

**RANDOM THOUGHTS
AND
COMMENTARIES
OF A LAYMAN**



By Walter A. Cates v5

What I believe

I belong to the international Evangelical Covenant Church which is a Pietist guided outgrowth of the seventeenth century Swedish Lutheran Church. (ECC).

What is the ECC?

We are an apostolic Church.
We are a catholic (universal) Church.
We are a reformation Church.
We are an evangelical Church.

Our fellowship believes:

There are six AFFIRMATIONS that define the beliefs of the Covenant people. All members affirm their belief and dedication to these six statements.

- 1. We affirm the centrality of the word of God.** We believe the bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct.
- 2. We affirm the necessity of the new birth.** New birth in Christ means committing ourselves to him and receiving forgiveness, acceptance and eternal life.
- 3. We affirm a commitment to the whole mission of the Church.** This mission includes evangelism, Christian formation and ministries of compassion, mercy and justice.
- 4. We affirm the Church as a fellowship of believers.** The Church is a fellowship of believers who participate in the life and mission of Jesus Christ.
- 5. We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.** The ECC affirms the Trinitarian understanding of one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe it is the Holy Spirit who instills in our hearts a desire to turn to Christ, and who assures us that Christ dwells within us.
- 6. We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.** United in Christ, we offer freedom to one another to differ on issues of belief or practice where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God.

The Evangelical Covenant Church is a pilgrim Church. Until Christ comes, we worship, serve and witness so that the whole earth may hear God's voice, learn of God's love and experience God's joy. To learn more about the Evangelical Covenant Church go to www.covchurch.org.

RANDOM THOUGHTS AND COMMENTARIES OF A LAYMAN

By Walter A. Cates

For many years I have been led and taught by Church fellowship, studied scripture, participated in small group studies and led small group studies. Occasionally a random thought has jarred my senses and caused me to pause. Some are deep, some are shallow, and all are meant to spark meditation. The purpose of this document is not to answer questions – but to inspire study.

I do not propose any of my random thoughts as finite or for that matter truth. Neither do I claim them as original thoughts. There is nothing new under Heaven. All my thoughts come from what I have learned, some are **inspired** by the **Spirit** that dwells within. I merely present them to provoke thought and study. If all my thoughts are accepted as stated then I hope you have gained. If a thought is countered by sound scripture then I have gained.

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ANOINT

While preparing for a study of James I came across something rather interesting. We run across the word ANOINT all through scripture. In translating in to English there are two different Greek words that we translated as *anoint*. The first is the Greek word *chrío*. This word carried sacred or religious meanings. A derivative of the word *chrío* is the word *Christos* meaning 'Christ anointed by the Holy Spirit' as at His baptism by John the Baptist

So *chrío* is translated *anoint*.

Also, the Greek word *aleipho* is translated to English as *anoint*. *Aleipho* means to apply or rub with oil or ointment for appearance or medical reasons. When Hezekiah suffered an outbreak of boils, God heard his prayer. Isaiah the prophet prepared an *aleipho*, a medicine, and *anointed* the boil. Hezekiah was healed.

So, *aleipho* is also translated as *anoint*.

Now read James 5:14-15. The word *anoint* used here was translated from the Greek word *aleipho*, remember now that this means for appearance or medical purposes. James is saying if you are ill, pray yes, but go to the doctor, get medicine and pray for speedy healing.

JUDGMENT

We will not be judged on what we believe, but on what we put into practice.

WITNESSING

Our vocation, whatever it is, gives us a base for effective witnessing

HUMILITY

Humility is not a process of putting yourself down, it is a process of raising others up.

PATIENCE

Patience requires very little teaching but very much practice.

A HARAN MOMENT

Terah the father of Abram lived in the land of Ur. There he had children. His eldest son Nahor lived, married, had children and died in Ur. Terah took his surviving family members on a trek to the land of Canaan. However, when Terah reached Charan (Haran) he found the land fertile. He decided to settle in Haran. In Haran Terah and his family prospered. Terah followed the local pagan gods.

Abram and his nephew Lot stayed true to the one true God.

God spoke to Abram and informed him that he and his nephew Lot were not where God wanted them to be. God basically said pack up and go and that He would show Abram where he should be. That was Abram's "Haran moment".

Are you listening to God?

Have you had a "Haran Moment"?

Are you where God wants you to be?

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

Far too often zealots take 1 John 2:15 to extremes. They try to make this simple statement into a prohibition of all earthly pleasures.

Love is mentioned three time in this verse. But this is a special kind of love – agapate, agapa and agapE. This is the highest form of love, it is Godly spiritual love. Agapate and agapa refers to our mimicking God's love. AgapE is God's unbounded love for us.

Literal translation from:

Interlinear Scripture Analyzer 3 beta (basic)

2:15	μη	αγαπατε	τον	κοσμον	μηδε	τα	εν	τω	κοσμω	εαν	τις
	mE	agapate	ton	kosmon	mEde	ta	en	to	kosmo	ean	tis
	NO	YE-BE-LOVING	THE	SYSTEM	NO-YET	THE ^(e)	IN	THE	SYSTEM	IF-EVER	ANY-one
	no	be-loving ^(e) !	the	world	neither	the ^(e)	in	the	world	if-ever	anyone

αγαπα	τον	κοσμον	ουκ	εστιν	η	αγαπη	του	πατρος	εν	αυτω
agapa	ton	kosmon	ouk	estin	hE	agapE	tou	patros	en	autO
-IS-LOVING	THE	SYSTEM	NOT	-IS-BEING	THE	LOVE	OF-THE	FATHER	IN	him
is-loving	the	world	not	is	the	love	of-the	Father	in	him

So, it is OK to love BBQ ribs and apple pie and ice cream. But be very careful of what you worship.

THE RACE TO ETERNITY

Your life is your own event in the Olympics of Eternity. In this event you are competing only with the prince of darkness. Your goal is to qualify to approach Christ's Bema seat of judgment and rewards. Each and every day you run qualifying races. With every race you run, you may store a reward at the Bema seat. To approach the Bema Seat, you must qualify in your own event. Once you truly give your life to Christ you have won your event, you qualify for the final run to the Bema. You are racing to the light. At the Bema seat you will find all the rewards you have stored up as you ran races in the event of "YOUR LIFE".

FAITHLESS

In 2nd Timothy 2:12-13 we find these words of Paul; "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we disown Him, He will also disown us. If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

I ran into difficulty understanding the "If we are faithless...." Statement. The word 'faithless' is translated from the Greek *apistoumen* (ἀπιστοῦμεν) from the root word *apisteo* (ἀπιστεῶ). From the root *apisteo* we get; to be unbelieving, i.e. disbelieve (transitively), or (by implication) disobey. I can see that the transitive translation does not fit the context of 2Tim2:1-13. However, if I take the Greek word 'by implication' and translate "disobedient" the entire statement becomes very clear.

Transitive: being or relating to a relation with the property that if the relation holds between a first element and a second and between the second element and a third, it holds between the first and third elements.

Implicate: to involve as a consequence, corollary, or natural inference:

HEAVEN

Heaven is not a hall of fame for achievers. It is the Fathers house for believers. (Be Comforted by Warren W. Wiersbe)

GUIDANCE

You must be in motion to be steered by the Spirit.

SORROW

Worldly sorrow leads to worldly regret which leads to death.
Godly sorrow leads to spiritual regret which leads to repentance.

THE NEEDY

No person in need is ever an interruption.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

(C. S. Lewis)

The Christian view is, this is a good world that has gone wrong, but retains the memory of what ought to have been.

IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Uniformity \neq Unity
(Rev. Roger Gilbert)

EVENT POSTMORTEM

How we handle tragic events in our lives is a reflection of the maturity of our faith. How we handle glorious events in our lives is a reflection of the maturity of our faith. When the event has passed and the dust has settled we should do an *event postmortem*. We need to ask ourselves: How did I react? How should I have reacted? How could the outcome have changed if I had acted differently? Did I go to the Lord for guidance and comfort?

When we do a postmortem of our actions we are able to derive the maximum learning from our past. When we are learning we are maturing.

It is simple to develop the habit of event postmortem. Once a week or once a month sit down with a piece of paper and make two lists. One of good and one of not so good events. Then ask the 4 questions listed above. In difficult situations seek a trusted Christian counselor. Always seek the council of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This could be an added dimension to your daily journaling.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

When hearing and believing the gospel, the Holy Spirit enters our being. At that point we have the gift of faith. We have given to God the sweetest sacrifice, that is, we have given back a portion of our free will. We have sacrificed the will to sin. If we do not pursue an understanding of our Creator and Savior our faith never develops beyond that point. Only when we study and gain understanding of the WORD do we grow in to the person we were created to be.

PURPOSE

You don't decide your purpose in life **you** discover it.

?

Do you practice churchianity or Christianity?

DISCIPLINE

Ref: Hebrews 12:1-11

The word discipline is a dominant term in this passage. This passage was translated from the Greek. Written in the context of Jewish wisdom literature, the term meant '*a sign of a father's love for his children*'. In the Greek world the term translates '*most basic form of education containing any or all of the following; instruction, correction and punishment.*' Therefore, when you read the word discipline, try to focus on the totality of the word and not just the English meaning of the word. My interpretation, discipline is training that produces behavior modification.

REPENTANCE

You cannot confess or repent for someone else's sins

LOVE IS ALL THERE IS

When you pass from this world all of you that you will take is LOVE. All your wealth, social position, skills and worldly treasures will be left behind. It would be a shame if so little of you was love that so little of you passed on into eternity.

3 JOHN IN CONTEXT

Setting the scene: Early AD 80's. Jerusalem has been destroyed. The Jewish state no longer exists. Temple worship has ended.

The main characters are John the Elder, Gaius, Demetrius and Diotrefes.

First some historic background. Gaius met Paul on Paul's first mission journey in the city of Derbe. He traveled with and was instructed by Paul from Derby on to Attalia. He rejoined Paul at Derbe on the second journey. When they came to Corinth on Paul's second mission journey. Gaius remained there as an elder of that Church. Romans was most likely written in Corinth during Paul's third journey. In closing the Romans letter Gaius is commended for his hospitality to the brothers and the church in Corinth. When Paul was imprisoned the second time in Rome Gaius joined him to help and administer to him. After Paul was martyred Gaius, on Paul's request, returned to the troubled Corinth Church.

Historical, non-scriptural documents indicate that over the next ten years Gaius and John became close friends. They developed mutual respect for each other's spiritual maturity and faith. At some time between AD 75 and AD 80 John asked Gaius to journey to Pergamum to stabilize that Church. Most theologians agree that Gaius was in Pergamum when John sent him the letter we now call 3 John.

There is some historical evidence that 3 John was a personal cover letter to Gaius. It is believed that it accompanied the letter to the local churches we now call 1 John. I believe this may be the case. If you clear your mind and read 3 John and then read 1 John I think you will find the contextual connection. I personally believe that 2 John was a predecessor of first and third John, but that is another story.

Demetrius was a believer, student and trusted companion of 'John, The Elder'. Most theologians believe that it was Demetrius that carried the letters First and Third John to Gaius in Pergamum and remained an undetermined length of time to help and give support to Gaius.

Diotrephes was a person who somehow gained great influence in the Church at Pergamum. Diotrephes seemed to be driven by pride, greed and power.

It is believed that Gaius, with the help of Demetrius and the support of the letter we call First John, was successful in dealing with Diotrephes. No mention of Diotrephes appears elsewhere in scripture or the historical documents of the late first or the second century. A despairing footnote on the effects of following pride, greed and power. Yes, you do get your 15 minutes of fame, but, as in the case of Diotrephes there are no lasting accolades.

In conclusion the letter 3 John was most likely written at the same time as 1 John. It was written to his friend Gaius in the city of Pergamum, the leader of the Pergamum Church. This was 11 to 13 years after the martyrdom of Paul.

1 JOHN CONTENT:

- Gaius has the full support and blessing of **John the Elder**.
- Diotrephes is not in Christ and must be corrected.
- John is encouraging Gaius to stand firm.
- John is sending Demetrius as John's personal representative and aid to Gaius.
- Always hold to the truth and interact in love.

BEWARE OF RATIONALIZATION

Scriptural rationalization will lead you away from truth.

"I do no work on Sunday, it is the Lord's Day". This is an admirable statement as God commands a day of rest. But, along with the day of rest scripture says you will work 6 days. Think about this a while.

MY RELIGION

I prefer my religion to be a religion to have been repeated by men not invented by men. (Rev. Roger Gilbert)

GROWING UP

Christian maturity is not a DIY project, seek out a mentor and get into a fellowship. (Rev. Randy Horn)

THE SPIRIT RENEWS

I'm sure everyone has witnessed a birth, be it real and in person or via some form of video media. The mental milestones are the same. The child's first gasp of air to fill its lungs; then the piercing cry and finely everyone in the delivery room smiles. That cry was the sign of life.

What thoughts and feelings do you associate with natural birth?

What about Christian rebirth? It happens when a person hears the message of Christ, and believes. At that moment that person is born into a whole new spiritual realm. The Holy Spirit was intimately involved in that new birth. Someone delivers the message of the gospel and someone receives it with faith. But the Holy Spirit brings the new life.

What thoughts and feelings do you associate with Christian birth?

John 3:1-8

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." So it is with everyone born of the Spirit

John 3:1-8 DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe Nicodemus to your friends?
2. Summarize his view of who Jesus was (v.2). What was positive and what was lacking?
3. How would you explain Nicodemus's initial understanding of being "born again" (v. 4)?
4. Jesus talks about two births—the first a birth of the flesh, the second a birth of the spirit. Describe each birth in your own words.
5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the new birth?
6. In what ways is the Spirit's work of bringing people to new birth like the blowing of the wind (v. 8)?
7. How can your understanding of the Spirit's work affect how you talk to others about Jesus?
8. Have you experienced the new birth Jesus talks about in this passage? Tell how the spirit worked in your life to bring you to Christ.
9. There are obvious signs that a person has physical life. What are the signs that a person has the spiritual life Jesus describes in this passage?

Take these thoughts with you.

In reference to discussion point 9, which of these signs of new life is most obvious in your life? Which is least obvious, and what would it take to change that?

Is there a Nicodemus in your life—someone who has expressed an interest in Jesus but who has not yet believed in him? Plan to communicate more about Jesus with that person this week. Ask the members of your group or a Christian friend to pray with you for the right opportunity.

DIRECTION IN LIFE

Are you spending your life or are you investing your life?

WAITING ON GOD

Truly waiting on God is resting instead of worrying.

BEMA SEAT

A COMMENTARY ON 2 CO 5:6-10

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he used the analogy of a race to bring home his point. Why would he use this analogy when addressing the Corinthians?

In Paul's time, the "games" in Corinth were more prestigious than the games at Rome or Olympia. From Greece to Rome athletic competition was a big thing. Everyone was involved or at least a fan. They had a deep understanding of the dedication, training and the sacrifice involved in becoming the best in an EVENT. Think of the fervor when your team won the Super-bowl. The Corinthians understood rewards for performance.

The Corinthians knew the climax of the games occurred at the BEMA seat. They also knew and understood the processes involved in the bestowing of honors upon the winners in each EVENT. So, what was the Bema seat? The Bema seat was where the game's final judgment and presentation of rewards took place. The Bema seat was usually an elevated platform. On this platform were seated the presiding judge and the performance judges. The presiding judge was usually the highest ranking or most prestigious person in town at that time. The performance judges were the experts in the game's rules and expected performance.

All through the games the performance judges would carefully observe the behavior and performance of each athlete. If they observed infractions of the rules they would penalize or disqualify the offender. They were the final arbitrators in all performance issues. If the performance judges became deadlocked the presiding judge would rule and his ruling was final. As the games progressed they would record the exceptional and outstanding attributes of the contestants. At the conclusion of the games all the "winners" would approach the Bema Seat to receive their accolades. Most important was the olive branch, which was often formed into a crown. But also, they received special awards. They could receive invitations to banquets where they were the guest of honor. They could receive money.

(BEMA SEAT CONTINUED)

They could receive beautiful wives. And if they were slaves they could receive freedom. Most important was that olive branch. That olive branch signified they came in first in their EVENT. Yes, Paul knew that the Corinthians understood how the games worked. He cleverly used their knowledge of things of this world to bring home an understanding of God's Holy realm.

Have you ever heard comments such as: ***“Ok I read scripture, I get the point, and my life is a race to the finish line. But there can only be one winner and there is no second place. I have a family, six children and dependent parents. How can I compete with all the pastors, bible teachers, missionaries and do-gooders in the church? My EVENT is stacked against me”.***

EPIPHANY!!! Our EVENT is not a competition in the material world. Our competitors are not other people. Our EVENT is our life and how we live it. Our event started when God breathed a soul into our developing bodies. Our competitors are the demons that wish to divert our dedication, training and sacrifice away from the Godly and to the “worldly”. Our EVENT is staged in the physical world but is truly spiritual. What spirit or Spirit is the driving force in your EVENT?

So, let's look at our EVENT through the eyes of the Corinthians.

- The arena is all of creation. The starting flag for my EVENT has been waved. There is nowhere in all of creation that I can hide from the outcome of my EVENT.
- My EVENT is my life. Every step I take in my EVENT reflects on the outcome.
- My coach is the Holy Spirit. In training He opens my heart, mind and spirit to the word of God through the scriptures. He corrects me when I follow wrong paths. He councils me when I am confused and he consoles my heartbreaks.

My competitors are the demons who wish to control and defeat me. They try to convince me that treasures on earth are the real goal. If I want these treasures anything is allowed; lie, cheat, deceive, kill, covet, pride and immorality anything it takes to acquire the treasures.

(BEMA SEAT CONTINUED)

- The demon coach is the satin. Satin wants all that belongs to God. I belong to God, satin wants me.
- Jesus alone sits at the Bema seat. He alone judges my conduct in the race and there is no arbitration. He alone presents the olive branch. He judges my dedication, training and sacrifice. He judges what I have accomplished and weighs it according to what his plan for me was. He alone hands out my rewards.

Once I accept Christ Jesus as my Lord and Savior I am predestined to win my EVENT. I have a place at the banquet table. However, how I ran my race will determine where I set at the table. Yes, how I ran my race will determine what rewards I have stored up in heaven and Jesus will see to it that all of creation gets what is truly deserved.

Dedication -- I heard the gospel, believed and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

Training – Study scripture; develop an ear for the Spirit; develop an effectual prayer life; fellowship with believers.

Sacrifice – relinquishment of “my will” for Gods will; Godley living; supporting the fellowship of believers; reflecting the glory of God to nonbelievers;

Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit is the only perfect coach. You must hear your coach, understand Him and follow His direction if you are to succeed. Most Christians acknowledge that developing an “ear for the Holy Spirit” is most challenging. Our competitors are always handy saying “Did He really say.....”

Predestined – Yes!!!! Once you have accepted Jesus as your savior you have won your event. But, where will you sit at the banquet table? What rewards will you carry with you throughout eternity?

EVIL

Evil is the result of a determined will set against God. We can take solace from Paul’s Gospel that the most determined evil cannot overcome the Lord’s firm and secure power.

EXILE CONNECTIONS

Jeremiah, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah

BC	
586	Fall of Jerusalem as prophesied by Jeremiah
539	Cyrus II conquers Babylon; Jeremiah refers to Cyrus as my benefactor, the only pagan referred to as God's anointed.
538	Cyrus II allows the first return of the exiles.
538-516	Primary reconstruction in Jerusalem
516	Temple restored and purified under rule of Darius I the Persian king.
486-465	Xerxes (Ahasuerus) king of Persia
479-465	Esther queen of Persia.
465-424	Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) son of Esther is king of Persia. Artaxerxes is said to have had a kind heart toward the Jews.
458	Artaxerxes I decrees the second return of the exiles. This return is led by Ezra.
445	Artaxerxes I decrees the third return of the exiles. This return is led by Nehemiah. Jerusalem's walls are completed.

MERCY AND GRACE

Mercy closes the door to hell.
Grace opens the door to Heaven.

CONTENTMENT

Be contented with where you are on the way to where God intends
you to be.

SIN AND FELLOWSHIP

For the saved believer sin causes a break in **fellowship** with the
Holy Spirit not a break in our **relationship** with him.

FAITH AND THE LAW

Abraham was a man of faith who was given a promise (covenant). 430 years later Abraham's people, God's people had no faith. God through his mediator, Moses, gave the people the law. The law was a vehicle to bring them back to faith. The law was and is not their salvation. Faith is the only way to salvation.

The law was given so the leaders could judge the misdeeds of the Hebrews. Only God has the perfect insight to render perfect and just judgment. Leaders were given the authority to judge within the confines of the law, but only if they themselves remained un-defiled by sin.

DIVINE GUIDANCE!

Heavenly Father, provider of my daily bread: ¹Open my eyes to see your works in my life; ²Clear my ears to hear your guidance; ³Shield my mind from the influence of the devil; ⁴Inspire my mouth to freely speak of the sacrifice of Jesus; ⁵Melt my heart so compassion may flow; ⁶Bless my hands to perform tasks to your glory; ⁷Guide my feet down the difficult paths of righteousness; I seek these things in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

Will a prayer for someone who has passed help the departed one?

Is praying for the dead valid?

Mankind's eternity is determined by mankind's mortal relationship with God. God gave mankind mortal life, wisdom and free will. Every individual is given wisdom and choice. It is God's intent for all of us to have a personal relationship with Him. We are given life to accept or reject His fellowship. While a person is living, a prayer for his or her acceptance of Christ can be productive. At death a person's spiritual condition is set. God has been accepted or rejected. No amount of prayer can change the past.

JESUS MADE PERFECT

Read Heb. 5:8-9.

Question, wasn't Jesus always perfect, from before time to eternity? Grammatical and contextual confusion in translating from Greek to English has puzzled readers of scripture from the time of the first translation. In this case the actual context of the Greek phrase relates to proper and complete accomplishment of a task, that is, a "demonstration of perfection". The reflection of perfection is upon the action, not the actor.

Jesus, to all mankind, demonstrated obedience as he accepted the suffering for all mankind's sin. His "complete accomplishment" of the Father's assigned task demonstrated his *act* of perfection.

WISDOM AND FAITH

Some think that knowledge is in opposition to faith. In essence if I knew something then there was no faith required in knowing that fact, person or thing. Therefore, it would be pointless to study the scriptures if it only results in more knowledge and less faith. But, it occurs to me, this focus is in error. The focus is not on gaining knowledge, but on understanding the Creator's will.

TEMPTATION OF EVE

At least 3 times a year for the last 60 or so years I have listened to a sermon on the temptation of Eve. Not once have I heard a truly valid reason why the snake approached Eve and not Adam. Chauvinist preachers say it was because Eve was the weaker. Feminist preachers say Eve was the stronger and Adam would follow whatever Eve did. **Hogwash!** It seems very simple to me. Read Gen. 2:15-3:1. Look at the chain of events: 1. Adam is placed in the garden. 2. Adam is commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. 3. The animals are named. 4. Eve is created. Now let's review the chain of the command. Adam personally heard the command from God. Eve heard about the restriction from Adam. On whom is the stronger influence of the command? Satan and sin merely took the least resistant path.

LIVE IN THE WORD

The more at home the word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits. (Philipp J. Spener 1675)

GOD AND US

God is, before anything, after everything, forever. God created matter, the heavens and the earth. And it was pleasing to Him. He created life and was more pleased. But there was no kinship. So, He created the spirit of man and breathed it into his creation. The body, spirit and the kinship with God made man complete. God was gratified by His kinship with man. The prince of darkness corrupted man and spoiled man's perfection. The imperfection could not be tolerated by our perfect God. God sent man away from him into spiritual darkness.

However, He gave man a promise. When the time is right He would send to us a Messiah. The Messiah would take upon himself the corruption of mankind and all who accept the Spirit of salvation would be welcomed back into light. Jesus is the Messiah. Believe in Him, accept Him and the kinship will be reinstated to you and you will again walk in the light.

CONFESSION

Sin causes a spiritual wound that steals our joy. Confession is the cleansing, first step in treating the wound. It allows the healing salve of faith in to drive out the infection of sin.

MY CROSS

My cross is not all my pain in life.
My cross is God's plan for my life.
I strive to bare my cross well.

REFLECT GOD'S GLORY

Do what is just, not what you can justify.
Do what is responsible, not what is legal.
Do what is moral, not what is modeled.

SEEKER'S PRAYER

Father in heaven I know that you are the meaning of life.
I am a struggling Christian adolescent pledging my being to your
service.

By your will I have come from one of little faith to a seeker
dependent on your word. Bless my journey.

Amen

ABRAM TO LEAVE

GENESIS 12: The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

Scripture is not clear who Abram's people were. All we know is Abram's father had relocated the family from Ur to Haran. They settled there and became prosperous and comfortable. His father's household is not clearly defined.

What was the purpose of God's command to leave? From the time of Adam, the knowledge of the one true God was common to all. Some chose to follow some chose not to. Abram chose to follow the one true God. Abram's father, family and the culture of Haran where they were living, were all sun worshipers. Abram was comfortable and prosperous in Haran. It is easy to stray or be tempted in familiar and comfortable surroundings. God knew this and instructed Abram to leave and go to where he would be a stranger. So, Abram left his father's house hold (his father was 170 years old at that time and lived another 35 years). He left his family (other than his father "the family" is not well defined). He left the city of the sun worshipers.

So how do we apply this scripture lesson to our lives? Simply spoken anything that distracts us from a close relationship with God we must leave behind.

???? What distracts you from God?

PAUL & THESSALONICA

When you read Paul's letters to the Thessalonians you find it obvious that Paul had deep feelings for the Thessalonian Christians. I pondered this one morning as I studied and wondered why and how this happened.

It is clear from the passion and emotion Paul puts in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that he has deep and strong feelings for this church. Paul's love for the Thessalonians was agape love. Agape love is defined as selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. It is a spiritually binding love. For the mortal human agape love is the Everest of emotional bindings, it is slow to grow and requires passing through all of the lower forms of love and affection.

Here is where the conflict in my mind erupts. Tradition says that Paul was in Thessalonica for only two to three weeks. I accept that Paul was the most spiritually gifted common man who ever lived. But! He was still human and mortal. His mind and heart were still controlled by human nature. To get to the emotional level he was with the Thessalonians meant he would have to know them deeply. He would have to understand, individually and personally, who they were and how they got to that point in their lives. This does not happen in two to three weeks.

So, let us examine the evidence of a two to three-week tenure in Thessalonica. There is the, well of course it says,,,,, then again there was,??? Bottom line there is no evidence of two or three week mission in Thessalonica. There is one obscure statement, Acts 17:2 "***As his custom was, Paul went to the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures...***" This is where the casual observer of the scriptures leaps upon the three-week view. True this could suggest a time span of three weeks, but some celebration weeks have 4 and 5 Sabbath days. Let's take the Passover celebration. Each of the six days before the day of Passover is a Sabbath. The feast of tabernacles has 3 Sabbaths, Festival of Weeks has 2. The day before and the day of any ritual day of sacrifice are Sabbath days.

PAUL/THESSALONICA CONTINUED

Now let's look at who in Thessalonica he was writing to. Scripture says (Acts 17:4) a large number of Greek men and women and a few Jews heard and believed Paul's Gospel. Where did this large number of Greek men and women come from? It is safe to say they did not hear Paul speak at the synagogue. They would not have been allowed into the synagogue on a **Sabbath** day. No, I believe he did what he did everywhere else his mission took him. He went first to the Jew then he went to the Gentiles and built a Church fellowship. If you look closely at what Paul has to say in the two letters you will find it is all about the new covenant with Christ. There is absolutely no reference to Old Testament scripture. Paul was a Jewish history and religion scholar, a Pharisee's Pharisee. If he would have been writing to Jews he would have used Jewish arguments, proofs and scripture. But he did not.

In Philippians 4:14-16 Paul gives thanks to the Philippian church for their support throughout his mission work. In particular he notes that they sent him aid while he was in Thessalonica "again, and again". In the original Greek style of writing the "again" would mean at least twice the second "again" would indicate at least 4 times. Philippi is a young man's 12 to 14 day walk from Thessalonica. Even by horseback it would take 4 to 5 days. With the time restraints of travel and communication of that age, using the minimum of 4 occurrences of aid from Philippi I would put Paul's tenure in Thessalonica at minimum, 4 months.

The folks that study New Testament history and time lines give the length of Paul's second missionary journey from 2 years 9 months to 3 years 6 months. That is in the time frame of 49AD to 52AD. This also gives us some fodder for looking at when Thessalonians was written, but that is another study for another day.

The time line discrepancies alone allow for as long as a 9 month stay in Thessalonica. The study of the aid sent from Philippi suggests a minimum of 4 months. Even if it were 3 months I could understand the level of connection between Paul and the Thessalonians. After all, in 3 months of Navy boot camp 56 years ago I forged bonds that have lasted till today.

TRUST

I, THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE, am with you and for you. What more could you need? When you feel some lack, it is because you are not connecting with Me at a deep level. I offer abundant Life; your part is to trust Me, refusing to worry about anything.

It is not so much adverse events that make me anxious as it is my thoughts about those events. My mind engages in efforts to take control of a situation, to bring about the result I desire. My thoughts close in on the problem like ravenous wolves. Determined to make things go my way, I forget that You are in charge of my life. The only remedy is to switch my focus from the problem to Your Presence. Stop all my striving and watch to see what You will do. You are my Lord!

Therefore, of my own free will I give my being to your Holy Spirit to do Your will, with the hope, only to be recognized as a good work of the Lord.

BARRIERS

ROMANS 12-15

Do you separate your life into compartments? Do you construct barriers between your spiritual life from your secular life? Strive to consolidate your spiritual and secular lives into one. Pray while mowing the lawn. Commune with Jesus as you do the laundry. Take the Holy Spirit to work with you.

Paul's understanding of Christian humankind does not allow a division of life into different compartments. To Paul, spirit, body, mind and heart are just different ways of looking at the same reality – the total self or soul. For this reason, Paul's appeal for the dedication of the body is a call for the total commitment of self.

Are you fractured or are you whole?

CORRECTNESS

A majority of acceptance is not proof of correctness.

WORKS

Works are a consequence of faith, not a condition for faith.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

WAIT do not read the scripture until the end of this random thought.

Paul quite often used metaphors to explain the concepts and ideas God put in his heart.

What is a metaphor?

Webster: Metaphor; a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.

The use of a metaphor works only if the audience recognizes the analogy and can relate it to the speaker's objective. The first century secular stresses, fears and norms were quite different from ours in the 21st century. To truly understand the metaphors and parables of the first century we must try to understand how the first century people related to life around them. Paul used many subjects for his metaphors like farmers, athletes, war and soldiers. Each one was specifically targeted to zero in on a specific audience. Hearing the words, **ARMOR OF GOD**, the Ephesians would have immediately pictured, in their minds, a Roman soldier. To them, like him or not, a Roman soldier was the essence of strength, skill and power. He was the personification of the Cesar and the Roman Empire.

What did the Ephesian know about a Roman soldier?

They knew he was just a man, but a man with special skills and training. They knew that before he was allowed to wear the armor of an Imperial soldier he had to complete rigorous training in the arts of war and combat. He had to be good at what he did because when he put on his armor he would project all the power and authority of the Emperor of the Roman Empire.

Where ever he went he carried that image of authority. Take him out of his uniform of armor and he was just a man not unlike any carpenter, baker or shepherd. However, in his armor he was the might of the Roman Empire.

With these ideas clearly in the minds of the Ephesians Paul built on these concepts. He related each part of the uniform of armor to a specific attribute of the Christian Soldier. So how do we, of the twenty-first century, relate to the metaphor? It is relatively simple as Paul explains each part of the armor to understand what he is saying. Yes, God provides us with the armor to battle evil in the world. However, I believe that most Christians miss an important meaning of wearing the **ARMOR OF GOD**. **When we wear the armor of God we must reflect the power and majesty of our Sovereign in heaven.** When you put on the armor of God and go among the people... do they say “look there goes the majesty, authority and power of God?”

Are you training rigorously?

Are you reflecting God’s majesty in your life?

OK, now, perhaps with a new insight, GO, read Ephesians 6:10-20.

THE PULPIT

The pulpit is for feeding not bleeding

JAMES 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 may be the most misinterpreted discussion in James. So, let’s remember the total context: Written by James the brother of Jesus, the disciple to the Jews; Written to the Jews whose beliefs were embedded in the Law of Moses. Again, we must remember the Jew of the time was obsessed by the law, that is, the Law of Moses. They, to a fault, worshiped the Law of Moses. So, James uses the word “law” as a tool. We must read carefully because James speaks of two laws, the Mosaic Law and the *perfect law of Grace*. In a clever play on Jewish beliefs and prejudice, James introduces the new covenant of the law of Grace to supersede the Law of Moses.

THE GIFT

There is a kingdom far, far away. There are many villages in this kingdom.

On a cold, cold day following a heavy snowfall the king was passing through one of the villages. He saw a man shoveling snow in his driveway. This man had a very long driveway. The king asked his driver “who is this man”? His driver replied “Oh that is Bob. He is the village baker. He makes the most delicious bread and his croissants are the finest in the kingdom.” The king said “Such a man should not have to toil so hard to get where he needs to be. After you take me home I want you to go to Home Depot. There I want you to buy the best snow blower they have. Put it on MY account. Have it delivered to Bob in MY name.” His driver did as he asked.

Bob was overwhelmed when he received the gift of the king. He placed it in his driveway and when people ask where he got such a fine snow blower he would say “My friend the king gave me this gift.” Word got around, Bob is a friend of the king.

But alas it did not snow again that winter. Bob did not use the gift the king had given him for a long, long time. The glory of the gift soon diminished and it was stored in the back of the garage.

Well you know what happened next, spring gave way to summer and summer to fall. Winter arrived and the first snow was a twelve incher. Bob’s neighbor looked out his window and saw bob shoveling snow in his driveway. He went over and asked, “Bob, why are you shoveling snow when you have that fine gift of the king in your garage”? Bob replied that he did not know how to make it work. The neighbor asked if the gift came with a book. Bob replied “Yes it came with a very fine book. But some of it is difficult to understand. I am afraid I will damage the gift.”

Bob’s neighbor responded, “You know, there is a group of neighbors that meets at Olivia’s Grill on Monday mornings. We meet to discuss and help each other with problems. Why don’t you bring your book to the group and we will all work together to understand your gift through the book. And Bob did just that.

Bob and his neighbors studied the BOOK together. They soon understood the BOOK and understood how to use the gift. Guess

what, the entire neighborhood has benefited from their FELLOWSHIP, the BOOK and the GIFT.

Now Bob clears his driveway in minutes. Then he clears the driveways for those who are unable to do it themselves. And all the others in the neighborhood take turns cleaning their driveways with the **king's** gift.

One cold day after a great snowfall the king passed through Bob's neighborhood. All the driveways and sidewalks were clean. The king said to his driver, "It makes me smile when I see good people benefit from my gift."

The kingdom is your town.

The village is your church.

God provides gifts.

Gifts should be used not honored.

Fellowship solves problems and provides wisdom.

Wisdom produces fruit.

Fruit pleases God.

DOCTRINE?

DEFINITION: A principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

A faith doctrine is a living, growing 'ever maturing' personal belief system through the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit we gain wisdom at a level and rate we can understand and put into practice. A true Christian's faith doctrine is at any point in time true, proven by an understanding of scripture, for that person, at that time, in their spiritual walk. So, for now, can we say—a new recipient of the Holy Spirit, will have a faith doctrine which may be much different from the 40-year veteran of the walk in grace. Blindly accepting the doctrine of someone else when it goes against your own Spirit driven conscience (doctrine) opposes your freedom in Christ Jesus. By accepting someone else's doctrine when it goes against your conscience you are moving away from grace toward law.

James 4:1-10

Submit yourselves to God.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You DO HARM and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that God jealously longs for the spirit that he made to live in us? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." {Prov. 3:34} ⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James seems to say that if you love the world you hate God. Yet John says "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" {John 3:16}. Can we hate something God loves?

ANSWER: Love the creation of God. Hate the attitude that rejects God.

PRAYER

Prayer is a relationship not a task

Do you pray for easier paths when you should be praying for stronger shoes?

RELIGIOUS FOCUS

The following was inspired by a sermon of Pastor Roger Gilbert. He asked the question “Are you pursuing God only for His blessings?”

I then asked these questions.

Is your religion focused on living in the blessings God can provide?

Is your religion focused on living God’s will?

Answer both of these questions with a percentage. There is only a total of 100%. Remember every time you pray for a turn of events you are praying for God to provide, you are seeking a blessing. If you pray for guidance, council or inspiration you are inquiring of God’s will. No one has ever come up with an ideal balance of *blessings* and *will* because everyone’s state of maturity is different. Note, I did not say everyone’s needs are different. Balance in one’s religious life is an indicator of spiritual maturity and not their needs. No one but you and God knows where you stand in your journey to spiritual maturity. But, you should face the questions and acknowledge where you are in your journey. You can fool yourself but you cannot fool God.

LONG SUFFERING

The Bible says God is long suffering. It does not say God is forever suffering. Remember Sodom, remember King Saul.

BLESSINGS

There is a catch to God’s blessings. The blessing comes only after the obedience.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is a given that once you reach the point where you need and desire the fellowship that the Christian Church provides you have already acknowledged a Godly presence in your life. As Christians we know that presence as the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is at work in every individual that has accepted Christ Jesus as the redeemer and savior.

- The Holy Spirit is the Counselor sent by God to make known his desires for all mankind.
- The Holy Spirit is the answer to Jesus' promise to send a counselor to abide in us.
- Although we constantly walk in temptation, as Christians we also walk in the Spirit. If we consciously seek the Spirit He will, over time mold our conscience.
- Our goal is to be able to affirm Paul's statement "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

The Holy Spirit is at work promoting Fellowship among believers.

- It is the Holy Spirit that has brought you to this fellowship.
- It is the Holy Spirit that produces that feeling of peace when we are in fellowship.
- It is the Holy Spirit that produces that empty feeling in Christians as well as non-believers when they are not in fellowship with Christ.

Reinforced by the Reformation ideals, Covenanters abide in the knowledge that the word (that is scripture) and the Spirit are congruent and inseparable.

HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE

All Christians agree that Jesus gave his life on the cross for the salvation of all mankind. However, have you ever considered that he laid down his life when he was born a mortal man? He laid down his life when he changed water into wine. He laid down his life when he was baptized in the river Jordan. He laid down his life when he resisted the devil in the desert.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit bestows gifts on believers, not for the benefit of the holder of the gift but for the benefit of God. *Think about this a moment.*

It is God's plan that gifts strengthen believers and that an amalgamation of believers' gifts makes a fellowship strong and powerful. *What if everyone in the fellowship had the same gift? I propose that the fellowship would soon dissolve.*

In fellowship we each aid the others in discernment of our gifts.

A spiritual gift cannot be learned or taught, it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit.

I visited a church that had a weekly class to teach people how to speak in tongues. What do you think about the concept of a person teaching you a Spiritual gift?

PRIDE AND ATHEISM

Let us look at secular morals and Christian morals. If you look closely at secular morals and Christian morals you will find only one measure of character that differs. That is the character of pride. In the secular morals pride is looked upon much as a virtue, "I have too much pride for such lowly pursuits". (Think about that one a moment.) In Christian morality pride is the root of all other sin.

- To know God, you must acknowledge God's superiority.
- Pride is enmity.
- Pride refuses to acknowledge any superiority to self.

CHRISTIAN WALK

The Christian walk is like a walk on a tight rope. We must always seek the spiritual balance. It doesn't matter if we fall to the left or fall to the right. Either fall results in death.

WORSHIP or RELIGION

Since the dawn of mankind, men have endeavored to replace worship with religion.

JOSEPH, A PROMISE

(A PARABLE BY WALT)

We all know the story of Joseph and his rise to authority through the will of God (Gen. 39-40).

This is the story of a farmer who lived and prospered in the time of Joseph. Wahankh (name means strong in life), his wife Khu Kiya (means protected woman of joy), and their children's lives were deeply impacted by Joseph.

Wahankh was a farmer near the town of Nauerutis. Nauerutis is located on a minor arm of the Nile river delta, 45 miles from the sea. Wahankh, his wife and children raised beans, lentils and chickpeas on his small farm. His crops were good and each year he had a surplus which he sold or traded for fish, meat and spices. He grew beans and lentils in the spring and summer. In the fall and winter, he raised chickpeas. He had a good well on his farm. First came the planting. Then his days were spent lifting water from the well, directing it to the plots as needed, weeding, and cultivating the crops. He prospered and was moderately wealthy in his community.

It came to pass that a great famine was prophesized. An edict from Joseph with the authority of Pharaoh was announced in the land. All agricultural efforts were to be maximized. Each farmer was allowed to keep just the bare minimum for survival and all surplus was to be gathered and stored for future use. For seven years Wanankh and Khu Kiya maximized their efforts and produced bountiful crops. Wanankh was well pleased for he and his family had provided much food to the storehouses.

In the spring of the eighth year a drought hit hard. The small arm of the Nile which feed his well dried to dust. Each day household water was taken from the well. Very little was left for crops. Only a small portion of his farm was watered. By fall of that year he could not produce any crops. He soon ran out of food and had to purchase food from the local storehouse. By the fourth year of the famine Wanankh was penniless. He and his neighbors went to Joseph. They pleaded, "We have no money and our families are starving". Joseph said "Sell me your fields and I will give you food". So, they sold their fields and returned home with food. In the fifth year of the famine Wanankh and his neighbors again ran out of food.

They returned to Joseph “We have no money and no property and our families are starving”. Joseph said “Sell me yourselves and I will give you food”. Once again, they returned home with food.

Shortly after returning home with the food Wanankh was restless and could not sleep. Khu Kiya asked “What is wrong, why are you restless and unable to sleep?” Wanankh replied “I am worried I have given all. How will we survive when this food runs out?” Khu Kiya replied, “We belong to Joseph now. We need only be concerned with today. All our tomorrows are in the promise of Joseph.”

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

Your past is irrevocable. Your present is where you are now. Your future is determined by your now.

BURDENS ≠ BURDENS

Galatians 6:2 says we must bare one another’s burdens. Galatians 6:5 says we must bare our own burdens. ??? In 6:2 the word translated as burden is the Greek “barE” the literal translations of this word is life’s heavy loads. The Greek word used in 6:5 is “φορτίον” (phortion) which is literally translated as “portions, rations, or supplies”. The Greek word “φορτίον” (phortion) was colloquialized in the first century to mean the pack or pouch that solders or travelers carried containing all their sustenance for travel. They were personally responsible for their own “phortion” and could not or would not expect any one other than a slave to carry it for them. But life’s heavy loads are different.

Sometimes we must help a fellow Christian when the “BarE”, load, “BURDEN” is too difficult to handle alone. Sometimes sharing the load is just a reinforcement of the shared fellowship. Sometimes it is lifesaving. **Always** it is a pleasing aroma to our Lord.

SHEEP

Did you know that domesticated sheep will not drink from moving water? Now think about Psalm 23“...He leadeth me beside still waters.”

EVIL COMES IN PAIRS

Do not doubt the cleverness of the devil. He sends many evil concepts into the world. He is clever and sometimes sends them in pair opposites. So, if you recognize the fault in a concept there is an opposite, but equally faulted concept to take its place. We easily recognize one evil which drives us in the opposite direction. There we find an opposing idea that seems to have redemptive qualities. Take *totalitarianism*, this is the concept that the *common* populous is incapable of regulating their lives and must be firmly and completely controlled. Then there is the opposite and equally faulted concept of *individualism*. At first, in comparison to totalitarian views one might say individualism is a good thing. But when you look closely at individualism you will see its evil flaws. An individualist cares not about the condition of others unless the other's condition harms them. Stop and think about that for a moment. Somewhere in-between rests the Godly attitude.

For every good concept of Christianity or shall we say Godly behavior the devil supplies a pair of evil concepts. Take the term *liberalism*, most Christians will agree that liberalism to the extreme goes against biblical truths. The evil twin of liberalism is *conservatism* or the concept that all is well and correct let's not change anything (We have always done it this way and there is no need to change). The faulty conditions of liberalism and conservatism don't take too much thought realize. Some attributes require a little deeper thought. Try "Pride / Modesty" and "Lustful / Chaste". In each case the extreme of the first (pride, lustful) is simple to understand. But the extreme of the second (modesty, chaste) is not. Take a few minutes and meditate on them.

The Christian walk is like a walk on a tight rope. We must always seek the spiritual balance. It doesn't matter if we fall to the left or fall to the right. Either fall results in death.

FEAR AND PEACE

Fear comes from the word of man. Peace comes from the word of God.

FORGIVING & FORGETTING

**If you cannot forget yesterday you cannot excel today,
and tomorrow is unattainable.**

Forgiving is something we are commanded to do. It is not easy and takes much prayer and practice. Forgetting is a seemingly unconquerable challenge. Once an action is planted in our physical brain, it is there forever. Nothing short of brain washing will remove it. So, do we require brain washing to remove all the hurt and sorrow that is injected into our lives? Well... no. We must alter the circumstances of that memory. That is the forgiveness action. If we look closely at the context of the words and phrases used and translated as FORGET where *forget* or *forgetting* are used in conjunction with forgiveness we find a different meaning. When we forget an offense in conjunction with forgiving that offense, it simply means that we alter the feelings associated with the offense. The offense becomes just another incident in our life. We still remember the incident but we are no longer upset by it. Shall we say “at peace with it”?

In this context forgiving and forgetting are unremittingly bound. Let me propose that the *forgetting* is a test of the *forgiving*. When we recall a once painful incident in our lives and there is no longer any pain or anger associated with it then we have truly forgiven. But, what if there is still some residual pain. Does this mean we are a bad person? Does this mean we have sinned? No and no. It only means we have a little more work to do on that forgiveness task. As Christians in this world we have a physical being and a spiritual being. As long as we are in this world we must contend with things of this world. Forgiveness and forgetting is one of the ways we contend. We seek to have a predominant spiritual being. But that is another “Random Thought”.

FORGIVENESS: THE COST

If you believe you must do something to receive God’s forgiveness then you will require something from those you wish to forgive. If they do not comply then you will carry the pain forever.

CHOICE

Free will gives you a choice. However, you have no choice in the results of your choice. If you choose to stick your hand into water you will get wet. If you choose to stick your hand into fire you will get burned.

END TIMES

Our inability as Christians to be specific about the end times is not a sign of weakness or ignorance, but rather a true awareness of the limits of human knowledge. Obviously, I believe that the coming end of the world as we know it is something we Christians need to take seriously. But, I also believe that a preoccupation with interpreting times and events can distract us from an authentic relationship with Christ and from concern for our neighbor's welfare. To fall into that trap can easily cause us to miss the profound implications of Paul's teaching on the last days found in 1Thes 4 & 5.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

While leadership in the church does require a certain amount of management, it can be better understood in terms of a caring and shepherding service. As a Servant-Leader, Jesus gave us the prime model for leadership, and most certainly this was the style Paul introduced into the early church. Authoritarian models may be efficient, but the spirit of servant leadership can easily be lost. The domineering temptation in leadership is an ever-present threat to all church congregations. This weakness is forcefully confronted all throughout the New Testament.

LAST CHANCE

Life is your last chance to develop a fellowship with God.

LIFE & FAITH

Faith is not a way of life. Faith defines your way of life.

MAJOR events in early Christianity

Early AD35 Stephen is martyred. Until this time “The Way” was mostly confined to Jerusalem and Judea. After Stephen was martyred there was intense persecution of the followers of the Way. This forced a majority of those who had followed Stephen to scatter throughout the region. Many of them settled and evangelized Damascus, Sidon, Tyre, Caesarea and as far as Antioch Syria. The “Way” began to infiltrate the lives of Gentiles, see Acts 10.

Late AD 35 Saul has the Damascus road experience. Saul takes a 3-year sabbatical in the desert. It is during this time that, it is believed, that Paul is mentored by Christ and has an ‘out of body’ experience.

In AD 52 Paul goes to Jerusalem and a council is convened. Here the principals of Salvation to all mankind are debated. The council accepts gentile salvation principals and drafts the ‘Letter to Gentile Believers’ (Acts 15:23-29).

In AD 70 the Romans destroy the temple in Jerusalem. Most of the Priests and Levites are crucified. The last of the zealots are destroyed at Masada. All sacrificial rites in the Jewish religion are terminated. This ends the organized Jewish opposition and persecution of the Christian movement outside of Palestine.

In 98AD Trajan assumes power and asserts himself and his family as gods. Christianity is again declared an illegal religion. He states “They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance.”

NEW TESTAMENT TIME LINE

Many of the dates in this time line are disputed by theologians and scholars. I have picked dates supported by the majority of NIV sources.

	30^{ad}	CRUCIFIXION, Pentecost
Saul the Pharisees at the stoning of Stephen.	34	Stephen martyred,

Saul's conversion/3 years in desert	35	
Saul preaches in Damascus	38	
Saul preaches in Jerusalem	39	
Barnabas and Saul to Antioch	40	James son of Zebedee killed
	41	Peter's vision, goes to Cornelius
At Antioch Barnabas and Saul are sent off. From this time on Saul is mentioned first and is called Paul.	45	
Paul's first missionary trip	46	
Paul's first missionary trip	47	
Paul's first missionary trip	48	
Galatians written	49	Council at Jerusalem In 19AD Jews were expelled from all of Italy but the edict was only enforced at whim. In 49AD the expulsion was brutally enforced.
Paul's 2 nd trip		
Paul's 2 nd trip	50	James written
Paul's 2 nd trip 1 & 2 Thessalonians written	51	
Paul's 2 nd trip	52	
Paul's 3 rd trip	53	
Paul's 3 rd trip	54	Jewish expulsion ended.
Paul's 3 rd trip 1 Corinthians written	55	
Paul's 3 rd trip 2 Corinthians written	56	
Paul's 3 rd trip Romans written	57	
	58	
Paul sent to Rome in the fall.	59	Luke (Gospel) written
Ephesians written Paul in Rome house arrest	60	
Philippians Philemon written Paul still under house arrest	61	
Colossians written	62	Mark (Gospel) written
1 Timothy written Paul released from arrest (And goes to Spain?)	63	Acts written
Titus written	64	1 Peter written
	65	2 Peter & Jude written
Paul rearrested	66	
2 Timothy written Paul's martyrdom	67	Peter martyred Gaius to Corinth

Nero dies	68	Jude and Hebrews written
	69	
	70	Temple destroyed sacrificial rites terminated. Temple priests killed.
	71	Matthew (Gospel) written
	72	
	73	
	74	
	75	
	76	John sends Gaius to Pergamum
	77	
	78	
	79	
	80	John (Gospel) written
	81	
	82	
	83	2 John, written
	88	1 John, 3 John written
	89	
	90	
Jewish Council of Jamnia (Christians branded as heretics)	95	REVELATION written
Nerva becomes emperor. Christian persecution is ended.	96	John is pardoned
Christian persecution is reinstated as Trajan asserts himself and his family as deity.	98	John dies

BIRTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

It dawned on me while researching the New Testament Timeline that Galatians and 1&2 Thessalonians was the first scripture the gentiles really had for guidance. The letter of James had been written by this time. Although very applicable to Christian study today it was considered by the first century church as a Jewish epistle directed to the *twelve tribes*. As Paul planted churches and moved on, all the new Christians had to hold on to was the memory of the words of Paul. When Paul sent the letters to Thessalonica, he instructed the

BIRTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTINUED

reading of the letters throughout Macedonia (Thessalonica, Berea, Apollonia, Amphipolis, Neapolis and Philippi). These early gentile believers would have treasured these letters. There is evidence that all of Paul's letters were copied and circulated among the first and second century churches. Between A.D. 51 and A.D. 57 Paul had written what I feel is the core of Christian belief; 1&2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1&2 Corinthians and Romans. It would be a little over 300 years before the New Testament would be set and official.

THE CURE

The curse of Adam is a cancer. Spiritual rebirth through Christ is the chemotherapy. Compassion, love and good works are the side-effects.

PURE LIVING

We tend to be Old Testament Jewish. We define pure living to a fault. We make rules (doctrine) and judge ourselves and everyone else by these rules. We live to uphold appearances. We forget why we should live pure, that is – for God's approval.

FISH SYMBOL



During a time of persecution, you couldn't just go around telling everyone you were a Christian because you might be killed. So, they developed a code (so the story goes). But why a fish? Because of what the letters stand for. "Fish" in Greek is "ichthus." Using these letters as the first letters of words, you came up with:

iasous christus theos uio sotar

Which means, in English.

Jesus Christ God's Son Savior.

STATUS QUO

There is no status quo for the Christian. There is nothing static about the Christian walk. Either we grow spiritually or we degenerate.

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

- Does confession absolve us of sin?
- Is repentance required for forgiveness?
- Does a lack of repentance separate us from God?

I do not think confession absolves us of anything. Confession says to our Father ‘we are sorry for our actions that offend Him and acknowledge that we understand the nature of our sins’. Confession is the first step in the repair of the damage we have done to our fellowship with God. (*See random thought ‘SIN AND FELLOWSHIP’*)

Repentance has been deeply complicated by “doctrine” throughout Church history. Some say there is no salvation without repentance. If that is true then Christ died for nothing. Others say that absolution (which is another deep subject) comes with repentance. Everyone seems to have a different take on what it is, how it works and what it accomplishes. If we seek out the Greek word translated as repentance in the text of the New Testament we find that it is the word *metanoian* which translates--*change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion*. Idealistically, then, if you repent a behavior you never do that thing again. Therefore also, if you have an undesirable behavior that you repeat over and over again it has not been repented. We as Christians affirm that all mankind sins and will continue to sin until the day of Christ’s return. Bottom line repentance is behavior modification. Repentance will come easy in some areas of our behavioral lives and not so much in other areas. For the sake of our spiritual fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we need to confess all our sins and pray for the strength and wisdom to repent of what we are capable of repenting.

FAUX HOLINESS

Counterfeit holiness is easily discerned by its lack of humility. The huntsman of holiness need be on guard for, unconsciously what was begun in the spirit becomes perfected in the flesh. Pride creeps in where its presence is least expected.

PRAYER & FAITH

Prayer “God I need _____” (fill in the blank).

God “Take the step”.

Prayer “I can’t, the door is closed.”

God “Take the step”

Prayer “The door is **still** closed!”

God “Take the step”

Prayers are answered through FAITH, **take the step!**

PRIME QUESTION

What is the most relevant question Jesus asked?

“Who do you say I am”?

ATTITUDE

A good Christian is full of joy and happiness. I have met people who are never happy. It is like they live in a constant “curse the devil mode” and never in the “Thank God” mode. They just refuse to be happy or joyful. Try thanking God for the good in life. Ask God for strength to face the not so good. Leave the devil out of your ATTITUDE.

THE BIBLE

The bible was given to us not to increase our knowledge but to increase our lives.

WHAT YOU BELIEVE

The way you look at life is a reflection of how you believe God looks at you.

FOCUS IN LIFE

What is the focal center of your life? Is it jobs, friends, family, wealth, property, recreation? What brings you happiness? Can it be taken from you? Focus your life on Christ and no one will steal the joy in your life.

REVERE

You will become what you revere.

LET GO THE PAST

If you do not let go of the past you cannot excel in today. And, tomorrow is unattainable.

MORAL DECAY

(CULTURAL MORALS) – (CHRISTIAN MORALS) = PRIDE

Think about this one for a moment.

TUNING YOUR SPIRIT

Every conscience choice you make tunes your spirit. Are you tuning your spirit for good or evil, heaven or hell, everlasting life or death?

BODY SOUL SPIRIT

Your **body** is your existence in time.

Your **soul** is your existence in eternity.

Your **spirit** is your connection with God **and** Satan.

TOLERANCE

We are taught as Christians that tolerance is a good thing. BUT is this really true? You will never change behavior that is tolerated. It is true that tolerance is the foundation of any culture. But over liberalized tolerance breaks down cultural bonds. Tolerant liberalism is destroying the churches (fellowship gatherings) in America. ??? Why must our church morality keep pace with the moral decay of our society???

GOD'S PLAN FOR PAUL

The vast universe that charges through space like an unstoppable locomotive was designed and engineered by God, fueled by God, steered by God and loved by God. This brings up the question in my mind. If “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son”, why did God make Paul’s life so tough. Everywhere Paul went there were troublemakers. Paul was beaten, stoned, prosecuted and run out of town. Then one day while studying, it struck me, God must have had a plan! Paul was God’s messenger of the new covenant. This new covenant and the Gospel that defined it was the most radical thing to hit the universe since ADAM. Whether it be a closed-minded culture like Thessalonica or an open-minded culture such as Berea this new Gospel was sure to generate controversy. Then I saw a pattern and an extremely clever motive for this repeating scenario. Clearly evident in Paul’s second and third mission trips Paul boldly enters the community and assertively broadcasts this new Gospel. Paul preaches and teaches vigorously and becomes the focal point of extreme feelings good and bad. When things get to the breaking point Paul leaves. The object of all the hate and discontent are gone and the community calms down. And here is the beauty of the plan. Paul always leaves behind trusted disciples of Christ to continue teaching, instructing and guiding the new Church of Christ. In Philippi Luke stayed behind. Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea. In other cases, unnamed “Brothers” stayed behind and caught up later. These trusted Brothers in the faith could then continue in a much calmer environment. The focal point of the opposition, Paul, has been run out of town. All the malcontents were content in the fact that they ran the bad guy, Paul, out of town. In most cases the malcontents were more concerned about the town Paul had gone to and oblivious to what was continuing to grow in their own towns.

Being the focal point of persecution, I believe, was the true thorn in Paul’s side. But that is another ‘random thought’.

FAITH

Faith is not an ingredient of Christian life, it is everything. Do you feel that faith is something that you have been forced into? If you do it is imperative that you make a radical change in your life. If you have a church home, it is not working for you. Get active in your church or find a new one. If you do not have a church home then you really are not a Christian. Christianity is a FELLOWSHIP of believers in Jesus as our Christ. In either case I would suggest trying an Evangelical Covenant Church.

SYMBOLISM

All through the Bible there are symbolisms. The book of Revelation is 99.9% symbolism. God uses symbolism in part, I believe, to simplify across the ages, a thought or command. But in OUR wisdom, we try to elevate things to a higher plane and in doing so lose track of the simple meaning. Sometimes the meanings are obscured by translation errors or the fact that our language does not express in a word or phrase the idea God had inspired in the original writer. This is why it is so important to understand the age in which the Word was written, who wrote it and to whom it was written. There are those who will argue that all Word was written to all mankind for all times and this is true. BUT it was written by a person who was defined by the intellect and circumstances that person was living in, to be understood by people of his time. That is why God commanded parents to teach their children. Alas parents did not do this. There are many 200, 300 and 400 year gaps in the fellowship of man and God. In each of these lapses of devotion, meaning is lost and must be regained and redefined. With the aid of the Holy Spirit we can regain the lost meanings.

So on to the point. **The following is meant to be a point of meditation. It came to me as a random thought and is offered as an item of contemplation.** “THE MARK OF” is a good example of symbolism gone awry. See Ex 28:38, Rev 9:4, 13:16, 14:9, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4 and 22:3-5.

SYMBOLISM CONTINUED

POINT 1: The symbolism of “THE MARK OF” can be a good thing or a bad thing depending upon the source of the mark. What is the source of your MARKS?

POINT 2: What is this mark? Does God or the antichrist come down and brand, tattoo, or place a chip under the skin on your forehead or hand? No, I don’t think so.

POINT 2A: The mark of the forehead is what you believe, your faith, what is in your heart that directs your faith and belief system.

POINT 2B: The mark of the hand is your works. It is how you live your life. Who have you worshiped, how have you worshiped. Who have you aided, who have you mistreated?

In prejudgment times the true mark of the forehead is truly seen only by God. In the end times it will be clearly seen by all. The mark of the hand, on the other hand (pun intended) is there for all to see but, this mark can be somewhat faked. We can display to those around us a character we wish to project. But God always knows our true works. We will be rewarded or judged in line with our true forehead and hand MARKS.

SIGNIFICANCE

If God is involved in your life, your life is significant.

NO REGRETS

Set about to redeem your time so in the end you will not have to regret your time.

SUFFERING

Our suffering comes from; our own foolishness, our sin, living in a fallen world, following Christ or doing good. None comes from God. Understanding the source of our suffering is the first step to healing.

RAPTURE

All Christians understand what the word rapture means. The term sparks much debate and disagreement. Sooner or later in lay discussions someone will make the statement, “Well the word never appears in the Bible”. Well,, yes it does,, just not in **your** Bible. What is **your** Bible? Your Bible is a translation of Spirit driven scripture into your spoken language.

Before I get to the rest of the story we need a little history lesson. The roots and foundation of our Bible today was formed in the Christian Church of Rome. Its major development occurred from the 2 to the 5 centuries. It was written in what we now call OLD LATIN. Prior to 382AD it was referred to as the Vestus Latina Bible. This Vestus Latina document was not without discussions of accuracy. In 382AD Pope Damasus commissioned St. Jerome, a leading scholar in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, to do a careful and accurate translation of all the scriptures into Latin. St. Jerome accepted the challenge and set about the task. He completed only about 4 or 5 of the “books” of the Bible. He had a group of trusted scholars assisting him and they continued his work after his passing. This version of the Bible, written in “old Latin” is called the Vulgate Bible, and St. Jerome is generally credited with the entire work.

Ok that said, back to rapture, and yes, it is in the Bible. In the “old Latin” the word for the act of taking up appears in two forms, raptura (N) and raptus (V). The English language scholars love to “rapture” words from other languages. The French do also, in French raptus means to seize or kidnap. So that is the rest of the story. Rapture is there, you just have to read the old Latin version.

PHILADELPHIAN LOVE

Philadelphian love in the Christian sense is not an emotion. It is not state of feelings but a state of will. A state of will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have for others.

HOLDING BACK THE LAWLESS ONE

While doing a group study on 1 & 2 Thessalonians I had a minor epiphany¹. It came when I read 2 Thessalonians 2:7 *“For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.”*

Who is the one who holds back the lawless one? The Holy Spirit. Where is the Holy Spirit? In the spirit of every believer who has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So essentially every ‘born of the Holy Spirit’ believer is holding the lawless one in check. That’s correct I am holding him back, you are holding him back. I, we, have the power of God in our spirits. How does that thought make you feel?

Now let us tie things together. Paul goes on to say *“He will continue to do so till He is taken out of the way”*. As long as the Church exists on earth the Spirit dwells on earth. So, for the lawless one to be released to bring havoc to the earth the Church, that is, all “baptized of the Holy Spirit” must be removed. Does that sound like,,,, rapture?

Side Note. At the current rate of liberalization of the Gospel and growing rate of behavioral tolerance I can foresee a time when there will be no one left to rapture.

1) Epiphany. A sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.

OPPORTUNITIES

We are faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations. (Charles Swindoll)

PRAYER

Our words are important, our actions are important, but without prayer nothing is important.

The purpose of prayer is not to get things, but to get things started.

Prayer is a dialog not a monolog, remember to set aside time for listening

MARRIAGE

What a Pandora's box we have in the bond of marriage today. Civil laws say one thing (Every jurisdiction says it different.), religious doctrine says another (Every doctrine says it different.) and group culture says it yet another way (Here again cultures differ).

For now, I want to put aside all the cultic and cultural interpretations and concentrate on the Christian's views. I do not mean the church establishment views. I want to talk about the "believer's" views. For simplicities sake I will divide the views into two groups. There is the traditional group and there is the modern liberal group.

Let's discuss the traditional group first. This one is easy. You prove you meet the civil law requirements. You get a license. You affirm the requirements of your church. In a ceremony you vow to each other, your fellowship and God that you are now one. If these vows are ever set aside then there is the civil law that must be satisfied. A broken relationship with the Church and the Fellowship then follows. But most important the vow to God is broken. The fellowship with the Lord, so painstakingly developed over the years is damaged.

Then there is the Christian, modern liberal group. For one reason or another they have become disillusioned with the civil and religious laws and doctrines. Their vow is between each other and God. Don't get me wrong, this is a beautiful thing when it is authentic. But, understand this, they have made a vow with god and will live in his grace as long as they do not break that vow. Deep down there is the thought that if this does not work out they can go their separate way no harm done. Not so, a vow is a vow. Once the vow is broken they are no longer under **grace** but are subject to **law**. Gods law is very clear about broken vows. And, this is the point, it is not the separation or divorce that brings dishonor. It is the breaking of the vow with God. The fellowship with the Lord, so painstakingly developed over the years is damaged.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

The Gospel of Christ is not ours but Gods, mankind is the honored keeper and purveyor of the Gospel only by God's acquiescence.

WHO ARE YOU

If you belong to Christ then no other label such as Jew, Gentile, slave, free, old, young, male or female can describe, define or limit who you are.

My Christian walk

I started life in an Irish Catholic family. Attended Catholic school. Was an altar boy. At 23 I experienced conscience and doctrinal conflicts. From 23 to 55 I was a seeker. I joined and was active in Presbyterian, Baptist and several non-denominational churches. I thought I had finally found a home in a small non-denominational church. There I was introduced to small group bible study. Wow this was fantastic. I could finally ask questions and express thoughts in a non-antagonistic setting. Then came a shock. As we got deeper into study I soon realized the leaders of the church were deep into Gnosticism. So once again I was seeking, but now a little wiser. When I visited a church after that experience the first thing I asked to see was their doctrine statement. Sometime later I visited with the pastor of a new church plant in our area. I asked to see a copy of their doctrine. He said “We do not have a doctrine as such. The bible is our doctrine. What we do have is a set of affirmations.” (See the back of the front cover.) **I found a home.** That was 1998 and I have been on a joyful journey ever since.

**Reading the scripture is
good.**

**Memorizing scripture is
ok.**

**Understanding the
scripture and God's
message in it is
PARAMOUNT.**