to guilty, obsessive Christians. If we stop at the cross the resurrection life and ascension authority gets left out of the equation. If you get anything at all from what I have just written get the determination to live in ALL that Jesus has done for you. In His life, death, resurrection, ascension and impending return. Don't live in old patterns, live in new life.

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