

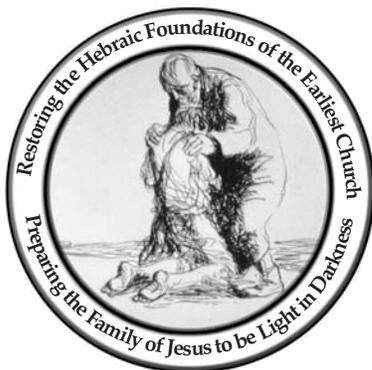
The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation



*'Whoever trusts in me as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow from within him.'
By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who
believed in him were later to receive* (John 7:38,39)

Do You Know
the Gospel the
Earliest Church embraced?
• Is it the one you embraced?

Do You Know
that 97 out of every 100 people
who call themselves "Christian"
have embraced a false gospel?
• Are you one of the 97?



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The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation

Introduction

As you go through this study guide on the Gospel of the Covenant, you'll come to understand that salvation is a pilgrimage, much like a marriage. Those who are welcomed at the Judgment Throne by the Lord will be His *"called, chosen and faithful followers"* (Revelation 17:14).

Jesus warned, *"For many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matthew 22:14). We are addressing in this article the *chosen*. The chosen, through the encouragement and support of others in the family of Jesus, still need to be found *faithful* when they reach the Judgment Throne. May each of us be found welcomed by our Lord.

When you hear the word "gospel", what does it mean to you? In other words, if you consider yourself a *Christian*, can you articulate the gospel you embraced?

- Describe the biblical basis that substantiates why you believe you are saved.

Let's discern now if the gospel you wrote down matches the true Gospel our Father established in Jesus. The reason we're putting you on the spot right away is that there are so many false gospels. One of the difficulties surrounding "faith" is a resistance to consider that you might be wrong or may have believed a lie. Nobody really wants to find out that any of their faith practices are in error.

In recent years studies have been conducted

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives; he who keeps seeking finds; and to him who keeps knocking, the door will be opened"
(Matthew 7:7,8).

that indicate the bitter fruit of the false gospels so pervasive in the world today.

- Ray Comfort, an international evangelist, reports that he has found less than 10% of those who go forward at evangelistic crusades continue to follow Jesus afterward.
- A recognized evangelistic association in the US found that less than 4% of the people who go forward at their crusades continue to follow Jesus afterward.
- A well-known and widely respected campus ministry found less than 5% of the students who had been active in their ministry are following Jesus 5 years later.
- The divorce rate in the "Bible Belt" is 50% higher than among non-Christians in the US. This sad statistic may seem unrelated to the Gospel, but, as we shall show later, the true Gospel and God's purpose for marriage are intricately connected. We contend that the gospel of much of the Bible Belt is in error, and contributes to the epidemic divorce rate among people who call themselves "Christian".

Because of their concern that they may have embraced one of the false gospels so popular today, a number of people have asked us to write about the Gospel that the earliest Church embraced. In order to accomplish this, we have developed this study guide.

Before we begin looking at the Covenant foundations of the true Gospel, ponder two key points:

1. Embracing the true Gospel that is offered by our Father starts you on a pilgrimage that will transform you into increasing Christ-likeness, and ultimately finds you welcomed at the Judgment Throne.
2. Embracing a *false* gospel sets you on a counterfeit path that completely misses the salvation our Father offers, resulting in your demise in hell.

We encourage you to take your time as

you go through this study. The Gospel which the earliest Church embraced requires far more than your mental agreement with the “gospel idea”. As you will see, to embrace the Gospel our Father offers demands everything you are and have.

Never Assume That Either You or Someone Else Is A Christian!

When people who *call* themselves “Christian” first encounter each other, they often assume that the other person is a “Christian” because he/she *claims* to be. Of all the areas in which you need discernment, this is THE area in which you should assume nothing! Every person is either the Father’s child or Satan’s. There is no middle ground in the Bible. As the apostle John clarifies, apart from true followers of Jesus, “*the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One*” (1 John 5:19).

The Bible warned that “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*” would attempt to infiltrate and destroy our families and faith communities. Satan, the deceiver, enjoys creating false gospels and penetrating faith communities with individuals he has under his controlling influence. Therefore we must choose to appropriate the weaponry with which Jesus has armed His own: “*We know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment, so that we may know who is genuine*” (1 John 5:20a).

We wrote in one of our newsletters about satanists in Connecticut who had infiltrated certain congregations. In one of the largest Baptist churches in the state, a woman satanist became superintendent of the Sunday school. She’d been sent to “water down” the curriculum. If it hadn’t been for the spirit of discernment in the pastor’s wife, this woman would have gotten away with her insidious assignment.

How many other faith communities are now being infiltrated because Christians *assume too much*? And how many “Christians” have been duped into embracing a satanically-inspired false gospel, totally missing the Father’s Good News and the promises it brings?

- How about you? When someone tells you that he or she is a Christian, do you accept them as such just because they say so? Why?

- What discerning questions could you ask to determine if that’s really the case? Why is it important to ask?

- Before beginning Part 1, can you define the biblical definition of “covenant”?

Part 1

THE COVENANT BASIS TO THE TRUE GOSPEL

Our Father — A Covenant-giver

The early Jewish followers of Jesus — and most of the earliest followers *were* Jewish! — clearly understood the significance of biblical *covenants*. Today these are understood dimly at best. God had established covenants with His people through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Jeremiah had prophesied that the Jews could expect yet another covenant, one in which *Torah*, the teachings of God’s way of life, would be written in their hearts.

In terms of covenants, God is the *initiator* between Himself and His people. Each covenant comprises distinct parameters:

- Our Father’s *stipulations* in order for man to accept the covenant.
- His promises of *blessing* for obedience.
- His *judgment* for breaking the covenant.

*** Read Deuteronomy, chapter 28, to deepen your understanding that alongside God’s promise of blessing stands His judgment for refusing to obey.

Paul reminded the Gentiles (the non-Jews) about covenants as part of the heritage they’d received from the Jewish people: “*Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises*” (Romans 9:4). The writer to the Hebrews builds the foundation of the Messiahship of Jesus on the institution of a



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new covenant: “*To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*” (Hebrews 12:24).

This phraseology may sound strange to us in the postmodern West. But what a thundering impact Jesus’ words must have had on the Jewish ears which

first heard them: “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*” (Matthew 26:28). Suddenly in that upper room that evening, it was a new ball game on earth — a new covenant was transcending the old!

This is the Gospel that was proclaimed to Abraham, foretelling that Gentiles were part of God’s plan for redemption:

[Abraham] trusted in God and was faithful to him, and that was credited to his account as righteousness. Be assured, then, that it is those who live by trusting and being faithful who are really children of Abraham. Also the Hebrew Scriptures, foreseeing that God would consider the Gentiles righteous when they live by trusting and being faithful, told the Good News to Abraham in advance by saying, “In connection with you, all the Gentiles will be blessed.” So then, those who rely on trusting and being faithful are blessed along with Abraham, who trusted and was faithful (Galatians 3:6-9, JNT).

Today, we can’t adequately appreciate the new Covenant offered to us through Jesus unless we have a heart-knowledge of the old covenants as the early Jewish followers did. *The sacrifice of Jesus inaugurated a new covenant, but the Gospel — the full meaning of that covenant Good News — is found in the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament.*

- When you decided to follow Jesus, did you have any concept of the covenant relationship into which you were entering?

- What did the “blood of Jesus” mean to you at that time? How has your understanding of the significance of His blood changed since then?

Our Father — A Covenant-keeper

As we discuss the facets of biblical covenants, you may wonder why they are so important. Anchor for yourself that embracing the Gospel of the Covenant is similar to entering into marriage and *staying* married. Our Father intended for the marriage covenant to be the physical representation of the spiritual Covenant He offers us through Jesus.

God refers to Himself in a “matrimonial” context with his people. In the Older Testament our Father describes Himself as the “Husband” of Israel:

Our Father intended for the marriage covenant to be the physical representation of the spiritual Covenant He offers us through Jesus.

“For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth” (Isaiah 54:5).

The followers of Jesus are His bride, and He awaits her at the wedding banquet: “*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready*” (Revelation 19:7). As you read, continue to remind yourself that the covenants of salvation and marriage are intricately linked.

Like marriage, our relationship with our Lord is a *heart issue*. Jesus is our *heart circumciser*, so that our minds may then yield to His purposes. The Gospel calls for loving trust in Jesus in order to enter a Covenant relationship with our heavenly Father. Although covenants permeate the Bible, most of us have an ambiguous understanding, if any, of their significance.

Many see covenants as some form of contract, but nothing could be further from the truth. When Jesus stresses, “*This is the blood of the covenant,*” He is not focusing on the cup of wine. Rather, He is directing our attention to the *goal of our Father*, that all who put their trust in the atoning blood of Jesus may live in intimate relationship with Him. The emphasis is on the *relationship with Him*. For instance, when a couple marries, which is more important: the ceremony, or the loving relationship which the ceremony makes possible? Of course, the ongoing relationship!

The word “covenant” can mean “to come into union with”, particularly as it pertains to a marital relationship. The covenant our Father offers invites you to *live in union with Him*. Union implies a oneness, and an ongoing pilgrimage with Him on earth until the time when your name is read aloud before the host of heaven.

Our goal in keeping the Covenant is to live in a way that brings glory to our Father. In fact, any goal or purpose that *doesn't* incorporate glorifying our Father will ultimately prove idolatrous. Your heart's desire for *anything but* His glory will lead you down the wrong path of self-focus and self-gratification to ask, “What blesses *me* in this relationship?”

Our Father is a *Covenant-keeper*. That is, *He* doesn't break the covenants *He* makes with men. But to their own detriment, men do. As we shall see, even in the Covenant of precious blood offered to us, we can break this covenant with dire consequences.

The word covenant can mean “to come into union with”. The covenant our Father offers invites you to live in union with Him. Union implies a oneness, and an ongoing pilgrimage with Him on earth until the time when your name is read aloud before the host of heaven.

- If you are married, how could a deeper understanding of your marriage covenant change your relationship with your spouse?
- If you are married, how does the word “union” display itself in your marriage?
- If you are single, how does your understanding of your “marriage relationship” with Jesus affect your walk with Him?

Covenants Must be Both Ratified and Consummated

Every covenant requires *both* ratification *and* consummation to confirm that the conditions of

the covenant have been accepted by both parties. In the wedding ceremony the couple *ratifies* the intent of the marriage. A couple ratifies their marriage as they pledge from their hearts their vows, such as, “*For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.*”

Pure motive is crucial in order for a biblical covenant to come into existence. Consider Jonathan's motive when he established a covenant with David: “*And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself*” (1 Samuel 18:3). Isn't this the purity of devotion required of a prospective husband? “*In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself*” (Ephesians 5:28).

Our Father scrutinizes our motives before entering into a Covenant with us — a relationship which *He* initiates. As Jesus confirmed, no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him or her (John 6:44). Hopefully, a prospective groom and bride have already demonstrated that they want each other with pure motives to fulfill their covenant responsibilities to each other. If the groom was marrying the bride only for her money, the covenant framework could be nullified. Or if the woman wanted to get married only to escape a difficult home situation, her motives could be judged as corrupt.

Although ratified at the ceremony, the covenant of marriage is not *consummated*, however, until the couple shares their first intercourse. The ceremony ratifies the couple's intent to enter into the covenant of marriage, but *consummation* is the critical part that seals the covenant. The seal is the physical sign that the covenant has been consummated. This applies to all of the covenants our Father has offered mankind. Each covenant evidences a seal of consummation:

<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Sign of Consummation</u>
Noah	rainbow in the sky
Abraham	circumcision
Moses	sprinkling of blood
Jesus	receiving the Holy Spirit in spiritual union
Marriage	breaking the hymen in physical union

It's a sign of our sinful times that the sign of marital consummation, breaking the hymen,

occurs so often before the wedding ratification. Sadly, so many who become Christians *after* marriage fail to grasp the seriousness of either their Covenant with the Father or their marriage covenant.

These two covenants are inseparably linked.

Embracing the Covenant our Father offers and the marriage covenant are the two most important relationships people will ever embrace. Nothing should compete with either. *The marriage covenant is intended to be the physical representation of our spiritual Covenant with our Father.*

Through the myriad of counterfeit gospels and rampant sexual promiscuity even within the church, current understanding of these covenants *disregards the holiness* our Father intended. It is Sue's and my intent to help restore an understanding of covenant relationships that our Father prescribes for the generations to come.

- If you are married, did you consummate your relationship prior to the covenant ceremony? Do you think this hurt your relationship after you were married?
- Have you asked forgiveness from our Lord in order that you might undergo change in your hearts toward each other as covenant partners?

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What a demonstration of intimate devotion! The intensity of David's loyalty to Jonathan pours forth in David's lament after Jonathan's death: *"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women"* (2 Samuel 1:26). As we discuss how the covenant was enacted and consummated, notice that the ceremony is not as important as the deep yearning to enter into a covenant relationship. Don't get hung up on form here. *The ceremonial form only ratifies the intense desire that is already present in the heart.*

David compares the love relationship in his covenant with Jonathan as greater than that found with a woman. A millennium later, Jesus voices from the Hebrew Scriptures the intense love that is required to embrace our Father's covenant: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37).

The intensity of *commitment* our Father requires in the "Greatest Commandment" is a condition for ratifying the Covenant. The same intensity of relationship is enjoined in Matthew 10:37: *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* Here Jesus affirms the surpassing devotion that's required in the Covenant our Father offers to those who follow His Son.

Do you really want Jesus? Do you want with all your heart to live as our Father's child? Are you willing to forsake all other goals or values that compete with your devotion to Him?

Intense Devotion and Desire Needed To Enter Into a Covenant

Visualize our Father's view of the covenant He offers through His Son by studying the covenant young David made with Jonathan, Saul's son:

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself...And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

- A noted writer admitted that until he had cancer, he'd always thought Jesus was #1 in his life. After confronting his disease, however, he realized that Jesus had been #4. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is *your* level of love for our Lord?
- Whom do you love more than you love Him? Your parents? Spouse? Children? (Now, be honest. Your Father knows your heart anyway.)

Devotion to Your Covenant-Partner

At our wedding 34 years ago, the ceremony only ratified my heart's desire for Sue to be my wife:

- I wanted her.
- I wanted no other.
- I was in covenant with her in my heart first, before the ceremony took place.

This is the same process in the Covenant offered by our Father through Jesus. Do you really *want* Him? Do you want with all your heart to *live* as our Father's child? Are you willing to *forsake* all other goals or values that compete with your devotion to Him?

Reviewing a Covenant Ceremony

Research into ancient customs illustrates the type of ceremony that David and Jonathan enacted to ratify and consummate their covenant. They would have cut an animal in two and placed the halves between them as they faced each other, half on one side and half on the other. Then both men would have walked through the middle of the two pieces doing a figure "8" around each other. The blood of the animal would drench their feet. The figure "8" signifies infinity. The covenant was to last forever, and was ratified by the blood of the sacrifice.

Their exchange of valued possessions would be the physical sign evidencing to others that a covenant existed between them. There must be a sign that a covenant exists. This is a vital point for later discussion of the Covenant with our Father that is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Sometime later, at great personal danger, Jonathan sought out David as he was hiding from Saul at Horesh (see 1 Samuel 23:18). There the two *renewed their covenant* to confirm that the conditions under which the covenant had been established were still viable; nothing had changed.

When a man has intercourse with his wife, they are *renewing the covenant*. The normal place of covenant renewal is their bed. Therefore the writer of Hebrews could admonish, "*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure [undefiled], for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral*" (13:4).

When you receive the body and blood of Jesus, you are *renewing your covenant* with our

Father. Covenant renewal isn't to be taken lightly. The Corinthian believers were taking the body and blood without discernment, and Paul warned them, "*That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep [died]*" (1 Corinthians 11:30). Communion is much more than bread and wine consumption, or spiritual commemoration. It is the precious *covenant renewal* with our Father, remembering that which Jesus has accomplished on our behalf until He comes back for us.

- How seriously do you take renewing your covenant with our Father in Jesus when you share in communion?
- Have you ever experienced consequences from partaking of communion lightly or with known sin in your heart?

Breaking a Covenant Means Death

What wonderful promises are showered on those who embrace the Covenant our Father offers through Jesus! Thank Him again as you breathe in the joy of a right relationship with our Lord!

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23)

Continuing on in the same passage is the warning against those who break the Covenant: "*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*" (Hebrews 10:26,27).

Entering into a covenant in ancient times was so serious that if a man broke a covenant, one of his own family members were obligated to kill him. Covenant-breakers didn't deserve to live. Each of the covenants our Father establishes offers promises of blessing for those who keep their part of the covenant. However, covenants also contain judgment or curses for those who break the covenant.

The Older Testament is a great source for understanding our Father's dealings with covenant-breakers. Paul urged the Corinthian believers (and us as well) to pay heed to God's relationship with Israel: "*These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come*" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The examples and accounts in the Hebrew Scriptures encourage us that God keeps His promises. They also warn us that God does not change, and that dire consequences await covenant violators! For example, Solomon reiterated that people have an *ongoing obligation* when they enter into Covenant with their Lord: "*You keep covenant with your servants and show them grace, provided they live in your presence with all their heart*" (1 Kings 8:23).

Tragically, time and again the kingdoms of both Israel and Judah roused the anger of God by breaking their part of the covenant, paying the penalty of famine, plague, and banishment from the Land He'd set apart for them: "*This happened because they did not heed the voice of the Lord their God, but violated his covenant, everything that Moses the servant of God had ordered them to do, and would neither hear it nor do it*" (2 Kings 18:12).

The Older Testament ends with Malachi pronouncing the judgment of God to those who broke marriage covenants through divorce. We today need to pay particular attention to the intensity of our Father's regard for the marriage covenant.

The LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one [to live in union]? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and

do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith!" (Malachi 2:14-16).

Notice our Father's purpose for the marriage covenant: "*Because he was seeking godly offspring.*" Every covenant initiated by our Father entails purposes for the person who embraces the covenant to fulfill. In the Covenant offered to us through Jesus, His purpose is emphasized in Ephesians 2:8-10: "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

In the Covenant with our Father through Jesus, the blessings as well as the warning of curses apply. The covenant is offered through Jesus. But, we can break this covenant with terrible consequences, just as our disobedient spiritual ancestors experienced.

Pay attention to the interconnection between the covenant-breakers of Moses' time and those who insult the Holy Spirit by forsaking the Covenant with Jesus:

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:28-31).

Every covenant initiated by our Father entails purposes for the person who embraces the covenant to fulfill.

Settle this in your mind if you are going to be found called, chosen, and most importantly, faithful: You are capable of breaking the Covenant with

your Father. Our Father's part of the Covenant will never be broken, but we, as the Older Testament has shown, are not always that faithful. Consider these passages of Scripture offered by Newer Testament writers as a warning to those *who are believers*:

*Watch out, brothers, so that there will not be in any one of you **an evil heart lacking trust**, which could lead you to **apostatize** from the living God! Instead, keep exhorting each other **every day** [keep working out your salvation together], as long as it is called Today, so that none of you will become **hardened by the deceit of sin**. For we have become sharers in the Messiah, **provided**, however, **that we hold firmly** to the conviction we began with, right through **until the goal is reached**" (Hebrews 3:12-14, JNT).*

We, as brothers and sisters in Jesus, need relational encouragement and diligent daily alertness. Deceitful teachings and temptations could harden our hearts against the truth of the Living God.

*Therefore, let us be **terrified** of the possibility that, even though the promise of entering his rest remains, **any one of you** might be judged to have **fallen short** of it; for Good News has been proclaimed to us, **just as it was to them**. But the message they heard didn't do them any good, because those who heard it **did not combine it with trust** (Hebrews 4:1,2, JNT).*

Sobering words, aren't they? Especially when considered in contrast with the "easy believism" of so many counterfeit gospels that excuse sin under the guise of "grace". And if those warnings aren't enough, then seriously consider this truth:

*It is **impossible** for those who have once been enlightened, who have **tasted the heavenly gift**, who have **shared in the Holy Spirit**, who have **tasted the goodness** of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they **fall away**, to be **brought back to repentance**, because to their loss they are **crucifying the Son of God all over again** and **subjecting him to public disgrace** (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

How diligent each of us must be in a walk of obedient trust that is grounded in love so that we can withstand the temptations of the world, our own fleshly desires, and demonic assaults!

*If they have escaped the corruption of the world by **knowing** our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again **entangled** in it and **overcome**, they are **worse off at the end** than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them **not to have known the way of righteousness**, than to have known it and then to **turn their backs on** the sacred command that was passed on to them (2 Peter 2:20,21).*

Speaking to fellow Christians, Paul warns, "If you live **according to your old nature**, you will **certainly die** [spiritually, since everyone dies physically]; but if, **by the Spirit**, you **keep putting to death** the practices of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

It's not the *actions* that we do that count with our Lord, but our hearts being *filled with His Spirit* so that our lives bring Him glory: "**Many** will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never **knew** you. Away from me, you **evildoers!**'" (Matthew 7:22,23). Here Jesus is turning away people who had walked in the prophetic, cast out demons, and even performed miracles — yet they failed to do what *His Father in heaven wanted* (Matthew 3:2). They were known by Him as evildoers.

Another word for "evildoer" is "*worker of lawlessness*" — someone who has no regard for keeping His commands. Richard Wurmbrand, a Jewish Christian who suffered for his faith for fourteen years in a Rumanian prison, wrote several years ago, "We live in the last days. Morality, laws, and the standards break down. The heresy of antinomianism [belief that God's laws are invalid for today], of **lawlessness united with religiosity**, is very dangerous today. Let us beware of it."

Yes, let's beware so that we can be found faithful when our time comes! (See 2 Timothy 3:1-5.)

- Do you believe a person can break the Covenant? Explain.

- After reviewing the passages that deal with covenant breaking, what changes do you think God is calling you to make so you can walk diligently in obedient trust with Him?

Our Father's Covenant Ceremony

Perhaps now you can grasp the seriousness that surrounds embracing the Gospel our Father offers as a new Covenant. When you are baptized, you are making a vow to our Father through your immersion: "[T]he water of immersion, which is not the removal of dirt from the body, but **one's pledge to keep a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah**" (1 Peter 3:21, JNT). Baptism is an active response that confirms your heart's desire.

Followers of Jesus serve a covenant-giving Father. And, He lovingly accepts covenant-keeping children. So when Jesus says, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*" (Mark 14:24), He is confirming far more than the self-serving motives of today's so-called "gospels." This Covenant calls for entering into THE most important intimate relationship because it involves eternal consequences. The goal is to live in *covenant relationship* with our Father, that is, to lovingly obey *our* part of the Covenant since He is so faithful to fulfill *His* part.

Picture yourself spiritually ratifying and consummating the conditions of our Father's Covenant. Father God stands opposite you. You agree in your heart to the stipulations of the Covenant. When He sees the desire of your heart to want this relationship above all things, He walks through the blood of the sacrifice with you. And Who is the sacrifice? Jesus. You and our Father both do a figure

We're talking about entering into the most important intimate relationship, one with eternal consequences. The goal? To live in covenant relationship with our Father by lovingly obeying our part of the covenant.

"8" in the blood of Jesus. This *ratifies* the Covenant through the blood of the Lamb. What *consummates* the Covenant? Our Father seals you with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing that *if you do not break* the Covenant, you will have redemption on the Last Day.

This Covenant is no small matter! You no longer belong to Satan. You have been adopted into our Father's family: "*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'* So you are **no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir**" (Galatians 4:6,7). No longer being a *slave to sin* frees you to walk in obedient trust!

Keep in mind that *receiving the Holy Spirit* as a sign of the consummation is vital to your ability to keep the Covenant. Paul repeats several times that the seal of the Holy Spirit consummates the Covenant. "*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*" (2 Corinthians 1:21,22).

"Whoever trusts in Me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive."

The presence of the Spirit in our lives guarantees our Father's faithfulness to set His children apart for His purposes. "*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit ...And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*" (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30).

Our Father is *for* those He has marked with His seal! But He extends to us the same warning He gave to His people through the apostle Peter. Believers of the first century were bombarded with entangling temptations and distortions of the truth just as we are today: "*Dear friends, since you know this in advance, guard yourselves so that you will not be led away by the errors of the wicked and fall from your own secure position*" (2 Peter 3:17, JNT).

Noticeable signs are evident when you are indwelt by the Spirit. As much as the rainbow, circumcision, or David wearing Jonathan's robe are recognizable, the Bible makes plain the signs that reveal that our Father's Covenant has been both ratified and consummated in you.

- What went through your mind as you pictured yourself and our Father walking through the blood of Jesus to ratify your covenant?
- How would you articulate the assurance God gives those who trust in Jesus by being “marked” by His seal?

Place a check mark next to the indicator that best describes you.
Discuss your answers with someone who knows you well.

COVENANT GOSPEL

- Fully aware of your own depravity
- Sin grieves your heart
- Ongoing desire for intimacy with our Father
- Bible is life-giving resource to glorify the Father
- Ongoing heart change by the Holy Spirit
- Living sacrificially for Jesus
- Others see dramatic difference in you
- Worship expressed from a cleansed, exuberant heart
- Fellowship gathering spurs you on to greater courage
- Opportunistic to represent Jesus in the world
- Confident of the Spirit’s indwelling
- Life empowered by the Spirit

FALSE GOSPEL

- I’m okay just as I am
- Hardly conscious of sins
- Father hardly considered, or no relationship at all
- Bible studied for knowledge, not a way of life
- Same motivations / no heart change
- Avoid suffering or rejection at all cost
- No substantial difference from world’s values
- Worship is self-pleasing; no regard for repentance
- Service attendance epitomizes your religious expression
- Apathetic toward the salvation of others
- No assurance of the Spirit’s presence
- Religious life based on own efforts

Part 2

DISCERNING THE TRUE GOSPEL FROM FALSE ONES

Signs of False Gospels

No matter what size faith community you are in, Satan will send as many people as he can who have *embraced a false gospel*. Since the Holy Spirit does not dwell in these individuals, leaders have to use “prop up” programs to keep them coming:

- If people can't worship in “*Spirit and truth*,” they'll seek worship that entertains them. Worship leaders will try to conjure a “spiritual” mood. Success is measured by the numbers who attend your services rather than on *their impact* in the world.
- Without the Spirit Who gives life to God's Word, reading the Bible is a chore. People devoid of the Spirit look to *someone else* to teach them, someone not relationally close enough to confront them *to live* its truth.
- In order to attract more people, you rely more and more on programs and services that cater to the carnal nature. You enable husbands to neglect their spiritual responsibilities at home. They “outsource” their wives and children to others for spiritual development, such as Sunday schools and youth programs.

Religious systems that cater to false gospels operate through administrative busyness — keeping all the programs running efficiently. Leaders in the system may be called “pastor” or “elder”, but they are in reality administrators *in charge of programs* — functioning more as managers than as spiritual role models and leaders.

If you're a person who has embraced a false gospel, you'll seek out faith communities that can fulfill any of the above-mentioned needs. When you have embraced the true Gospel, none of the above will be your motivation.

Mission agencies that are still sending missionaries to the same places generation after generation because they *failed to raise up* spiritual leadership from among the indigenous people should question the gospel they share. Without the Holy Spirit, mission agencies will have to “prop up” the people they serve for generations.

A few years ago we visited a school for Native American children. The missionary principal was proud that he had quadrupled enrollment during his relatively short tenure. I asked him how many Native people had ever taught at the school during its 75 years of existence. “None,” he replied. I asked, “Don't you see a *problem* with that?” He didn't.

Satan is a deceiver. Wherever our Father has shed the light of His love and established Covenant with His chosen, the Adversary will counterfeit that truth with his own false gospels. In the 10 years we have shared the Gospel embraced by the earliest Church at our seminars around the country, we have found that only 3 out of every 100 people have a *ratified-consummated* relationship with our Father. Most *admit themselves* that there is no sign of the Spirit's presence in their lives. They were deemed “saved” by someone when they agreed with a few Bible verses and “went forward.”

Tragically, the majority shared one issue in common that kept our Father from ratifying and consummating the Covenant: ***bitterness***. We'll deal with this issue shortly.

Always be on guard against counterfeit “Good News.” Even the first-century Galatians were warned to beware of a perverted gospel: “*Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*” (Galatians 1:8). Any so-called “gospel” of today that differs materially from the Gospel understood by the earliest followers of Jesus is a path to hell.

Satan is shrewd. He doesn't care *how* you don't get to heaven, as long as you *don't* get there! Some people mistakenly assume that God will excuse them at the judgment throne for not knowing the true Gospel. The Bible states otherwise.

Entering into Covenant with our Father is first and foremost a heart issue. It's a step of yearning to live in union with Him, as much a heart issue as a faith issue. Covenanting with our Father is never a mere cognitive act. *You don't enter our Father's Covenant through your mind's analysis.*

Only 3 out of every 100 churched people have a ratified-consummated relationship with our Father.

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Many of the false gospels ask you to agree with a few Bible verses. Then someone ratifies you as “saved.” Generally these verses are lifted solely from the Newer Testament. No covenant relationship is established, and definitely no consummation. All you end up with is *human ratification*.

*Repentance grieves
you that you have
grieved God; you
hunger for the forgive-
ness, cleansing, and
restoration that only
He can give.*

Most likely there was no requirement for *repentance*, a determination to *turn from* the sins that needed to be forgiven and *come to* the Father through Jesus for reconciliation. Thus, the Holy Spirit did not enter to consummate the Covenant because no covenant relationship existed. Yet, others will *assume* you’re a “Christian.” Deluded, you’ll never be welcomed into heaven *without the Spirit*.

Human ratification is occurring in this country in epidemic proportions. The false gospels of today banner “getting you saved” or proffer “fire” insurance. How far short of our Father’s goal of intimate relational union they fall!

Put in the context of a marriage analogy, a cognitive gospel would be if someone shared with Sue and me before we ever met a list of personality characteristics about each other. Both of us liked what we read and, as a result of our positive response to the character qualities, we’re told, “You and Sue are married!” Still, we haven’t met, we have no viable relationship, and have definitely experienced no consummation. But we are assured by others, “You’re married!” I know *about* her and she knows *about* me, but sadly, we *don’t know* each other. It’s impossible to live in covenant union this way.

This is the same foolishness of the false gospels. They require nothing more than cognitive assent to Bible facts but bypass the intimacy and devotion of a covenant union with our Father.

- How would *you* differentiate between a cognitive “getting saved” gospel and a “covenant union with our Lord” Gospel?

- Having read thus far, what type of gospel depicts the one you currently believe? Does a change need to be made?

Many False Gospels / One True Gospel

Salvation was understood by the earliest Church to occur at the *end* of the pilgrimage. For those who endure to the end our Lord promises, “*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels*” (Revelation 3:5). *This is the moment of salvation!*

To keep your name in the Lamb’s Book of Life calls for two essential elements.

Justification — placing your trust in, and *continuing* to trust in, the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins

Sanctification — the lifelong purifying process of the Holy Spirit that enables you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ so that you *can* endure to the end

The pilgrimage of a Jesus follower:

- Begins with Justification, your Spiritual Rebirth;
- Continues a lifelong process of Sanctification;
- Culminates ultimately in Salvation before the Throne.

True Gospel:

***Justification + Sanctification =
Salvation***

The true Gospel is a pilgrimage to the moment of salvation when you appear before the Lord. Let’s relate this concept to marriage. Justification is the day you get married, and sanctification is living out your marriage. Marriage must be worked out together until the covenant ends when death parts the couple.

Justification frees us from the penalty of our sins: “*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!*” (Romans 5:9). Jesus paid the price.

The true Gospel is a pilgrimage, a journey to the moment of salvation when you appear before the Lord.

Accepting the atoning work of His death alone justifies us before our Father and *reconciles* us to Him. Sadly, many false gospels contend that justification *is* salvation. But these gospels leave out other verses pertinent to our *salvation pilgrimage*, the aspect of our faith that is sanctification.

In its fullest sense, sanctification may be described as:

A lifelong process by which the Holy Spirit changes our character, that is, our motivation and behavior, into conformity to Jesus.

“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). Our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted around the world for Jesus understand this truth far better than we in the West do. Keeping your focus on living in obedient trust in our Lord Jesus produces evidence of His grace in your life. And by focusing on Him as He reveals Himself through His Spirit and His Word, you can discern error and avoid deception.

Therefore, my beloved friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12,13).

Now “the Lord” in this text means the **Spirit**. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us, with faces unveiled, see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord; and we are **being changed into his very image**, from one degree of glory to the next, by the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17,18, JNT).

So far as your former way of life is concerned, you must **strip off** your old nature, because your old nature is **thoroughly rotted** by its deceptive desires; and you must let your spirits and minds **keep being renewed**, and clothe yourselves with the new nature **created to be godly**, which expresses itself in the **righteous-**

ness and holiness that flow from the truth (Ephesians 4:22-24, JNT).

Through His Spirit we are transformed and receive the will to live out His purposes for our lives. This is the continuing course for us to undertake with serious focus until we stand before His Throne to be acknowledged as His.

False Gospels: Justification = Salvation

The most common thread among the false gospels of today is that justification is the same thing as salvation, a once-for-all *point in time* rather than a biblical *pilgrimage* leading to our deliverance. No wonder this gospel is most prevalent in the “Bible Belt,” where the divorce rate (the *breaking of covenant*) is 50% higher than the rest of the nation. There is an important connection here. Suffice to say, embracing a false gospel carries dire consequences for your marriage.

When you hear phrases like, “*Once saved, always saved,*” or, “*You can lose your salvation,*” you’re encountering arguments that have nothing to do with the Gospel that the early Church embraced. Such statements are the result of the man-made gospels of the last three hundred years. You can’t lose what you haven’t yet obtained. Salvation comes at the Judgment Throne.

Reread the letter of First John for a refresher on a life of *continuing* love that *keeps on* obeying our Lord’s commands in *union* with Him. The *Jewish New Testament* translation by David Stern does an excellent job of presenting the *ongoing* sense of the original Greek verbs!

Another marriage analogy illustrates a false gospel. A man and a woman have a wedding. Right after the ceremony he leaves his wife. Five years later you meet him and you ask, “Are you married?” He responds, “Yes.” When you ask where his wife is, he answers, “Oh, I left her right after the ceremony.”

Is the man *married*? We asked this question in the “Bible Belt” and were told, “Yes! He’s just ‘backslidden.’” [“Backslidden” describes those who are going to smash into the wall next to the narrow gate.] This response views salvation and marriage *technically*, not relationally. In other words, the *letter* is more important than the *spirit* of the matter.

- Letter — mentally agreeing with Bible verses.
- Spirit — embracing a covenant relationship.

Those who have embraced the true Gospel and understand salvation as a pilgrimage immediately respond to the “married” question with an emphatic “No!!! The man’s intent never was to enter a covenant relationship. Therefore the marriage is void in God’s sight!” This describes so many who embrace false gospels and are “ratified as Christian” by man. Their so-called “*salvation*” is *void already*.

- Describe the difference between a “point-in-time” gospel and a pilgrimage of loving endurance to the end.

- Your ongoing sanctification may be considered as the “relational glue” that binds you to God. Describe as many changes as you can recall which He has made in you.

Part 3

THE TRUE GOSPEL OF THE COVENANT

The Older Testament:

THE Source for the Gospel of Jesus

The Bible stipulates one true Gospel as the way to eternal life. Jesus speaks of it to his Jewish listeners:

“Whoever trusts in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:38,39).

The “streams of living water” refer to the undeniable evidence of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in the life of anyone who puts his trust in Jesus. The only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words was the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament. If you want to trust Jesus “as the Scripture has said,” you must study the Hebrew Bible to discern the complete Gospel.

Acceptance of an individual by God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus was the central issue in the early Church. The Gospel that is based on the Hebrew Bible and understood by the early Jewish church was *not* man accepting Jesus as his Savior, but that the Father accepted the Lord Jesus as the only sacrifice for sin out of His great love for mankind.

Christ fulfilled the reconciliation requirements of His Father with mankind. Jesus’ payment was complete, and a new Covenant was established through His blood. Veteran missionary Trevor McIlwain puts it well: The resurrection of Jesus was our Father’s sign that the sacrifice for our sins had been accepted by Him. He was, and forever will be, satisfied. If Jesus hadn’t been raised from the dead, our hope would be in vain. We would have no sign from our Father that the sacrifice had been acceptable to Him and that a New Covenant had been established.

Years before the coming of Jesus, a number of what we call the “Hebraic stream” of rabbis taught that a person must experience a spiritual birth, a response to God’s call on his life. These rabbis

understood the trust-filled relationship Abraham had with God. Conversion meant rebirth. Being “born from above” was a shift from following the letter of the law to abiding in loving obedience with our Father.

Being born again was the point at which you shifted from religious practice (or *no* practice!) and put your *full trust and reliance* in the Lord. That’s why Jesus was so surprised when Nicodemus professed ignorance of this new birth: “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?” (John 3:10).

Jesus endorses this break with religious form and practice when He tells the audience who criticized Him about His disciples not fasting, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the **new piece will pull away** from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into **new wineskins**” (Mark 2:21,22).

To be “born again” was to trust in Jesus “as the Scripture has said” — as Abraham trusted. Trying to trust in Jesus while relying on religious tradition only rips each apart, rendering each useless.

Through the apostle John, the Lord voiced concern that His Jewish audience was missing what *Torah* aimed for: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that **by them** you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that **testify about me**, yet you **refuse to come to me** [as the Scriptures have said] to have life” (John 5:39,40). Sadly, many who embrace any of the false gospels of today seek a **form of religion** over the relationship with the PERSON who gives life.

- What do you think about the statement that the true Gospel is our Father’s acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sin, and not our response to it? How does this statement differ from gospel presentations you’ve heard in the past?
- The Hebrew prophets foretold Jesus’ coming as Messiah. What specific scripture passages do you know that corroborate His fulfillment of these prophecies?

**Our Father's Covenant:
A Trust-filled Pilgrimage of Love**
[Not a life of rule-keeping!]

This bears repeating: The early Church understood salvation as a process or pilgrimage. A pilgrimage has a beginning and a desired end. Our goal as followers of Jesus is to ultimately be found faithful and to hear our names proclaimed to the hosts of heaven. No one can accomplish this without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God expressed His heart's desire for an ongoing love relationship with the Israelites. But many of the misguided Israelite leaders in what we call the "Judaizing Stream" perverted our Father's desire into a series of rules and obligations designed to earn salvation only if precisely followed. These men cherished religious form over relationship with God, and their form of religious practice is known as "legalistic perversion." Unlike the trust-filled obedience of their father Abraham as he related to God, legalists focus on rule-keeping, not relationship.

Legalistic perversion is egotistical in that a person thinks, "I can fulfill these requirements *on my own*. I don't need God." Zechariah 4:6 tells us otherwise: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty."

- How would you articulate the difference between legalistic perversion and a life of obedient trust that evidences the Spirit's work in you?
- What motivates your walk with our Lord? What evidence in your life would convince a jury that He lives in you?

**Our Father's Stipulations for Ratifying
and Consummating the Covenant**

- *Repentance*
- *Love*
- *Obedient Trust*
- *Forceful Conviction and Determination*
- *Forgiving Others*

Let's review the stipulations of the Hebrew Bible spoken of when Jesus said, "Whoever **trusts in me as the Scripture has said**, streams of living water will flow from within him."

**1. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both begins
and
continues with your Repentance**

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter at Pentecost all affirmed *repentance* as the first step toward salvation. Biblical repentance always demands a *turning from sin* and a *turning to God*. Do you see these two distinctives? Turning from sin **and** turning to God.

That's the vital message in this verse: "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must **turn to God in repentance** and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

Repentance grieves you that you have grieved God. You hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that only He can give. That grief is the "godly sorrow [that] brings **repentance that leads to salvation** and leaves **no regret**" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance and confession flow throughout the Bible as a continuing stream of reconciling truth.

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' — and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah (Psalm 32:1-5).

Perhaps that's why we're warned not to become hardened by sin's deceit, but to stay malleable with His Spirit. Trying to ignore that which is separating us from loving fellowship with our Father becomes a spiritual cancer gnawing away at body, soul, and spirit.

"I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin" (Psalm 38:18). Use that guilt and troubled spirit to humble yourself before our Father and to turn

away from the iniquity that has brought you such distress! Restore the peaceful righteousness that comes from receiving His cleansing and forgiveness.

*[God speaking] "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will **hide my eyes** from you; even if you offer many prayers, I **will not listen**. Your hands are full of blood; wash and **make yourselves clean**. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! **Stop doing wrong**"* (Isaiah 1:15,16). Think of all the prayer that is going up for our nation. Yet, unless each praying heart has humbly washed in the river of repentance and forsaken sin, the eyes and ears of our Father will not respond.

Many people believe that God hears and responds to every prayer uttered by every person. But what does His Word say about those who choose to abide in sin? *"Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the Lord. "This is the one I esteem: he who is **humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word**"* (Isaiah 66:2). The "gospels" that offer you prosperity or life improvement have revealed themselves as spawn of the Evil One who wanted to be exalted and recognized. The message of Jesus calls instead for us to be poor in spirit, trusting in Him alone and standing in awe of His Name.

The apostle John sums up his pivotal passage on forsaking a sinful lifestyle in order to remain united with Jesus with this verse: *"Here is how one can distinguish clearly between God's children and those of the Adversary: everyone who **does not continue doing what is right is not from God**"* (1 John 3:10; see 3:1-9 also).

Our Father's parameters for those who want to be counted among His own are precise. *"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation **stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'**"* (2 Timothy 2:19).

He Who penetratingly examines our hearts recognizes if we are truly seeking Him or are just deceiving ourselves with religious self-justification. *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we **confess our***

sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9). Our Father lovingly pursues those who repent and are submitted to His authority as represented in His Name, for then they are available to fulfill His purposes.

Our Father hasn't changed. He won't set aside His holiness for anyone. The penalty for the sins of all mankind has been paid by the shed blood of Jesus. But His atonement is useless to us until we turn from our sins to Him in repentance so that we can be forgiven. Each person who would enter our Father's Covenant must come to the same realization that David did:

*God, in your grace, have mercy on me; in your great compassion, **blot out my crimes**. Wash me completely from **my guilt**, and cleanse me from **my sin**. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is **evil from your perspective**, so that you are right in accusing me and justified in passing sentence* (Psalm 51:1-4, JNT). Then David adds, *"My sacrifice to God is a **broken spirit**; God, you won't spurn a **broken, chastened heart**"* (Psalm 51:17).

To help you understand the sweeping importance of repentance, let's again use an analogy from marriage. On the morning of his wedding a groom approaches his betrothed and says, "Honey, I love you deeply, but I also have two lovers I'm having difficulty giving up. Let me keep them for a while and maybe I can get rid of them later."

How would she feel? Would she marry him? So many people who embrace false gospels continue to pursue the same besetting sins they had before their human ratification. In fact, many have no intention of giving up their sins. By their intent they are committing **spiritual adultery** against our Father.

Everything in your Christian life — everything about knowing God and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will — depends on the quality of your love relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus. If your love relationship is not right, nothing in your life will be right. His love compels you to obey.

Scripture very graphically depicts Israel as “adulterous”, “unfaithful”, even as a donkey in heat chasing after many lovers. We in the church should consider this warning and examine ourselves for whatever is more important to us than Jesus. Lack of repentance says to our Father, “I want what you have to offer, *but I don’t intend to change or to give up anything.*” Will He enter into a Covenant with a person who refuses to give up other lovers?

- In the gospel you received, were you told that you needed to repent? If not, what consequences have occurred in your life?
- Is the concept of *spiritual adultery* new to you? What “lovers” might be competing with an intimate and powerful relationship with Jesus in your life?
- As you review the passages that enjoin turning away from sin in order to walk in forgiveness and purity, are any of your theological premises being challenged? Is the Holy Spirit pinpointing specific areas of tolerated sin in your own life?

2. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both begins and

continues with your *agape* (*ahav*) Love

On your pilgrimage with our Father, He establishes the same relational requirement in both the Older and Newer Testaments, that is, to *love Him*. The Older Testament speaks of a Father Who longs for a love relationship with His people. The foundation of this love requirement is found in Deuteronomy 6:4,5: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*”

The Hebrew word for love, *ahav* (ah-hahv’), means that you are filled with desire and delight and passion for the one you love. You long to be

with our Father. The meaning of the Hebrew letters of *ahav* is “*a window into the Father’s heart.*” The second of the ten commandments declares that our Father promises to show His love to a thousand generations of those who *love Him and keep His commandments.*

Quoting from that same Deuteronomy passage cited earlier, Jesus delivered the most vital commandment: “*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second [which is from Leviticus] is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Greek word for love here is *agape* (ah-gah’-pay), and its meaning is similar to the Hebrew *ahav*. Our source of *agape* love is the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22, which lists the fruit of the Spirit, the first of which is *agape* love).

To summarize the priority of loving God: Everything in your Christian life — everything about knowing God and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will — depends on the quality of your love relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus. If your love relationship is not right, nothing in your life will be right. *His love* compels you to obey.

This wholehearted, self-sacrificing love is wonderfully manifested by those who know the Gospel of the Hebrew Scriptures and understand the *depth of their own depravity*. For them it’s easy to see God’s grace in the atonement and to lovingly appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus on their behalf.

We noted earlier Trevor McIlwain of New Tribes Missions. He has gotten phenomenal response by teaching native peoples the Bible in chronological order, from Genesis to Revelation. When they complete the Older Testament, they grasp the depth of their own sin. Then, when they hear about Jesus, they are overwhelmed and grateful to respond in love for His sacrifice on the cross.

If you try to keep God’s commands without loving Him, you’ll grow proud, caught up in what

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won't face trials, but with your Lord as a shield, you can stand, and keep standing.

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in **all your ways** acknowledge him, and **he** will make **your paths straight**”* (Proverbs 3:5,6). It's much easier to walk along a path our Father has leveled than to stumble about in confusion and unbelief! A person who trusts our Father first seeks His will and then does it without concern about the cost of his obedience. The child who trusts forgoes looking to circumstances as confirmation of His will; rather, he presses on despite them.

*“Here is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Look, I am laying in Zion a tested stone, a costly cornerstone, a firm foundation stone; he who trusts will **not rush here and there**’* (Isaiah 28:16, CJB). If you are certain of His Sovereignty, your heart can rest in peace. Or would you rather rush here and there, soliciting opinions of what course to take next?

Salvation is based on a loving trust in God, a relationship of trust in His faithfulness: *“Abraham trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6). Our trust produces the same results. Respected teacher Dwight Pryor concurs: *“Faith is more than belief in something. It is **faithfulness to Someone.**”* Because of Abraham's trust, a promise was given to him that through his seed blessing would flow to the Gentiles. And that Seed's blessing *has!!!*

- Under which circumstances have you found it hardest to really trust your Father in heaven? What were the consequences of your doubt?
- How would you differentiate between a season of worry and a habitual distrust of God? How might you find yourself hedging against His plans and will for you? *Have* you? When?

4. Your Salvation Pilgrimage Both Begins and

Continues with Your Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination

Answering the call of our Father to trust wholeheartedly in Jesus is a vigorous response from which no earthly power can hold you back! As Jesus proclaimed, following Him is a heart issue that in no way nullifies the Hebrew Scriptures: *“Up to the time of John there were the Torah and the Prophets. Since then the Good News of the Kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is **forcing his way into it**”* (Luke 16:15,16). This passage can best be understood by considering the walls that surround Jerusalem:

Around a military fortification such as the walls of Jerusalem, *“killing zones”* are established to concentrate weapon fire for maximum killing effectiveness. Those who attack the fort must first courageously battle their way through the killing zone. Because of the strong likelihood that they might be killed in the attack, these individuals have to *“be dead”* to everything beforehand in order to fully focus on their objective.

Such forceful determination was the standard in the earliest Church for those who embraced our Father's covenant. This essence is captured in Matthew 13:44-46:

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then **in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, **he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.**”*

It takes tremendous certainty to give up everything you've got in order to lay hold of that which our Father is offering you. *Genuine repentance, agape love, and your complete trust* produce the type of conviction and determination our Father requires.

- Do you believe forceful conviction and steadfast determination are required to enter the Covenant our Father offers? Why or why not?

- If you consider yourself to be a Christian already, how strong is your conviction and determination to follow our Father and His Son, Jesus?

weak **dutiful** **intense**
 0---10---20---30---40---50---60---70--- 80--- 90---100
 [Put an X on the number that best describes you.]

- Write in your own words why you answered as you did.

5. Your Salvation Pilgrimage Both Begins and Continues with You Forgiving Others

One truth in particular startles many who spread false gospels. Jesus declared, *“If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”* (Matthew 6:15). The question for us is, Can we be forgiven of anything by our heavenly Father if we *do not forgive* those who have violated us? NO!

The Apostle John warns us about unforgiveness: *“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (1 John 4:19-21).

The early Church understood that our Father will not consummate a relationship with an unforgiving person. Why? Because our Father refuses, in light of the tremendous sacrifice of His own Son, to walk through His blood with someone who refuses to forgive. To the earliest followers of Jesus, bitterness and pride were nearly synonymous. The former is a reflection of the latter, which our Father resists.

*Can we be forgiven of anything by our heavenly Father if we do not forgive those who have violated us?
 “NO!”*

In the 97 out of 100 we mentioned earlier who knew they didn’t have a consummated relationship with our Father, *unforgiveness*, that is, unresolved bit-

terness, was the most common factor that hindered them. A bitter person is like a bride on the day of her wedding who tells her groom, “Honey, I’m a prostitute and I’m going to continue my profession. I refuse to give it up. Will you still marry me?” The spiritual adultery that is manifested by clinging to bitterness is just as vile!

A bitter person shows no evidence of the Holy Spirit operating as a *“stream of living water.”* Our Father doesn’t need *“streams of bitter water”* representing Him in this world. A person who clings to unforgiveness has failed to appreciate how much he or she needed to be forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus. That’s a relational fact, something obvious to early believers but not so obvious to those who have garmented themselves with false, man-centered gospels that allow people to *stay* “just as they are.”

Our Father doesn't need "streams of bitter water" from ungrateful, unforgiving people representing Him in this world.

Your decision to forgive opens the way for the Holy Spirit to take up His residence in you. It is *He* Who heals your heart and emotions, since you can never heal yourself.

Richard Wurmbrand teaches a profound and correct interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer. He states that *“forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* should be translated, *“forgive us our debts as we have already forgiven others their debts.”* Only by correctly understanding forgiveness could martyrs throughout history have responded with grace toward their persecutors. Those suffering for their trust in Jesus *have already forgiven* their tormentors. It all begins with the loving words of Jesus, repeated by Stephen, *“Father, forgive them...”*

- One of the most common reasons we found for our Father not consummating His Covenant is bitterness. Does anyone come to mind who raises up negative feelings in your heart? What did they do to you?

- Do you purpose to forgive from your heart those you recall? Do you purpose to ask their forgiveness when you are next in contact for not having loved them as Jesus would have you?

Summary of the Covenant Issues

Fulfilling our Father's purposes is the only way we can understand the intent of the apostle James as he teaches the connection between trust and deeds in chapter 2:14-26. "*Show me your trust without deeds, and I will show you my trust by what I do... You see that [Abraham's] trust and his actions were working together, and his trust was made complete by what he did... As the body without the spirit is dead, so trust without deeds is dead*" (James 2:18,22,26). The deeds spoken of here refer to fulfilling the purposes of our Father. This is no more or no less than Jesus did.

Let's review once more the biblical stipulations for us to enter into our Father's Covenant. Your Salvation Pilgrimage begins and continues with your:

- 1 *Repentance.*
2. *Agape (ahav) Love.*
3. *Obedient Trust.*
4. *Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination.*
5. *Forgiving Others.*

Sue and I had reservations about listing these criteria out of concern that people may take a "by-the-numbers" approach to this. But they need to be displayed in one place so that you can understand the criteria for our Father to ratify and consummate the Covenant.

Our Father designed marriage to be the *physical representation* of the Covenant we have with Him. In other words, if you want to know the depth of my relationship with our Father, then watch my love for Sue. The *agape* of a man for his wife is the same kind of *agape* that he must have for his Lord. I for sure haven't arrived, but as I am sanctified — set apart for His purposes along the way — my love continues to grow. "*For in Christ Jesus...the only thing that counts is trust expressing itself through [agape] love*" (Galatians 5:6).

This is vital! Just as in a marriage, it is your *heart devotion* to want to live in Covenant with our Father that makes it happen. As you weigh these criteria for embracing the Covenant our Father is offering you, can you see how the five apply to your own marriage covenant?

1. Can it exist without Repentance?
2. Can it bloom without your *agape* Love?
3. Can there be peace without your mutual Trust?
4. Can it flourish without Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination to make it succeed?
5. Can love grow without Forgiveness?

As with God's design for the marriage covenant to produce godly offspring, keepers of the Covenant with our Father are also expected to bear fruit:

Every branch which is part of me but fails to bear fruit, he cuts off; and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit... I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who stay united with me, and I with them, are the ones who bear much fruit; because apart from me you can't do a thing...This is how my Father is glorified — in your bearing much fruit; this is how you will prove to be my disciples (John 15: 2,5,8, JNT).

In deference to His Father's will, Jesus fulfilled His purposes. As our Father's children, we, too, have specific, God-given purposes to carry out. Yet, without the indwelling Spirit, we would neither be able nor expected to fulfill these on our own. He *enjoys* our dependency on Him. To be "born again" is to become His child. There is no better relationship I'd rather have!

Review your spiritual journey to this point.

- Have you repented of known sin according to His Word?
- Do you love Jesus with gratefulness that your despicable sin nature no longer has rule over you, and you can commune intimately with Him as His own?
- Do you fully trust in the shed blood of Jesus as payment for your sins? Are you walking with hope in obedient trust in your Father, alert for opportunities to fulfill His purposes?

- Are you forceful in your heart to keep pressing on despite circumstances that try to deter your walk of trust?
- Have you forgiven in your heart all who have violated you in any way?

If you are prepared to embrace the Gospel offered to you by our Father, and to enter into Covenant union with Him, then ratify the conditions of the Covenant with Him from your heart.

Also, we encourage you to be baptized — pledging to God that you will keep a clear conscience on your pilgrimage to salvation.

Part 4

THE SEAL OF CONSUMMATION — THE HOLY SPIRIT

Streams of Living Water: The Indwelling Holy Spirit

To consummate His Covenant with us, our Father seals us with His indwelling Holy Spirit. We become “streams of living water.” To us who embrace our Father’s Covenant, the Spirit’s indwelling is critical if we are to press on in the pilgrimage as our Father desires.

Stop for a moment and picture this. *God now indwells you!* A union of oneness with our Father now exists. Hey! A wonderful miracle has taken place within you! A woman who is pregnant for the first time knows that this new life is more than a biological event. She has a physical and emotional union with that new life.

The indwelling Holy Spirit engenders a spiritual union within that perhaps can be pictured by the loving intimacy a pregnant woman experiences with her growing child. But the Holy Spirit has a special ministry to complete both *in you* and *through you*. All you have under your control is your willingness to yield to Him the easy way in cooperation, or the hard way with fear and doubt.

It’s sadly within your power to break the Covenant by rebelliously turning away from Him and denying Him by habitually walking in sin. As the writer to the Hebrew believers warned, along that path lies “*the terrifying prospect of Judgment, of raging fire that will consume the enemies*” (Hebrews 10:26,27; Isaiah 26:11). The consequences of blaspheming the Spirit are heart-wrenching: “[E]veryone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will **not be forgiven**” (Luke 12:10).

In light of the beauty and the empowerment the Holy Spirit brings with Him, do you understand the tragic impact of the false gospels of today that negate His Person and His presence? The deluded blaspheme the Holy Spirit by negating His significance to the followers of Jesus and denying His power or attributing it to Satan as did the Pharisees. In their desire to “save” others, Spirit-deniers make them “*twice the sons of hell*” that they are. Yet, the truth is, “**If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ**” (Romans 8:9).

With the Holy Spirit within, you have the potential to be transformed into the character of Jesus and to live an *empowered life*. This type of living threatens the very gates of hell. It is open warfare between you and the minions of Satan. How Paul relied on power from above! “[Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my **power is made perfect in weakness.**’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that **Christ’s power may rest on me**” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Knowing how important the power of the Spirit is in your ability to live for God, you can understand the depth of the great apostle’s emotions when he chastises the Galatians. “*Are you so foolish? After **beginning with the Spirit**, are you now trying to attain your goal by **human effort?**” (Galatians 3:3). How many who are trying to follow Jesus end up quenching His Spirit and struggling in their own strength, refusing to trust in His loving power to deliver them?*

- Describe a time when you knew the Spirit was directing you in a particular situation or encounter and you followed through in obedient trust. Did you share that testimony with anyone to encourage and strengthen them in their own walk?
- Describe a time when you resisted His prompting through disobedience. What consequences or conviction followed?

The Spirit Throughout the Bible

Skim your concordance to grasp how much the Holy Spirit was part of God’s work in the Hebrew Bible. He is so much more than we can imagine! The Spirit of God is found all throughout the Older Testament. You don’t go far into it without encountering the Spirit: “*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **Spirit of God was hovering over the waters***” (Genesis 1:2).

In another example, the elders selected by Moses validated their God-given authority through the anointing of the Spirit: “*Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he*

took of the Spirit that was on him and **put the Spirit on the seventy elders**. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied [a sign of the Spirit's presence], but they did not do so again [because He wasn't indwelling them]" (Numbers 11:25).]

In the Newer Testament the Holy Spirit's work continued in a deeper dimension. For Jesus to become incarnate as "*the Son of God*" and "*the Son of Man*", a very human Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35).

In order for Jesus to take up the priesthood of Melchizedek, the Spirit descended on Him upon His immersion in the Jordan River. With that anointing, the Levitical priesthood ended and an everlasting Priest in the order of Melchizedek came into being (see Hebrews, chapter 7).

Realizing that Jesus would give His people the power to carry out their Covenant responsibilities, John the Baptist announced to his listeners, "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (Luke 3:16b).

Jesus, about to ascend to His Father, urged His disciples, "*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:4,5,8).

That promised moment came, and it didn't arrive unnoticed! "*Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them*" (Acts 2:2-4).

In response to this miraculous manifestation, the apostle Peter proclaimed the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: "*In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see*

visions, your old men will dream dreams'" (Acts 2:17). Peter was addressing devout Jews from all over who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate at Pentecost the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. These men were thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew Bible and its promises.

Stung in their hearts, they pleaded with the apostles, "*Brothers, what shall we do?*" Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call**" (Acts 2:38,39). What glorious hope and purpose for these men as they trained up their households as Abraham did, in devotion and intimacy with their Lord!

- What are the key differences between the Levitical and Melchizedek priesthoods?
- Why is it important to your journey that Jesus is a High Priest from the line of Melchizedek rather than a Levitical priest?

Many internationally known "evangelists" do not call for repentance. This may be the reason why 90%+ of those who are called "born again" fail to walk on in Christ.

How Many Generations of Jesus Followers Need the Holy Spirit? *Every One of Them*

It's not as if the Holy Spirit isn't being given to consummate the Covenant any longer. The Lord's promise is still in effect: "*You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.*" Nothing in this promise has been revoked by our Father. "*The gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about*" (Acts 1:4), is still being offered to all who enter into Covenant with Him.

Then what has happened to dissuade church people from walking wholeheartedly in covenant with Jesus through His Spirit? Consider these assaults on the intimate relationship our Father has desired with His people.

- Because of the inroads of *Hellenistic philosophers* in the second and third centuries, the Hebraic covenant foundations of the Gospel were removed.
- The Bible was *hidden in Latin* for over eleven hundred years, available only to the few who were educated.
- Well-meaning theologians over the last three hundred years have developed man-centered “gospels” but have *ignored the Covenant foundation* of the Good News found in the Older Testament.

If religious leadership had set aside their anti-semitic bias, their “gospels” would have been grounded on the substructure of the Older Testament and its prophetic fulfillment in the Lamb in the manner *He* called for: repentance, love, and obedient trust.

As it is, few false gospels even quote a verse from the Older Testament. Even fewer call for repentance. Many internationally known “evangelists” overlook repentance; instead, they offer a “forgiveness” without the need to turn from the old way of death. This may be the reason that, according to evangelist Ray Comfort, 90% of those who are *declared* “born again” by man fail to live on in Christ. Without repentance, there is no “new birth.” And without that turn from darkness into the Light, there is no indwelling Spirit to empower and to convict.

Grievously, so many who are sent to evangelize rely on “drive-by” crusades. Yet biblically, unless a person shares the Gospel and *stays on* until a *faith community is started*, he/she is not an evangelist by the definition of that anointing in the early Church. An evangelist is a “*church planter and repairer*” as were Paul, Timothy, and Titus. Understanding the relational issues of our Father’s Covenant, these men entered into a discipling/spiritual parenting relationship with those who turned from sin to embrace the Gospel.

Sense the parental heart of Paul in his letters to the different faith communities. “*As emissaries of the Messiah, we could have made our weight felt; but instead, we were gentle when we were with you, like a mother feeding and caring for her children...for you know that we treated each one of you the way a father treats his children. We encour-*

aged you and comforted you and appealed to you to lead lives worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11). These were spiritual sons and daughters to him! And the depth of that intimacy takes time and devotion to develop. You can’t share the true Gospel at an impersonal evangelistic Crusade. Fruit that lasts calls for faithful nurturers and pruners.

Keep in mind that the false gospels developed in the last three hundred years consider relationship unnecessary, and the *need* for the indwelling Holy Spirit optional at best.

- Who came alongside you as a spiritual parent to disciple you when you first walked with Jesus as your Lord?
- Have you ever discipled anyone as a spiritual parent, helping them to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus? How long did that relationship continue? When you completed discipling, was that person fully equipped to reach others as a discipler?

Empowerment: “Streams of Living Water” from the Spirit

Have you ever observed streams? There is something beautifully pleasant about each one, yet no two are ever alike. They are on a pilgrimage themselves, with a starting point and an ending point. Many end up joining with other streams to become rivers before they reach the ocean.

We, too, can be streams that, when joined together through the covenant union with our Father, can become mighty rivers. The Spirit’s indwelling in each of us brings this about. No programs are needed for this living water to bring refreshment and healing to others, just walking with the Spirit.

As fellow “streams” we want to share what this might mean to you concerning the empowerment and work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we don’t want to become definitional about Him. No one can adequately describe God. When the Spirit indwells those with whom our Father consummates His Covenant, we become the Spirit’s temple. If someone asks you where God is,

you can answer, “In me!” You don’t have to try to conjure up His Presence. Intimacy with Him is a special privilege, rather like being pregnant with spiritual fruit ready to be birthed as we draw nourishment and strength from our Holy Indweller!

A reminder of encouragement and exhortation: When the Covenant is consummated, you are *sealed* with the Holy Spirit. “*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*” (2 Corinthians 1:21,22). He will not break the Covenant, but you can become a covenant-breaker through habitual sin and permanently forfeiting your trust in Him. Live in reliant trust on the Spirit as one who knows you’re loved! “*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:24,25).

Our Father verifies His love for us through the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not God Himself, but only *His Word* for us. Both Testaments point to our Father and His salvation purposes: “*...the Holy Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through trusting in Jesus the Messiah*” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Word presents truth to us, but only the Holy Spirit can open our hearts to believe it as truth and give us empowerment to live it.

As you yield your life to the Holy Spirit, He produces “*... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” (Galatians 5:23). These qualities are necessary for you to have healthy relationships with others. They are also personal indicators that the Spirit is winning the spiritual battle!

As your motives and attitudes are changed, your behaviors follow. This is our Father’s process of sanctifying us into conformity to His Son Jesus — it is a lifelong pilgrimage of *heart change* in which behavior then follows suit out of love. Remember: *God is examining your heart as motivation for your behavior*. The Pharisees had the behavior, but not the heart.

Our Father gives us understanding of *His love* for us through the indwelling Holy Spirit: “*And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*” (Romans 5:5).

The Spirit’s presence in you starts to change

your motives and attitudes — a lifelong process of decisions and choices. His goal is to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ, the First Born among us. In the midst of this alteration process, a battle rages between the Spirit and your carnal nature. Which one will rule your mind, will, and emotions? Paul voiced this tension when he counseled the Galatians,

What I am saying is this: run your lives by the Spirit. Then you will not do what your old nature wants. For the old nature wants what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is contrary to the old nature. These oppose each other, so that you find yourselves unable to carry out your good intentions. But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism” (5:16,17, JNT).

The Roman followers of Jesus, too, needed admonition to turn away from their sinful desires and live by the Spirit of Christ in them:

For those who identify with their old nature set their minds on the things of the old nature, but those who identify with the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Having one’s mind controlled by the old nature is death, but having one’s mind controlled by the Spirit is life and shalom...But you, you do not identify with your old nature but with the Spirit — providing the Spirit of God is living inside you, for anyone who doesn’t have the Spirit of the Messiah doesn’t belong to him (Romans 8:5,6,9, JNT).

In our book *God’s Instruments for War*, Sue and I address the importance of gifts of the Spirit so that we may effectively wage war against Satan. Note that you first have to *identify* your spiritual weaponry and that of your extended spiritual family, then use it.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to

another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

Because so few take God at His Word and fail to walk in these empowerments, Satan continues to grow in His control over this nation. Is the darkness spreading because so many who call themselves “Christian” do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to penetrate the gloom with His Light?

- In what manner are you using your spiritual gifting to bring praise to our Father?
- What is the most frequent temptation to give in to your old nature that you face? How do you handle that temptation?

Prophecy, Words of Knowledge and Wisdom: *Support Your Trust — Confront Your Reason*

Following Jesus is an obedience-based trust, grounded in a love relationship much like that of Abraham. *Obedience-based* trust means that we are concerned with seeking our Father’s will and doing it no matter what the cost. *Outcome-based* religious practice, on the other hand, relies on rationale, not obedient trust. People within that framework seek a desired result regardless of whether it is our Father’s will for them.

As you walk in trust in our Father, you’ll rely less and less on your carnal rationale. Your love for our Father produces trust-filled obedience empowered by His Spirit within. He has not called you to be mind-less. But part of the sanctification process of your *mind* calls for you to replace with *trust* the rationale on which you’ve always relied before. Whenever you conjecture about the future, or try to make decisions by weighing the

‘pros-and-cons’, you are relying on reasoning, not trust. Our Father wants to bless you by making the decisions for you — making level and straight your path.

One of the purposes of prophecy and words of knowledge and wisdom is to help you have *His mind* on the circumstances and encounters that affect you. These giftings cut through the rationale of your carnal nature, that is, trying to rely on your own reasoning as you weigh the positives and negatives of your choices. He reserves the right as our Father to make the decisions for His children, and receives glory when His children look for and count on His intervention and revelation.

We are warned, “*Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Doesn’t this accord with, “*Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets*” (Amos 3:7)? Fear of the prophetic voice of God indicates that you want to be in charge of your own life. If you find yourself *habitually distrusting* our Father to show you the path He desires for you, you may find yourself sliding toward the ledge of breaking the Covenant.

Sue and I have written on behalf of the Hebraic Restoration as a result of my mother’s prophetic words to me ten years ago: “When you get back from Israel, the Lord wants you to move in with me and write.” I remember my first inclination was, “Write *what?*” Next, I received a fax from a man in upper state New York whom I had never met. When he heard from mutual friends that we had left our retreat ministry and were going to live in Jerusalem for a while, he wrote, “The Lord is sending you on a *prophetic mission.*”

We didn’t even have money for the air fare until the last hour to pay for the ticket! He ended his letter with a passage from Isaiah, “*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*” (Isaiah 41:10). Our spirits were boosted!

Whenever you conjecture about the future, or try to make decisions by weighing the ‘pros-and-cons’, you are relying on reasoning, not trust. Our Father wants to bless you by making the decisions for you — making level and straight your path.

In Israel others approached us to confirm our *prophetic mission*. Now, 10 years later, we are fulfilling that prophetic mission, sharing what our Father revealed to us during that time — the restoration of the intimacy and relational priorities of the earliest Church.

- What specific prophecies or words of knowledge or wisdom have been shared with you that impacted your life in a particular way?
- What is your response to the whole idea of the Spirit working with power in His people today? Do you share close fellowship with others who are walking in their gifting to bring praise to our Father?

Suffering, The Spirit's Agency for Change

*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to bring you back again into fear; on the contrary, you received the **Spirit, who makes us sons and by whose power we cry out 'Abba!'** (that is, 'Dear Father!'). The Spirit himself **bears witness with our own spirits** that we are children of God; and if we are children, then we are also **heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with the Messiah — provided we are suffering with him** in order also to be glorified with him (Romans 8:15-17, JNT).*

No one enjoys suffering. But along with our acceptance of our Father's Covenant comes suffering. It's part of our Father's refining plan. Jesus suffered. Should our Father treat His children any differently by withholding that which helps to conform us to His Son's image? *"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation **perfect through suffering**"* (Hebrews 2:10).

Why should we suffer? Wasn't the suffering of Jesus enough? Our Father explains why suffering is essential in our pilgrimage: *"We also **rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us,***

*because God has **poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us**"* (Romans 5:3-5). Hope is the lifeline that keeps us focused on the narrow gate and a heavenly welcome. Satan offers us pleasure, then despair. Our Father offers us suffering, then hope — the confidence of His love for us.

It would be so simple if we could just bask in our Father's care here on earth and then be zapped up into heaven before any trials come our way. However, that notion just does not fly scripturally, nor does it bring honor to the Father Who sustains our brothers and sisters in persecuted lands during harsh torture and the loss of all things for the sake of Christ.

Peter didn't tell anguishing followers of Jesus to pray that their trials be snatched away from them. On the contrary, he comforted them with these words:

*Rejoice in this [assurance of deliverance on the Last Day], even though for a little while you may have to **experience grief in various trials. Even gold is tested for genuineness by fire. The purpose of these trials is so that your trust's genuineness** which is far more valuable than perishable gold, **is judged worthy of praise, glory and honor at the revealing of Jesus the Messiah** (1 Peter 1:6,7, JNT).*

- How do you view suffering as an instrument of refinement in our Lord's hands?
- What character transformation have you undergone as a result of a personal season of trial or suffering?
- How often do you pray for our suffering family in Jesus who are being persecuted around the world? When did you last share of your own means with organizations that help to meet their needs and bring them comfort and encouragement?

Grumbling Impedes Spiritual Growth

Failing to grasp the sometimes disquieting methods of character development that our Father uses hinders our growth in spiritual maturity. Sharing the *cup of suffering* is one of His most effective means of drawing us to trust Him more. Yet, in a culture of false gospels, suffering is a nemesis: "If you're suffering, there must be *something wrong* with you." (Remember the finger-pointing of Job's buddies?) Our Father, however, uses the fires of affliction to burn away the dross of worldliness and self-reliance.

And how do we often respond to these opportunities to learn greater dependence on our Father? We grumble. We complain that we don't deserve such irritations or assaults. But when we protest to God, all other spiritual development stops. Do you remember what Paul said about the Israelites? "**And don't grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroying Angel. These things happened to them as *prefigurative historical events*, and they were written down as a *warning to us* who are living in the last days. Therefore, let anyone who thinks he is standing up be *careful not to fall!*"** (1 Corinthians 10:10-11, JNT).

I remember a time our Lord dealt with me about my grumbling:

We'd been working hard at our retreat ministry/farm. Most weeks required 80 hours of work, and we had little time off. Our teenage son, Mike, had been accepted to go to Irian Jaya for the summer with Teen Mission. We intended to drive him from Connecticut to the training camp in Florida with a stop at Disney World first.

The night before we were to depart, Mike and I were wrestling. Somehow I twisted my back. All throughout the trip, including our time at Disney World, I fought off agonizing pain. After we dropped Mike off, Sue and I headed north for several stops to visit friends. I was getting more weary by the day as I struggled with the pain. I began grumbling to our

Father, "We've been working hard for months. Surely you want to bless us with a great vacation!" I received no healing and heard no reply.

When we arrived at a friend's home near Philadelphia, I got out of the vehicle. Our friend, Bill, was tossing a frisbee to his son on the front lawn. The moment I closed the door he threw the frisbee to me. As I returned it I felt a little click in my lower back—and I was healed! Later, the Lord convicted me about my false expectations and showed me how I had grieved the Holy Spirit with my grumbling and distrust.

Our Lord wants *convinced and convicted* people to represent Him to the world: "*Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life for me** will find it'*" (Matthew 16:24,25). He uses convicted people — those who are so persuaded about Him that they have chosen to set aside their own desires in order to take on the daily willingness to put Him first. Then they follow through with obedient trust. The Holy Spirit instills *increasing conviction* in those who keep in step with Him as they run the gauntlet.

Grieving or Quenching the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit enables us to be changed into the likeness of Jesus. Paul isn't being brash when he asserts, "*We have the **mind of Christ***" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Picture the sanctification process of your life with the Holy Spirit as running a gauntlet through demonic attacks in the form of mental lies that attempt to hinder you from pressing any further. Your unwillingness to lean on the Holy Spirit does affect the Spirit: "*And do **not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption***" (Ephesians 4:30).

Your *thought life* is the battle ground. Within your thought life you confront temptation. If those tantalizing thoughts linger, you develop emotions about them. Then you take action based on those emotions. If those actions become habitual, they captivate you, becoming sinful strongholds that influence that realm of your life: "*Each one is tempted when, by his **own evil desire**, he is dragged away and **enticed**. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives **birth to sin**; and sin, when it is **full-***

Examine your heart. Are you humbly grateful for the privilege of coming before our Father because of Jesus' suffering? Or are you inwardly angry that your false expectations or self-centered desires are not being catered to?

grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers" (James 1:14-16).

The vast majority of people who have sought help from us over the years have shared a common thread. They entertain demons in their thought life, but finally want to escape the bondage that listening to these demons produces. The Lord warns, "*Demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up [in your mind] against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:6). [See our book *Demolishing Strongholds* for more about demonic hindrances.]

NO one can take our thoughts captive for us. To take our thoughts captive and bring them into

Picture the sanctification process of your life with the Holy Spirit as running a gauntlet through demonic attacks in the form of mental lies that attempt to hinder you from pressing any further.

obedience to the thoughts of Jesus calls for personal spiritual discipline.

Our thoughts *do* come into obedience to Jesus over time as we exercise that discipline. We begin to recognize that our motivations are being

changed — we want intimacy with our Father and the joy of fulfilling His purposes more than we crave sinful satisfaction. First our motivations change; then our behaviors are changed by our motivations.

I often find myself rebuking the demonic spirits who are trying to use the thoughts of my mind against me. Demonic voices often sound just like the voice of *your own mind*. If you reflect frequently on what you've read in the Bible, you develop discernment about the thoughts that demonic spirits whisper. Aren't we told that "*Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light*" (2 Corinthians 11:14)?

Recognizing that a demonic voice is imparting nothing that Jesus would think, say or do, I want to submit to the authority of my Father and rebuke that Adversary's servant in the Name of Jesus. Then I ask the Lord Jesus for *His* mind on the matter and praise Him for the difference!

Unclean spirits labor to hinder us from walking in the Spirit. Paul tells us, "*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons*" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

I'd like to add, "*You cannot entertain the voice of demons in your mind and hear the Spirit's voice or experience His power.*" You become like whomever you listen to.

The indwelling Holy Spirit produces a way of life that becomes increasingly Christlike on your pilgrimage. Listening to demons and believing their lies quenches the Holy Spirit's power.

- What demonic lies most often assail your thoughts? How do you respond to them? How *should* you respond in order to hear only the Holy Spirit in your thoughts?

Prayer: Trusting God to Respond

Jesus' disciples knew from experience that even the Son of God relied on prayer. Earnest in their zeal to learn from Him, they pleaded, "*Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples*" (Luke 11:1). Jesus replied to them and to all of us, "*When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come...'*" (v. 2).

Prayer is *intimate communication* with our Father. As we praise and worship Him, confess and bow before Him, laugh and cry with Him, we draw strength from being attuned to His Presence. He already knows our needs. Our petitions and thanksgiving to Him indicate that we understand our dependency on Him to meet these needs. As the disciples asked Jesus to "*teach us to pray,*" the indwelling Spirit helps us, too, to pray:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26,27).

Answered prayer is one of many ways you can bring glory to our Father as you share testimony with others about His faithfulness. Remember, your part of the Covenant is to glorify our Father! Your repentance and our Father's willingness to answer your prayers is intricately connected.

Peter warns us about failing to repent and entertaining sin in our lives: "*For the eyes of the*

Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, **but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil**" (1 Peter 3:12). Another word for "evil"-doing is "lawlessness". A lawless person has no concern for the commands of God, and consequently fails to repent. God refuses to answer the prayers of the unrepentant.

Answered prayer is one of many ways we can bring glory to our Father as we share testimony with others about His faithfulness.

- How would you describe your prayer life? Intense? Obligatory? Uplifting? Rote? Rare? What do you need to do to draw closer to Him in prayer?
- What prayers has our Father answered on your behalf or on behalf of those for whom you've interceded?
- Have you made known to friends, neighbors and co-workers that you come before our Father regularly to pray, and that you'd be glad to bring before Him their concerns?

Remember: Our Father's Children Are Free!

As the Spirit wins the sanctification of your mind, will, and emotions, your life grows in the freedom Jesus promises His own. **"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"** (2 Corinthians 3:17,18).

We hope that each one who lives in Covenant with our Father can proclaim a phrase that comes to us each year: *"The person I was last year at this time wouldn't recognize me because of what the Spirit has changed!"* Since our research ten years ago in Jerusalem, our Father has given both Sue and me a dignity in Him that we hadn't known in the previous 17 years of following Jesus. With His dignity comes increasing freedom.

- Please ask yourself, "What evidence of His freedom in my life can I testify about to others?"

Final Exhortation

We hesitate to describe more about the Holy Spirit. If you want to know more, you need to read the Book He inspired and ask Him for wisdom and revelation to apply it to your life. As in our marriage, knowledge of each other grew as our relationship together matured. I believe you will find this true of the Spirit. If you don't harden your heart and grieve, quench or blaspheme Him, you'll yearn to know Him more deeply. Then you'll know what Zechariah understood: *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty*" (Zechariah 4:6).

We trust that this study has helped you and those for whom you care to understand and to *live* the pilgrimage of the true Gospel. First and foremost, your journey is a heart issue, one of devotion and desire. If you like formulas and rules so that you can feel good about yourself, then our Father's Covenant isn't for you. But if you desire loving intimacy and the trust of childlike dependence on our Father, then review the stipulations of His Covenant. If your spirit bears witness with what the Spirit is showing you, walk through the blood of Jesus with our Father and give Him the joy of consummating His Covenant with you. Begin a life that lives to glorify Him.

What a wonderful moment for all of us when Jesus declares each of us *called, chosen, and faithful!* I trust that Sue and I are doing our part to make you aware of what our Father has always desired from His chosen ones. So many of you who are being encouraged by what we share are personally unknown to us, but your correspondence encourages us to keep writing. We look forward to meeting you when Jesus introduces each of us to the hosts of heaven!

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?"

*In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except **the Spirit of God**...This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in **words taught by the Spirit**, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:9-11,13).*

To Jesus, the One
Who loves us, Who has
freed us from our sins at the
cost of His blood, Who has
caused us to be a kingdom,
that is, priests for God, His
Father—to Him be the glory
and the rulership forever
and ever. Amen.



Mike & Sue