

1. The Wheat and the Tares

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'" (Mt. 13:24-30)

This is Jesus' analogy about the kingdom of heaven with some special emphasis on how it will be at the end of the age. And if Jesus had left us with just this story, we would be free to conjecture as to what He really meant and we could insert whatever meaning and interpretation pleases us - as so many people in the "prophecy industry" are doing now with the endtimes prophecies. Fortunately for us, the disciples were curious about this particular parable and questioned Jesus specifically as to its true meaning. So, once Jesus begins to define the different elements of this story, we are no longer free to insert our own notions and interpretations. As soon as Jesus begins to label each element of His story, we are stuck with His interpretations, His definitions. However uncomfortable those definitions might become for some of us, it is the truth - the truth that we must face squarely or, just as did the rich young ruler when told he must forsake his wealth (Lk. 18:23), we must sorrowfully turn away from Jesus and walk off in our own direction, reaping the consequences of our refusal to be set free by the truth of Jesus Christ.

Here is Jesus' explanation of His story about the tares and the wheat:

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."

He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mt. 13:36-43)

While there are many things that we could focus on that would clearly demonstrate how modern evangelical Christian religion has missed many points in Jesus' teachings in this parable and its explanation, we are going to focus primarily on only one element of this parable. Jesus said, "the tares are the sons of the wicked one." (v. 38) This "wicked one," Jesus says, "is the devil." (v. 39) Throughout the remainder of the New Testament, there are only three passages that refer to sons or children of the devil. An examination of these passages reveals some dire truths that modern Christian religion has failed to convey to the vast crowds they seek to please with ear-tickling fables about Christ, God and life as it really is.

Let me first lay the foundation and then we will examine the specific stones that make up this foundation. Jesus said:

"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (Jn. 8:43-44,47)

Luke, the author of the book of Acts, records:

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:6-12)

The apostle John wrote:

Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice

righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 Jn. 3:1-12)

These are the three passages from the New Testament which speak of the sons or children of the devil. Let us carefully examine each passage and the elements that define who the children of the devil are with great care - lest our negligence cost us a great deal more than we are prepared to pay.

And as we examine these passages, let us keep in mind where we are going to find these "sons of the devil." They are going to be "in the kingdom." Jesus said, "The tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather *out of His kingdom* all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire." (Mt. 13:38-42 - emphasis added)

Let us be careful to note these things:

- tares and wheat are quite similar in outward appearance but only the wheat is a valued, usable grain
- the tares are sown among the wheat and the differences are most apparent when each reaches maturity
- if the tares were uprooted prematurely, the wheat would be damaged or lost so the tares are left closely intermingled with the wheat until they both reach maturity
- the tares are the sons of the devil while the wheat are the sons of the kingdom, the sons of God
- the harvest is at the end of the age, a time yet in the future
- the reapers are angels (not crusade evangelists nor guilt-driven door knockers zealous to bring in new converts or new "church" members)
- the tares are gathered out and burned prior to the harvest at the end of the age
- the angels gather out of Christ's kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness

The sons of the devil whom we will see described in great detail are, right now, existing side by side with genuine believers - and, in far too many instances, hold positions of leadership within the body of Christ! They use titles like pastor, worship leader, assistant pastor, senior pastor, elder, teacher, priest, father, deacon, apostle, prophet, evangelist, minister, reverend, and bishop - many of the very same words which God uses (with some important exceptions and additions) to describe the functions of leadership in the body of Christ. But what they all really have in common is that they are sons of the devil planted in close proximity to the body of Christ in the hopes that they will prevent the sons of the kingdom from reaching maturity and being harvested.

As we enter the end of the age, the characteristics of the previous age will be superseded by the characteristics of the coming age. So, while it is true that the angels will be the reapers and it is these heavenly beings who will ultimately do the final separation - it will not be this teaching or any actions of any man that causes either the separation or the harvest - the Lord is revealing and/or reminding us of these truths because now is the time when how we respond to these truths will clearly demonstrate to the angels whether we are wheat or we are tares.

2. Your Father the Devil

"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (Jn. 8:43-44,47)

Not Able to Listen to My Word

"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil..." (Jn. 8:43-44)

One of the first attributes we find of someone who is truly a son of the devil is that they are unable to hear the word of God. They may diligently study the Bible, know the words in it quite intimately and even be able to quote and teach what the Bible says. But they are like the Pharisees of whom Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (Jn. 5:39-40) The Pharisees, we should recall, were those who handed Christ, the One about whom all the Scriptures are written, over to the Roman governor and demanded His execution.

But what is the word of Christ? The writer of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12) Let us be careful to notice what it is not. The word of God is not a cold, hard fact. It is not the opposite of fiction. It is not a scientifically proven hypothesis. It is the living Person of Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn. 1:1)

One of modern Christian religion's greatest weaknesses is that men, through the processes of logic and reason, try to deduce from the Scriptures what the will of God might be. This is closely akin to asking a blind man to draw you a map or to describe a color but that does not stop many "pastors" and leaders from concocting their eloquent sermons in just this manner. Thus, these tares among the wheat will teach doctrines they have conjured up in their own minds - some times with the assistance of demons (1 Tim. 4:1) - and they will present them as "the word of God." No, no, a thousand times no!

It is not merely a question of reaching a mistaken conclusion. To teach or believe a false doctrine means that the teacher has been listening to the wrong spirit - either they listened to their own soul, which may have endured years of listening to someone else teach that false notion, or they have actually listened to a demon, a lying spirit. In either case, they have clearly demonstrated that they are unable to hear, to listen to and obey, the Word, the Person of the living Christ. Modern religion's dismissal of those who believe they hear God on a regular basis is only proof positive that modern religionists are the tares among the wheat. If you don't, can't or won't hear the word of the Lord yourself - but instead you require the "pastor's" sermons to be spiritually "fed" long past the time when you should have been feeding yourself and others too (Heb. 6:12) - then the word of the Lord says that you may be a son of the devil.

The Desires of Your Father

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do." (Jn. 8:44)

The person who is actually a son of the devil will desire to do whatever the devil desires. This will be manifested in two ways. First, he will seek to do whatever the devil desires him to do. John wrote, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." (1 Jn. 5:19) A son of the devil will be susceptible to the machinations and enticements of Satan and will be a pliable tool, a relatively helpless puppet, in his hands.

And just what are the desires of Satan? God described Satan to Isaiah and said, "For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." (Isa 14:12-14) A son of the devil, a tare sown among the wheat, will do whatever Satan bids him to do to further the devil's attempt to usurp the authority of God.

The second way a son of the devil, a tare among the wheat, will desire what his father wants is by imitation. He will display the same arrogance and rebelliousness that Satan displays toward God. He will seek to exalt his own seat of power and to build his own empire - in direct opposition or in the place of what God would do to establish His kingdom, a full-blown expression of the spirit of antichrist. Thus a "pastor," operating in the role of CEO (Chief Executive Officer), will build up his own "church" empire, practicing division by indoctrinating his followers to his own or to his denomination's notions and teachings, and surrounding himself with "yes men" who see nothing wrong with their CEO's unScriptural behaviors. Then they call this "a work of God" and demand that anyone who comes must agree with the "pastor" or leave!

Anyone who is a tool in the hands of Satan for this or any kind of divisiveness and destruction or who imitates the arrogance and rebellious nature of Satan is simply a son of Satan, a tare among the wheat. Such a one is not to be given the honor of being received as a leader in the body of Christ.

A Murderer from the Beginning

"He was a murderer from the beginning..." (Jn. 8:44)

The first murder recorded in the Bible is Cain's murder of Abel, right? So, is this a reference to Satan operating in Cain in an attempt to snuff out the human lineage of Abel from which Satan thought would come the One who was to crush Satan's head? (see Gen. 3:15) Actually the first murder in the Bible is *not* Cain's murder of Abel. And while it is indeed certain that Satan in some way prompted Abel's murder, that is not what Jesus is referring to here.

Genesis records, "And the Lord God commanded man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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.'" (Gen. 2:16-17) This was God's command - and warning. There was a consequence associated with disobedience.

Later, Genesis records, "And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Gen. 3:4-5) Here the serpent comes to the woman and deceives her. He convinces her that she can disobey God and escape the consequences. In truth, Satan has just committed murder using the weapon of deception for in that day, Adam and Eve did surely die. And this is really why he is referred to as "a murderer from the beginning."

However, we can also gain insight into other reasons why Satan is a murderer by examining Cain's motives - Cain being the first human murderer. In the third passage that describes the sons of the devil which we will be examining, the apostle John wrote, "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous." (1 Jn. 3:11-12) John also wrote in that passage, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 Jn. 3:15)

Jealousy which leads to hatred is another key sign of a son of the devil. May we not be so religious that we no longer see the simple truth of God's word.

Does Not Stand in the Truth

"He...does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him." (Jn. 8:44)

This seems so obvious that there seems no reason to comment on it - except perhaps to combat the rampant Biblical illiteracy which is in our society today. Following are a few passages which speak of light and truth. Comment seems unnecessary as the Scriptures speak so plainly. Let he who has ears, hear.

- "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 Jn. 4:1-6)
- "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (Jn. 3:19-21)
- "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:5-7)

Hearing the Lord, walking in the light of truth, being cleansed from all sin - these are the requisite characteristics of the children of God. Not being able to hear God or His true servants, avoiding the glaring light shining from a holy God, and remaining trapped or comfortable in a lifestyle of sin - these are the requisite characteristics of the children of Satan. One is either a child of God or a child of the devil. One can have no other father than one of these two.

From His Own Resources

"When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." (Jn. 8:44)

There is an important point to notice here: God did not create the devil with an evil nature. The evil that resides in the devil and that is loose in the world is something of the devil's own manufacture. Only someone who has rebelled against and departed from the source of all goodness and of life itself could produce the evil that is rampant in the world today - God is neither its source or author. The sinful nature, that nature which insists on rebellious independence from God, is the "creation" of the devil. So when he rebels against God, he draws from his own resources.

This is true of the human as well. Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mk. 7:21-23)

And Paul wrote, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to God, nor indeed can be." (Rom. 8:5-7)

The human who draws upon the powers and strength of his soul and sinful nature is imitating the devil and practicing enmity against God. We must never again neglect to see that there is no middle ground in this war between God and Satan. The person who continues to live only to please his own soulish and/or sinful pleasures is a tare among the wheat who will be uprooted before the harvest at the end of the age.

Not of God

"He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (Jn. 8:47)

We have no problem understanding that unbelievers are not able to hear God. But this statement goes much deeper than that. Modern "churches" are filled with people who haven't a clue what God is saying to His people at this time - some of whom are even able to actually agree that the modern "church" system is a construct of the devil! They can reason and guess at some of the truths of Scripture - just as did the Pharisees who crucified Christ - but they have no ability to hear what God is saying to them now.

This is primarily because the "church" has excluded the prophets - those whom God primarily gifts with the ability to hear Him. The "churches," and especially the "pastors" and leaders of these divisive sects we call "denominational churches," are quick to denounce anyone who speaks like a prophet, that is, one who condemns the fleshly works of men building their own "church" empires. They especially target anyone who actually receives the designation of prophet - no matter how many other people in the body of Christ have previously confirmed that person as a true prophet. As soon as a prophet speaks against their unScriptural practice, they will label him either a nut case or a false prophet and they point to their years of "church" service and leadership as a sure sign that they, and not this "self-proclaimed prophet," this "loose cannon," have God's approval. These actions of the "pastors" and leaders is precisely the divisiveness Paul commands us to avoid. (1 Cor. 11:19; Rom. 16:17)

John wrote, "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 Jn. 4:6) This verse is an easy one to take out of context. Anyone with a built-in "us and them" mentality will read this and say, "us," as if John the apostle, writing in the first century, intended to include 20th century readers in his usage of the word "us" - people whom he never met nor knew nor had any clue or idea what or how they, being from a vastly different culture, would think and do, nor that they would even exist. No, "us" is anyone who holds faithfully to the Person of Jesus Christ. Even holding to the teachings or practices of the New Testament is not enough. The "us" John the apostle has in mind is the apostles and prophets and the other disciples who held to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and proclaimed Him.

Those who are "of God" will listen to those who are truly holding to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be a recognition of the Spirit resident within them and there will be a recognition of the truth they speak. Those who are not of God but who are of the devil - even if they are the most respectable and faithful "church" members or "church" leaders - are unable to hear either God or those who speak for the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. These sons of the devil are of a different spirit, the spirit of this age, the god of this world who blinds men's minds to the truth. (2 Cor. 4:4)

Jesus spoke to the blindness of religiosity in His letter to the Laodiceans: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.'" (Rev. 3:17-19)

Being rebuked and having one's soul disciplined by the Lord is *the* sign that we are truly God's sons. (Heb. 12:5-11) Reliance on the strength and powers of the soul, characterized by a false and deceptive view of one's self, is *the* sign of lukewarm, compromising religiosity. Religiosity is *the* primary characteristic of a tare sown among the wheat, one destined to be uprooted and burned.

3. Elymas the Sorcerer

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:6-12)

To Turn Away from the Faith

"Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." (Acts 13:6-8)

In this passage, Paul singles out Elymas as a son of the devil. (Acts 13:10) One of the key reasons he described him as such was because of his efforts "to turn the proconsul away from the faith." We know that turning away from the faith is also a key element in the end times. Paul wrote:

- "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." (1 Tim. 4:1-3)
- "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was." (2 Tim. 3:1-9)
- "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Many who read these passages miss the obvious fact that this is not describing the world. It is describing the people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. But even those who recognize that the mainstream of Christianity will succumb to the efforts of the spirit of antichrist and fall away from the faith, even these fail to recognize the subtlety with which the spirit of antichrist works this deception.

It is to be noticed that the spirit of antichrist, the spirit of the devil, seeks to turn people away from "the faith." Many people who read that assume that "the faith" is simply a compilation of doctrines and beliefs that must be agreed with. This is precisely why many people believe themselves to be "Christians" and "believers" when they have never truly been spiritually born again. Or, if they have had a genuine born-again experience, they are kept in spiritual infancy because they are so busy learning this misconception of "the faith," their denomination's list of creeds and doctrines that divide them from other believers who hold to

slightly different creeds and doctrines. The end result is that they are effectively turned from the faith - all in the name of Jesus Christ!

"The faith" is that moment-by-moment life lived in obedience and trust in the Person of Christ Jesus through the promptings of the Holy Spirit of God. It is not the mental agreement with a certain divisive sect's list of ideas about God. It is a personal life lived in and by the Spirit of God - it is not a religious exercise of the powers of the soul independent of the commands and expectations of God. The religious exercising of the soul is the essence of the sin of unbelief, that doubt that God is able to sustain the life of the follower. To gain the soul at the expense of living the life of the Spirit *is* the sin of unbelief - it deftly shows that you have no trust in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to preserve your life.

Unbelief is not a refusal to subscribe to some list of doctrinal creeds. Unbelief is the actions of a person who has succumbed to the efforts of the spirit of antichrist and been turned away from "the faith," that moment-by-moment resting and trusting in Jesus Christ that produces prompt obedience. Believing is not a once in a lifetime kind of thing - like saying a "sinner's prayer" or answering an "altar call" - as most people perceive to be the criteria as to whether or not they are a believer. Believing is an ongoing, moment-by-moment surrender to the promptings of the Holy Spirit of God. A person who has no ability to lay down his or her own life at the command of Christ is living in unbelief. The one who refuses to repent and forsake his unbelief is in great danger of being only a tare among the wheat.

Filled with the Holy Spirit

"Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said..." (Acts 13:9-10)

When Paul called Elymas "a son of the devil" (Acts 13:10), he was not speaking on his own. He was "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he made this statement. With complete discernment from the Holy Spirit, Paul recognized Elymas as a son of the devil and, by the promptings of the same Spirit, publicly denounced, rebuked and even cursed Elymas with blindness. The modern clergy of today and their blind followers will use slander and gossip to oppose those who speak against their unScriptural practices - and quite a number of people will believe them even though they are mistaken in their judgments. But woe to the man whom *the Holy Spirit* denounces and declares to be a son of the devil.

Full of All Deceit and All Fraud

"O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil..." (Acts 13:10)

Elymas was a Jewish sorcerer, a spiritual man capable of performing wondrous acts of power. Elymas was quite acceptable in the upper crust of Cyprian society - and his services were greatly desirable to the Roman proconsul. He was a man who had arrived in life. In the context of North American evangelicalism, Elymas would have made a great charismatic television preacher/showman. Religious people who claim to be Christians are especially good at putting on a good front, of giving a good show. This is nothing new - and Elymas is by no means the first.

Jesus said to the Pharisees of His day, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your father's guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Mt. 23:25,27-33)

"Church" goers today read this passage and, having failed to apply it first to themselves, are nearly incapable of seeing how closely parallel their own religious habits are to those of the Pharisees. Jesus said, "you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of extortion and self-indulgence. ...you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Mt. 23:25,27) Modern "church" goers will dress up, gather on Sunday morning to listen to a sermon, feel guilty about something from the message and resolve to do better, go home and come back next week to do it all again while they continue to live as they please, as they have always lived, throughout the rest of the week. They look the part on Sundays but their religious form of godliness lacks the power to make them truly righteous in God's eyes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And their soulish expression of the Christian faith does nothing to bring them into regular, close, personal contact with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Jesus also said, "...you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'" (Mt. 23:29-30) This is precisely what nearly every modern "church" is - a monument to some man who opposed what he perceived to be an error in the teachings of some previous group of believers. And if the man or his ideas were popular enough, the monument crystalized into a denomination. And now those who regularly attend this denomination, especially those in distinctively "non-denominational" denominations, loudly proclaim their allegiance to their denominational roots, inextricably linking their founders, at least in their own minds, to the prophets and righteous men of the Bible. And yet, when someone comes along and calls their founders' and leaders' unScriptural notions and practices to account, they will be just as quick to crucify this one as were the Pharisees who condemned Jesus.

Jesus then said to these religious hypocrites, "Fill up, then, the measure of your father's guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Mt. 23:32-33) Those who find these statements "harsh and unloving" have failed to see the irony contained within them. Standing before these Pharisees being so "harshly" rebuked was the very One to whom they could turn to for forgiveness so that they might indeed escape the condemnation of hell! But their arrogant pride and religious blindness

kept them from seeing Christ as their Savior - instead He was just another competitor for the attentions and support of the people. So too today. A prophet holds forth the truth of Jesus Christ and calls for repentance but the religious "church" goer is offended by his "harsh and unloving" presentation of the truth that says we cannot remain religiously hypocritical and escape the condemnation of hell. The religious "church" goer is so filled with arrogant pride and religious blindness that he is often filled with rage and will make every effort to stone the messenger who dared to intrude upon his religious rights and freedoms to bring him this "supposed message from God."

These tares among the wheat will be uprooted and burned before the harvest at the end of the age.

Enemy of All Righteousness

"You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness" (Acts 13:10)

To recognize what an enemy of all righteousness is, it would be helpful if we were certain what righteousness really is. The Amplified version gives, as its rendition of the word "righteousness," the phrase "right living and right standing with God." That's good as far as it goes. But for those who want a practical way to approach and understand this word, we need a little more. And actually, this word has a very simple, very practical meaning. Genesis records, "And [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6) Paul quoted this passage in his letter to the Romans. Paul wrote, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Rom. 4:3)

This is another instance where, like when we read above about "the faith," we read "righteousness" and we assume that to be some list of rules and regulations which we are expected to uphold. But, as we can see from Abraham's experience and the revelation Paul received about Abraham's example, righteousness is what God accounts to the person who believes Him. Jesus said it bluntly, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jn. 6:29) The work we are to do in relation to God is to believe Him - the work He does in relation to us is to account it to us as righteousness. It is not up to us to determine *what* we are going to believe. Once we have made a commitment to receive Christ, our only option is *whether or not* we will believe. Yes, we must be careful to make sure what we are hearing and reading is the full counsel of God on the matter. But once we are sure we have received the instruction in full from God, our only choice is to believe and obey or disbelieve and disobey. There are no other options.

True righteousness is not just a personal, independent function in a believer's life. It is also an essential element in the corporate expression of Christ in His body. Paul wrote, "The kingdom of God...is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) When we are walking in that moment-by-moment life in the Holy Spirit, truly believing God and obeying Him moment by moment, then we will experience the righteousness, peace and joy of God's kingdom. If we continue to soulishly strive to adhere to some external or denominational notion of things to do and not do, we will experience the confusion and every evil thing that come because envy and self-seeking are an integral part of the soul and sinful nature. (Jas. 3:16)

This is why Satan opposes all genuine righteousness by deceiving us to live in soulish or self-righteousness - those acts we can do in our own strength, by our will, by our own design. We can be as gods knowing good and evil when we walk in self-righteousness. And this is the carrot by which Satan lures people to live in error. Any religion that requires you to utilize the power of your soul - that is, your mind, will and emotions - *at the expense of* that moment-by-moment, obedient relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit is a counterfeit which will rob you of your inheritance in the kingdom.

Those religious people who have nothing to do with Christ or the Holy Spirit are living in self-righteousness and, as such, are the tares sown among the wheat, the tools of the devil to keep the genuine wheat, the true believers, from reaching maturity. These tares will be uprooted from the kingdom and burned before the harvest at the end of the age.

Perverting the Straight Ways of the Lord

"you son of the devil, ...will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10)

This is an echo of John the Baptist's message. Matthew records, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.'" (Mt. 3:1- 3) The keynote of John the Baptist's message was twofold. First, the kingdom of heaven was near - that is, the King was approaching and giving the people the opportunity to be His subjects in His kingdom. And second, the way of this King would be characterized by straightness.

When we read that in English, we often lose the full meaning of that Greek word. The word in Greek is "euthus" [Strong's No. 2117] and it has three connotations. The first is what we could call the geometric aspect - that is, "straight" and "level," without curves or angles. The second is what we could call the moral aspect - that is, "straightforward, upright, true, sincere," without guile or deception. But the third that is often overlooked is what we could call the temporal aspect of this word - that is, "straightway, immediately, forthwith," an urgency and immediacy, without delay.

From this complete recognition of the full meaning in the Greek, we can see that a straight path for the Lord would contain three elements - simplicity, sincerity and immediacy. That is, while His commands may be difficult in the sense that it causes us to reject our own desires, His commands will be simple and straightforward. There will not be the theological subterfuge and weaving of "doctrinal" threads that is so common from the pulpit. In addition to the simplicity and straightforwardness, there will be the righteous requirements of God. And in addition to the simplicity, straightforwardness and righteous requirements, there will also be a timing. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Heb. 3:15)

We should consider again John the Baptist's message for it was the message that prepared the people to receive the Messiah. His call was for the people who would hear to make straight paths for the Lord - not for the Lord to make a straight path to the people. It is the responsibility of those who hear to keep the relationship to God simple, to keep that relationship straightforward, to keep

to the path of righteousness (through obedience and confession of disobedience), and to keep all this current. Yesterday's manna has rotted and is full of worms. That is, the bread of life that comes down from Heaven, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not available to us yesterday. For us, confined to a temporal, linear existence, that is a contradiction in tenses. He *was* available to us yesterday and He *will be* available to us tomorrow (once we get there in time), but He is only available to us *right now* through His Holy Spirit who dwells within us. If we will not communicate with Him now, when are we going to communicate with Him?

The devil attempts to pervert the straight ways of the Lord in all three aspects. If he can deceive us into over-complicating the simple and straightforward truths of God's word, then he has succeeded in perverting the straight path of the Lord. If the devil can deceive or lure us into unrighteous or deceitful actions - anything from blatant fraud and theft to putting on social masks and robbing one another of the gifts that God would give us through one another - then he has succeeded in perverting the straight path of the Lord. And if the devil can divert our attention away from the Lord *right now*, he has also succeeded in perverting the straight way of the Lord.

The straight way of the Lord is not just a list of religious requirements and creeds. It is a clear, a certain, a constant and an instant path between the King and His subjects - both in an individual capacity and a corporate capacity. Anyone who does not have a straight path to and for the Lord and who attempts to distort the straight paths of the Lord in others is a tare sown among the wheat, a son of the devil destined to be removed and cast into the fire before the harvest at the end of the age.

4. The Children of the Devil

Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. (1 Jn. 3:1-8)

Children of God

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:1-2)

We have so often read that we, as believers, are the children of God that we have become jaded to the full truth of what that means. Paul wrote, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." (Rom. 8:14-17)

If we are to claim our heritage as the sons of God - and truly live that and not just make false claims - we must be led by the Spirit of God. It is that Holy Spirit who enables us to cry out with joy and adoration, "Abba, Father, Daddy!" And this is not a one-time occurrence. We must have that moment-by-moment life with the Lord through the Holy Spirit. And this is not just a "He says, we do" kind of thing. The workings of the Holy Spirit affect us on every level - spiritual, soulical and physical. The spiritual level may manifest as either a straightforward command to be transmitted directly through our spirit to our soul (the mind, will and emotions) or it might manifest as something that more resembles an instinctual desire or urgent compulsion to do a certain action. But whichever way the leading of the Holy Spirit manifests, it is a command which, when analyzed, will conform to the parameters God has laid out in the Scriptures. There is no room here for someone to claim that the Holy Spirit led them into a rash or unrighteous action. It will not happen. When the Holy Spirit leads, He leads towards righteousness, peace and joy. He establishes the kingdom of God in our lives. (Rom. 14:17)

It is essential that we understand this basic description of the kingdom of God: it *is* righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And this is the heritage that we will progressively embrace if we are true children of God, truly "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." If our lives are not characterized by genuine righteousness (believing and obeying God), peace (resting in God) and joy (knowing we cannot be diverted from God's path by any outside force), then we can know with certainty that we have embraced a religious alternative and have somehow missed the genuine kingdom of God.

It is also important to note that, if we are truly God's children, we shall be like Christ. (1 Jn. 3:2) The passage we just read from Paul's letter to the Romans confirms this by saying, "We are children of God...if indeed we suffer with Him..." (Rom. 8:16,17) Christ *learned* to be obedient by the things He suffered. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (Heb. 5:8) If we will not suffer the discipline of God - not referring to the "church abuse" foisted upon so many by those religious leaders who are truly sons of the devil masquerading as leaders of the people of God (though God can and will make use of that too) but referring to that correction and persistent training that truly conforms us to the likeness of Christ that genuinely comes from God's hand - if we will not endure that, then we are embracing a religious alternative to the kingdom of God.

Those who are not willing to suffer through the things which teach obedience to God are not the children of God. Those who are not the children of God are the children of the devil and they will be removed from the kingdom of Christ before the harvest at the

end of the age. They will be taken to a place where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth and a fire into which they will be cast to be burned.

Hope

"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 Jn. 3:3)

"This hope" is the hope "that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.." (1 Jn. 3:2) Again we see that "family resemblance" is at the heart of what God is doing. If there is no family resemblance to Christ in our lives - and this is measured in terms of righteousness, peace and joy and not in terms of self-righteousness, strife and religiosity - then there is no family tie. It is that simple.

The essential element of the genuine believer's life that is exposed here is hope. If this hope is present in an individual's life, that individual will purify him or herself from all impurities of this world. This is also the only religion the Scriptures says is acceptable to God. James wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (Jas. 1:27) And while we can do all these things outwardly to some degree, we must remember that God looks at the heart.

What we really do not understand is just what the world is. John wrote, "For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 Jn. 2:16) *All* that is in the world - not most or some or even a little - *all* that is in the world is not of the Father and all of that *is* contained and concealed within the human heart. (Mt. 15:18-20) John describes just what is of the world in terms of lust and pride. The lust of the flesh is the desires of the sinful nature - whatever is sinful or wicked. The lust of the eyes is the desires of the self-life - whatever pleases "me" or makes "me" feel good independently of God. And the pride of life is the assertion of ourself to primary importance and status - doing whatever it takes to be or feel superior to all others in our life.

All of these things are what the person who genuinely hopes in God will seek to remove from his or her life. If a person is not interested in being free of all the impurities of the world in their own life and personhood, they have only embraced a religious alternative to the genuine life in Christ. A person who is content to be even a little worldly is simply a religious person, a tare sown among the wheat by Satan in his attempt to prevent some genuine wheat from maturing and being harvested to the benefit of the Master.

Lawlessness

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4)

Lawlessness is not the absence of law. Rather it is the absence of a righteous standard. Thus one could have, as does this nation, multitudes of laws - but yet it is legal, and therefore "right," to murder innocent children and call it "abortion" and "right to privacy." It could be legal, and therefore "right," for homosexuals to flagrantly and openly practice their rebellion against God and call it "alternative lifestyle." It would be legal, and therefore "right," for the leaders of this nation to lie, cheat and steal, doing whatever they can get away with to remain in power and call it "politics." This is the essence of lawlessness - the complete absence of a moral and righteous standard even within the framework of a legal system. Lawlessness is best summed up in the description of the Israelites at the end of the time of the judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Jdgs. 21:25)

It is lawlessness, the absence of a righteous standard, that will characterize the end times. Paul wrote, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Ths. 2:3-4,9-12)

Jesus was asked, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation; and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Mt. 24:3-14)

There is much in all this which we could examine but it would derail us from the study of the true nature of the sons of the devil. Suffice it to say that lawlessness, the absence of a righteous standard, is the order of the day and that it can cause us to cease laying down our lives for those around us. I believe those most in danger of having their love grow cold are those who perform their acts of service from a sense of religious duty. They may be genuinely born again and even have a genuine love from God for the particular people they serve. But when lawlessness abounds, the multitude of people who need to be served with their particular gifting and talents, as well as the magnitude and depth of these people's needs, will also be proportionally increased. Those who rely on their soul's strength to love and serve will find themselves overwhelmed and their love will grow cold.

Only those who have that moment-by-moment life with Christ will be able to remain fervent in their love for fallen humanity. First, they will recognize that not every need can or should be met. Jesus did not meet every need nor heal everyone around Him -

nor will those who truly follow after God. God is not interested in having us perform generic good works that glorify only the person doing them. No, He has prepared, before the worlds were created, good works for us to do that will bring Him glory. (Eph. 2:8-10)

If we would be a wheat that matures and is ready for the harvest at the end of the age, we must neither practice lawlessness nor succumb to its numbing effects by becoming unconcerned about the victims of lawlessness. We must simply remain in Christ, seeking His will and His plan for our lives.

In Him There Is No Sin

"And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 Jn. 3:5)

In recognizing the purpose of the enemy, it is always good to recognize the plan and purpose which he opposes. According to this passage, one of the reasons God was manifested in the Person of Christ Jesus was to take away our sins. Those who might think this verse means *only* that after we die and are resurrected, that all our sins are somehow magically dispersed out of our lives, have really distorted the Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another - He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Heb. 9:24-28) While there is much that we could glean from this passage, let us at least see that the sacrifice of Christ, a better sacrifice by far than that of bulls and goats, was the price "to put away sin." And as certain as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this death, they will face judgment, so too is it certain that Christ was sacrificed only once to bear the sins of many. Later, He will appear a second time, *apart from sin*. Let us not miss the fact that Christ and sin are not to be mixed together!

Sins, as we will see later in this study, are clearly defined throughout the Scriptures. And everyone has committed one sin or another. This alone qualifies us for an eternal destiny in hell. The good news, however, is that if we will submit to Christ's purpose to progressively remove sin from our lives while we are yet alive, we will remain with Him for eternity instead. And the good news does not end with only a promise for the hereafter. No, we are given great and precious promises pertaining to *all* of life and godliness. (2 Pet. 1:3-4) And these promises are not given by a distant, uninvolved, insensitive generic "God." No! The writer of Hebrews tells us, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

The forsaking of all sin is part and parcel of the life of a genuine believer. Paul said that the seal that is written on the solid foundation of God had two sentences. Paul wrote, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'" (2 Tim. 2:19) Departing from all iniquity is a foundational and integral part of every genuine believer's life. Make no mistake about that for, if you find that you will not forsake any and all sin, you are not His. You belong to another, the devil, the adversary of God, and you will suffer the same consequences and judgment he will suffer.

Abiding in Him

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 Jn. 3:6-7)

Jesus said to His disciples shortly before He was crucified, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (Jn. 15:4-10)

Explanation, to this overly-intellectual (soulish) generation, is almost more harmful than good. We may never fully understand what it means to abide in Christ though we will come to know what abiding in Him is like if we will just do it. Abide, remain in, stay with - Him, the Lord Christ Jesus. Take every thought captive to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5) Confess every sin and every failure to obey Him. (1 Jn. 1:9) Remain in His love. (Jn. 15:10) If you don't abide in Him, you cannot practice righteousness - that is, believing and obeying God - you are simply not capable of it in your own strength and resources. Do not be deceived, anyone who does not abide in Him is not His.

He Who Sins

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning." (1 Jn. 3:8)

Seems plain enough to me - when you recognize that John is referring to a habitual lifestyle that includes some sin. Interestingly, the New Testament only has a few places that speak plainly about what sin is. We will look at a list of sins, "the works of the flesh," (Gal. 5:19-21) in some detail in just a moment. But aside from that list (which is echoed in part in other places in the New Testament), there are only a very few "definitions" of what "sin" is. Yet we see the word "sin" used often. "How often should my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" (Mt. 18:21) and "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46), as but two examples out of dozens, seem to indicate that knowing what sin is, especially in others, is not a difficulty for most human beings. But while knowing what sin is may not be difficult for the human, it would seem that confessing that sin, especially to the one or One sinned against, is virtually an impossibility for fallen human nature.

But just so that there is no question as to what sin is, the New Testament does have some "definitions" by which we can recognize sin. Paul wrote, "...whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23) James wrote, "...to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." (Jas. 4:17) And John wrote, "All unrighteousness is sin..." (1 Jn. 5:17) These three statements would seem to give us a fairly conclusive view of just what sin is. Anything done apart from a belief that this is what God would have you do, anything not done when it is known that this is what should be done and anything that is not consistent with the righteous standard of God is sin. And anyone who practices any sin on an ongoing, habitual basis - no matter their social or religious standing in the community or in the "church" - is a son of the devil, a tare among the wheat.

5. Sin - the Work of the Flesh

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21)

Now, let's get down to it. This list of sins, if one is a consistent characteristic that dominates your life and there is no remorse for or repentance of this sin, this will qualify you as a tare among the wheat. When we read this list, often because a word is unfamiliar or completely unknown to us, we think it has no meaning whatsoever. And it would seem that we are often quite content to remain in ignorance about the exact meaning of each of these sins for, if we don't know, then surely we're not guilty or at least not accountable. But as we examine these words individually, we are quite likely to find that, not only do these words have a very specific meaning, we are often, both as individuals and as a corporate group, quite guilty of practicing many of these things.

Interestingly enough, these words are not used very often - and they are often used together. In each following section, every usage of each word in the New Testament is given (except for its appearance in the above list from Galatians). When another word from this list or when a closely related word appears in the same passage, it will be emphasized as well to make readily apparent the connectedness of these words, these actions, these sins. The numbers in brackets [] are the Strong's numbering system to make it easier for you to do your homework by checking these things out for yourself. (Acts 17:11) Definitions in quotes are also taken from the Strong's Greek Dictionary.

But as we examine these words, let us remember that this is not an academic exercise. Let us remember that he who commits any of these things on a regular, ongoing basis with no remorse or repentance - even if that might apply to ourselves - this person is a son of the devil, a tare sown among the wheat for the express purpose of preventing a true son of God from becoming a mature wheat ready for harvest. The one who refuses to repent of any of these sins will be removed from the kingdom of God and taken out and burned. If you read this and are convicted by the Holy Spirit that you are guilty of any of these, by all means, repent! Confess your sin(s) to God that you may be cleansed. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Heb. 3:15)

Adultery

The Greek word used here is "moicheia" [3430]. This word appears only 4 times in the New Testament. And every time, it means a married individual engaging in extra-marital sexual relations. Here are the three other usages:

- "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, *murders* [5408], *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..." (Mt. 15:19-20) Adultery proceeds out of the heart along with all the other evils which defile a man.
- "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], *murders* [5408], thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness [766], an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mk. 7:21-23) Again, adultery comes from within and defiles a man.
- "Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in *adultery* [3430]. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in *adultery*, [3431] in the very act." (Jn. 8:3-4) Okay. So where's the other partner if *she* was caught in the act? Why'd they let the guy go? This is legalistic religious hypocrisy in action. What is wrong for one isn't so bad for another.

Fornication

The Greek word here is "porneia" [4202] and it simply refers to any sexual act with anyone other than your marriage partner. This word is used 26 times in the New Testament:

- "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except *sexual immorality* [4202] causes her to commit adultery [3429]; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery [3429]." (Mt. 5:32) Two sins for the price of one.
- "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, *murders* [5408], *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..." (Mt. 15:19-20) Fornication also proceeds out of the heart along with all the other evils which defile a man.
- "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for *sexual immorality* [4202] and marries another, commits adultery [3429]; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery [3429]." (Mt. 19:9)

- "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, *adulteries* [3430], **fornications** [4202], *murders* [5408], thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, *licentiousness* [766], an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mk. 7:21-23)
- [Jesus said,] "You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of **fornication** [4202]; we have one Father - God." (Jn. 8:41) Oh, that's rich! The Pharisees (probably the same ones from the beginning of the chapter who brought the woman caught in adultery but not the man) accuse Jesus' mother of fornication and then claim that God is their Father! When the truth is, Mary did not commit fornication and God *was* Jesus' Father. The religious liars always get things exactly backwards and apply descriptions onto others that are true of themselves.
- James the brother of Jesus said, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from **sexual immorality** [4202], from things strangled, and from blood." (Acts 15:20) Keep it simple, keep it pure is the message.
- The Jerusalem assembly would then write, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from **sexual immorality** [4202]. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:28- 29)
- Upon Paul's return to Jerusalem, James and the elders reassured him, "But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from **sexual immorality** [4202]." (Acts 21:25)
- "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, **sexual immorality** [4202], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; *full of envy* [5355], *murder* [5408], *strife* [2054], deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:28-32) Another list of sinful actions and attitudes. Notice how this list begins with simply forgetting about God and His righteous requirements.
- "It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality** [4202] among you, and such **sexual immorality** [4202] as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!" (1 Cor. 5:1) Gross sexual immorality earned Paul's stern rebuke.
- "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy it and them. Now the body is not for **sexual immorality** [4202] but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." (1 Cor. 6:13) We are not our own - we have been bought with a price. Sexual immorality is not an option for the genuine believer.
- "Flee **sexual immorality** [4202]. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." (1 Cor. 6:18) Run from it as if your life depended upon staying away from this sin. It does.
- "Nevertheless, because of **sexual immorality** [4202], let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." (1 Cor. 7:2) Marriage is the cure for this sin.
- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the *uncleanness* [167], **fornication** [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) This is a list we will see often in this study. Paul is writing to the people he rebuked for their many sins. And he is afraid they will not have repented of them and he will have to rebuke them again in person.
- "But **fornication** [4202] and all *uncleanness* [167] or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them." (Eph. 5:3-7) Don't be deceived. You can't commit this sin in a regular and ongoing basis and be a genuine believer. You are only making yourself a son of disobedience who will receive the wrath of God.

- "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: **fornication** [4202], **uncleanness** [167], passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is *idolatry* [1495]." (Col. 3:5) Kill this sin. Do not toy with it.
- "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from **sexual immorality** [4202]" (1 Ths. 4:3) Wondering what God's will for your life is? Sexual purity. This is a no-brainer.
- "And I gave her time to repent of her **sexual immorality** [4202], and she did not repent." (Rev. 2:21) The reference is to a false prophetess, Jezebel, who was leading many astray through this sin.
- "And they did not repent of their *murders* [5408] or their *sorceries* [5331] or their **sexual immorality** [4202] or their thefts." (Rev. 9:21) Mankind, what is left after witnessing and experiencing many plagues and judgments, still refuses to repent.
- "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the *wrath* [2372] of her **fornication** [4202]." (Rev. 14:8) All nations have partaken of Mystery Religion's fornication, the worship of a god other than the true God, and all will drink of the cup of God's wrath because of that.
- "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her **fornication** [4202]." (Rev. 17:1-2) The inhabitants of the earth will be intoxicated, made giddy and impaired in their ability to recognize reality, by the practice of idolatry, spiritual fornication.
- "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her **fornication** [4202]." (Rev. 17:4) Spiritual fornication is considered by God to be filthy and abominable.
- "For all the nations have drunk the wine of the *wrath* [2372] of her **fornication** [4202], the kings of the earth have committed *fornication* [4203] with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." (Rev. 18:3)
- "For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her **fornication** [4202]; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." (Rev. 19:2) One day, true righteousness will reign and all the wickedness of this harlot, the religious spirit, will be avenged.

Uncleanness

The Greek word here is "akatharsia" [167] and it means to be "unclean, dirty." In its moral sense, it carries the idea of "the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living." It is comprised of two words: "a" (the negative, "to negate") and "kathairo" [2508]. "Kathairo" is the word from which we derive "catharsis" and it means "to cleanse of filth and impurity." In an interesting sidenote, "kathairo" is the word that Jesus uses when He speaks of pruning trees and vines of useless shoots that bear no fruit. (Jn. 15:2) When used metaphorically, "kathairo" means "to cleanse from guilt, to expiate." To be unclean, then, is to refuse to be cleansed. It is a persistence in being dirty.

- "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all **uncleanness** [167]." (Mt. 23:27) You just can't judge a book by its cover. It requires patient observance and the discernment the Holy Spirit gives to know what's really on the inside of a person. And since evil is truly inside every man because of the fall, the difference between a wheat and a tare would be the question of which nature rules, the Spirit of God or the sinful nature, the nature of the devil.
- "Therefore God also gave them up to **uncleanness** [167], in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 1:24-25) Only God can keep a human from obeying the sinful nature. Part of His judgments against an individual and a people is to give them up to the evil that is resident within themselves.
- "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of **uncleanness** [167], and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness." (Rom. 6:19) We were once slaves of filthy living - now, with the same gusto, pursue righteousness and holiness, for without righteousness and holiness, you won't see or know God. (Heb. 12:14)
- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for

many who have sinned before and have not repented of the **uncleanness** [167], *fornication* [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) Paul did not want to have to confront, in the assembly of the Corinthians whom he loved and spiritually fathered, persons who were unrepentant in their filthy living.

- "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to *licentiousness* [766], to work all **uncleanness** [167] with greediness." (Eph. 4:17-19) The Gentiles, those people who do not adhere to the One True God, not only live in filthiness but plunge into it with enthusiasm. We are not to live in the way that draws men into that lifestyle.
- "But *fornication* [4202] and all **uncleanness** [167] or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no *fornicator* [4205], *unclean person* [169], nor covetous man, who is an *idolater* [1496], has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Eph. 5:3-5) Uncleanness is not only inappropriate for believers, it will cost you your place in the kingdom.
- "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: *fornication* [4202], **uncleanness** [167], passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is *idolatry* [1495]." (Col. 3:5) Kill it. Put it to death. Do not compromise by leaving it alive and bringing it out whenever you wish to play with it. Put it to death or it might just kill you.
- "For our exhortation did not come from deceit or **uncleanness** [167], nor was it in guile." (1 Ths. 2:3) The message of the Lord is pure.
- "For God did not call us to **uncleanness** [167], but in holiness." (1 Ths. 4:7) Have you been wondering what God's call on your life is? Holiness. This is also a no-brainer.

Licentiousness

The Greek word used here is "aselgeia" [766] and it means "unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence." In essence, it is the extremity of the sinful nature, a greed for sin and sinful living.

- "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], murders [5408], thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, **licentiousness** [766], an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mk. 7:21-23) This greed for sin is also part of the resident evil within. Only Christ is able to remove its stain from our hearts.
- "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in *revelry* [2970] and *drunkenness* [3178], not in **licentiousness** [766] and lewdness, not in *strife* [2054] and *envy* [2205]." (Rom. 13:13) Gratifying this greed for sin is not acceptable practice for a true believer.
- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the **uncleanness** [167], *fornication* [4202], and **licentiousness** [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) Paul is not interested in confronting supposed believers who live only to gratify every whim of their sinful nature. He would rather they repent now.
- "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to **licentiousness** [766], to work all **uncleanness** [167] with greediness." (Eph. 4:17-19) The people who do not know God gratify every whim of their sinful nature - we are to no longer live in that way.
- "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in **licentiousness** [766], lusts, drunkenness, *revelries* [2970], drinking parties, and abominable *idolatries* [1495]." (1 Pet. 4:3) We've wasted enough time gratifying every whim of the sinful nature. Now it is time to pursue God in purity, holiness and righteousness.
- "[God turned] the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the **filthy** [766] conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)." (2 Pet. 2:6-8) The filthy lifestyle of God-less people is oppressive to genuine saints. If you

can be in the world and not be bothered by the rampant sin around you, perhaps you are overdue for a long heart-to-heart talk with your heavenly Father.

- "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through *licentiousness* [766], the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error." (2 Pet. 2:18) The context here is false teachers in the last days that use flattery, words that convey any inflated notion about the listener that is inconsistent with reality. Even the presentation of an intellectual gospel to those who are too lazy to study the word for themselves is a form of flattery because it makes the hearers think they are Christians in good standing with God because now they know (at least *they* think they do) what the Bible says since someone has explained it to them in a way that did not make them feel convicted (though most of these would-be saints would prefer to use the word "condemned" here). These false teachers use flattery to stir up their listeners' greed for sinful living to gain followers for themselves or their own ego-gratification. And the chief way they stir up this greed for sinful living, that is, any life independent of God, is to call for improved moral living, all accomplished by the power of the soul. This is how those escaping misbeliefs and false doctrines are lured away from a true life in the Spirit of God.
- "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into *licentiousness* [766] and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude 4) Jude is also warning about false teachers at the end of the age. These men will pervert the grace - the power of God to cause you to become what He knows you to be - into a willful expression of the sinful nature to become all that *you* want to be. This is the essence of the New Age gospel - the exaltation of man completely independent of God. But a true believer is still completely reliant and dependent upon God.

Idolatry

The Greek word used here is "eidololatreia" [1495] and it refers to "the worship of false gods, idolatry." It refers to the formal sacrificial feasts held in honor of false gods and it refers to the practice of having anything as a higher priority than obeying and following God. The clearest example of this latter form of idolatry is the greedy love of money which is referred to as the worship of the god Mammon. When this word is used in the plural, it refers to any and all of the vices that come from practicing idolatry. An obvious example from the Scriptures is the practice of sexual immorality that often accompanied the worship of false gods.

- "Therefore, my beloved, flee from *idolatry* [1495]." (1 Cor. 10:14) Run, do not walk to the nearest exit! Run as if your life depends on your being free from idolatry because it does.
- "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: *fornication* [4202], *uncleanness* [167], passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is *idolatry* [1495]. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them." (Col. 3:5-7) Having anything as a greater priority than your life with God is something that is to be put to death. It is not to be tolerated in small doses. It is not negotiable. It must die.
- "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in *licentiousness* [766], lusts, drunkenness, *revelries* [2970], drinking parties, and abominable *idolatries* [1495]." (1 Pet. 4:3) We've wasted enough time worshipping false gods and committing all the abominable practices that come with that - let us now turn to the true God and worship Him in purity and truth.

Sorcery

The Greek word used here is "pharmakeia" [5331] and it refers to "the use or the administering of drugs or poison, sorcery and magical arts." It is often found in connection with idolatry and, when used metaphorically, it refers also to the deceptions and seductions of idolatry. It is the reliance upon drugs to perform miracles of healing or power rather than trusting God to work. As we are believers living in this world but not being of this world, the system of medicine competes against God's provision of divine health for our faith. It is when our faith rests in the medicines and powers of drugs that our faith is displaced from God. God may and has healed people through medicines - but as we mature our faith needs to be in God, not the powers of medicines and drugs.

- "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their *murders* [5408] or their *sorceries* [5331] or their *sexual immorality* [4202] or their thefts." (Rev. 9:20-21) Again, men have seen plagues and judgments but still have no heart to repent of their sins - in this case, their reliance upon drugs to perform miracles.
- "And the light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore. And the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your *sorcery* [5331] all the nations were deceived." (Rev. 18:23) The power of drugs and medicines is a contributing factor in the deception of the nations.

Hatred

The Greek word is "echthra" [2189] and it means "enmity or hatred." It is derived from the Greek word "echthros" [2190] which is used either passively, "odious," or actively, "hostile."

- "That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for before that they had been at **enmity [2189]** with each other." (Lk. 23:12) Their evil treatment of the King of kings brought these two rulers into friendship.
- "Because the carnal mind is **enmity [2189]** against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) One cannot be a genuine believer and live by the dictates of the carnal or fleshly mind - it is hatred or antagonism towards God.
- "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the **enmity [2189]**, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the **enmity [2189]**." (Eph. 2:14-16) Jesus' death on the cross is the end of racism, the hatred and antagonism between Jew and Gentile, and it is the end of the law of sin and death, that antagonism between the spirit and soul of man. There is now no distinctions between men. All are guilty of sin and all are freely redeemed if they will but come and live in and by His Spirit.
- "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is **enmity [2189]** with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an *enemy* [2190] of God." (Jas. 4:4) One or the other. You can have God *or* you can have the world. But you can't have both.

Contentions

The Greek word here is "eris" [2054] and it means simply "contention, strife, wrangling." It is the idea of being argumentative, often for no better reason than just to be "right" or more "right" than others. As we examine these Scriptures, let us also recall that this word "contention" or "strife" is also in the list of "works of the flesh" which, Paul warned, "those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:20)

- "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, *sexual immorality* [4202], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; *full of envy* [5355], *murder* [5408], **strife [2054]**, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom. 1:28-32) The lifestyle of those who have forgotten about God and His righteous requirements are characterized by, among other things, strife and contentions.
- "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in *revelry* [2970] and *drunkenness* [3178], not in *licentiousness* [766] and lewdness, not in **strife [2054]** and *envy* [2205]." (Rom. 13:13) Striving and contentiousness are not acceptable patterns of living for a genuine believer.
- "For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are **contentions [2054]** among you." (1 Cor. 1:11) The context is the opening paragraph of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. And what were the outward symptoms that showed there were contentions among the Corinthians? Some say, "I'm of Paul," others, "I'm of Apollos," others, "I'm of Peter," and still others, "I'm of Christ." (1 Cor. 1:12) If it was contentious for people of Paul's day to claim allegiance to a certain man as an excuse to divide from and ostracize other believers in Christ, then how is it different when we claim our denominational allegiance and use it as an excuse to divide ourselves away from other believers in Christ? Is saying, "I'm of the pope," (Catholic) or "I'm of Martin Luther," (Lutheran) or "I'm of John Wesley," (Methodist) or "I'm of Chuck Smith," (a non-denominational denominationalist), is this any different than saying, "I'm of Paul," "I'm of Apollos," "I'm of Peter," or "I'm of Christ"? No! And if, in Paul's day, it was a sin that, if it is allowed to become a lifestyle, characterizes one who was not a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, then what is it in our day? It is a sin that is characteristic of the tares and not the wheat. Those who persist in their denominational alliances at the expense of the life they could have in Christ will be removed by the angels from God's kingdom and they will be taken out and burned before the great harvest at the end of the age.
- "For you are still carnal. For where there are *envy* [2205], **strife [2054]**, and *divisions* [1370] among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3) Paul is returning to the idea with which he opened his letter to the Corinthians. Here he adds the description that those who are practicing contentions, dividing from other believers in Christ because of loyalties to a man, that these people can *only* be carnal. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) As has already been said, one who is a genuine believer cannot live by the carnal or fleshly mind - it is hatred or antagonism towards God. But it is also true that we cannot expect a denominational "church" goer to have any spiritual maturity or depth so long as he is God's enemy. Contention is carnal living while the spiritual mind "is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6) They are mutually exclusive. If you have an allegiance to any man that supersedes your relationship with Christ, you can only be God's enemy and you will never have any spiritual understanding or maturity that would enable you to genuinely lead

others to a true and deep relationship with Christ - no matter what titles you claim as yours and no matter how many people are following you into the ditch.

- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be **contentions** [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the *uncleanness* [167], *fornication* [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) This is the end of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. He is afraid that his first letter which addressed the contention and strife among the Corinthian believers would have been a wasted effort.
- "Some indeed preach Christ even from *envy* [5355] and **strife** [2054], and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from *selfish ambition* [2052], not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." (Phlp. 1:15-17) There are those who would see this verse and suppose that preaching Christ from the motives of envy, strife and selfish ambition is an acceptable practice. And there is a small bit of truth enclosed in that idea. That is, it is always true that others have to live their own life and we who witness their life only have so much influence over their actions and we must, ultimately, surrender them to their accountability to God. If these who preach Christ from these false motives persist in their hypocrisy and sin, we may indeed confront and expose them. (see 1 Tim. 5:20 for example) But, when it comes to dealing with these religious people who have a form of godliness but no power, Paul said, "from such people turn away." (2 Tim. 3:5) Jesus said of the Pharisees, a sect within the Jewish religion who were also characterized by hypocrisy and sin in the midst of their religious zealotry, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but they do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do." (Mt. 23:2-3) When they sat in Moses' seat, they read the Law. What they said when they read was the written words of God. Those were to be listened to - but the example of the Pharisees' lives was to be completely ignored. Jesus also said of the Pharisees when His disciples questioned Him about offending their religious sensibilities, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." (Mt. 15:13-14) Jesus clearly tells us here that the religious hypocrites, no matter what title or position they have, if they were not planted by the Father, they will be uprooted. He also points out that they are incapable of leading people to God for they are blind themselves. In warning about such things as this, Jesus also said, "It is impossible that no offenses (sins) should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!" (Lk. 17:1) At the end of the age, the angels will remove every thing that causes offense or sin. (Mt. 13:41) So, while hypocrisy and preaching Christ from false motives merits the confrontation and exposure of these false preachers, it does not give us excuse to seek them out just to argue with them. For, if we did, we would be guilty of the strife and contention with which they practice their religion and we would probably soon be insane or dead and they would be none the less deceived and not one bit more saved.
- "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come *envy* [5355], **strife** [2054], reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." (1 Tim. 6:3-5) Paul is pointing out the danger of remaining around those who are contentious. Those who see nothing wrong with having an allegiance to men or men's traditions that is superior to an allegiance to Christ will produce only strife and contentiousness. And their sin will produce the same sin in you. Thus, Paul says, "from such withdraw yourself." That's pretty clear, don't you think?
- "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, **contention** [2054], and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless." (Tit. 3:9) Here Paul says that contentions, any loyalty to a man, philosophy or tradition that usurps the loyalty we are to have to the Person of Jesus Christ is "unprofitable and useless." Those who engage in these disputings are able only to accomplish nothing of eternal value - just as Jesus said, "apart from Me, you can do nothing." (Jn. 15:5) We can pour great amounts of time, energy and resources into a great number of activities, especially arguing with other believers to show how wrong they are and how right we are, but if it is done apart from Christ, it amounts to absolutely nothing.

Jealousies

The Greek word here is "zelos" [2205] and it means "excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit" and it has three basic manifestations, one good, one evil and one that could be either depending on how far one goes with it and what motivates it. It can be a good "zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything, zeal in behalf of, for a person or thing." Or it can be an evil, "envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy." Or it can be "the fierceness of indignation, punitive zeal." It is to be noted that, most often, only God is capable of exhibiting a sinless jealousy.

- "Then His disciples remembered that it was written, '**Zeal** [2205] for Your house has eaten Me up.'" (Jn. 2:17) The context here is when Jesus cleared the temple of the money-changers, the greedy frauds who were cheating the worshipers of God of their money by changing foreign money at extravagant rates and buying the "flawed" sacrificial animals and

selling "flawless" sacrificial animals (or reselling the "flawed" ones because there was never anything wrong with them in the first place, except that the priest responsible for approving the animals was getting his share of the take). Zeal or jealousy for the purity of God's house led Jesus to take up a whip and chase out the frauds. When we consider that the sons of the kingdom, the true people of Christ, are His house now, what do you suppose is His attitude toward those who fraudulently con His people, His house, out of their money now? Perhaps the tares should be grateful that He sends the angels to gather them out of His kingdom and does not come to do so Himself.

- "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the *sect* [139] of the Sadducees), and they were filled with **indignation** [2205], and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison." (Acts 5:17-18) When the Sadducees saw that the new Nazarene sect (as they called the followers of Christ at first) was more popular than their own, they were jealously indignant and imprisoned the apostles.
- "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with **envy** [2205]; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." (Acts 13:45) Again, popularity of others caused an envious jealousy and led these Jews to contradict the truth, the fresh revelation of God, and to even blaspheme God.
- "For I bear them witness that they have a **zeal** [2205] for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." (Rom. 10:2-3) Paul is saying, "Oh, the Jews are zealous alright - but not according to a true understanding of the nature of God. They are jealous over their own religion which permits them to be their own gods but they will not submit to the One True God."
- "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in *revelry* [2970] and *drunkenness* [3178], not in *licentiousness* [766] and lewdness, not in *strife* [2054] and **envy** [2205]." (Rom. 13:13) A jealous zeal apart from a true knowledge and experience of God that causes envy of others and discontent with one's own situation in life is not appropriate for genuine believers.
- "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are **envy** [2205], *strife* [2054], and *divisions* [1370] among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?" (1 Cor. 3:2-4) Wherever you find people jockeying for positions of leadership or advantage and seeking only to gather followers after themselves, there is no possibility of finding spiritual maturity in those people. They can only be blind leaders of blind followers heading directly toward a ditch.
- "Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your **zeal** [2205] for me, so that I rejoiced even more." (2 Cor. 7:6-7) Here Paul rejoices over the news that Titus conveyed about the repentance that Paul's first letter produced in the Corinthians. When the Corinthians were zealous to obey the truth he had spoken and they were able to recognize him as a genuine messenger of the Lord, it was cause for his rejoicing.
- "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what **zeal** [2205], what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." (2 Cor. 7:11) Again, after their godly sorrow came, among other things, a godly zeal to obey God.
- "Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your **zeal** [2205] has stirred up the majority." (2 Cor. 9:1-2) The context here is a large gift of money for the believers in Jerusalem. Paul is rehearsing the fact that the Corinthians were among the first to be eager and zealous to give to meet this need.
- "For I am jealous for you with godly **jealousy** [2205]. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:2) Paul is fervently zealous that the Corinthians be kept from following after false teachers who would lead them astray from the pure and straight ways of the Lord. It was appropriate for Paul to be passionate about keeping the Corinthians aware of false teachers and teachings - even to the point of naming names in some cases (see 1 Tim. 1:19-20 for example) - but if anyone does it today (including this author), well, they're just "divisive and contentious."
- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], **jealousies** [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for

many who have sinned before and have not repented of the *uncleanness* [167], *fornication* [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) Envious jealousy of the positions and advantages of others was among the list of the Corinthians failings which Paul was not eager to confront in person. He would rather they simply repent now.

- "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning *zeal* [2205], persecuting the ekklesia; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." (Phlp. 3:3-7) "Fleshly zeal?" Paul asks. "If you think that's a sign of greatness, especially spiritual greatness, I had that as much as anyone could have - so much so I tried to kill the people of Christ. But, no, zeal and all these other supposedly great things I had as a religious leader are a loss, a complete waste of time, to me now that I want to know Christ."
- "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great *zeal* [2205] for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis." (Col. 4:12-13) Epaphras is a spiritual hero to be emulated. He laid down his own life zealously for the people whom God had burdened his heart with.
- "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery *indignation* [2205] which will devour the adversaries. (Heb. 10:26-27) God's judgment is jealous over those who receive the truth but become opposed to it. It will seek you out and hunt you down. If you oppose the truth after tasting of it, your judgment is not sleeping. It will tear you apart on the appropriate day. Do not be deceived. It hungers for you.
- "But if you have bitter *envy* [2205] and *self-seeking* [2052] in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where *envy* [2205] and *self-seeking* [2052] exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there." (Jas. 3:14-16) If someone has a zealous envy, you will find confusion and sin surrounding that person. Do not receive such a one as any kind of a leader in the body of Christ. He is only deceived or a deceiver.

Outbursts of Wrath

The Greek word here is "thumos" [2372] and it means "passion, angry, heat, anger boiling up and soon subsiding again." It can also refer to "glow, ardor, the wine of passion, inflaming wine (which either drives the drinker mad or kills him with its strength)." It is when anger explodes out of the soul in either verbal, emotional or physical violence. Whether you scream at the cat, the dog, your children or the computer, if you verbally abuse and browbeat your wife, your friends or your employees, or if you actually engage in physical violence, you have committed the sin of "outburst of wrath." It is to be noted that God is capable of displaying His wrath without sinning but this does not seem to be possible for the human being unless that person is completely directed and controlled by the Spirit of God at the time.

- "Then all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with *wrath* [2372], and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff." (Lk. 4:28-29) The context here is that Jesus is speaking things the people in the synagogue didn't want to hear. Wrath leads to attempted murder.
- "And when they heard this, they were full of *wrath* [2372] and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" (Acts 19:28) The context here is that Paul's preaching of the gospel was having a very seriously deleterious effect on the income of the idol makers' trade in Ephesus. Demetrius, one of the most prosperous of the idol makers, first stirs up the silversmiths about their financial losses and then gets the whole town in an uproar by accusing Paul of bringing the temple and worship of Diana into disrepute. When the Ephesians idolatrous religion was challenged, it stirred up their wrath.
- "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are *self-seeking* [2052] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - *indignation* [2372] and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." (Rom. 2:5-11) One day, God will unleash His wrath on all those who are self-seeking, disobedient to the truth and obedient to unrighteousness. Count on it. It will happen.

- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], *selfish ambitions* [2052], backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the *uncleanness* [167], *fornication* [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) Temper tantrums seemed to be among the list of the Corinthians' failings also.
- "Let all bitterness, *wrath* [2372], anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." (Eph. 4:31) All wrath is to be put away from the genuine believer. Not most, not some - all.
- "But now you must also put off all these: anger, *wrath* [2372], malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth." (Col. 3:8) Again, wrath is something to be put off, not tolerated.
- "By faith [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the *wrath* [2372] of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27) Moses thought it better to obey God than to worry about Pharaoh's wrath. The Red Sea proved that Moses was right.
- "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great *wrath* [2372], because he knows that he has a short time." (Rev. 12:12) When the devil is cast to the earth, he will be furious and he will vent his wrath, his anger at being defeated by Michael and the angels and at his impending final defeat by the returning Christ, he will vent this wrath upon the people of God who are on the earth at that time. (But the saints of God do overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony that they did not love their lives so much as to avoid dying for the name of Christ - see Rev. 12:11. So even as he vents his wrath, he seals his defeat.)
- "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the *wrath* [2372] of her *fornication* [4202].'" (Rev. 14:8) The wrath is God's. The sin is Babylon's. One day, righteous judgment will fall upon all who practice religious infidelity.
- "Then a third angel followed them saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the *wrath* [2372] of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.' Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." (Rev. 14:9-12) Everyone who takes the mark of the beast, that number which identifies one as a willing participant in the devil's rebellion against God, will experience God's wrath for eternity.
- "So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the *wrath* [2372] of God." (Rev. 14:19) The wrath of God is expressed in one great battle wherein the blood will flow in a depth "up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs" - a distance of approximately 180 miles (Rev. 14:20)
- "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the *wrath* [2372] of God is complete." (Rev. 15:1) Perhaps God's wrath is not sinful because it is not out of control as is true of human wrath. When His wrath is done, it is done and it is gone. Humans, even after getting satisfaction, often carry and nurse a grudge, unforgiveness, against the object of their wrath. When the righteous judgments of God upon wickedness are complete, there is simply no more need for wrath.
- "Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the *wrath* [2372] of God who lives forever and ever." (Rev. 15:7) These angels are agents of God's wrath.
- "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the *wrath* [2372] of God on the earth.'" (Rev. 16:1)
- "Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness [2372] of His wrath." (Rev. 16:19)
- "For all the nations have drunk the wine of the *wrath* [2372] of her *fornication* [4202], the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

(Rev. 18:3) Not just one nation, all the nations have participated in the religious spirit's deceptions and are due for God's wrath.

- "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness [2372] and wrath of Almighty God." (Rev. 19:15) Jesus Himself also carries out the execution of the wrath of God. So much for the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" theory.

Selfish Ambitions

The Greek word here is "eritheia" [2052] and it means "electioneering or intriguing for office, courting distinction, desiring to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts, partisanship, fractiousness." It is also interesting that this word is found before New Testament times in Aristotle where it denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. Our modern equivalent is "the ends justifies the means," especially when the end is some selfish, self-centered or self-aggrandizing goal.

- "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are **self-seeking [2052]** and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - *indignation* [2372] and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." (Rom. 2:5-11) Selfish ambition, seeking the agenda of our selfish nature and using whatever evil methods are required to accomplish that agenda, is a characteristic of those who are destined to experience the impartial wrath of God.
- "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be *contentions* [2054], *jealousies* [2205], *outbursts of wrath* [2372], **selfish ambitions [2052]**, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the *uncleanness* [167], *fornication* [4202], and *licentiousness* [766] which they have practiced." (2 Cor. 12:20-21) Selfish ambition, the seeking of self's desires and doing whatever was required to realize those desires, was another trait of many Corinthians.
- "Some indeed preach Christ even from *envy* [5355] and *strife* [2054], and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from **selfish ambition [2052]**, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." (Phlp. 1:15-17) Yes, Christ can be preached from selfish ambition, that is, using the gospel to gain followers who stroke the ego of the leader or who line his wallet with money. But woe to those who so preach the Good News for they turn the grace of our Lord into an abomination. (Jude 4)
- "Let nothing be done through **selfish ambition [2052]** or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (Phlp. 2:3) Selfish ambition, letting some selfish end justify all manner of wicked behavior, is not to be any part of our life in Christ. *Nothing* is to be done because self wants it done that way. Yet, how often do we choose a certain "church" simply because religion is conducted there in a manner which *I* approve of?
- "But if you have bitter *envy* [2205] and **self-seeking [2052]** in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where *envy* [2205] and **self-seeking [2052]** exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there." (Jas. 3:14-16) Where confusion and wicked activity is found, even in "church" leadership, it is a sure and certain indication that someone has their own agenda and is neglecting God's agenda. Run, do not walk to the nearest exit when someone, anyone, claiming to be a leader in the body of Christ is surrounded by confusion and sin.

Dissensions

The Greek word here is "dichostasia" [1370]. It is a compound word from "dicho" ("twice or again") and "stasia" ("stasis or condition of standing"). In English, it is rendered "dissensions" or "divisions," but, in the Greek, this word carries a much larger and more precise picture in its meaning. To understand this word, we must first understand how the body of Christ works and how men with natural eyes distort what spiritual things they see, measure and, especially, analyze with reason and logic.

The body of Christ, in Scripture, is not an analogy. Nowhere in Scripture do any of the writers say that the people of Christ are *like* a body. No, all the writers that use this terminology say that the people of Christ *are* His body. The Scriptures plainly state that Christ Himself is the Head of the body and that His body are the called-out people of God, the ekklesia. (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) With the human body as the explanation of a spiritual truth, we recognize that the Holy Spirit performs a similar function in the body of Christ to that of the human nervous system. He transmits the commands of the Head to all the various parts of the body.

"Stasia," and especially the English word which derives from it, "stasis," is a term associated with fluids, particularly bodily fluids like blood and waste products. When a fluid is measured, a "cross section" or sample is taken and the measurements applied to the whole, even though not every "cross section" or sample would necessarily be completely identical. "Stasis" is also associated with the idea of a person suspended in time, when everything comes to a condition of standing perfectly still.

When a leader in the body of Christ sets forth his understanding of what God is doing and that understanding is then used as the basis for gathering followers to that leader, "stasia" has occurred. A sample of the bodily fluids of the body of Christ have been captured and the findings are then applied to the whole, often with a margin of error which is apparent when compared with another sample, another "stasia." A picture, a snapshot, of the way the body of Christ was at that moment in time has been taken and now men worship that picture as if it were God Himself. That is "stasia." This is the method by which theological doctrines and denominational creeds are formed. The doctrines and creeds may contain a great deal of truth, but they are a photograph of a living being - something is lost in the transaction. It is, in truth, much like the superstitions of the American Indians who feared that their spirit would be lost if their image was captured in the white man's picture box. The Spirit of God is simply not available to those who worship only a photograph of God's movements among men.

This Greek word, "dichostasia," goes one step further. It speaks of "twice standing." In slang English, we would call that the "double standard" whereby the ones teaching a certain code of behavior are exempt from having to actually live it out - in this case, they cry out against the sin of divisiveness, applying it to anyone who disagrees with their teachings, when, all the while, their whole position is only a "stasia," a lifeless photograph of God's past movements among men, a thing of their own creation, a "nehushtan," a thing of brass that has outlived its usage by God (see 2 Ki. 18:4) "Dichostasia" happens when those who have formed and grasped, to one degree or another, a "stasia" of the body of Christ, that momentary snapshot in time of what God was doing, will not allow for anyone else to present their own snapshots. And, of course, those who don't agree with the leaders' understanding of the truth are expected to leave and go form yet another denomination based around that second snapshot of *their* own making.

And so long as you form another denomination but don't call into question the underlying fallacy of taking such snapshots in the first place, religion has absorbed you and you pose no threat to the spirit of antichrist who is raising up its own sons so that the true sons of the kingdom might never reach maturity.

Let me say that again with great deliberation and careful choice of words. "Stasia" is the taking of a snapshot in time of the body of Christ, a theological understanding of the body of Christ at a particular moment in time. "Dichostasia" is the separating of the body of Christ according to the dictates of a "stasia," that snapshot in time of the body of Christ. Thus you could have a Catholic "stasia," a Baptist "stasia," a Lutheran "stasia," a Methodist "stasia," an Episcopalian "stasia," a Presbyterian "stasia," a Charismatic "stasia," an Evangelical "stasia" and even a non-denominational "stasia." But each of these are incomplete pictures of the body of Christ for they are pictures frozen in time. The body of Christ is not frozen in time. It is not even of time. It is an eternal entity which has its existence throughout time. When we first create a "stasia," a denominational or doctrinal understanding of Christ and His body in the context of a certain culture or time, we have only attempted to put God in a box, to limit His abilities to fit within our understanding. It is no wonder the "church" of the end times has the form of godliness but no power. (2 Tim. 3:5) The "church" is fragmented by multitudes of these "stasias" - and each "stasia" is only a graven image to what Christ was doing in times past that really has no connection to what the Spirit is doing in their own time.

"Dichostasia" happens when I take my own particular "stasia" of the body of Christ and force someone to leave my circles of influence so that they can seek God according to their own light - whether that light be true revelation from God or just their own "stasia." When someone is forced to leave my circle fellowship because there exists differences of beliefs or opinions about the Lord Jesus Christ, the sin of division, "dichostasia," has occurred. And so long as the person I have forced to leave goes off and forms yet another "stasia," the spirit of antichrist has scored yet another victory and the religious "church" spirit will not antagonize this new movement too greatly - only enough to "verify" (at least in the minds of the adherents) that this new division, this new "dichostasia," is indeed a "new work of God."

But let anyone refuse to buy into the practice of taking snapshots in time of the body of Christ but rather insist that the Holy Spirit rule freely and completely in his or her life, and the religious "church" spirit will go to great lengths to silence and even crucify the one who so enters into the true liberty of the Spirit.

This word "dichostasia" appears only three times in the New Testament, but I think the precision of the meaning of this Greek word went a long way in uniting the believers of the first centuries. There were many disagreements and isolated instances of division (like Corinth), but it was not until the second and third centuries that people began to routinely divide into theological or ideological camps based on the teachings of leaders.

With this understanding of the word "dichostasia," then, let us consider what is said in the Scriptures.

- "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause *divisions* [1370] and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." (Rom. 16:17) Note those who cause divisions and avoid them. The Senior "Pastor" who insists on his views and says, "If you don't agree with me, then leave," is one who causes divisions and is to be avoided. But don't you go off and start your own brand name either - for then you will be a partner in this Senior "Pastor's" divisiveness. "The doctrine which you learned," which Paul speaks of here, are not 3rd, 10th, 15th or 20th century theological constructs and creeds. The doctrines the Romans received was the original announcements about the Person and Spirit of Christ. When we downgrade the Person and/or Spirit of Christ to a list of doctrinal beliefs or theological creeds, we have created a "stasia." When we force other believers away because they don't recognize every point listed in our "stasia," we have committed "dichostasia," the double standard that, by its own nature, unnaturally divides the body of Christ. As Jesus said of marriage, "What God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mt. 19:6)
- "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still

carnal. For where there are *envy* [2205], *strife* [2054], and *divisions* [1370] among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (1 Cor. 3:1-4) Paul could not speak to the Corinthians as being spiritual people but was forced to speak to them as fleshly, spiritually immature people. Why? Because they were dividing the body of Christ along lines of loyalty to men's differing "stasias" of the body of Christ. Anyone who embraces the "stasia" of any man prohibits himself from reaching the fullness of spiritual maturity that is found in the full measure of Christ. If your "church" is founded on the "stasia" of a man and you give your loyalty to your "church," you have no hope of ever being spiritually mature in Christ.

This word, with its specific definition and few usages, strikes at the roots of denominationalism with astonishing precision. "Dichostasia" is a work of the flesh that will keep you from inheriting the kingdom of God - a kingdom characterized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:20-21; Rom. 14:17) And it is a sin that will keep you from growing up spiritually and which makes you someone to be avoided.

As is evident in the parable of the wheat and the tares, it is not our responsibility to uproot the tares - that is the angels' responsibility. Indeed, the tares do practice division based on their own misunderstanding of Scriptures - they are guilty of "dichostasia" and they are to be exposed and avoided. Thus, as the Spirit leads you to do so, you may speak freely of these modern-day Pharisees and their hypocrisy. But if you are only obedient to an agenda of removing from public view anyone you believe to be a tare, you are taking far too much upon yourself. The tares are to be left for the angels who will do far more to them than removing them from public view. The angels will remove them from the kingdom of Christ and take them to a fire where they will be burned. It is our responsibility, however, to take care that in the rampant divisiveness of today's denominationalism, we do not get drawn into the same sin and form yet another "stasia" whereby we think it appropriate to disassociate ourselves from other true believers in Christ who subscribe to a different "stasis" than our own - even if our "stasia" is based on a more complete revelation of the work and purposes of God. For, if we do that, then we are simply another tare, one who causes offense and commits lawlessness and we will be removed from the kingdom along with all the other tares before the harvest at the end of the age.

Heresies

The Greek word here is "hairesis" [139] and it has several meanings. It can refer to "the act of taking or capturing," as in storming a city. It can refer to "choosing, choice or that which is chosen." It can refer to "a body of men following their own tenets (sect or party like the Sadducees, Pharisees and even Christians). Or it can refer to "dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims." It is a direct opposite to the concept of the body of Christ which is based in unity and oneness. "Hairesis" is dividedness and multiplicity.

- "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the *sect* [139] of the Sadducees), and they were filled with *indignation* [2205], and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison." (Acts 5:17-18) The Sadducees were a division of their own within the Jewish religion - that is, they had captured followers, they willfully chose to believe their false doctrines, and there was a body of men who followed what they had chosen to believe.
- "But some of the *sect* [139] of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.'" (Acts 15:5) The Pharisees were another sect of the Jewish religion and they attempted to bring their sectarian ways into the body of Christ. They became known as the Judaizers who sought to draw genuine believers away from the grace bestowed by Christ and back under the Jewish Law. (see Gal. 5:4)
- "For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the *sect* [139] of the Nazarenes." (Acts 24:5) The context here is that Paul is on trial before the Roman governor Felix. This is the accusation brought by Tertullus, the lawyer brought in by Ananias the high priest to prosecute Paul. The Jews viewed the first Christians as a divisive sect within the context of Judaism - or at least that was how they explained it to the Roman (Gentile) governor. It is interesting to note, however, that true believers are accused of divisiveness by those inextricably involved in yesterday's revelation. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Heb. 8:13) So, even though the Old Covenant, the Jewish law and religion, was now obsolete and vanishing, the high priest, in an effort to maintain the status quo was willing to murder Paul. (see Acts 23:12-15) When that attempt failed, the high priest resorted to false accusations and prosecution in the Roman legal system. This is the pattern of organized religion - it will always attempt to kill off and silence those who pursue the current revelation of God because that current revelation always and clearly reveals the selfish ambition of the current leaders of the various sects.
- "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a *sect* [139], so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14) Here is Paul's defense: "They say we are a sect but we worship God in spirit and in truth." The unspoken truth here is: "They are really the ones who are trafficking in deception and false religion while *I'm* the one that's on trial."
- "They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest *sect* [139] of our religion I lived a Pharisee." (Acts 26:5) The context here is that Paul is now before King Agrippa. The charge is the same and the issues are the same. This is part of Paul's defense to the charge of causing divisions in the Jewish religious structure.

"They knew me when I was part of their division." The underlying truth is that the Jewish leaders had no problem with Paul while he agreed with a sect within their false religion. But as soon as Paul began to preach and demonstrate the true Way, he, just as was Christ, became the targeted enemy of organized religion.

- "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this *sect* [139], we know that it is spoken against everywhere." (Acts 28:22) The context here is that Paul has arrived at Rome and the Jews of that city want firsthand information. All they had received were rumors of a new sect, a new division, a new denomination, of Judaism.
- "For first of all, when you come together as an ekklesia, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be *factious* [139] among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." (1 Cor. 11:18-19) Here is the jockeying for positions of prominence that divides the body of Christ. Someone argues with and schemes against other leaders to show that he has the true anointing of God upon him. For those who miss it, this is sarcasm on Paul's part. God does not approve of those who divide the brothers - in fact, He hates it and considers it abominable. "These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: [# 7] ...one who sows discord among brethren...." (Prov. 6:16,19) He who has ears, let him hear.
- "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive *heresies* [139], even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." (2 Pet. 2:1) Here is where the common misunderstanding of this word is most often exhibited. This verse is most often taught that false teachers will bring in false *teachings* and those *teachings* are called "heresies." But a heresy is not just a teaching - it is practicing division based on a false teaching. It is a capturing of followers' loyalties, a choosing to believe certain notions, *and* a group of people who follow after those notions. Thus every denomination (even the "non-denominational" denominations) that secludes itself from other parts of the body of Christ *is* a heresy. It denies the Lord who lives in the other believers and it will bring upon all its followers swift and certain judgment on the day Christ unleashes the angels to remove the tares from the wheat.

Envy

The Greek word here is "phthonos" [5355] and it means simply "envy." Envy is defined as "a feeling of discontent or jealousy, usually with ill will, at seeing another's superiority, advantages or success; a desire for some advantage possessed by another." (Webster's Dictionary)

- "For [Pilate] knew that because of *envy* [5355] they had delivered [Christ]." (Mt. 27:18) The Jewish leaders desired something that Christ had - whether it was His holiness, His personality or the way He drew so many away from following after them - they envied Him so much that they had Him killed.
- "For [Pilate] knew that the chief priests had handed [Christ] over because of envy [5355]." (Mk. 15:10)
- "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, *sexual immorality* [4202], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; *full of envy* [5355], *murder* [5408], *strife* [2054], deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom. 1:28-32) Being filled with envy, a discontented desire to possess or enjoy what others have, is one of the consequences of forgetting about God and His righteous requirements.
- "Some indeed preach Christ even from *envy* [5355] and *strife* [2054], and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from *selfish ambition* [2052], not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." (Phlp. 1:15-17) Envy can be the driving force behind a preacher or teacher of Christ - even if all the outward appearances seem quite appropriate. Inwardly, the one who preaches Christ because he envies the following or charisma that other teachers have is only a tare among the wheat. Follow him at your own risk.
- "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come *envy* [5355], *strife* [2054], reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." (1 Tim. 6:3-5) The religious man who argues endlessly is driven by envy or some other evil within his own heart. Leave him alone.
- "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and *envy* [5355], hateful and hating one another." (Tit. 3:3) Envy is a characteristic of lost and dying mankind - not of the

redeemed of the Lord.

- "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns *jealously* [5355]'?" (Jas. 4:5) This is another instance where God can do something without sinning that would most likely produce sin in a human. God yearns over us jealously as He watches how we practice our enmity against Him by dabbling in the things of the world. (see Jas. 4:4) This ought not be so.
- "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, *envy* [5355], and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Pet. 2:1-3) All envy is to be laid aside. Not some, not most - all. If you won't give up your envy, don't expect to grow out of your spiritual immaturity - that is, assuming you have truly been born again and truly experienced the grace of God, that power of God at work in you to conform you into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ. And if you continue to thwart the grace of God, don't be surprised when you are uprooted as a tare from among the wheat.

Murders

The Greek word here is "phonos" [5408] and it simply means "murder, slaughter." Murder is to kill another human being without having justifiable reason. Executing a man convicted of a capital crime or defending one's self or one's family from marauders and villains is not murder. Those who distort the sixth commandment teach "You shall not kill." The sixth commandment is: "You shall not murder." There is a vast difference. Those who advocate no killing whatsoever most often do so from a distorted sense of the value of man. Because man is the supreme being, he is not to be killed - no matter what heinous crimes he has or is committing. The Bible, Old and New Testament, speaks of the value of human life but places an equal value on righteousness and peaceful living - neither of which can be maintained on a cultural level without deterrents to crime. The righteous requirements of God are not necessarily violated with the death of a human being. Rather, they are violated by the wrongful death of a human being. Murder is simply the most wrongful death possible.

- "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, *murders* [5408], *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], thefts, false witness, blasphemies." (Mt. 15:19) Murder comes from the heart. So much for the theory that we, as humans, are innately good and would never do anything like that.
- "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, *adulteries* [3430], *fornications* [4202], *murders* [5408], thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, *licentiousness* [766], an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." (Mk. 7:21- 22)
- "And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow insurrectionists; they had committed *murder* [5408] in the insurrection." (Mk. 15:7) Barabbas is the man who would ultimately be set free so that Christ would be crucified. The religious people who were prosecuting Jesus were so envious of Him that they would rather have one who committed murder while revolting against the rule of Rome go free than recognize Christ as their rightful King and Messiah. These were the same ones who accused Pilate of not being loyal to Caesar and who cried out that they had no king but Caesar. (Jn. 19:12-15) This is the pattern of hypocrisy of organized religion - two faces to confuse you while they arrange your execution (or excommunication) behind your back.
- "And they all cried out at once, saying, 'Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas' - who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for *murder* [5408]." (Lk. 23:18-19)
- "And he released to them the one they requested, who for insurrection and *murder* [5408] had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will." (Lk. 23:25)
- "Then Saul, still breathing threats and *murder* [5408] against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." (Acts 9:1-2) The religious spirit so stirred up Saul and the Jews that they were willing to murder and slaughter the men and women of the Way, the real followers of God.
- "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, *sexual immorality* [4202], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; *full of envy* [5355], *murder* [5408], *strife* [2054], deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom. 1:28-32) Those who neglect to retain God in their knowledge will commit murder - no matter how religious or "civilized" they might be.
- "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the *sword* [5408]. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11:37-38) The context is the list of heroes of faith. Some

were murdered. So why do we think that we shall be treated differently? Paul wrote, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12) And as the examples of history show, from Jesus and Stephen to the Roman and Catholic and Islamic persecutions of Christians, it is organized religion that is the worst enemy of the body of Christ. This will also be true in the end times for all true believers. Jesus said, "The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service." (Jn. 16:2) The religious folks of the end times will be so deceived they will think murder is a way to serve God.

- "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their *murders* [5408] or their *sorceries* [5331] or their *sexual immorality* [4202] or their thefts." (Rev. 9:20-21) After all mankind has seen and experienced of man's and God's wrath, they still won't repent.

Drunkenness

The Greek word here is "methē" [3178] and it means "intoxication or drunkenness." While this word was commonly associated with consuming alcohol, the chief drug of that day, it refers to the state of inebriation, the loss of self-control and recognition of reality, that results from imbibing a controlled substance. It is the altered state of consciousness that is referred to and would include the state that results from the use of drugs. It cannot be said that it refers only to the inebriated state that results from consuming alcohol.

- "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, *drunkenness* [3178], and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly." (Lk. 21:34) If you get caught up in the non-reality of an altered state of existence, the return of Christ will come unexpectedly for you.
- "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in *revelry* [2970] and *drunkenness* [3178], not in *licentiousness* [766] and lewdness, not in *strife* [2054] and *envy* [2205]." (Rom. 13:13) We are not to live our lives in a drug- or alcohol-induced state of non-reality. We are to worship God in spirit and in *truth*. (Jn. 4:24)

Revelries

The Greek word here is "komos" [2970] and it means to "revel, carouse." It had specific reference to a nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome men who, after supper, parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity. They would sing and play before houses of male and female friends. Thus it is used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry. It is to be what we would call a "party animal." And while one usually has to be the center of attention to be considered a party animal, to be constantly in that atmosphere and environment, even as a "wall-flower," is to practice the sin of revelry.

- "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in *revelry* [2970] and *drunkenness* [3178], not in *licentiousness* [766] and lewdness, not in *strife* [2054] and *envy* [2205]." (Rom. 13:13) Revelry, traveling from one raucous party to the next, is not proper for true believers.
- "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in *licentiousness* [766], lusts, drunkenness, *revelries* [2970], drinking parties, and *abominable idolatries* [2970]." (1 Pet. 4:3) Revelry, partying the night away, is a characteristic of people who don't know God, not those who do.

And the Like

Paul, with the Holy Spirit inspiring him, inserted this phrase just so no one can say, "Well, what about this activity? It's not on the list. Must not be a sin." No, this list from Paul's letter to the Galatians is by no means exhaustive - as can be easily seen in some of the above quotes. When it comes to the contrast between sin and righteousness, it has been appropriately said that there are any number of ways to fall but only one way to stand upright. This is particularly true of the Christian life.

It is also to be noticed that Paul ends this list by saying, "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:21) This is not a reference just to eternal life - though most people read this verse and assume that's all it refers to. And while it is true that one who practices these things on a regular basis will not spend eternity with God, it is also a reference to this life. "The kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) Anyone who practices any of this list of sins or any other similar activity - whether that be "gross sins" or simply religious but false imitations of the kingdom of God - cannot experience the righteousness, peace and joy of the kingdom that comes by living in the Spirit of God. It is those who seek *first* the kingdom of God who can expect His mighty provision for every need - those who are content to practice their favorite sins can only expect to be uprooted and burned before the harvest at the end of the age.

6. The Children of God

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 Jn. 3:8- 12)

For this Purpose

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested..." (1 Jn. 3:8)

We have become so jaded in our reading of the Scriptures that we miss the obvious things it says. Whatever follows this statement *is* one of the very reasons for which Christ came to earth. It is not an incidental footnote attached to the bottom of some addendum at the back of the book. It is one of *the* foundational reasons He came, lived and died among us. Let us not fail to recognize, then, the primary importance of the statement which follows.

The Works of the Devil

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 Jn. 3:8)

This is war! The devil is very serious about completing his work because it means his survival. He has challenged God for His throne and if he loses his bid for ultimate power, he loses his life in the lake of fire! And God is equally interested in winning the war, not only because His throne and authority are being challenged, but also because His having children made after His likeness is also at issue. Were it possible for God, the source of life and goodness, to lose this war, evil and destruction would have no restrictions. There would be no justice, no righteousness - only evil. And if God were to somehow lose this war, all those who hope in His redemption would be lost and *they and God Himself* would be eternally condemned by Satan to the lake of fire. These are the issues upon which this war is being waged. It has almost nothing to do with whether you go to "church" or not.

The children of God, as they are affected by this war, are being called to truly being heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, suffering with Christ in the carrying out of this war so that the people of Christ can demonstrate to the angels the manifold wisdom of God. (see Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:10-11) The children of God have a specific role in all this and they must conform to the character of Christ. If they do not do so, they are not sons of the kingdom but rather sons of the devil.

Practicing Righteousness

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God" (1 Jn. 3:10)

As we have already seen, when it comes to recognizing the traits of the godly and the ungodly, we are most often hampered by our own ignorance of what the words found in the Bible really mean. And this is indeed another word that, through unfamiliarity, has come to mean almost nothing. Though we have discussed this to some degree, let us consider again just what righteousness is. Remember? Paul wrote, "For what does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Rom. 4:3) So, what is righteousness? To believe God and obey Him. It is that simple.

Jesus said it this way: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jn. 6:29) We, in our twentieth century, reason- and logic-induced mental fog take that to mean that we are supposed to have the mental opinion that Jesus Christ, who is God in human flesh, came as a man and died on the cross to take away our sins and that mere mental assent to this truth is all that is required of us.

The writer of Hebrews displays it much differently than this. He writes, "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Therefore since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For we who have believed do enter that rest... For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience." (Heb. 3:18-4:1,3,10-11)

The rest of God is an important thing for all believers to grasp. The Sabbath rest was a type, a foreshadowing, a physical explanation and representation of a spiritual truth, of how we, as believers, are to live our entire life. Notice how it says that he who has believed has ceased from his own works. (Heb. 4:10) If we truly believe in Christ, we cease from all our self-generated efforts to be and live righteously. This is why Scripture says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'" (1 Cor. 1:30-31) Our glorying, our boasting, our source of joy and confidence, is not to be found living according to our own abilities but in living according to His. All of our attempts to be righteous can only be as filthy rags, literally, used and soiled menstrual cloths. (Isa. 64:6)

This abominable picture is how God views our every independent attempt to please or serve Him - that is, every attempt outside of Christ to please God. It is our way of spitting in His face and telling God, "I don't need Christ's sacrifice - I can make it *my* way!" No! Apart from Christ we can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5) Only in Christ are we seated in the heavenly realms, partaking of His divine nature. (Eph. 2:6) The difference between the sons of God and the sons of the devil is as simple as whether we are in Christ or out on our own.

Love Your Brother

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever...does not love his brother [is not of God]" (1 Jn. 3:10)

The call to love one another as Christ loved us is an integral part of the true life in Christ. (Jn. 13:34; 15:12) But because the people of Christ are so inundated with legalistic teachings which wrongly associate loving one another "as Christ loved us" (the new commandment from the Head of the body, Christ) with loving one another "as you love yourself" (the second greatest commandment in the outmoded Law), we really have no clue how to draw upon the grace of God (that power of His Spirit at work in us to conform us to our individual expression of the likeness of Christ) so that we may indeed truly and selflessly love our brother.

The catch will really come for us when, as lawlessness abounds, the tendency for most will be to become unloving. This is only natural. Wickedness produces many victims. As the needs go up, our hearts, especially as believers, are stirred and we want to

minister to and meet all the needs. Those who rely on their own strengths are going to be overwhelmed. Those who rely on the grace of God, His power at work in them, will not be overwhelmed because, first, they only move to meet the needs for which God is supplying a remedy, and second, they are only vessels, channels for God's grace, His power, at work in others. Any need for which God is not supplying a remedy and any person for whom God is not giving them the grace to minister to, is someone else's opportunity, not theirs.

But we should indeed notice the viciousness with which we shall be attacked so that we are not surprised at how close the betrayal, even unto death, will come from. Jesus said, "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake." (Lk. 21:16-17) Betrayal and hatred is going to come from very close quarters indeed. But our responsibility to remain settled in Christ and to continue to display His love for fallen humanity still remains. Jesus also said, in direct answer to lawlessness causing the love of many to grow cold, that "he who endures to the end shall be saved." (Mt. 24:13)

The difference between the children of God and the children of the devil will be clearly demonstrated in end of the age. Those who endure and continue to love their brothers and sisters, even when they are betrayed and hated by their families and close friends, will be the children of God. Those who succumb to the numbing effects of lawlessness will most likely end up participating in the killing and hating of the genuine children of God. It is imperative that we learn how to move in the grace, the transforming power, of God now while the stakes are not nearly so high. For if we cannot even keep up with the foot soldiers, what are we going to do when they bring in the tanks and helicopters? (see Jer. 12:5)

Expose Them

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." (Eph. 5:11)

There are those who will be opposed to a study like this either because they have religious notions or practices of their own that have been called into question or because they mistakenly think that to speak clearly and truthfully is to violate the command to "speak evil of no one." (Tit. 3:2; Jas. 4:11) To speak plainly the truth about the true nature of the sons of God and the sons of the devil is not to speak evil of anyone - it is merely to recognize, in the light of God's truth and reality, just who is who and what is what. You cannot practice anything that is a lie nor follow after anyone who teaches or practices a lie and hope to believe that you're worshiping God in spirit and in truth. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (Jn. 4:24) There is no second alternative given. We are not at liberty to start our own denomination where we can worship God according to the dictates of our soul or according to our own ideas of what is true. To do so is to fall away from the faith that was given once for all.

That the tares could slip in among the wheat is not a subject we like to think about. To think that we, ourselves, might also be just another tare, is even more unthinkable. But this is clearly what the Scriptures teach. The servants of Satan masquerade as "servants of righteousness." Paul wrote, "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." (2 Cor. 11:14) A false servant of righteousness would be one who gives the appearance of leading you toward righteousness when, in truth, he is leading you into unrighteousness. And it would be beneath the expertise of the father of lies to provide us with a shabby deception which everyone and his brother could easily see through. No, it will require the diligent, moment-by-moment surrender to the leading of the Spirit of God to avoid being deceived by what Satan has concocted to prevent the wheat, the true sons of the kingdom of God, from reaching maturity and being harvested to the benefit of the Master. Satan is not going to just roll over and play dead just because he knows he is near to being defeated. No, he will make extra effort to destroy the saints when he knows his time is short. (Rev. 12:12)

Another description of the devil says that he is "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Paul wrote, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (Eph. 2:1-2) Those who are disobedient to the Holy Spirit - the One who is only transmitting the commands of the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ - those are only the tools of another spirit, the spirit of antichrist, the one who comes in the place of Christ to usurp His rightful authority. These who are disobedient to God - as a routine course of their lives - are the sons of the devil.

Avoid Them

Some who recognize the lethal nature of the "church" and who recognize that tares are in positions of leadership, especially within the "church" system, still advocate that we have no right to abandon these tares, that we are not being called by the Lord to abandon either these false believers and leaders or their Satanic, deceptive "church" systems. These people equate exposing false "church" teachings and practices - leaving the tares alone to their own devices and machinations but warning the unwary and untaught about them - they equate that with the uprooting that the angels will do. (Mt. 13:41-42) These people seem to think that ruining a false leader's ability to deceive people is the equivalent of what the angels will do when they uproot the tare and take him out to be burned. No, exposing and avoiding the tares *is* our responsibility - handing him over to the destruction of fire is the responsibility of the angels. We who are true wheat, true sons of the kingdom of God, are under absolutely no obligation to remain in the presence, let alone under the authority of, a son of the devil. To believe or teach otherwise is simply another demonic scheme propagated upon the people of God to keep them in the chains of institutional deception and systematic unrighteousness.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, *and avoid them.*" (Rom. 16:17 - emphasis added) Paul wrote to Timothy about false teachers saying that they were men "who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. *From such withdraw yourself.*" (1 Tim. 6:5 - emphasis added) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But now I have written to you *not to keep company with* anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or

covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - *not even to eat with such a person.*" (1 Cor. 5:11 - emphasis added) Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and *do not keep company with him*, that he may be ashamed." (2 Ths. 3:14 - emphasis added) And again to the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: *'Evil company corrupts good habits.'*" (1 Cor. 15:33 - emphasis added)

These passages alone are sufficient to show that we are under an obligation to *get away* from anyone who claims to be a believer and follower of Christ but yet is not - and that false claim is identified chiefly by their failure to depart from sin and/or deception.

You Can't Uproot Them

The process of uprooting a tare is a process that can only be done by an angel. The tare will be removed from the kingdom of Christ and taken to a fire to be burned and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The other references in the New Testament to this fire, wailing and gnashing of teeth certainly seem to indicate an eternal judgment though there are some who see it differently. But either way, it will be a most unpleasant experience for the tare. And it is simply not possible for any human being to deliver a tare to that fire.

There are those who don't understand how there could be centuries of "church" traditions that are nothing but the schemes of the devil designed to inhibit the growth of the real sons of God. The answer is simple. God has permitted it to be so. Jesus said, "Let both grow together *until the harvest*, and *at the time of harvest* I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." (Mt. 13:30 - emphasis added) The tares have been allowed by God to continue unchecked. The spirit of antichrist has been at work in any who have been disobedient to the living Word of Christ. This is why the traditions of men have been able to accumulate and set the stage for the great falling away which will characterize the end of the age.

But while it is neither possible nor permissible for us to uproot tares, let us also note that we must be very careful not to simply abandon everyone who holds different opinions than ourselves. That would be the sin of contentiousness and divisiveness - an action and attitude which would characterize us as being tares ourselves. We must be careful that, if we must make a judgment about someone, that judgement is accurate. For it is still true that "with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Mt. 7:2) If we truly use the word of God as it is enlivened to us by the Spirit of God to measure rightly, first ourselves then all others, then we will have no problem being measured by that same standard for we will have already subjected ourselves to God's righteous standards. But if we judge on the basis of our own desires, opinions or imaginations, then, when we stand to be evaluated, we will be counted among the tares because we will have wrongly divided the body of Christ and failed to repent of our own sins.

Those who live in the days just before the angels are dispatched to separate, uproot and destroy the tares face a serious challenge. We must forsake *all* iniquity - *all* things that offend and *all* who practice lawlessness will be removed. (Mt. 13:41) We must give up *all* the traditions of men and *all* the deceptive schemes and systems of the devil that war against God and we must give up *all* notions of walking in our own ideas of what is right and wrong (lawlessness - what is right in our own eyes) or we too will be removed from the kingdom of Christ as a tare.

It is really that simple.