

How the World Got this Way and How to Fix It

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Ever notice how people get weird when Jesus is mentioned?

He has withstood all kinds of attacks over thousands of years. Yet, His impact is still being felt. In fact, things as fundamental as our calendar year are still based around His life.

Curious?

Learn who He is, why He came, and what He did. Also, discover how it is good for you, all in a straight-forward and non-judgemental way. If you want peace-of-mind, better health, deeper relationships, even better finances, please read this high-level overview of what went wrong and how Jesus fixed it.

Enjoy!

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1. God wants more for you

God meant for you to live better than you are.

Discover how.

How would a good God, who calls himself Father, want his children to live? This is not a trick question. A good Father loves his children, provides for them, and helps them discover and develop their unique gifts. This is what God wants for you.

Some of you may think God is not good. We will deal with this misconception in due time.

The thing God wants most is a deep, long-term, and intimate relationship with you. The benefits of this relationship are peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, and faith. This is quite an abstract list. God is abstract. Would you expect anything different?

Do you believe you are living to your fullest God-given potential? Few of us are.

Years ago, I was not living to my fullest potential. I have several God-given talents. I know they were God-given because I do not work at them. They are just given to me.

I used my talents to build a pretty good life. What I did not know was how to achieve fulfillment in my life.

There are reasons, both internal and external, for this.

Internally, everyone struggles. Doubt seeps in. Our knowledge is incomplete. We are ignorant of the truth. And we become jaded by the world.

My hope for you is that you become firmly entrenched on the path to fulfillment through these writings. Fulfillment is a journey NOT a destination. It is a long-term, lifetime endeavor... a continuum towards a greater and deeper relationship with God.

Externally, there are forces that do not want to see us achieve right relationship with God. These forces are against us, not for us. We will talk about this in a future lesson.

These words are only the beginning of a fantastic journey. A journey towards a deeper relationship with God and a better understanding of spiritual matters.

I want you to understand the nature of God, the world we live in, and your role in it. I want you to be a part of something bigger. I want you to be part of a community where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

To get there, we will start with an analysis of how the world got into its present shape. This is sort of a history lesson. I will keep it brief and only address the specific threads of history that influence us today. My goal is to illustrate how we can overcome the past and achieve a brighter future!

First things first.

Are you up to the task?

This material is not for everyone.

I ask you to be OPEN. Let's leave our baggage at the door and work towards an open and constructive dialogue. (There is a form you can use to ask questions.)

Most people are just not wired to seek things that go against their concept of reality. Everyone is guilty of this at one time or another. I am guilty. My wife often reminds me of this.

Ouch.

Don't you just hate it when your spouse is right about you? That's okay. I can take a punch, especially when it is accurate, true, and delivered without malice. The truth is the truth. None of us are qualified.

Putting my obvious guilt aside, let me draw a picture of the non-hypocritical mindset I am trying to achieve through the following mental exercise.

Let's not get impressed with our own knowledge.

Imagine this: you can build a sphere that represents everything you know.

I like to envision a translucent ball that has mass but it is very buoyant. I imagine what it would be like to hold this ball up in the air. It is much bigger than I am. Mine appears to be larger than some smaller than others. Sometimes I get impressed with my sphere of knowledge.

Now let's build another sphere. This sphere has the same physical properties as the first sphere. However, this sphere represents everything that you DO NOT know. This is a more difficult exercise because, to a large extent, we don't know what we DO NOT know. Take a few minutes to think this through. Deliberately build a sphere that represents everything you do not know.

Now, in one hand, hold up the sphere of knowledge that represents what you know.

In the other hand, if possible, hold up the sphere that represents what you DO NOT know.

Try to make this as visual and physical as possible.

This part is always a moment of truth for me.

When I do this exercise, I am unimpressed with my sphere of knowledge and intimidated by the size and mass of the sphere that represents what I DO NOT know. How about you? What is your conclusion?

My conclusion is to be modest about what I know or think I know. And always be humbled by the massive amount I DO NOT know / need to learn.

What is a hypocrite?

Briefly, a hypocrite is a person who pretends to have virtues and principles that he or she does not actually possess; a person who says one thing but does another; a person whose actions contradict their stated beliefs.

With the "sphere of knowledge" exercise fresh in your mind, let's add to the definition of a hypocrite. Let's expand our definition to include someone who is impressed with his or her own sphere of

knowledge. Additionally, he or she is unaware and/or unimpressed with the size and mass of that which they DO NOT know.

Using this definition, I believe there are many out there who are NOT hypocrites. People like you who have a driving curiosity to dig into the “sphere of knowledge” that you do not know. To know the unknown.

There are certain kinds of hypocrites who think they have superior knowledge about God and flaunts it over others. You may or may not believe in God. Regardless, let's apply the following logic to our ‘sphere of knowledge’ concept. If there is a God, his intelligence is far greater than anything we can fathom. He has the biggest huge ‘sphere of knowledge’.

His ‘sphere’ dwarfs my ‘sphere’. All of our ‘spheres’ combined would be dwarfed by God’s ‘sphere’.

One person’s sphere may be bigger than someone else’s. Comparing ourselves to each other in this area is ignorant. God’s huge ‘sphere of knowledge’ is where our focus should be. I want to know what is in His ‘sphere’.

Anyone who claims superior knowledge about God and flaunts it over another is a hypocrite AND a fool. We all need to be humble and focus on God’s ‘sphere’. Our goal is to explore His ‘sphere of knowledge’.

This quest to explore what I do not know led me to an interest in the nature of God. I investigated Aristotle's concept of the ‘unmoved mover’ and other spiritual concepts. Feeding this curiosity led me down several avenues of study including economics, sociology, and philosophy. This was all well and good but it was merely a mental exercise.

When my first child was born, I had an epiphany. Briefly, this epiphany was about my responsibility for my newborn son’s spiritual development. This changed the nature of my quest to understand God. I needed answers quickly and took a more practical approach. I quickly came to one logical conclusion about the nature of God. And that is...

God is a spirit.

Even for those of you who do not believe in God. If there were a God, he would be something beyond a mere physical and mental existence. He would be spiritual.

Therefore, the best way, perhaps the only way, to communicate with Him is at a spiritual level.

[John 4:24 – God is a Spirit: and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.]

How do we communicate at a spiritual level?

This is a big question to be discussed later in our lessons.

Right now, let’s consider what happens when we do not relate to God on a spiritual level.

If we merely see Him in the physical world around us and mentally accept the words in the Bible as His, we fall short. Many atheist and agnostic writings prove this. Many churches fail because they deal with spiritual things in only physical and mental ways.

When you can break through the barriers that link your thinking to merely the physical and mental realm, your life will change dramatically.

I have been blessed with many good friends over the years. They come from all lifestyles and backgrounds. I know (in alphabetical order) Agnostics, Atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Taoists. All races. Varied sexual preferences. These relationships were (and still are) trusting enough that we could discuss deeply personal and spiritual topics.

After much discussion (and numerous 'beverages' and cigars), only a few of my friends could grasp the nature of God through the writings in the Bible. Most approached it in an academic style. I believe they gave it an honest try. But, they just could not get there by engaging the topic with only their physical and mental capacities.

Many times I would say, "You need to read the Bible with your heart and not just your head."

They could not fully grasp that we are made up of three parts: body, mind, and spirit.

*[1Thessalonians 5:23 – And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole **spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.]*

When we live using only our physical and mental abilities, we only live to 2/3s (at most) of our capacity. Understanding this in practice (not theory) is essential.

The first level of our being is physical. This is simply height, length, and width; what we can take in with our five senses seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. For better or worse, these make up our tangible, bodily beings.

The second level of our being is our soul. It consists of our mental capacity, our personalities, our thoughts, and our emotions. It is the link between the physical and spiritual being. Changing the way we think is critical to operating at full capacity spiritually and physically. In later lessons we will study concepts like 'renewing you mind' and 'the battle is in your mind'.

The third level of our being is spiritual. This level is outside of and beyond the first two levels of our being. That is why some people refuse to acknowledge it. To shun our spiritual beings, is short sighted.

Spiritual awareness is abstract and difficult to apply. Most teachings are theoretic and not practical. I will focus diligently on overcoming this barrier.

Reading the Bible helped me to realize that all of us come into this world spiritually dead and need to be awakened. The Bible and many spiritual teachings are dead to those who are spiritually dead. In order to understand spirituality there needs to be an awakening.

I have experienced this awakening and documented it in as practical a fashion as I can. In these writings, you will discover the barriers to progress and the structure for development.

2. The problem with the Bible...

...is almost everyone has a problem with it.

Before we jump into this, let's clear the air on some things. Many people take issue with the Bible. That's okay. This book has earned a bad reputation over the years because of the way people have used it.

Many people have used it to as a club to beat others over the head in the "name of righteousness." Beware of these people. They take this Book out of context and/or use it as a means of control... particularly by using the Old Testament. The Old Testament examples are quite harsh. However, it helps appreciate and understand The New Testament. The New Testament is a new and better agreement. This is the good news I want to tell you.

Once again, beware of those who use this book incorrectly. Some signs of this are:

- They focus too heavily on rules and commandments (this is called legalism)
- They take a passive, God is in control approach (this is misunderstood sovereignty and lack of understanding of our authority)
- They downplay or misrepresent the Holy Spirit (this will be explained later)

Let me challenge you with this:

Please give the Bible the benefit of the doubt. It has been around longer than all of us and withstood the test of time. You owe it to yourself to figure out what this book is. Don't take anyone else's word for it. Figure it out for yourself.

Don't be scared off by this challenge. Over twenty-five years ago, I was in the same or similar spot that you are. I knew very little about spirituality. I thought I did, but it turned out to be words I picked up in church or the media.

Then I started reading the Bible. I listened to many teachers and studied different disciplines. Some were good, some bad, and some mediocre. You do not have to take the same difficult path that I took. There are much easier ways and you have the benefit of everything that I have learned.

I've heard the Bible described as love letters sent from God to each and every one of us. I like that description. It is simple, concise and tangible. It reveals his nature over the course of time. Like any relationship, it grows and matures. It is a portrayal of a father's relationship with his children. The breadth of this relationship spans the history of humanity.

Another great way to grasp the Bible is to use the analogy of a mirror. The Bible is the mirror we use to see our spiritual selves.

[James 1:23-24 - For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror); for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.]

Just like a physical mirror enables us to see our physical selves. The Bible enables us to see our spiritual selves. This concept helped my spiritual awakening.

All of us have walked around in a spiritually dead state. Many continue to walk around in this state, barely two thirds alive. God wants us to have life and have it more abundantly.

[John 10:10 - The thief comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly.]

To be full and complete, three thirds alive. That is why He embarked on the story I'm about to tell you. Before we get to that, let's look at the numbers behind this book.

A Statistical Point of View

From a sheer numbers/ranking point of view, the Bible has outsold every book of all time. According to the www.StatisticBrain.com, there are over six billion bibles in print. It continues to be bestseller, every year.

Given the raw magnitude of these numbers, don't you think this is something you should investigate? Of course it is.

You owe it to yourself to come to you own conclusion about the Bible. Please pay off the debt you owe yourself by approaching this book objectively. I have dedicated my life to explaining the Bible in as many ways as possible with clarity and simplicity. I respect any conclusion you come to. From one sovereign individual to another, I owe you that.

This is all I ask of you.

What I ask of you is to approach the Bible respectfully. (Based solely on the numbers, you have to respect it.) Also, approach it with an open heart. The worldview of this book is so tainted. Please break free from those influences and be deliberate and unbiased.

Your life will be better with an understanding of the Bible than without it.

3. Once upon a time

The Relationship

The Bible is a story about God and His relationship with His most treasured creation - humans. Understanding this relationship that spans all history will help you understand the relationships you have with your children, your spouse, your parents, your friends and your enemies.

Relationship with God is the primary focus of everything I write. My goal is to keep it practical, not theoretic or academic. This does not mean it will be as concrete as many of you may prefer. We will be getting abstract.

Remember this is a Biblical depiction of man's relationship with God. The history of our relationship goes back to the beginning. We pick up the story as God gave it to Moses.

Creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...

Whoa. Hold it right there. No, he did not! Everything evolved from blah blah blah...

Oh, come on. The theory of evolution is still just a THEORY.

If you want to call 'God created the heavens and earth' a 'theory' or a 'story', go ahead. Just don't be one of those chest thumpers who say evolution is a fact.

Here is a fact. No human was there. Therefore, not one of us has first hand knowledge of what happened.

Run with me on this...

If God were God, He would be the most powerful being. If He were not, He would not be God and I would not want to praise Him.

Presume He is the most powerful being. Therefore, he can create any world, any way He pleases.

If there was a Big Bang, as the theory goes, who lit the fuse?

Couldn't the most powerful being (a.k.a. God), just create the rock formations that are already billions of years old at the onset?

Our point of view is so limited. What if this is not the first time He created a universe. What if we live in universe 'version-10-to-the-nth-power'?

Maybe He had all this debris lying around from the last bazillion times he made a universe. And He just made this universe out of that debris.

The story of creation reveals God's character. It also reveals how he operates. He does not waste time or energy. Observe the way creation works. It is extremely efficient. We should strive to be as efficient.

Regardless, just look around you. There is logic and order beneath the chaos of this world. There are patterns that hold true under all circumstances. There are laws by which our earth operates that are not random. Really, when was the last time you saw chaos produce order?

The Order

Let's look at the order in which the Bible says God created the universe. (Per the Bible, God gave this information to Moses.) First, there was water. Then, there was light. A cycle of light was separated by a cycle of darkness. Thus creating day and night.

Then there was land. On the land, He brought forth vegetation that had seeds in order to reproduce its own kind.

After this the sea creatures and birds appeared, each with the ability to reproduce. Then the land creatures were created. Once again, with the ability to reproduce.

The last thing he created was man. He created man in 'their' own image and likeness. Then woman from the man.

Whether this account is symbolic or literal, many powerful things leap forth from this narrative.

Here are important points about the nature of things we can pick up from this narrative:

Words

How did God do all this creating? He spoke it. God spoke the universe into being. This is important! Why? Words are the most powerful things in the universe. Remember this. Burn it into your memory.

Words are powerful. You have the ability to use words. Your words are powerful. Use them carefully.

Order is important

Notice the order in which creation occurred. He uses a very bottom-up approach. Starting with the simplest elements and working His way up the food chain. God created humans last so they would have everything they needed from the start.

Everything was and is self-sustaining. This is logical. This has God's fingerprints on it. God is not running around Heaven trying to keep things from spinning out of control. His creation was complete so he stopped, reflected, and called it good... Very good.

Likeness and image

This 'likeness and image' separates humans from the rest of creation. We are made to look like (image) and have characteristics like (likeness) God. No other beings have this quality.

Key Verse - The most profound statement about creation occurs when God says, "*Let us make man in our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over... the earth.*" (Genesis 1:26)

Let's focus on the 'us' first. Who is 'us'? The 'us' is the Trinity; The father son and Holy Spirit. Thus, being created in His likeness and image, we have three parts: body, mind, and spirit.

The scary part about being created in his 'image and likeness' is, we are therefore, by default, 'mini' Gods. And we act like it. We need to remember that we are merely three-dimensional representations of His quasi-dimensional being.

The 'likeness' of God means we are similar in character. He is sovereign. Therefore, we are sovereign. We are capable of acting on our own.

Dominion

He gave us reign and control over all of the earth. He commanded us to fill the earth and govern it. That's it. No more instructions. It's yours.

In essence, he made us Gods over this earth. This supports the statement that we are made in his likeness.

We are the 'Gods' over this earth. Remember this when we discuss angels. There is one angel who wants to be God. He is jealous of us because we are like God and have dominion over the earth.

He was done

When he was finished He said, "This was all good... Very good." God rested after this because he was finished, not because he was tired. This sets an example for us to rest.

Woman came from man

Women are different from the rest of creation. Woman is the only land creature that did not come from dirt. Perhaps God knew He would have to redeem us. And this would have to happen through a woman. So he created her a level above the other land creatures.

Adam and Eve were referred to as one unit, Adam.

[*Genesis 5:2 – Male and female He created them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam in the day they were created.*] It wasn't until after "the fall" that Adam named Eve.

Let's stop here for now. I have touched on some very heavy concepts in this section. These are foundational concepts. For now, I just want you to know that they exist. Later we will dig into each one in more detail.

4. A good angel gone bad

An angel named Lucifer

During all this creation, God also created angels. There was one angel named Lucifer who was particularly beautiful and full of wisdom. It is also believed that he was musically gifted.

[Isaiah 14:12 – How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!]

His job was to lead worship.

*[Ezekiel 28:13b – You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: **the workmanship of your tabrets (timbrels) and of your pipes was prepared for you on the day that you were created.**]*

However, like rock stars of today, he wanted all the glory, applause, and fame for himself. That honor belongs to God. Lucifer wanted to be like God. He wanted control. He saw that God had given control over the earth to the man and the woman. So, he devised a plot to steal it from them.

He deceived them into disobeying God so he could steal the authority that God gave them over the earth. Then he would be in control of the earth and Adam and Eve would be his hostages.

How did he deceive them? He planted a seed of doubt in Eve's mind. He caused her to question God's word. She began to consider things contrary to God's guidelines.

She said, "we can eat from all trees except this one and we can't even touch it."

[Genesis 3:3 – ...but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.']

This was incorrect. Touching the fruit was not mentioned in God's instructions.

Here is what God said.

[Genesis 2:17 – but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.]

No mention of touching. We can assume you could touch it as long as you did not eat it.

Take away: Adding to or subtracting from God's word gets us in trouble. Let it stand as it is.

Notice how Lucifer operated. He made her doubt what God said to the point where she actually gets it wrong by saying 'even if you touch the tree you will die.' He then expands on his deception by saying 'you will not die.'

[Genesis 3:4 – Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die..."]

This is partially true because physical death did not manifest itself immediately. (Remember, a well-crafted lie has some truth in it.) However, spiritual death and separation did occur immediately.

Lucifer also said God does not want you to have knowledge as he has.

[Genesis 3:5 - "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing food and evil."]

Another lie.

God did not want us to have knowledge of good and evil. I wish I did not know some of the evil I know. How about you? I heard a heroin user describe his first experience. He said, "As soon as I did it, I wished I did not know what I now knew."

Lucifer's downfall was he wanted to be like God. He saw what we were like God in our dominion over the earth and used his cunning deception to steal what we had.

The Fall

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they lost their spiritual connection with God. They were dead spiritually. However, they still had their mental and physical capacities.

Adam and Eve were banned from the garden because there was another tree in the garden. Not because God wanted to be mean to them or was mad at them. The other tree was the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is mentioned in the beginning and the end of the Bible.

[Genesis 3:24 – So He drove out the man and placed Cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way of the Tree of Life.]

[Revelation 22:2 – In the middle of its street and on either side of the river, was the Tree of Life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.]

This tree would give them eternal life. They were banned from the garden and a mighty angel was placed to guard the entrance so they would not eat from the Tree of Life.

What's so big about eating from the Tree of Life?

Keeping them from eating of the Tree of Life was an act of mercy for Adam and Eve and for all of humanity. Adam and Eve now had the capacity to sin. If they were to eat from the Tree of Life they would also have eternal life. The capacity to sin coupled with eternal life is a bad combination. What would the earth be like if it were full of sinners that would never die? The amount of evil that could be spread is mind-boggling. Think about Adolph Hitler with eternal life...

If a sinful and fallen humanity had eternal life, we would be surrounded by more misery than we could handle. There would be disease, deformities, and other ailments. But, these people would not die. They would have to live physically with us with all of these ailments. Banning Adam and Eve from the Tree of Life was an act of mercy.

It is important to note again that Adam and Eve did not die physical death upon eating the fruit. They suffered a spiritual death and separation from God. Physical death will eventually manifest itself but

that would take time. Just as this physical death took time to manifest itself; spiritual rebirth takes some time to manifest itself. We will dig into this later.

Our Sin Nature

This was just the tip of the iceberg. Adam and Eve immediately became self-conscious. That is, they became aware of themselves. This is when they realized they were naked. Prior to this, they were God-conscious. Their focus was God, creation, and each other.

So, the first consequence of their disobedience was self-centeredness. Just like them, we continue to be self-centered. This is the source of all of our grief, pain, and sorrow. Do you experience grief, pain, and sorrow? Focus on God and others instead of yourself and you will find relief.

This tendency toward self-centeredness was baked into our DNA when Adam and Eve sinned. Self-centeredness is the original sin. We do not know as much as we think we know about DNA and its impact on our behavior. There are certain thought patterns and tendencies that seem to run in families.

Remember from the creation story that each species procreates after its own kind.

Simple Example: My youngest daughter does not like to wear necklaces. Neither does my sister. The two of them did not meet until my daughter was about four years old. There is no way for this peculiar tendency to be transmitted from my sister to my daughter because they had never met. My daughter was born with this tendency. It is somewhere in our families DNA.

This is a small example but it is representative of much larger trends. Alcoholism runs in families. Schizophrenia runs in families. Good things such as athletic ability and musical talent also run in families. We really know very little about DNA.

The original sin of self-centeredness is baked into all our chromosomes. Additionally, we have our particular familiar propensities towards certain sins. For example, one person may have a tendency towards heavy drinking and profanity, while another has a tendency towards stealing and lying. The bottom line is this: we all have our particular weaknesses to deal with.

What was Lucifer doing in the garden in the first place?

No one really knows the answer to this but I will speculate shortly.

The book of Ezekiel places Lucifer in the garden in his 'pre-fallen' form, which is as a glorious angel. After he entices Adam and Eve to sin, he is no longer referred to as Lucifer. His fallen name is Satan. (And I have my own names for him. Feel free to make up your own names as well.)

In his pre-fallen form, Lucifer is described as an awesome creation that is believed to have musical talents and whose job it was to lead worship. I will speculate that Lucifer was in the garden to serve Adam and Eve; perhaps to demonstrate worship; perhaps to demonstrate music.

His job as a worship leader probably gave him rock-star syndrome. He wanted the glory for himself. He wanted to 'play' God. This was his opportunity to do so.

Adam and Eve, being created in God's likeness, had dominion over the earth. In essence, they were 'mini-Gods'. He wanted what they had. However, directly taking it from them would not work. He needed to trick them out of it.

It worked. And it changed the course of history. There were consequences for all parties involved. We are still dealing with the aftermath of these consequences.

Nonetheless, God's love prevails. He showed mercy right after the fall and continues to show mercy. The ensuing history of the Bible shows repeatedly how God reaches out to us in love. It has been a tumultuous relationship with his creation, humanity. Long-term rewards of building this relationship must be worth the effort or He would not have exerted the effort. Just like any relationship, it takes work.

5. A really bad thing happened

The Curse

The actions of Lucifer, Adam, and Eve resulted in curses that continue to affect us today.

Lucifer took the subtle form of the serpent in order to deceive Eve. God first cursed the 'serpent' for the part he played in Adam and Eve's fall. This is where Lucifer became Satan. He was stripped of his heavenly capabilities and fell from heaven like lightning.

[Genesis 3:1 - Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"]

[Genesis 3:14 - And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shalt you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.]

[Luke 10:18 - And He (Jesus) said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.]

All of the agony, pain, and suffering that humans have ever felt started at this point. Satan is the source of all evil and here is where it began. He tricked us out of our birthright so he could play God. So he could inflate his own ego. At this point in our story, he now had authority over the earth and humanity was hostage. He is our enemy, adversary, and accuser.

Eve's curse consisted of pain in childbirth and a limit to the number of children she could bear. Also, she was now subordinate to her husband. Prior to this, they were both viewed as one unit named Adam.

[Genesis 3:16 - To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be for husband, and he shall rule over you.]

Adam's curse was he would now have to work very hard for his food. And now, thorns and thistles would interfere with his efforts.

[Genesis 3:17-19 - And unto Adam he said, Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; Both thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.]

This sets the stage for our epic saga. Humanity living under a curse with a fallen angel hell-bent on controlling them and destroying them.

Adam and Eve began innocently in the Garden but now their nature was changed. They had fallen and had no idea the magnitude of what happened. They now knew sin and had innate tendencies toward self-centeredness.

They were not capable of saving themselves or getting back the authority over the earth that God had given them. Satan now had the authority over them and the earth.

It would take thousands of years before a Savior would be born who could break this curse.

Let's recap our story so far...

Once upon a time, there was an awesome God with massive creative powers. He created a world far beyond anything we could create. He built it to run on its own and to withstand the errors of those who participate in it. No matter what the error, whether intentional or unintentional, with malice or without malice, His design would withstand and prevail. He planned for all contingencies.

At the center this creation, he created humans. These creatures have special characteristics. They were made in his likeness and image. He gave them control over the portion of the universe called the earth. They had lordship over the earth and in essence were the 'mini-Gods' who could rule the earth.

He endowed humans with many of his characteristics just as our offspring are endowed with many of our characteristics. It is clear that he wanted and still wants relationship with his creation that he lovingly refers to as children.

However, most stories have a villain. The villain in our story was an awesome and beautiful yet equally vain and jealous angel named Lucifer. Lucifer was jealous of God's children, the humans. He wanted what they had and that was reign and control over the earth. To that end, he devised a plan to steal the creation that God lovingly gave to his children.

His plan was insidious, sneaky, and downright devilish. He would trick the youngest, most unique, and truly innocent creature, woman, into doubting her creator. Her other half, the man, would follow suit. His plan worked. However, there were consequences he hadn't planned for.

He gained control over the earth but he was stripped of his awesome form. He was no longer the beautiful angel God created. Figuratively speaking, he was reduced to a legless reptile.

There were consequences for God's children as well. Now that they had knowledge of good and evil, they could no longer live in the Garden that God created for them. This is because it would have access to a tree that would give them eternal life. Having knowledge of good and evil and eternal life is something God wanted to prevent.

Another consequence was spiritual death. That is, they no longer had a direct spiritual connection with God. They had lost their God consciousness and become self-conscious.

God must have been sad.

His beloved Adam and Eve, the ones he would walk with during the breezy part of the day had been tricked out of a relationship with Him.

[Genesis 3:8 - And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.]

They were spiritually dead and could no longer communicate with God at this higher and most intimate way. God is a spirit and communication with Him needs to be at a spiritual level.

[John 4:24 - God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.]

Humans no longer had spiritual communion with Him.

However, do not fret. This is only the beginning of our story. God would show mercy and prove his love repeatedly over the following millennia. We would come to learn more about his character. We would see his anger. We would see Him reaching out to us. We would see him coming down to our level to meet us where we are.

Immediately after Adam and Eve lost spiritual relationship with God, He showed mercy on them. He saw that they were dressed in fig leaves. He knew this would not be adequate. They clearly knew nothing about fashion. So what did he do? He killed the first animals and made them fur coats.

[Genesis 3:21 – Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.]

This sets an important precedent. God sacrificed the first animals on earth. He was the first to shed blood because of sin.

Cain And Abel

We do not know how many children Adam and Eve had, but we do have a story about two of their sons, Cain and Abel. Cain would grow up to be a farmer and Abel, a hunter. Somehow, these boys understood the need to make a sacrifice. (They probably learned from the parents who learned from God.) Cain offered a sacrifice of fruit and Abel offered the firstborn of his flock. God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's. Cain was upset. God comforted him and gave him another chance. Cain rebelled and killed his brother.

[Genesis 4:1-8 - And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said to Cain, Why art you angry? Why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Now Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him.]

He could have corrected the offering. God wanted a blood offering not a grain offering. Why was that? Let's go back to where Adam and Eve first disobeyed. They realized they were naked and made garments out of fig leaves. God knew a couple of things. The fashion would not last. And there needed to be a pattern established for their remission of sin. This pattern involved shedding the blood of an

animal. God killed the first animal, shedding its blood to make garments for Adam and Eve. Pay attention to this 'blood' pattern. It is important.

Cain's punishment for killing Abel was to be a fugitive and a vagabond. Even after Cain committed the first murder, God had compassion on him. Cain feared for his life so God set a mark upon him so that no one would harm him. God protected Cain even after he committed murder.

[Genesis 4:15 – And the Lord said to him (Cain), Therefore whosoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken upon him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.]

The Development Analogy

There is a correlation between the development of individual humans and the progress of humanity.

The development of human kind is very analogous to the development of a child from infancy to adulthood. The stages of God's relationship with humankind over the centuries parallels the stages that a human father would have with his children over the course of their lives together.

At this stage in our story, humanity is in the era before The Law. This is like having a child in the infant to toddler stage. They are too young to understand rules, consequences, and punishment. However, they do require discipline.

During this era of humanity's existence, the world was growing more sinful by the day. However, there was no law to point out what sin was. Therefore, there was no punishment and sin was running rampant.

(Side note: I believe humanity is currently somewhere in the adulthood stage.)

Please keep in mind that none of this is upsetting God. He has a plan of redemption. And He has time. A few thousand years is nothing to Him.

As I said earlier, sin was rampant on the earth. It got to the point where God had to do some drastic things to curtail its consequences.

The discipline mankind received during this stage seems quite severe. One example is Sodom and Gomorrah. Another is The Great Flood. God's purpose in these events was like cutting out a cancer so that humanity could reach the next stage in its development.

Something needed to be done about sin. God has a plan that is being executed in parts. First, He laid down some rules through Moses (the Ten Commandments and many more). This would expose sin and control it a bit. Next, He sent us a savior to fully cleanse us and restore us spiritually. (This is where we are today.) In the future, there will be another turning point where our sinful natures are eliminated.

We will get into more details about Moses and the law soon. First, I want you to remember the analogy where the development of humankind over the centuries is much like an individual from infancy to adulthood. At this place in our story, we are just before the point Moses introduced that law. This is analogous to the late toddler / preschool stage in human development.

6. Blood that binds us all

A Bloody Situation

At this stage in our story, we are still in the Old Testament and will be introduced to the first agreement known as the Old Covenant. Prior to this, there was no 'agreement' between God and man.

Under this Old Covenant, one's sins were placed on an animal and the animal was slaughtered. This shedding of blood must be important because it is a recurring theme.

Do you remember when Adam and Eve realized they were naked in the Garden? They made clothing out of fig leaves but God killed animals so they could wear the hides. The concept of the blood sacrifice started here.

God shed blood to cover them. This is important.

Clearly, someone (probably their parents) had taught Cain and Abel the importance of the blood sacrifice. Abel offered a blood sacrifice. Cain did not, leading to more bloodshed (the first murder) where Abel's blood "cried out from the earth."

[Genesis 4:10 - And He said, What have you done? the voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.]

What is it about blood that is so important? I believe it is because blood permeates every part of our physical being. Blood cells hold the keys to our physical existence.

Many cultures and religions have traditions of blood sacrifices. These are abominations of the original concept. What God was building towards is the ultimate pure blood sacrifice.

Everything in the Old Testament points forward to the climax of our story, the ultimate sacrifice. Everything in the New Testament points back to this epic event. Like Adam and Eve's fall, it would change the course of history.

Understanding this helps us understand our times. We live in New Testament times under a 'new agreement.' We have a better deal than our predecessors.

Let's pause for a quick recap. Where are we on our story's timeline?

From God's point of view, His prized creation, humans, were now self-centered and sin-focused. They had fallen out of relationship with Him. One of His angels masterminded this dreadful downfall. His beloved creations were unable to save themselves because of their fallen nature.

He was sad but not worried. He had a plan. From our point of view, hundreds of years have past and this plan looks like it is taking a long time. However, God is not bound by time the way that we are. His thoughts are beyond our thoughts.

[Isiah 55:8-9 - For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.]

He sees our existence from an eternal perspective. And He will take as long as necessary to restore our relationship.

The plan would unfold like this. First, he needed a people through whom he could work. He chose the Israelites. We will pick the story up where Moses enters the picture and the law is given.

God loves His creation and does what is best for it at the right time.

Society during Moses time was bad. Humanity was sinning, due to their fallen nature. They had no awareness of sin. They were under the influence of our enemy, Satan, and they were just doing what was in their nature due to the fall.

God would use the law that He gave to Moses to make them aware of their sins. But first, He had to get their attention and prove a few things to them.

At the time, the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians. Their plight was only getting worse and they sought to be free from their oppressors.

God used Moses to free them from their oppression through a series of plagues and awesome displays of His power.

The most devastating of these plagues was the death of every firstborn male. In order to protect the Israelites from this plague, He instructed them to perform an important ritual. This ritual was Passover. And, you guessed it, it involved blood.

The protocol for the Passover ceremony was as follows. The Israelites were to slaughter an unblemished, perfect lamb and place its blood in a pattern around the threshold entering their homes. This protected their homes from the plague that would kill the firstborn male in every household. This ritual is hugely symbolic and full of foreshadowing. There are other aspects to the ceremony and I am doing it a great disservice by being so brief. But, I only want to make one point here about the shedding of blood for the covering of sin.

This ceremony and protocol was a foreshadowing of the ultimate blood shedding. For the Israelites, Passover marked the end of captivity and the beginning of freedom. The cross represents the same

transition for us.

Multiple aspects of the Passover ceremony relate to the sacrifice Jesus would make at the cross. Rather than go into every one of them here (and they are numerous), I merely want to point out the correlation between Passover and Easter.

Passover is when there was bloodshed to protect the Israelites from death and give them freedom from their captivity.

Easter is when there was bloodshed to give all of us freedom from death and release us from our captor, the devil.

Back to the First Passover

That evening after the Israelites performed the ritual of Passover every firstborn male in the land died. None of the Israelites were harmed.

Pharaoh, the leader of the Egyptians, lost his firstborn son. He was distraught and let the Israelite slaves go. Then he changed his mind and goes after them. He corners them at the Red Sea. God parts the sea so the Israelites can pass through. When the Egyptians pursue them, the sea engulfs them and victory is declared.

This is an epic tale in and of itself. But it is only part of the bigger story.

I am going to skip over a lot of the history of the Israelites. There is a deep and rich history here that is worthy of study. My goal is to get quickly to the era in which we live, the new covenant era.

But first, we need to highlight a couple of events that occurred on the other side of the Red Sea.

An Example of Our Sovereignty

After all God had done for the Israelites, they had the audacity to complain. They questioned and doubted God who had just freed them from over 400 years of slavery. Because of their unbelief, they were able to limit God's ability to work in their lives.

How could this happen? Here we have the One who created everything, the God of the universe. He reaches down and miraculously plucks out a group of people from slavery and they have the ability to limit his work in their lives.

*[Psalm 78:41 – Yes, and they (the Israelites) turned back and tempted God, and **limited** the Holy One of Israel (God).]*

Astounding isn't it? How can this be?

Let's go back to the beginning for the answer. Remember when God created mankind in His own image and likeness? Well, there is something we need to understand about "image and likeness".

We are reflections of God. We are made in His image and likeness. Let's focus on "likeness". This means many things. In its rawest form; it means we are like God. We actually are. We are like little gods who have been given authority over the earth. Not the universe. Just the earth.

God created us in His likeness to rule over the earth as he does over the universe. This implies a level of sovereignty. God is sovereign. And in His likeness, he made us sovereign.

God is a logical being and will not violate His own Word. If we are made like Him, we are sovereign. And we have the ability to limit Him in our lives.

This goes against most of Christian thought today where God's sovereignty is mistaken for total control. When God created us in His likeness, He gave a form of sovereignty similar to His. (Our sovereignty is not as broad sweeping as His.) He gave us the ability to choose and control our own destiny. When God gives something, He does not take it back. That would be a violation of His nature.

It is evident that He is not in total control of the earth. Look around you. The world around us is a mess because we have handed our dominion of the earth over to Satan. He is our number one adversary.

Many things happened at the cross. Our adversary was defeated and our dominion over the earth restored. However, our adversary still exists to agitate us. Ultimately, the angel now named Satan will be destroyed.

In the meantime, we need to embrace our authority and seek the understanding we need to run this planet properly. We need to seek that understanding from the right place, God. We have an enemy who hates us and wants to destroy us. Too many humans openly accepted his lies as truth. This interferes with the progress of all of us.

Meanwhile, back at the Red Sea, let's resume our story in the next section where Moses is receiving the law from God.

7. Enter The Law

The law is a very peculiar thing. Its purpose is to make us aware of sin. It is very useful at controlling civilization. The most peculiar part is that no matter how hard we try, we cannot obey all of the rules. Remember we have self-centeredness baked into our DNA. The propensity to sin is very strong.

By design, the law helps us get to the point where we throw our hands up and ask God for help. If we were not aware that we are sinning, we would not get to this point. Restated, being aware of sin in our lives makes us realize we need help getting rid of it.

That is what the world was like before Moses. People were sinning and were not fully aware of it.

You are probably aware of the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai on the stone tablets. You probably did not know there are a lot more than just Ten Commandments. Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of Commandments. I haven't sat down and counted all of them but there are thousands.

Here is the kicker. To get to heaven, you have to obey each and every one of these laws all the time. If you can do this, you can make it to heaven. However, it is virtually impossible.

Let's be honest with each other and ourselves. We don't obey all the rules all the time. We simply can't be good enough to earn our way into heaven. No matter how hard we try. We just cannot do it. And anyone who says they can do it is deceived, outright lying, full of themselves, or worse.

The law was given so that we would come to the following conclusion. We need a Redeemer. We need help. The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were merely symbolic. They didn't achieve full reunion and restored relationship with God. They were merely to put the consequences of sin on hold until a Redeemer could fulfill the next phase in God's plan.

The Old Covenant was inferior to what we have today. It was very sin focused and incomplete. It dealt with sin in an intangible way and did not deal with the spiritual death that affects one third of our being.

What I mean by one third of our being is we are three parts: body, soul, and spirit. That is, we have a physical existence; we have a mental existence that involves our personality, feelings, and emotions; and we have a spiritual existence that is dead and must be reborn.

Becoming reborn spiritually, or bringing our spirits to life, is part of the good news. This is only part of the goodness. We will get to this. Don't go away. There's more to come.

Back to the development analogy

Remember the analogy where the development of humankind over the centuries is much like an individual from infancy to adulthood.

At this point in our story, Moses received the law. This is analogous to being in elementary school. The reward system is clear and simple. Everyone gets along pretty well if they obey the rules. The biblical

time frame that coincides with this stage starts from where Joshua enters the Promised Land through the reign of Solomon.

And then, the teenage years hit.

How well behaved were you in high school? Even the most well behaved students have occasions where they rebel. A teenager can disrupt even the best home.

After Solomon's reign, Israel rebelled. This was the season of the Judges where rebellion was rampant. This eventually led to the exile of Israel from their homeland. This is quite analogous to sending my son away to boarding school.

After this rebellion comes the disbandment of the tribes of Israel. Then, there is a long period of silence... about 400 years.

Excuse me for taking centuries of history and relating them to a couple paragraphs about school age children. I don't want to get bogged down in this period because I want to get to the good part.

It is necessary to build a foundation and understanding of where we have come from in order to appreciate where we are.

You need to have an understanding of the old covenant in order to understand how great the new covenant is.

Thus far in our story, the plight of humanity has been tragic.

This is where the story gets better.

All along God had a plan to pay our ransom, redeem us from sin, restore our authority, and defeat our oppressor. This all unfolds in the person of Jesus.

Enter Jesus

This is when God really starts to make His move. From humanity's point of view, it took quite a while for things to come together. However, God is not bound by time and space as we are. He operates on an eternal time frame. If it took thousands of years to get this far, so be it. Time is not a factor in His equation.

Nonetheless, the time was right for the predictions prophets had made to be fulfilled. There are some fascinating studies on how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.

I have heard naysayers argue that this was all just a big conspiracy. Fact: When more people are involved in a conspiracy, it is the more likely to be exposed and fail. The number of people needed to execute this 'conspiracy' is so big that the odds of it being a conspiracy are tiny.

Countdown to Christmas

Here's how the timeline unfolds. God creates everything and it is good. Humanity is tricked into sin and is held hostage for centuries by a fallen angel. During this time, God continues to reach out to humanity, slowly informing them over time of his plans for salvation.

We are created perfectly in union with God, one man and one woman in perfect union with each other. God said, "I was good... very good." Then, that demonic angel deceived us out of our birthright. Our nature changed. We experienced spiritual separation and are now driven by our physical desires. We have become bound by sin and slaves to the fallen angel.

However, God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus, his son, so anyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

[John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.]

Jesus' job was to teach us about our new agreement with God, offer himself as the final and ultimate sacrifice for sins, and then send his Holy Spirit to live inside us. This last step, sending his Holy Spirit, is overlooked and important. Having the Holy Spirit within us restores our spiritual condition to what Adam and Eve had in the Garden.

This restoration is spiritual. We still have to live with our mental and physical ailments. However, we can manifest the perfection we now have in our spirits into the physical world by renewing our minds with Jesus' teachings.

*[Romans 12:2 - And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.]*

The Bible does speak about another era that is to come in the future. That is a whole other topic for another day. Let's stick to the here and now. Understanding our new agreement with God, this good news, the Gospel, is a big enough task.

Let's start by debunking a myth about Christmas and peace on earth.

Peace on earth

Where?

Just look around you. Something is wrong here. There is no peace on earth.

The peace that the Angels announced when Jesus was born was peace from God towards man.

*[Luke 2:14 - Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will **toward** men.]*

Specifically, peace between God and us was restored. It is now available for our taking. However, not everyone takes advantage of this offer. Each of us has the sovereign authority to accept or refuse this offer.

The result is there is no guarantee there will be peace between men. The only way peace between men occurs is when those men accept the peace God is extending towards each other. If peace between God and man is accepted, then the peace among men can happen.

This peace is something our enemy seeks to steal and destroy. If he can keep us from accepting the peace God extends to each of us, then he can keep us disconnected and fighting against each other. He has no strength to fight us so he uses us against each other.

The peace to be celebrated at Christmas is that the separation between God and man could now end. This separation began in the Garden where the first deception happened.

We are not going to live in peace with one another until first we reconnect with God. It is just not in our nature.

God would place all our punishment for sin, all of his anger towards us, upon Jesus. This nasty part of our nature called sin that the devil used and still uses to hold us hostage would be canceled out permanently, past, present, and future.

God and his creation, humanity, could be united. That is good news. Wait, there is more.

8. Freedom Achieved

Christmas is good but Easter is more important.

Easter is the most important day in history. Everything got reset... even our calendars. (This is where we get B.C. and A.D in our calendar.)

When Satan arranged for Jesus' crucifixion, he set the stage for his own demise. God brilliantly used Satan's own plan of destruction against him. Satan would set in motion the actions. He would use Judas to betray Jesus.

[Matthew 26:25 - Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said to him, "You have said it."]

[John 13:27 - And after the piece of bread, Satan entered into him (Judas). Then said Jesus to him, "What you do, do quickly.]

These actions set in motion the final payment for all sin and the defeat Satan's stronghold over the earth. (Think about how brilliant this is!)

It is great news that our sins are forgiven and we no longer have to live under that burden. However, it does not stop there. So much more was achieved that day. The following pages summarize all that we received on this important day.

Freedom from the bondage of sin

Analogous to the Passover lamb, Jesus bore all the punishment, anger, and wrath God had and ever will have. This is huge. Once and for all. All sin is paid for. We can be redeemed.

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

By the grace and design of God, we don't have to bear the punishment we are due if we accept Jesus for who he says he is and for what he did on Easter. The only way we can accept this is through faith.

[Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace are you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: but faith that is the gift of God.]

If you don't think you have enough faith, you are wrong. We are all given the same measure of faith.

*[Romans 12:3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think soberly, as **God has dealt to each one the measure of faith.**]*

This is awesome but, many believers stop here and never live in full victory that we received on that day. They have been taught to be sin focused. This is a form of self-centeredness. Instead, they need to be focused on what Jesus did, not what they did.

Sin is no longer a focus. Relationship with God is the focus. Our relationship with God is now restored through Jesus and maintained through the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit).

[II Corinthians 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.]

Let's expand on this concept that sin should not be our focus through this illustration. Imagine one of those scales where you balance the two sides.

On one side of the scale, let's visualize all the sin in the world.

- Look at sin as a monetary debt.
- The total debt of all the sins of the world equals \$20.
- Imagine that \$20 debt represents all the sin of the entire world for all time.
- Place this \$20 on one side of the scale.
- Jesus came to pay off that debt.

On the other side of the scale, let's visualize how Jesus paid off that debt, in-full, many times over.

- Let's give that "payoff" magnitude.
- Jesus came with 100 pallets of \$20 bills and slammed them down on the entire scale.
- End of story.
- Sin is no longer the focus. Jesus is.

There is now only one sin. And that sin is... not accepting what Jesus did when he delivered the 100 pallets of \$20 bills to pay off the world's \$20 sin debt forever.

All sin is a moot point. It is not worth thinking about. Only one sin exists today, and that is not accepting Jesus as payment for your sin.

Freedom from guilt

Being declared not guilty is one of the most freeing things you will ever experience. I have seen people's faces and posture change before my eyes when this burden of guilt is lifted. It is quite a freeing event.

For many, having this burden of guilt lifted is the only way they can begin to see God. The peace that results from knowing, really knowing, you are forgiven for everything by the God of the universe is beyond comprehension. Peace that results from knowing you are forgiven is supernatural and not of this world. Any guilt or shame is replaced by the love and compassion God showed towards you by sending His son Jesus to pay the price for your sins.

God is unchanging in His expressions of love and compassion. He extended love and compassion to Cain early in our story. He continues to extend His love and compassion towards us.

Now, really think about this.

The God of the universe has every right to crush us out of existence. Instead, He extends love and forgiveness towards not wrath and anger. The wrath and anger were clearly there as the Old Testament depicts. However, they were placed on Jesus so that we would not have to bear the punishment we could not endure.

This redemption is the first step to your reunion with God and your beginning as a new creation. This new beginning is like a rebirth. It is the beginning of a growth process.

This rebirth happens immediately and is complete in your spirit. However, it is frustrating to look around you and see your rebirth not manifested in your physical world. Remember, your mental "bad habits" still exist and will have to be dealt with over time. The process of renewing your mind through God's word enables you to foster ongoing growth. This growth process manifests itself through many blessings, even miracles, in your physical world. This can happen quickly and definitely happens over time.

Freedom from oppression

Our enemy was stripped of his power. Additionally, our authority over the earth was restored. When Lucifer tempted us in the Garden and became Satan. He used sin to hold us hostage and keep us separated from God.

That all changed at Easter. The bondage of sin was broken. The only thing our enemy can do now is to accuse us of sin.

*[Revelation 12:10 - And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of Christ is come, for the **accuser** of our brethren, who **accused** them before our God day and night has been cast down."]*

All we have to do in response to any accusation from Satan is this: "I am forgiven by the blood of Jesus."

Our enemy's power over us is broken. However, he still exists. He roams the earth about looking for victims.

[I Peter 5:8 – Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour.]

[Job 1:7 – And the Lord said to Satan, "From where did you come?" Then Satan answered, "From going to and fro on the earth, and walking back and forth on it."]

Knowing we now have authority over him and our earth gives us a new boldness. This boldness will lead us to victory. All this stems from what happened on Easter.

Freedom from poverty

God is a God of abundance not of scarcity. Throughout the history of the Bible, He richly blessed servant after servant. Abraham was very rich as was David and his son Solomon. Solomon was the richest man who ever lived.

Living in poverty does not bring glory to God. In His word, He said he would provide.

[Matthew 6:25-33 - Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on it. Is not the life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit unto his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.]

God is good and He makes good on His word.

Poverty does not attract people to the Gospel... peace, abundance, and joy does. How does this sound for a sales pitch? "Hey, come join us and be poor." No wonder the church is in such sad shape.

Jesus was not poor. We stretch the fact that He was born in a manger into Him being destitute. It was just a temporary circumstance. The gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold that wise men gave His family were very valuable. This financed his upbringing.

[Matthew 2:11 - And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented to him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.]

Why would God want His children to live in poverty?

It makes no sense. In no way would it be in His best interest to have His children suffer in poverty. Who would want to become His children if that was the case?

One of the reasons Jesus gave up 'God-hood' to become man was so that we could prosper. It was not the only reason, but for our sake He became poor so that we might be rich.

[II Corinthians 8:9 - For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich.]

Let me calm any suspicions that this is just more of that new 'name it and claim it' philosophy. Preachers have bastardized this teaching by using it to lay claim to blessings that were not released and appropriated at the cross. They use it to justify covetousness and materialism.

Here is what was released at the cross: healing, forgiveness, love, peace, joy, freedom, authority, and power; the power to create wealth.

Here is what was NOT released at the cross: material wealth (although we still have the power to create wealth), new cars, divorce, self-centeredness, pain and suffering.

Freedom from sickness and pain

Everywhere Jesus went he healed people of physical and demonic ailments. He used healing as a bell to call people to the truth. Then, he said that his disciples would do all this and more.

[John 14:12 - Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to my Father.]

I have not seen anyone 'do all this and more' including myself. Yes, I have seen healing manifest itself in others and myself. However, 'all that Jesus did and more'? That is a tall order.

When I think about it with my physical mind, it is intimidating. When I think about it with my spiritual mind, I can see it. I am in the process of renewing my mind so I can effectively manifest what I see spiritually into the physical.

Sickness and physical death are by-products of the curse humanity received in the Garden of Eden. Jesus came to free us from that bondage so we may have life and have it more abundantly.

[John 10:10 - "10 The thief (Satan) comes to steal, kill, and to destroy: I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.]

Very few people believe in healing these days. This is sad. The very reason we have a few healings today is a direct result of our unbelief. Jesus himself could do very few healings in his hometown of Nazareth because the people there would not believe.

[Matthew 13:58 - And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.]

[Mark 6:5 - Now He could there do no mighty work, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marveled at their unbelief.]

Jesus has the power and released it to us at the cross. It is up to us to believe it and receive it.

Having God's Spirit dwell inside you

Understanding and accepting that God's Spirit can now live within you is critical. You are now a clean vessel. You have been washed of your sins and now the Holy Spirit can live within you. Just like the original plan. The spiritual death humanity experienced through Adam and Eve is now reversed. The Holy Spirit could not dwell in them but now it can live in us because of Jesus. This great news. This is the Gospel. Our sins are behind us and our spirits are renewed. Now, and only now, can the Holy Spirit be reunited with us. The Holy Spirit dwells with in us 'to take hold together' with us.

Remember, we are still sovereign individuals. Meaning we can choose to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives or not. This does not happen by default. There is great deceit and misinformation around this. Most churchgoers who call themselves Christians simply don't know that they need to invite the Holy Spirit into their lives. I am not saying they are not saved will and not go to heaven. They are and they will. However, they are not living their lives to the fullest.

Having one's sins forgiven and then living the rest of your life in quiet desperation longing for the day when they can go to heaven is a tragedy.

This act of receiving the Holy Spirit puts a fire in our souls. It gives us the ability to hear from God. It gives us an understanding of the world around us that is beyond mere knowledge and divine in nature.

This is such an awesome benefit. It is the Holy Spirit's job to teach us all things and bring to our remembrance everything we have ever learned.

[John 14:26 - "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you.]

Stop and think about that.

**This is the Gospel,
the good news,
the best news any of us could ever hear.**

What is so amazing about this good news? All the hard work and heavy lifting is done for us. We are now able to rest in the Lord. All we have to do is stop trying so hard, recognize Jesus for who he is, and receive.

By now, I hope you can appreciate the epic saga and understand that we are all a part of it.

So, what will you do about it? How do you get this good news to work in your life? That is a very good question.

You may be ready now or you may need some preparation. At a high-level, there are only two steps in the process.

Step one: Your dead spirit must be brought back to life. This is also known as being born again.

Many think this is the only step. However, if you really want life and want it more abundantly, you will want to read on.

Step two: Receive the Holy Spirit. This is a powerful and important thing. This is not taught in many churches.

There are further lessons at in the next module that will take you step-by-step through this journey. If you need help or have questions, feel free to use the "Questions" form on this website.

Five overlooked secrets

Things you need to know

Here are five key areas are overlooked and ignored. Understanding them will boost your spiritual growth and every aspect of your life. God wants you whole. He wants you to be healthy and to have good relationships, with Him and those around you. He wants you to live life more abundantly!

[John 10:10b - I have come that they may have life, and that they may have more abundantly.]

First, we must debunk the myth about God's sovereignty. Next, we need to understand and address our enemy. From there, a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit, without religious strings attached, is in order. This naturally flows into a discussion of reestablishing our authority. And finally, we need to grasp that we, each of us individually and together, are the church, not some building.

Sovereignty

The most dangerous doctrine in our society is the doctrine of God's sovereignty. God is sovereign but he is not a control freak and a sovereign being does not violate His own nature.

The church and our society depict God as a control freak. They say, "It is God's will" and "God is in control." He is in ultimate control, but gave us control over ourselves and the earth. People put back on God responsibility that he gave to us.

[Genesis 1:28a - Then God blessed them, and god said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it;]

Those are His words. His word is final. He will never break His word. If God were to take this authority and responsibility, he would violate His own nature. He gave us dominion over the earth and told us to subdue it.

He made us in His likeness and in that likeness we are sovereign, like Him. He gives us the ability to defy Him or accept Him. (What a risk taker God is!)

We are not a bunch of robots programmed to praise Him. We can praise Him by choice or not. When we do praise Him authentically, genuinely, and honestly; without hypocrisy or self-centeredness, it is one of the most awesome things in the universe. I hope you, in your sovereignty, will experience this.

The Holy Spirit

The church ignores and glosses over the Holy Spirit. This is insulting to God. It should be our primary focus. The most important thing we can accomplish in our lifetimes is to reestablish connection with God. The only way this truly happens is when we receive the Holy Spirit.

Receiving the Holy Spirit is different from water baptism although it can happen at the same time. It is a separate and distinct at an elemental level. It uses fire as its significant element rather than water.

John the Baptist states that he baptizes with water but Jesus will baptize with fire, which represents the Holy Spirit.

[Matthew 3:11 – “11 I indeed baptize you with water for repentance: but He that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to untie: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:]

[Luke 3:16 - John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I comes, the latch of His sandals I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:]

Fire represents God’s spirit that we receive into our spirits.

There is no longer the need for the Temple. We are the temple.

[I Corinthians 3:16-17 - Do not you know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?]

Our human bodies can now house the spirit of God just like in the garden. Our God consciousness and awareness can be restored but we need to receive it.

When the Holy Spirit is present it is awesome and awkward and everything in between. This can be an ongoing state of being. It’s the way we are designed. This is how we discover why we are here, what we are to do, and who we are.

Evil

As revealed in our story, a fallen angel seeks to destroy us. However, now that our authority over the earth was restored, he is on the run. The problem is he still uses deceit to make us think we do not have authority over him and the earth. His two key areas of deceptions are the Holy Spirit and God's sovereignty.

Satan is on the run. He is in survival mode. He wants to keep us from knowing and understanding God's word in order to maintain control over us. His biggest deception involves the Holy Spirit. This is our power source. If he can keep us from receiving the Holy Spirit, he can defeat us.

The church has played right into this deception. Their focus is on getting people born again, having their sins forgiven and then having them get more people to join their church. They focus on water baptism and skip the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The effect of this is twofold. People are saved spiritually but never achieve their true potential without the Holy Spirit. They are saved and stuck. This is why churches lose membership. It is frustrating to know about God but never really know Him as intimately as he wants to be known. Our hearts know this and long for it.

The other effect is just as detrimental. As I mentioned earlier, churches get people’s sins forgiven and then send them out to get other people to come to their church. This is dangerous. No one is prepared to go out and talk to anyone about God unless he or she has received the Holy Spirit.

If you have not received the Holy Spirit, do not try to spread the Gospel.

I know this is a strong statement. Nevertheless, Jesus did not start his ministry until he received the Holy Spirit and he specifically instructed the Apostles to stay put until they received the Holy Spirit. That is enough evidence for me to say "No preaching or evangelizing unless you have received the Holy Spirit."

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

Sending born-again people who have not received the Holy Spirit out into the world to evangelize does two bad things.

First, it is a bad experience for the born-again person. They are not prepared and their success rate shows it.

Secondly, it is annoying and just poor salesmanship.

Companies don't send salespeople into the field unprepared. Why is this? Because you may only get one chance to make the sale. If you blow it, you are done.

There is much more at stake when approaching a person about spiritual matters... their eternal life. You had better be prepared. You cannot do it without the Holy Spirit.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to help us evangelize effectively. He guides us and tells us what to do. Note: it may not even be your job to evangelize. The Holy Spirit will also tell you that. Rely on God. He knows best.

Authority

First, the church is deceived into believing that God is in control of everything. This makes their congregations passive and easily defeated by Satan.

Then the church is not teaching how to receive the Holy Spirit.

Yet another false teaching of the church is that we don't have authority over the devil.

We have sovereign authority through the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to use it. And make our enemy flee. Taking authority over our enemy increases your ability to succeed exponentially and thwarts his plans to destroy you.

The battle is over, Jesus has won it for us, all we have to do is accept the victory and live as if we believe it.

The hardest thing to understand is why our enemy is still around. I don't have an answer for this. If I were God, I would have destroyed the devil at Easter. However, God promises to deal with him in the end. He is not finished 'raising up' humankind.

Let's refer back to the analogy where the development of humankind over the centuries is much like an individual from infancy to adulthood. At this stage in our development as God's children, we have entered adulthood. We have experienced the foibles of youth and the rebellion of adolescence. Now we have left home and have access to all the instruction we need through the Holy Spirit.

The Temple

The centralized hierarchical structure of churches is wrong and not what Jesus intended. He came to destroy the organizational structure of the church. He came to start something completely new. What we have today is the same centralized, hierarchical, structure that existed when he walked the earth.

The examples Jesus used were these. You would not put new wine in old wine skins. And you would not sew new cloth into an old garment.

Wine in those days was kept in skins that would stretch. New wine would still ferment and cause the skins to expand. Skins lost their elasticity over time. So no one put new wine in old skins because they would burst.

The same concept applies to new cloth in an old garment. The new cloth will loosen over time and pull away from the old garment.

Similarly, what Jesus brought into the world could not be held by the old hierarchy. It needs a new vessel. One that is pliable and alive. He is referring to us.

[I Corinthians 6:19 - Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?]

This parable is depicted in three of the Gospels.*[Matthew 9:16-17 Mark 2:21-22 Luke 5:36-38]*

His ideas of "church" are depicted in the way he sent disciples out in pairs to go from house to house. Jesus told them if someone was open to hear what they had to say, remain there until that person is knowledgeable and then move on.

[Luke 10:1-10 - After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.']

At this point in Jesus' ministry, the Holy Spirit had not been sent to us. That would come later, after His death and resurrection. When the Holy Spirit arrived, the same thing happened all over again. Small

groups in people's homes. No centralized building or priests. Everyone had a role to play not just priests. We are all capable of ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit the swells within us.

The centralized church is ripe to collapse under its own weight and be replaced by a decentralized body of believers who have the power of the Holy Spirit in them everywhere they go.

I hope these writings can foster and nourish you and a new body of believers. I pray that you all come together and are responsive, integrated, decentralized, connected, neural- networked, transparent, simple, clear, free, prosperous, and most importantly - full of the Holy Spirit.

Keep reading to learn how to receive the Holy Spirit.

PART 2

Who is Jesus?

**This is a serious question.
Your answer is important.
It has to be your answer, not mine.**

If you seek the answer to this question, you will receive the answer.

Here are some basic answers...

- He is a figure in the Bible - He's my friend - He was a prophet - He was a great teacher

Here is the more targeted my answer

- He is either a stark raving lunatic - or - He is who said He is - God.

The answer is a binary function.

Some people take offense to this statement. That's okay. Hear me out.

He said he was God. God made man. The Redeemer!

How many people do you know who make that claim? Not very many I hope. Lunatics are made of this stuff. You know, people like Jim Jones or Charles Manson.

**Jesus said he was God!
This got Him crucified.
If you claim to be God,
you had better be able to prove it.**

As the 'story' goes, He did that. He rose from the dead after three days in a tomb.

This is as well documented as any event in history. And this separates Him from all the other wannabees.

Maybe there was something to this Jesus character after all. I mean, look at the impact He made in three years.

Let's look at the evidence.

He changed the way we track time. (A.D. versus B.C.) His birthday is a major holiday. The miggesst holiday if you are in retail. The records of His life stand up to scrutiny and have been tested over time. There is manuscript evidence. There is archaeological evidence. There are many logical arguments. They cannot all be ignored.

Some researchers point to the statistical improbability of all the scriptures He fulfilled. Others refer to

various historical records of the time for proof. And others point to astrological evidence. In his book "The Case for Christ", Lee Strobel does a solid job of addressing these rational points. This is a good book. I recommend it for those who need to work this out with a rational mind.

Coming to the conclusion that Jesus WAS God is one thing.

Coming to the conclusion that Jesus is God IS another thing.

It is a spiritual event.

**It's more than a head-trip.
It's a heart trip and a personal journey.**

At one point in my life, I took the stance that I would disprove the Bible using an objective and analytical approach. And, being of sound mind, I was unable to do so.

There were areas of "grayness" and uncertainty that I had to muddle through. Then, one day I just knew it to be true.

It's like riding a bike. There's a point at which you can 'sort of' ride a bike, but you wobble. This is not really riding a bike. Then, one day your form comes together and you're actually riding a bike. And you know it to be true. You never forget how to do it again.

I concluded the Gospels are not the teachings of a lunatic. They are full of truth and when I applied them to my life... it got better... much better.

Hmmmm... I thought.

**Maybe He is the Son of God.
After all, He did conquer death.
But, what if all this is just a bunch of stuff
made up by his followers?**

It is not likely. A conspiracy of this magnitude could not have been pulled off. Someone would have folded in the first century.

The key to debunking any conspiracy argument is this. The more people involved in a conspiracy, the less likely it is to be kept a secret. Someone will spill the beans. People just can't keep their mouths shut.

Conspiracy theory gurus have used this position to debunk myths about the Kennedy assassinations and the terrorist attacks.

If this were a conspiracy, some thread would have unraveled in the various recounts. I can't find that

thread. It does not exist.

There are four major accounts and several minor accounts of Jesus' life and death. They don't all match up exactly. The fact that they don't match up exactly, adds to their validity. Each person recounts the events in their own words. They should be different because the people involved were different.

Aside from all this detective work, something else happened to me in this process. I changed. I don't know how or why.

We don't understand how a seed knows how and when to grow. It just does. The words from this Book are seeds. They take root and just grow. This is beyond my physical and logical mind and involves my spirit.

As I said earlier, coming to the conclusion that Jesus was/is God is a spiritual event.

Jesus had a very interesting discussion with his apostles about who he was. He asked them this question. "Who am I?" They gave Him all sorts of answers. Mostly, their answers centered on what others were saying about Him.

He stopped them and said "Yes, that's what they say... But, who do you say I am?"

This is when Peter declared, "You are the Christ." Translated: "You are God."

Then, Jesus told Peter that he did not come to that conclusion by himself and that God had revealed it to him.

[Matthew 16:13-20 - When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.]

[Mark 8:27-30 - Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.]

[Luke 9:18-22 - And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” So they answered and said, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”]

You need to come to your own conclusion about who Jesus is. You need to decide what you believe about Jesus. And you have help.

My goal is to guide you, but stay out of your way. I must respect your sovereignty. It is not my conclusion it is yours. Your conclusion must be your conclusion; drawn from your sovereignty; without influence from others.

I'm squaring up with you, here and now, so please pay attention. This is the most important decision of your life. It is your decision to make. I respect your sovereignty in making this decision. You must make this decision for yourself. This is not a cult.

This is about you having a relationship with God.

Don't just explore the mental and physical aspects. Seek revelation and it will be given to you. Just like Peter, God will reveal Who He is to you.

Here are some Bible verses you can research on this topic.

At the beginning of his career, Jesus caused a stir by saying he was the fulfillment of a prediction in Isaiah 61:1-2. This occurs in Luke 4:14-21.

[Isaiah 61:1-2 - “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord , And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,]

[Luke 4:14-21 - Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord .” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”]

Later in his career, He really had had people puzzled about “Was he the Messiah?” This occurs in a few places in John. It starts in John 7:25-32 then continues in John 7:40-52 and 8:12-20.

[John 7:25-32 - Now some of them from Jerusalem said, “Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.” Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.” Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?” The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.]

[John 7:40-52 - Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, “Truly this is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him. Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?” The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”]

[John 8:12-20 - Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.” Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.]

In these instances, He knows it is not 'His time' yet. So He plays it down. (I think this was strategic. God's timing is an amazing thing. I have experienced it intimately in my life.)

The kicker comes in Mark 14:61-64 (also recorded in Matthew 26:63-66).

[Mark 14:61-64 - But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.]

[Matthew 26:63-66 - But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."]

Above where He said "I am." set Him up to be crucified.

The bottom line is this: Who do you say Jesus is? What do you believe? You don't have make a decision today. But you really should get started. Time is ticking for all of us.

11. Sovereignty Explained

Avoid the Number One reason people misunderstand God.

**When you learn this secret, you will get along better with others (even those you don't like).
It is a cornerstone that builds the successful relationships.**

We don't fully understand God's sovereignty or our own.

Sure, it's easy to see God as a sovereign ruler, up in the sky with a lighting bolt in His hand, ready to zap us when we mess up.

But, that's not what God is like.

God's Sovereignty is powerful and meek at the same time. This is a paradox. And where there is paradox, there is God.

God has the power to kill us all but he doesn't. Why? One reason is He loves us. Another reason is He created us in his 'likeness' and gave us our own sovereignty. And as a supremely logical being. He won't violate our sovereignty.

Sovereign is as sovereign does. Sure, but what about OUR sovereignty?

Let's start with a definition of the word sovereignty. The word sovereignty means supreme in rank or authority; enjoying autonomy; independent of outside authority.

We are sovereign individuals.

Believe it or not. We have the innate ability to make our own choices. Good, bad, ugly and otherwise. Don' believe it? Try telling a 5-year old it is time to go to bed. Many refer to this as our will or free will.

We all have a will of our own, some stronger than others, but we all have will.

Even though it may not look like we enjoy autonomy and are supreme in rank. At an individual level, we do have autonomy and rank. You may have external choices exerted upon you. But, you have a choice. You control you mind and you always have that choice.

God is a sovereign individual.

This site attracts a lot of atheists and agnostics. For those individuals, please give me the benefit of your doubt when I make blanket statements like this about God. Please read on, keeping your mind open and flexible. Thanks!

He can do anything he wants. But, any sovereignty comes with parameters. He cannot and will not violate his own nature. Sovereign beings don't do such things.

As a sidetrack let's do an exercise. I call this a "Pseudo-theological Circular Logic Breakdown" You may have heard this proof or argument before.

Q: Can God do anything?

A: Yes.

Q: Can he make a rock he cannot lift?

A: Yes.

Q: Can he lift it?

A: No?

Wait! Therefore, he can't do anything, nullifying your first answer and God's power.

The real answer: He would give someone the authority and power to lift the rock for Him.

A sovereign being does not violate its own nature. And does not fall for this pedestrian logic trap.

Problem solved. Sovereignty intact.

Enough of this mental exercise. You are smarter than this childish game. In know this because you have read this far.

Let's build out this concept of sovereignty.

To do so, we will have to refer to the book of Genesis. Since many of you are new to the Bible, I am going to skip most of the verses and focus on a few words out of Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 from the King James translation.

[Genesis 1:26 - And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the foal of the air, and over the cattle, and over all of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps."]

That is a broad statement. This means He made everything and handed the deed over to us.

The next few verses repeat in excruciating detail our likeness, image, and dominion. This is from the Amplified translation.

[Genesis 1:26-30 - Then God said, "Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]; and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and over the entire earth, and over everything that creeps and crawls on the earth." So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them [granting them certain authority] and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, and subjugate it [putting it under your power]; and rule over (dominate) the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves upon the earth." So God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of the entire earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to all the animals on the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that moves on the ground—to everything in which there is the breath of life— I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so because He commanded it.]

It's like repeating something to a child so they remember it. That is another lesson to be learned here. Repetition is important. Anyhow, let's focus on what "created in His image and likeness" means.

Don't make this harder than it has to be.

We look like and act like Him. We have His same qualities and properties. He gave them to us.

If you have biological children, you readily understand this concept. Your kids are not you but they are a lot like you.

Sometimes this is good and sometimes it is bad. :)

Please note: God is only good. Only goodness comes from Him. Bad is another topic. It comes from another source that we will cover later.

So, we are a lot like God (in His likeness)

And, He is sovereign.

Therefore, we are sovereign too.

But wait there's more... and we have dominion over the earth too!

We are naturally sovereign or sovereign by default because we are made in God's likeness and God is sovereign.

Let's go back to our definition of sovereignty...

"supreme in rank or authority; enjoying autonomy; independent of outside authority"

God has rank and authority over the universe.

He gave us rank and authority over the earth and our own identities.

He is in control ultimately, but not at the violation of the sovereignty He gave us when He created us in His likeness.

The world continues to turn and things will play out. God certainly has an influence. But, he's not a control freak and he will not violate the sovereignty that He freely gave to each of us.

This is where the church has failed and our culture misleads us. They believe God is a control freak. And I will give them this: God is the ultimate supreme and sovereign being and has ultimate control. Here is where they mess it up. In the end, God rules, but in the meantime, He does not violate the sovereignty he placed in each of us.

Here is the freaky part... By placing this sovereignty in us, God allows and enables us to limit His ability to work in our lives and in the world over which He has given us dominion.

This is one of the reasons the world is so messed up. We have the ability to crowd God out of our lives.

Misunderstanding God's sovereignty has caused a whole lot of angst and frustration.

Humankind has mistakenly thought God was in control when it was our own responsibility to take authority and act. This misunderstanding has caused us to blame God for evil and project our anger upon Him. Neither is true. He is not angry or evil... not even a little bit.

Right now, we need to take a little side trip about evil...

First, let's build the underlying givens in our proof statement.

- God is not evil
- We are created in His likeness
- Therefore, we are not evil

This leads to the question, where did evil come from?

Here's a brief history of our existence.

God created an archangel named Lucifer who wanted God's glory for himself (Isaiah 42). This angel saw that "this creation called man" was like God and had dominion over the earth. He wanted the dominion God gave us for himself. So, he deceived us out of our birthright. Then, Jesus came along and conquered sin and death, winning it back for us. This catches us up to today.

I just covered the history of our existence in about five sentences. Forgive me; I'm sure I left a few details out.

Recap and expansion:

Lucifer became Satan in 'the fall'. We lost control of our planet. Now we have it back. But, the devil was not removed. The power and authority he stole from us is now returned to us. (This is what Jesus achieved at the cross.)

Don't be deceived into thinking that God is mad at us and does evil things. We need to overcome this obstacle. We need to grasp and understand the sovereign authority that has been returned to us.

When we understand this concept, we get a sober view of our environment and ourselves. We live in a fallen world and we have a fallen nature as a result. However, we have access to redemption. But we are still in a battle and are being persecuted.

Pause for a moment and think deeply about God's sovereignty, our sovereignty, and even our enemy, Satan's sovereignty. Clearly, God gave him the ability to make a choice. Just like he did us. The pattern seems logical to me

Further expansion:

God is true to His original plan of giving us sovereignty. We have dominion over this world but not without opposition from our enemy who seeks to destroy and deceive all of us.

Please note: don't get worried about our enemy or the battle. He is defeated. We win. But the battles are now in our minds. (It will be a mind expanding lesson!)

God is not a control freak. But, we can limit His ability to work in our lives. He will not violate our sovereignty. If we want to live our lives with reckless abandonment, we can. It's not what He has in mind for us. Regardless, He respects our choices and loves us.

He is not mad at us. He does not cause bad things to happen to teach us lessons. He is not some mad Wizard of Oz pushing buttons and pulling levers to keep the world in order.

He is seated. His work is done. At his right side sits Jesus. The world was designed once. Some bad things happened. However, their possibility was considered in advance and a predetermined plan of redemption was executed. We can now live in that redeemed state. We make choice everyday base on our sovereign authority. This epic drama is not over. There is more to come and we are part of it.

So where does that leave us today?

Let's break the concept of sovereignty into nuggets and order them from least difficult to grasp to most difficult to grasp.

God is sovereign. Okay. That's easy to grasp.

We are sovereign. A little more difficult to grasp but manageable.

We can limit God's ability to work in our life because we are sovereign. This is difficult for many to grasp.

We have been wrongly taught that God is in complete control. This has caused many of us to become passive. We just accept the strife and stress of life as a given... as if it were right and sent from God. We are being deceived by our enemy. This is where he wants us. So he can keep control over us and steal the dominion over the earth that is rightly ours.

This is where agnostics and atheists have an advantage. They were never taught or refused to receive the teaching that God was in control. Logically, they deduced that they were in control of their thoughts and actions. Therefore, God was not. This is true. But it does not take away from any of the statements above.

When we reclaim our sovereignty, we can exert control over ourselves and change how we interact with others. At the same time, this foils the enemy's plans to destroy us. It's the ultimate win-win!

How are we (you and I) going to act?

I have mentioned this before and it is worth repeating. I pledge to respect your sovereignty. I owe it to you, by default, as a fellow human being, created in His likeness. And I expect the same from you.

If everyone made an oath to act like this towards each other, imagine the impact on the world.

Now let's just deal with what we can control... ourselves. I pledge to respect the sovereignty of everyone I meet. Regardless of whether I agree with them or not. Please make a similar pledge.

Let me share the revelation I received when I started living under this pledge.

People respond differently to me... more positively. I am lighter. I carry much less animosity, anger, and frustration. Life is better. It is so simple!

Going forward, I ask you to apply this pledge to your interactions. Willingly apply it to all your relationships. Please share your results. I look forward to a good report.

I know this was some heavy and abstract stuff. Please hang with me until we can tie all this together. The truth you will learn in the next lesson will set you free.

12. What is the Gospel?

It is a message so simple it is elegant.

It is so subtle it is easy to miss.

It is widely misunderstood.

It is what your enemy wants to keep from you.

First, some background.

We (all humans) were and continue to be separated from God. Because of our fallen nature, our internal wiring is, by default, to be at odds with Him. We were/are incapable of saving ourselves from separation and destruction.

We don't need to live like this. Our compassionate Creator reached out to us and provided a way out. That way is Jesus.

No one comes to the father but through Him. He said that in John 14:6.

[John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.]

Under the law, all we are condemned and still are if we choose to live under the law. Jesus brought a new covenant. The Gospel of Grace.

He took the judgement from the law upon Himself for all of us. All we have to do is receive it in faith. That is, all we have to do is believe in Him.

Have faith and focus it upon Him.

You already have faith. We are all given "the measure of faith."

[Romans 12:3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one the measure of faith.]

This faith is inside of you, wanting to believe in something. Look at human nature. If we don't have a God, we invent one. Too often, that is ourselves.

The problem with that is; we are not God. And we are incapable of redeeming ourselves. We can't reach nirvana, or heaven, or whatever you want to call it, on our own. However, we merely need to place our belief on Jesus. Accept what He did on our behalf and start enjoying the benefits now. One of those benefits is eternal life.

[John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.]

Most quoted and perhaps the least understood verse.

Most people interpret this verse as follows:

God loved the world so much he sent Jesus to die for us. So believe in Him and you won't go to hell.

IT DOES NOT END THERE!

Yes. It says, "whoever believes shall not perish" (go to hell)... But, it goes on to say... "shall have eternal life."

Why did He send Jesus? So we could spend eternity together, in union, with God.

Most people miss this point. Jesus came to give us eternal life, and have life more abundantly.

[*John 10:10 - The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. **I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.***]

**This is the Gospel.
You don't have to earn it.
It is a gift!
Simple enough?**

Most religions (even Christianity) say you have to earn it. This is where they go astray. No matter how hard any of us try, all of us fall short. We are not righteous.

[*Romans 3:10 - As it is written, There is no one righteous, no, not one.*]

The "rulebook" (Old Testament) says you must obey ALL the rules to get to heaven.

[*Deuteronomy 28:13-15 - And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them. "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:*]

[*Deuteronomy 6:24-25 - And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.'*]

[*Deuteronomy 30:8 - And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today.*]

Why are the standards so high?

Because God is perfect and anything that is imperfect cannot exist in this presence. As His beloved creation, he wants to have a relationship with us. So he came up with a way to 'perfect' us.

This "way" is the gospel, the good news, the best news ever.

This is what Jesus accomplished at the cross.

Through Him, we can be perfected so we can spend eternity in God's presence

The Gospel is not "accept Jesus to avoid hell." That's self-centeredness. This focuses on ourselves avoiding pain.

Please note: not going to hell is a real benefit. I don't mean to undermine this.

My point is that most preaching of the Gospel is incomplete and incorrectly focused.

The real Gospel is we get to spend eternity with God because of something Jesus did. The focus here is on what Jesus did, not what we did. We don't have to do much except use the faith that is part of our DNA to believe in and on Jesus.

That is the Gospel!

This news is almost too good to be true. Once you understand it your life will be better. Please tell every one you can.

13. Born Again?

**Nicodemus asked this question 2000+ years ago.
This was a new concept then and it is a new concept now.**

In John 3:1-8 Jesus introduces the concept of being 'born again'. The birth He is talking about is a spiritual birth and not physical birth. This is really quite simple. And many people make it more complicated than it needs to be.

[John 3:1-8 - There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."]

It is worth noting that Nicodemus was that a religious leader, a Pharisee. He was taking a risk of being cast-out by even talking to Jesus. This was that important to him.

In the Garden of Eden, when God said, eat from this tree and you will surely die, he meant a spiritual death. A separation from him. He is a spirit. He does not have a physical body. This is when Adam and Eve experienced separation from God and realized they were physically naked.

Jesus came to bring us back to life spiritually.

Adam and Eve did not experience physical death until many years after their fall in the garden. However, at that moment they ate of the fruit, they experienced separation from God in the spirit.

Many people look at this first and say, "See! God was wrong. They didn't die."

What they fail to realize is we are made up of three parts: physical, mental, and spiritual.

[I Thessalonians 5:23 - And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.]

When we are born into this life (as descendants of Adam and Eve), we have physical form and mental capabilities but our spirits are dead or dormant.

This is extremely simple and extremely profound both at the same time.

Being born again simply means that you acknowledge you are separated from God. And that you want to correct that separation. And that you believe Jesus is the means for that correction.

When you profess that you believe Jesus who he said he is, you are born again. At that moment, your spirit is renewed and alive, with and in God. You are now part of his eternal kingdom. You are now able to spend eternity with God in a spiritual form after the death of your physical body.

It is actually quite symmetric when you look at it like this.

- Spiritual death
 - Our spiritual death (which happened in the garden) happened quickly and our physical death took time to manifest itself.
- Spiritual birth
 - When we are born again, our spirits are instantly renewed and alive but it takes time for this rebirth to manifest itself in physically.

We are made new in the spirit and one with God (who is a spirit). We are born again.

Imagine a two-lane highway. One direction is you being born again and connecting with God. The other direction is God not only connecting with you but also coming to dwell in you just as he would dwell in a temple.

The two-lane highway image helps to frame the dialogue and relationship we want to achieve. I hope that you understand the 'first lane', the one where we connect with him.

But, how do we open the other lane? The one where God is one within us. We will get to this in the lesson on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But first, let's talk about Salvation.

14. Salvation

What does this word mean?

Let's play a word game.

Here are some words that mean the same.

Emancipation. Liberation. Pardon. Preservation.

Redemption. Restoration. Release. Safekeeping.

The word implies being saved from one thing to some thing else.

But what are these "things"?

First, let's deal with what we are being saved from. Then, we will deal with what we are being saved to.

What are we being saved from?

We are being saved from sin. Why do we need to be saved from sin? It is destructive.

Sin is the primary focus of the church. It is the primary focus of the news. It is the primary focus of the world. With all this focus on sin, you think we would have learned how to deal with it. Yet it only seems to be getting worse everyday.

How to deal with sin in our lives.

All of us have fallen short and sinned multiple times in our lives.

[Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;]

Don't get defensive. And please don't fall into self-deception by comparing yourself to others. I am just stating a fact.

All have fallen short and according to the law, none of us are worthy of spending eternity with God.

This saddens God. So, he came up with a plan of redemption because he loves us so much.

Being good just doesn't cut it.

The primary purpose of the law is not to keep order. Although it does accomplish that to a certain degree. The primary purpose of the law is to make us realize how far we have fallen short from earning our way into heaven.

I have asked Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians, "How do you get to heaven?" And each of them has a long rule-based 'to-do' list. "Just do this, that, and the other, and you will get into heaven." Then I asked them how they are progressing. The answer is always "Not very well."

Then I ask, "What if you do some of this, some of that, and none of the other?" This further confuses them because I have introduced gray area into their binary function.

At this point, I tell them I've quit trying to obey the rules. Often I don't even understand the rules. I've given up. I can't do it myself. I realized I needed help. Through faith, I reached out and accepted the grace that is extended to me through Jesus.

Now my life is a whole lot easier and better. I spend much less time thinking about sin or trying to be good. I just think about the new creation that I am as a result.

Earlier in these lessons, I encouraged you to decide who Jesus is to you. Do you believe he is the son of God or not? He said that when you believe on him your sins are forgiven.

[Acts 10:43 - To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins.]

He said that he is the way, the truth and the life. And no one comes unto God except by him.

[John 14:6 - Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.]

Plain and simple, sin separates us from God. We need a way to cleanse ourselves of sin in order to be in his kingdom for eternity. Jesus is that way.

Now, let's discuss what we are saved to.

What happened at cross? Jesus offered himself up a sacrifice for all sin. The perfect sinless sacrifice.

Over the course of history, God has used the Israelites as a means to show us his love and a means through which he could send us a Savior.

Through Moses, he sent the law and the sacrificial system for the cleansing of sins when one broke the law. Prior to this, there was no law. Therefore, men were literally getting away with murder. This saddened God but he knew humanity didn't know any better. And he had mercy on them.

As I mentioned earlier the law was put in place to identify the magnitude of our sins and to create some order.

The sacrificial system was a symbolic system where people placed their sins onto an animal and that animal's blood was shed. This is a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do for us. He was the perfect sacrifice that would end the sacrificial system forever.

[Hebrews 9:26-28 - For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and to them that look to him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.]

[Hebrews 10:14 - For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.]

This is the ultimate act of passion. He loved us so much that he gave his very life.

We can't save ourselves.

[Jeremiah 10:23 - O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man to direct his own steps.]

No matter what all the other religions say. Out of love, Jesus paid the price for us and offers us the gift of being forgiven and cleansed of our sins. This makes us right before God. Once and for all. Eternally. All other religions have a merit system. A way to earn yourself a place in heaven.

Most Christian churches have a merit system. 'Churchy churches' are so consumed with being good that they do not (or cannot) truly focus on what Jesus did for them. They are sin focused. Not Jesus focused.

There is deception in the system that is rooted in the organizational structures. Remember, the original source of all deception is our enemy.

I find this particularly frustrating. For me, shaking people loose of this deception has proven futile. They cling to their organizations even when they know they are wrong. That is why I am focused on non-churchgoers. Non-churchgoers are more open and less judgmental.

What happened when you accepted Jesus as your Savior?

At a spiritual level, you are washed clean before God. You are acceptable before Him. Now you are able, through Jesus' righteousness, to have relationship with God. (Notice this is not your own righteousness.) At that moment, you were made one with God who is a spirit.

Warning: You will still be in your flesh and have a sin nature or tendency to sin. This will be dealt with overtime through the renewing of your mind and focusing on Jesus.

Know this: You are forgiven. Not guilty. Stop focusing on your sin and your performance. Focus on what Jesus did. He is the top priority.

Churches miss this point. They focus on sin. They focus on how bad you have been in the past and point out how you still sin.

Jesus is good.

Through Jesus, you are made righteous like he is righteous. He does not see us as wretched. So, don't describe yourself as being wretched.

Rules help keep order.

However, their primary purpose of the law is to show us where sin is. Paul says this in 1Corinthians 15:56 that the law gives sin its strength.

[*I Corinthians 15:56 - The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*]

This is a deeply profound statement. This one verse in the New Testament warrants a college level course. I apologize for throwing it out there and moving on.

I tested this on school kids.

I tested this on my son and a group of his friends when they were about eight years old. They were playing with a care in the world in the cul-de-sac on a fine summer day. I went out and commended

them on how well they were playing together. Then, I said, "Oh, and by the way, please don't touch the mailbox." I then went inside, waited, and watched, as every one of them had to mess with the mailbox.

The rule about the mailbox made them aware of the mailbox. Rules about sin make us aware of sin.

Let's focus on Jesus instead. When He expands in your life, you will not want to think about anything else. You will live better than any high priest. This will happen effortlessly. Like the example with the eight-year old boys above, you will not be focused on the mailbox. You will just play happily in the cul-de-sac.

No more guilt.

Some people deal with guilt more than others do. If you are burdened with guilt over your past mistakes, please meditate deeply on this...

You are free. You are forgiven. Your sins and the sins of the entire world were dealt with at the cross. All the sins ever committed by everyone are pennies compared to the huge price that Jesus paid. I have seen people change before my very eyes when the burden of guilt was lifted. Please accept Jesus sacrifice for your sins, rid yourself of any doubt that He is who He says He is, and He can do this for you.

The magnitude of what happened at the cross is something we cannot grasp with our human brains. It is something to be pondered and studied for the rest of our lives.

All sin was forgiven, healing was released, prosperity was released, oppression from our enemy could now cease because he was defeated.

Most churchgoers stop at salvation and spend the rest of their lives in quiet desperation. It is sad to see the church system cheat them out of so much joy.

In the next lessons, let's unlock the secrets that our enemy has been fighting to keep hidden for centuries.

15. Water Baptism

**Water baptism is simple and straightforward.
Let's not make it a bigger or smaller deal than it needs to be.**

Here is a picture to paint in your mind.

Water baptism is symbolic of dying to your old self and rising out of the water as a new creation. It is a physical act on your part. It mirrors what has happened to you at a spiritual level.

When you, as a sovereign individual, resolved that Jesus is who He said He is and expressed this, you were *born again* spiritually. What you resolved is more an act of faith than an act of logic. At a cerebral level, (that is, using only our reasoning and logic) areas of doubt may still exist. Renewing your mind is a life-long quest. We will dig into this later.

Spiritually, there is a point at which you just know that you know. That is what happened to me.

So, how does water baptism fit into this?

Baptism is an action that takes place in the physical world, which represents what has happened to you in the spiritual world. There is a subtle nuance to this expression of faith.

Believing / having faith is one thing. Even our defeated enemy believes that Jesus is who he says is. However, he is taking no action to affirm that belief.

Taking action to affirm that belief, such as baptism, escalates, confirms, and solidifies your faith.

[James 2:18-20 - But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?]

[Romans 12:3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one the measure of faith.]

For me, baptism was a public declaration that stated I am on this side of the fence and not that side of the fence. Although the only people present were my immediate family and a friend, it was still a public declaration.

Your particular baptism is whatever you make it. I know a few situations where people baptize

themselves. I am not going to cast judgment whether this is right or wrong.

The beauty is that they took action. God knows their heart.

This is where the church goes astray on baptism. They make a tradition and a ceremony out of it.

The only element that is necessary is a changed heart towards God.

Salvation comes through faith in Jesus. Faith and a changed heart plant the desire to be baptized inside you. You will know it when you are ready. Please don't let anyone manipulate you about this. Without faith, baptism is meaningless.

I prefer total submersion in water. For me, going under the water represented a death to myself (within Jesus). Coming out of the water represented my new life.

Others prefer sprinkling of water or dabbling in water. Whatever. True, water is primary element. But all this bickering has just led to denominational splits that are just another ploy of our enemy to keep us from knowing the truth in unity.

**Here is another myth about baptism
our enemy has perpetrated.
You must be baptized to get into heaven.**

This is not correct. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

[Acts 10:43 - To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.]

There was the thief who was crucified with Jesus who said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The thief was never baptized. Paradise was a gift for him.

[Luke 23:42-43 - Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."]

Eternal life with God is a gift. It is received through faith in Jesus. (Please notice the passive voice in that sentence.) We receive grace through faith.

The church has really perverted this act of baptism.

During the Crusades, "priests" would baptize pagans prior to their execution so they would go to heaven. These "priests" believed they were doing these people a favor.

These crusaders were doing abominations in Jesus name. You cannot force someone to be baptized. Baptism is not what saves. It is Jesus. Water does not wash away sins. It is the blood of Jesus. (Remember our study on the blood.)

Let me stop here and clarify.

I am not talking down on baptism. My point is - Keep it in its proper place. It is to be revered and treasured not worshiped and glorified.

By all means, get baptized. It's a wonderful experience and a beautiful expression. But do it out of a pure heart.

Your heart needs to be in a certain state before you act on baptism. First, you must believe. You must exercise your faith. Second, you must be repentant.

[Acts 2:38 - Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.]

Please do not get hung up on this word repentance. It only means to turn away from your old ways and focus on your new ways. Another way of saying this is - focus only on Jesus and who he is in your life.

Baptism is wonderful. But it only scratches the surface of what God has in store for you. The enemy toils daily to keep you from these greater gifts. His goal is to steal, kill, and destroy.

[John 10:10 - The thief comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I have come that you might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.]

The church has fallen prey to his deception. They have ignored, prohibited, and taught against the next and most powerful lesson in our series - The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

16. Fire Baptism

**The most important thing you can do is to receive the Holy Spirit.
All of us have a tendency to look for a 'silver bullet'.
The one thing, the game changer, the tipping point.
Rarely is there a silver bullet.
Receiving the Holy Spirit is the exception.**

Don't worry. It is not real fire. That is just the symbolism the Bible uses to illustrate the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist said, I baptize in water but He who come after me will baptize with fire. The 'He' was referring to was Jesus.

[Matthew 3:11 - I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.]

[Mark 1:8 - I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.]

[Luke 3:16 - John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."]

[John 1:33 - I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.']

Fire Baptism is a life-changing event. I have seen it change lives more than any...

- preaching or
- Bible study or
- self-improvement courses or
- motivational speeches or
- diet or
- intervention or
- drugs or
- therapy or
- ANYTHING!

This is not something to be taken lightly. The Holy Spirit can separate your future from your past and your old self from your new self.

You will experience clarity, joy, peace, power, and happiness as you have never experienced it before.

I know these are some big promises. Perhaps, the biggest promises anyone has ever made to you. Rest assured I am not making these promises. God is.

Something attracted you to this site.

You have diligently made it this far in search of 'something'. You might not be able to articulate it but your heart knows there is 'something' missing. That 'something' is the Holy Spirit. Deep down inside, you want to receive this. You just need to know how.

Let's recap the path we have taken so far.

- First, you considered the information on the site.
- Then, you weighed whether Jesus is who He said He is or not.
 - It may have taken a change in your mental state to work through this
 - You may have dug into the Bible for the first time in your life
 - You may still be investigating its validity and authority
- You decided that Jesus is who He says He is
- You declared this and became born again
- Your spirit went from being dead to being alive.
- You are in God but He is not in you, yet.
- You were baptized in water.
- You are saved from spiritual death and are alive in spirit with God.

Pretty good so far...

However, God is not alive in you. He is the ultimate gentleman. You have to invite Him to dwell in you. Now, through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, you invite God to come dwell in you. The baptism of the Holy Spirit completes a two-way street that links you and God. This is what we were designed for: Intimate two-way spiritual communication relationship with God. Everything else is just an add-on.

Why is the baptism of the Holy Spirit so important?

It completes a process that sets us up for eternal growth. By no means are we complete. It establishes us at a point in time like a foundation. From this foundation, we can launch in any number of directions. We are able to stand on our own two feet before God, take our directions from Him, and fulfill His perfect plan for our lives.

Having God dwell in us is what we need. All of us long to have our emptiness filled. This does it... Permanently.

This is important...

Jesus did not begin His ministry until He received the Holy Spirit upon His baptism by John the Baptist. This is documented in all four Gospels.

[Matthew 3:16 - When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.]

[Mark 1:10 - And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.]

[Luke 3:22 - And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."]

[John 1:32 - And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."]

Furthermore, after His death and resurrection, He told His apostles to stay put and not to leave Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit.

It's that important.

This is the most important teaching I have ever attempted. Grasping this has changed my life for the better and I have seen this knowledge do the same for others.

This is critical time in your life. Expect resistance from our enemy. Do not be surprised if you experience difficult times as you work through these messages. Receiving the Holy Spirit restores your spiritual authority. The enemy does not want that. Please be warned. However, do not be intimidated or scared.

17. Religion and Fire Baptism

**Many churches are against the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
They have been deceived.
Our enemy fears this powerful gift
because it manifests your authority over him.**

Let's start with the church.

It sends people who have not received the Holy Spirit out into ministry on a regular basis. Once you join most churches, you are expected to go out and get others to join. This is wrong and it infuriates me. (I rant about this in next chapter called Poor Salesmanship.)

You may be very excited about what you are learning and want share it with others. That is great! Be careful. Take your time.

This is hard advice... but here goes.

Don't discuss this material with others until you have received the Holy Spirit. And then, only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is how it is supposed to work. The Holy Spirit leads. Not us.

When you became born-again, you were qualified to live a life with God on earth. The baptism of the Holy Spirit enables you to live it and share it with others.

Jesus died to reclaim the power and authority that our enemy had stolen from us. By receiving the Holy Spirit, we are now able to go forth and exercise that authority with Jesus over all the earth. Think about that. It's a big statement.

This power produces inward changes that can begin to produce fruit almost immediately. This produces an almost natural state of worship and gratitude in you that opens the gate to positive outflows and inflows.

I am angry with the church for never telling me about this. Why aren't they telling people about this? How can they teach against it? Why have they not figured it out? It's right there in the Bible!

Jesus said anyone who causes His children to stumble would be cast into the deepest ocean with a millstone tied around their neck.

[Matthew 18:6 - Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.]

[Mark 9:42 - But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.]

[Luke 17:2 - It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.]

**Refusing to hear God's voice on this matter is a heart issue.
Organized religion ignores their heart issues.
Their hearts are hardened.**

Please avoid discussing the baptism of the Holy Spirit with religious people until you are firmly grounded. It is new to you and they will discourage you. You are like a newborn that needs to be weaned from milk onto solid food. I want you to develop safely and soundly.

Jesus never wanted organized religion anyway.

He spoke against it vigorously. The picture of a timid, peace-loving, hippie Jesus is wrong. He was a carpenter without power tools. He walked everywhere. He was probably pretty strong as a result.

Two times, He was so angry about the money-getting schemes at the Temple that He violently cleared them out, single-handedly!

[John 2:13-17 - Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."]

[Matthew 21:12-13 - Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"]

[Mark 11:15-19 - So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.]

[Luke 19:45-48 - Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.]

He was not timid about this issue. He wanted to do away with the church hierarchy and architecture entirely. He spoke that not one stone from the Temple would rest upon another.

[Matthew 24:2 - And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."]

[Mark 13:2 - And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.]

[Luke 21:6 - “These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.”]

That is exactly what happened in 70 A.D. The temple was completely destroyed by Roman invaders.

His parable about wineskins and patches best illustrates what He came here to do.

[Matthew 9:16-17 - No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”]

[Mark 2:21-22 - No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”]

[Luke 5:36-38 - Then He spoke a parable to them: “No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved.]

That is to do away with the old and start something new.

Here is a paraphrase of this teaching:

No one sews new cloth into an old garment because it will tear away after the garment is washed making the hole bigger.

No one puts new wine in old wineskins because the new wine will ferment and burst the wineskins. New wine needs new wineskins.

What He is saying here is He did not come to patch up the Old Covenant. He came to replace it. The Old Testament can never expand enough to accommodate the New Testament concepts of faith, grace, and mercy.

He started something entirely new. He reset time literally and figuratively. He established God's New Covenant with us.

Peace between God and humanity was reestablished.

[Luke 2:14 - “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”]

Peace between humans is still a struggle. He did not necessarily come to establish between humans.

Peace between humans is a byproduct of having peace with God.

Victory is ours. However, we have to claim that victory over of our enemy who is defeated, but still around to heckle us.

The only weapon our enemy has is deceit. The level of hate he has towards us is beyond our grasp, indefinable, unimaginable.

Having the Holy Spirit dwell in us gives us power and authority over him. He will do anything to keep us from believing and receiving this power. He has used the church as his tool to keep us ignorant, unaware, misinformed, and deceived about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

18. Poor Salesmanship

I am a salesman.

I study, prepare myself, and work hard.

It bothers me when people look down on the craft of sales.

It bothers me more when church violates the basics of salesmanship.

I have an accounting and finance background. I consult depository institutions on balance sheet and income statement issues. Dry stuff. It is very technical.

I have a team quantitative analysts that support me. Over the years, I have enjoyed working with some brilliant people.

Selling and technical analysis are two different things. Generally, the analysts should not be allowed to talk to the customers.

Don't get me wrong... I love these guys. But,

- they are not good at human interaction,
- they are too technical,
- they talk over the customer's heads,
- they would rather be right than win the sale,
- they don't understand the sales sequence,
- they don't understand the customer relationship.

I worked in a large corporation where the leadership team thought it would be a good idea if the technicians were to begin selling our services. I knew this was a bad idea. Management's underlying motive was to cut the salesmen out of the transactions. The technicians were in the office and by default, were more visible than the sales staff. The salesmen were on the road creating business relationships and opportunities.

Management figured they could save a lot of money because they could pay the analysts less than the salesmen (i.e. no commission). Nothing could have been further from the truth. These technicians were not prepared, able, or ready to sell; no matter how much I trained them.

Of course, the experiment failed and it took years to repair the damage the analysts did to the customer relationships.

While all this was happening, I was sitting in a church service one Sunday and preaching was on how to go out and talk to people about Jesus.

Something about this just did not sit right with me. In fact, it deeply agitated me. I sat there and said "Lord, what is this about? Why am I so agitated?"

And then, it hit me.

You don't send people who are prepared and unable to sell out into the world to sell.

The same thing was happening at my work. The people around me were unable to sell. They were poorly prepared and most of them should never sell in the first place. That is okay. Not everyone is a salesman.

The church was making the exact same mistake my business was making.

That is, they were sending people who were not prepared out into the world to sell. And they were in direct violation of what Jesus told them to do. He instructed the apostles not tell the world about Him until they received the Holy Spirit.

We've all experienced it... You know, where some religious person comes up to you, pushes a Bible verse into your hand, asks you if you know Jesus, does not listen to your answer, proceeds to stand too close, and rambles on without pausing. This is just poor salesmanship and the Holy Spirit does not inspire it.

The worst part is...

This turns people off to some of the most important information they will ever receive. As a result, many people will tune out anything related to Jesus

What is a good salesman?

A good salesman knows you do not get many second chances. Once you blow a sales call, you probably will not get another one. Getting back in a second time is rare.

A good salesman studies, prepares, and obeys a sales sequence. Respect your customer, establish a rapport, and build a relationship.

If you go for the close before you develop a relationship, you violate the sale sequence.

Then, you not only don't get the sale, you completely turn that person off from having anything to do with your product or products like it.

Run with me on the analogy to sales...

The church is selling a product. They are selling membership in their organization. With the membership comes some the benefits that Jesus promised... forgiveness of sins, abundance, and eternal life.

Not only is the church failing in the sales process, they are selling an incomplete 'package' of Jesus' promises.

Very few churches recognize the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is a critical part of growing a relationship with God. More importantly, receiving the Holy Spirit is a required step before talking to anybody about the way to salvation and eternal life.

If Jesus is who He said He is, then we should take heed of His words and actions.

He prepared for 30 years before starting His work here on earth. He did not start it until He was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. This is captured in Chapter 15 on Fire Baptism and in all four Gospels. [*Matthew 3:11 / Mark 1:8 / Luke 3:16 / John 1:33*]

Furthermore, after He departed, He told His disciples not to do anything and wait until the Holy Spirit came to them. Only after that could they go out and spread the Gospel.

[Acts 1:4-8 - And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."]

This first outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened on the Day of Pentecost.

[Acts 2:2-4 - And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.]

The number of people who received this gift and became members of that first assembly was dramatic. This was not due to good salesmanship. It was due to the power of the Holy Spirit.

The church sends out its members to tell people about Jesus without first preparing them with the Holy Spirit. This is poor salesmanship.

19. Who is the Holy Spirit?

**This is as abstract as abstract gets.
How can we grasp the spiritual nature of anything with our minds and senses?
Let alone the spirit of God.
How can we understand the invisible when all we interact with is tangible?
The bottom line is... we cannot.
Expand your mind and let's dig into the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is part of the trinity of God. The three parts of this trinity are the Father, Son (a.k.a. the Word in John's writings), and the Holy Spirit.

[1 John 5:7 - *For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.*]

The Holy Spirit is the Part of God that we long for to make us complete. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we become like the 'original design'. We now have the Creator living within us again. We can spend the rest of our lives building upon this re-union.

God knows we are not able to plan our own course.

[*Jeremiah 10:23 - O Lord , I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.*]

Having the power of God dwell inside us has major implications. We have the power to face our enemy and all demonic forces. We can cast them out in Jesus name. We now have the right to use His name as one of His joint heirs. When we invoke these powers, we merely need to stand against our enemy and he will flee. Additionally, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to face death. We know through His intimate teachings that we will live eternally with God.

**Experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit
will give you boldness and self-assurance
like nothing you have never experienced.**

Your fears and anxieties will greatly diminish. Your confidence will soar. However, it is not self-confidence. It's much bigger than that. It's a confidence that God of the universe dwells inside you. The result is a peace, joy, and happiness that are indescribable.

[*Philippians 4:6b ...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*]

The Holy Spirit's job is to bestow gifts upon us. This is his positive ministry. He also has a negative ministry to rebuke and reprove the world... but not us.

The Holy Spirit's negative ministry.

It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict the world. It is not our job to convict the world.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of one sin and one sin only. It does not matter what yours or anyone's particular sin is. The only thing that matters is that the punishment for all sin was placed on Jesus. They only sin the Holy Spirit convicts anyone of is - not accepting Jesus payment for their sins.

Any preacher that stands on a pulpit and tells you that you're going to hell for this sin or that sin is dead wrong. Sin is like having a \$10 debt. Jesus paid that debt with a pallet of million dollar bills. The \$10 debt doesn't matter. The pallet of million dollar bills does. Disregarding Jesus' payment your debts (sins) **IS** the only sin the Holy Spirit will convict anyone of. (See example of sin debt paid in full once and for all in Chapter 8, Freedom Achieved.)

*[John 16:7-11 - Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: **of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.]***

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit does not convict born-again, Spirit-filled believers. Once we experience God's love we just love him back and others in the process. There is no longer any need for conviction.

This is just wrong.

Churches love to tell their members how bad they are, browbeat them, and preach Old Testament, rule-based legalism.

The only righteousness that matters is the righteousness of Jesus. Our good works and obedience mean nothing without Jesus. The church is still trying to convince people they can get to heaven by being good. None of us can be good enough. It's only through Jesus paying our debt and giving us the gift of his Holy Spirit that we can live peacefully and eternally with God.

If you try to come before God under your own righteousness, you will be judged just as our enemy has been judged. The Holy Spirit judges the world and He has judged our enemy. Our enemy is defeated and we may walk boldly throughout the world without fear of him.

Three things the Holy Spirit helps you understand.

1. Your sins have been paid for.
2. You are righteous through receiving Jesus.
3. Your enemy has been defeated.

These are deep concepts. However, the Holy Spirit helps you to understand... not only at a mental level but also at a spiritual level. He gets you to the point that "you just know that you know."

This is huge. This is awesome. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

The Holy Spirit ministers to us only through positive means, not negative means. He deals with the world negatively. He deals with us, the joint heirs with Jesus, positively.

The Holy Spirit is our conduit to God.

He is referred to as a person that is One with God just as Jesus is. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to achieve a number of things.

He is our comforter.

[John 14:18 - I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.]

He will abide with us forever.

[John 14:17 - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.]

He is the Spirit of truth that can speak no lies.

*[John 15:26 - "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."]*

He will bring to our remembrance things that we know so we can use them to our benefit in our current situations.

[John 14:26 - But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.]

He will teach us all things and reveal all truth.

[John 16:13 - However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.]

The benefits we reap from the Holy Spirit are the most precious gifts you will ever receive. Each one of these is a major topic on its own. In the next chapter, we go into specific benefits or fruits of the Holy Spirit.

20. Benefits of the Holy Spirit

At the risk of sounding selfish, let's ask the question "What's in it for me?"

There is 'something' in a relationship with God for each of us.

And it is more than you may think.

God wants you to prosper financially.

But, His riches go well beyond money.

Money cannot buy these things.

God does not give money. Instead, He gives the power to create wealth to those who are involved in establishing His covenant.

[Deuteronomy 8:18 - And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.]

This is an old principle.

The Holy Spirit gives you the good things in life. The things money can't buy. A circular and redundant way of saying this is... The Holy Spirit gives gifts that are spiritual. Kind of obvious, isn't it?

These gifts or benefits are found in two places in the Bible.

[1Corinthians 12:8–10 and Galatians 5:22–23]

These lists are not all inclusive. I am sure there are more benefits. And more benefits on top of those benefits. We are dealing God here. Don't forget that. And don't try to put limits on God or come up with rituals for this. Just be open to receiving.

A word of caution: These concepts are abstract, abstruse, complex, deep, transcendental, and beyond natural. This is not easy reading. In fact, these are the most difficult concepts I have ever tried to put in writing. Proceed with care.

There are nine gifts listed in 1Corinthians 12:8–10.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11 - But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.]

They fall into three categories with three in each category. The categories are revelation gifts, power gifts, and inspirational or vocal gifts. A more practical (less textbook) way of categorizing these gifts are eyes, hands, and mouth gifts. I find this description more meaningful because God does not have eyes, hands, or a mouth. He is a spirit. We are to be God's eyes, hands, and mouth. His Holy Spirit enables us to do so.

They are listed and categorized below with a brief description.

Revelation Gifts (Eyes)

Word of wisdom – When the prophecy of the future is revealed to you under the anointing of God.

Word of knowledge - The supernatural revealing of a fact that cannot be seen, heard, or revealed naturally.

Discerning of spirits - When a believer is given the supernatural ability to see into the spirit realm. To distinguish, differentiate, or perceive angels, demons, or the condition of the human spirit. And to determine whether it is good or evil. Of course, this is done through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Warning: Do not confuse this gift with suspicion or speculation.

Power Gifts (Hands)

Gifts of faith - An incredible manifestation of unlimited faith in a specific situation to achieve supernatural results.

Gifts of healing - God's supernatural healing power flowing through you to heal a person or group of people of a specific sickness or affliction.

Miracles - When God uses a believer to supernaturally do something by divine energy. This is a momentary gift of authority, which causes you to intervene in the ordinary course of nature. The outcome is supernatural and defies natural law.

Inspirational or Vocal Gifts (Mouth)

Tongues – A supernatural utterance given by a Spirit filled believer in a public meeting that is not understood by the person giving it and needs to be interpreted or translated by another.

This also is your personal spiritual language. A language you develop that is uniquely personal between you and God. When you communicate with God in this fashion, our enemy cannot understand your prayers.

Interpretation of tongues - the ability to hear and translate the supernatural utterances of a Spirit filled believer into prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, and discernment.

Prophecy - A supernatural articulation spoken forth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is not planned out, not guidance, and not fortune telling. Its purpose is to uplift, edify, encourage, and warn. It can involve future or past events.

But wait, there's more.

These fruits are outlined in Galatians 5:22–23.

[Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.]

When you receive the Holy Spirit, you also receive the Bible calls "fruits". These fruits reflect the character of Jesus being lived out and expressed through us.

Here is a list of these benefits with a brief description.

Love - This isn't just any love. This is a love that is earned, that can't be dis-earned, and is on conforming. This is God's unconditional love.

Joy - This is an eternal delight in God. It is not dependent on circumstances.

Peace - This is a calmness that comes from deep inside you. This is not just an absence of stress. This peace is uncanny, inexplicable, and almost inappropriate. The peace that comes from God is present in spite of whatever stress you may be experiencing. I have found myself in stressful situations, expecting to be stressed, but the peace of God prevailed. It is a supernatural experience. It is unearthly and uncanny.

Long-suffering - a steadfast patience and endurance that enables you to persevere despite difficult circumstances and people.

Gentleness - kindness, warmhearted, tenderness, a mellowing of what was harsh.

Goodness - to do good on behalf of others.

Faithfulness - a steadfast commitment that God will finish the good work he has started in you and me in the world.

Meekness - the power and ability to allow God and others to deal with you justly and not defend yourself. Being empty of self-importance. Humility is similar. However, meekness differs in that you could defend yourself and be made righteousness but deferred that option.

Temperance - a combination of self-control and rigid self-discipline. Like tempered steel.

So, are you interest? Do you get it? Are you ready to receive the Holy Spirit?

In the next chapter, you will learn how.

21. Receiving the Holy Spirit

**You simply ask for it.
Don't be misled by the simplicity of this answer.
You have to want it and you have to ask for it.
No one else can do this for you.
It is your decision to ask and receive the Holy Spirit.**

Pressure to receive keeps one from receiving. This is the decision that you make not only from your mind but also from your heart. God knows your heart and everyone's hearts. He will bestow his Holy Spirit upon those who want to receive.

The gift of the Holy Spirit comes to anyone who asks in faith. Luke 11:10-13 is a key Scripture about this.

Here is the King James Version (KJV)

"For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly father give you the Holy Spirit to them that ask him"

Here is my paraphrase.

"For everyone who asks, receives. Those who seek shall find. Those who knock shall find it opened. If a son asks his father for bread, would he give him a stone? Or, if he asks for fish, would he give him snakes? Or, if he asks for an egg, would he give him a scorpion? (Of course not.) If humans, being sinful by nature (and we are), know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more would a heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit freely to those who ask."

The key take-away from this passage is God gives the Holy Spirit freely to those who ask. These verses are packed with many applications. Please remember, they build up and focus on the Holy Spirit.

We, under the New Covenant, are 'temples' of/for God. This is why Jesus was so down on the church in his day. He came to replace it. There is no longer in need for a building to act as a temple. We are the temples. Through Jesus, God can now live inside us. Just like the original design.

**You are the Temple...
The place where God lives now**

In many places in the New Testament, people received the Holy Spirit when other Spirit filled believers laid their hands upon them. I've seen this done and it is very effective. In other cases, I know people who have simply asked for it and received... right where they were... in a field... in their apartments... I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit over the telephone.

Let's not get hung up on ritual. Don't try to make a human formula for a Godly event.

The bottom line is this... You'll know when you have received it because it will rise up from within you. This leads us to a discussion on tongues.

**Now I'm talkin' crazy...
Yeah, you're right.**

The Holy Spirit will give you the 'utterance' to speak in tongues. If you think this is weird, well, you're right. When the Holy Spirit shows up, it is awkward, awesome, and everything in between. You don't know what to expect. We cannot know what to expect. I have given up setting any expectations. As I said earlier, it rises up within you.

Think of it in this perspective. This is the God of the universe we are dealing with here. By default, this is out of our league. There are aspects of this relationship with God that we are just not going to understand with our mental and physical capacities.

This is a spiritual event. Some people are more spiritually mature than others are. Don't compare yourself to others. It does not matter. We are all like children who need to grow when it comes to spiritual matters. I do not think we ever mature spiritually in this life. To grasp heaven you must be like a little child.

[Matthew 18:1-5 - At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.]

[Luke 9:46-48 - Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."]

Speaking in tongues has a bad reputation. The Pentecostals are probably responsible for this. The Holy Spirit is awesome. However, I think some outward expressions like rolling on the floor and barking are self-motivated and theatrical.

The primary purpose of speaking in tongues is to uplift and edify.

This is done in a few different ways.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, they spoke in tongues and were understood in each person's native language. In this case, speaking in tongues bridges language barriers.

[Acts 2:6-11 - And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia,

Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”]

In another Scripture, Paul discusses the need for there to be an interpreter of the utterances that are spoken. This applies to, but is not limited to, group settings where prophecy is revealed.

[1 Corinthians 14:27-28 - If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.]

The most useful and immediate function for tongues is to have your own special language to be used between you and God.

[1 Corinthians 14:2-4 - For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.]

This is powerful on a few levels.

Our enemy can no longer listen in on our prayers. I never thought about this until I received the gift. The woman who helped me receive the Holy Spirit told me this and it clicked immediately. That's how he had been able to tamper with my life. He knew my prayers, my deep thoughts, and my desires. This enabled him to use them against me.

It makes sense. If his goal is to kill, steal and destroy, then what better way to attack us than at our core... our prayer life... our intimate conversations with God?

What better way to find out our fears and use them against them? What better way to discover our dreams so they can be spoiled?

This is a powerful tool to be used to your advantage.

For me personally, when I use my special prayer language it seems to engage some parts of my mind and disengage others. I don't know exactly how to explain this. But, the result is - I am better able to hear God's voice.

When I have my mind and voice engaged in speaking this special language, it changes me mentally and spiritually. While my mind and voice are engaged in this articulation, other parts of my mind open up to receive all sorts of things from God... Wisdom, intelligence, discernment, prophecy, and answers to problems for others and myself.

Our enemy is behind tongues having such a bad reputation.

Many churches will excommunicate you for engaging in this activity. They think it is from the devil. Actually, the devil wants to prevent us from using this gift and he uses the church as his enforcer.

This gift is so powerful it gives us power over him and connection with God. Power over him and connection with God are two things he wants **very** badly to prevent.

Please take this gift of speaking in tongues seriously. Experiment with it and develop your own language. It is one of the most important things you ever do.

God is a Gentleman, not a control freak

Speaking in tongues is not like vomiting. It doesn't take over your body. It doesn't take control of you. That is not God's way. You should know that by now. He is the ultimate gentleman. It's much more subtle. More like sailing or riding a surfboard. You get an 'utterance' from the Holy Spirit and just go with it. It takes a certain amount of letting go of yourself to achieve this. Before you know it, you are receiving from God of the spiritual level and comprehending it at a mental level.

I pray that you are grasping what I'm saying. This is very abstract and putting it into words is difficult.

Some gray area

I am not sure where I stand on people praying in tongues in a group setting. I have done it and enjoyed it immensely. I think this is for people who are more comfortable with the gift. I think people should develop their language on their own first before sharing it with others.

I've seen some people receive the Holy Spirit and be expected to speak in tongues immediately. This made them uncomfortable. I'm not sure this achieves the goal of having an awesome relationship with God. Let everyone develop at their own pace. God can handle the variety.

On the other hand, I have also seen people speak in tongues as soon as being baptized in the Holy Spirit. It was powerful. This is perfectly normal and biblical.

Remember, we are dealing with the God of the universe here. He knows every hair on your head and mine and he knows every tear that we have shed.

[Matthew 10:30 - But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.]

[Revelation 7:17 - For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.]

[Revelation 21:4 - And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.]

I think He can manage a customized program for each of us to develop our special language.

What is important is that you search your heart and make a commitment.

Prerequisites

To receive the Holy Spirit you must be born again. (Post explaining Born Again) That is you must have determined that Jesus is who He said He is and declared that you believe this to be true. You should have received water baptism. After that, all you have to do is ask in faith and you shall receive.

Important: Jesus does the baptizing here. John the Baptist used water. Jesus uses fire (His spirit).

[Matthew 3:11 - I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.]

[Mark 1:8 - I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.]

[Luke 3:16 - John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.]

[John 1:33 - I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.']

[Acts 1:5 - for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.]

Here is a sample prayer you can use to receive the Holy Spirit.

"Father I thank You for the gift of salvation, for being born again, for the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made at the cross to redeem me. I believe He is Your Son and ask that He fill me with the Holy Spirit. By faith, I receive Your Holy Spirit right now! I welcome Your Holy Spirit into my life. I serve as Your temple. I am in You and You are now in me. Thank You for saving me and fully redeeming me for relationship with You."

Ta da!

Be restored to our original state in open and free communication with God. Remember, every relationship requires work. Continue to pursue God with all your heart and He will manifest Himself in your life in awesome ways.