

In Quest of a Kingdom

by
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The Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted. Italics have been added for emphasis and bracketed comments inserted for clarification. The reader is encouraged to use their own Bible as their original source of truth. But at least be like the Bereans. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were true.” (Acts 17:11)

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Some of the following lessons were taken from Leslie Weatherhead's book with the above title. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press published the book in 1944. (Steve Bray 1950 – 2003)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Scripture speaks of “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God.” The two terms have the same meaning. God's Word uses them interchangeably in parallel passages. For example, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:17) Referring to the same kingdom, Mark reports Jesus as saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

The teachings of Jesus Christ revolve around the kingdom of God. When He opened His public ministry with His Sermon on the Mount, He provided a manifesto of life in God's kingdom. These teachings explain how the members of His kingdom will live. Because this Kingdom-life is now at hand, we are expected to turn from the kingdom of darkness and enter into His kingdom of light. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, ‘Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matt. 4:17)

Christians in this age of fulfillment are to look to Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their hearts. We will need to have His life from heaven revealed within our inner being before we will have the power to manifest the way of life that Jesus spoke about in His Sermon on the Mount.

God sent Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. The emphasis of his teachings was also on the kingdom of God. The Old Testament had taught him about a Messiah who would establish God's kingdom here on earth. He recognized Jesus Christ as the long awaited Messiah. Using the Old Testament Scriptures, he taught people the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ and depending on Him to establish His Kingdom-life of promise within their hearts.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect {in love} in Christ Jesus. (Col. 1: 27-28)

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue {to go forward} in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14: 21-22)

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, *reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.*

But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. (Acts 19: 8-9 Emphasis added)

{Paul} *explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God*, persuading them concerning Jesus Christ {the Messiah who had come to establish the Kingdom-life of perfect love within the hearts of men and women} from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. (Acts 28: 23 Emphasis added)

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, *preaching the kingdom of God* and teaching the things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence... (Acts 28: 30-31 Emphasis added)

This phrase that refers to God's kingdom has been used more than one hundred times in the New Testament. In one sense, it refers to a quality of life. *Jesus Christ was sent into this world to both display this unique form of life and to make the life available to everyone who will submit to becoming a vessel of His divine life from heaven.* Yes, the "kingdom of heaven" is now at hand.

Jesus, who is the Son of God, revealed what God is like. After emptying Himself of His own glory in order to live as a man in a mortal body, He received His Father's eternal life from heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit by dependent faith. He could therefore say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father... The Father who dwells in Me does the works." (John 14: 9-10) He was enabled to reveal God's image by surrendering Himself to be a vessel of the life and the will of the Father. As He walked in a Spirit-filled life, He revealed "the image of the invisible God." (Col. 1:15)

Even though God is a spirit and is invisible to the natural eye, He has a divine nature that can be displayed in the world through His actions. In essence, "God is love." (1 John 4:16) Everything He does is revealed as a manifestation of His eternal life of love. By examining the life of Jesus, we can see how divine love is always seeking to serve the ultimate good of God's creation by working to reestablish God's eternal kingdom of perfect love in this fallen world.

God originally created His universe with perfect order. He intended for everyone to live in harmony with each other. He filled the first man with His Spirit. The Holy Spirit revealed the Kingdom-life of heaven in and through Adam in the same way the life was revealed in and through Jesus. This enabled Adam to share with God in His nature of perfect love. Adam was able to express God's life and image of perfect love in everything he did while he participated with God in His divine nature. This enabled God and man to live in the same sense of oneness and harmony that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God has a life of love that never fails. This love is revealed in the way that God sacrifices Himself for the good of His eternal kingdom. The Son of God displayed this life of love when He sacrificed Himself for the purpose of redeeming man from His fallen state. *His work at the cross has made it possible for God's Kingdom-life of love,*

with its heavenly order and harmony, to be reestablished within the hearts of men and women in this world. Everything God does in His unfailing love has this purpose in mind.

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality {the Kingdom-life of perfect love}, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth {the Kingdom-life that was displayed through Jesus} and follow evil {a self-directed life}, there will be wrath and anger. (Rom. 2: 6-8 NIV)

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Eph. 1: 4)

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:10-11)

When Adam turned from the will of God, he lost the eternal life that had originally enabled him to display God’s nature of love. Adam then began to produce sons in his own image. (Gen. 5: 3) In contrast to living in God’s image of perfect love, Adam and his offspring became self-centered in nature. It was this self-centeredness, which leads to self-seeking, that has been the source of all sin. It has spread darkness and chaos throughout the world.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death {which includes a loss of the eternal life of perfect love} through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Rom. 5:12)

It was the loss of God’s life of love from within the soul that causes man to sin. There is now an inner emptiness that causes man to be self-centered, self-seeking, self-willed and self-sufficient. This corruption within the heart is the seedbed of sin.

When the Son came as the Second or Last Adam, He once again began to reveal the “light of life” from heaven in the world. (John 8:12) He displayed the eternal life that Adam lost at the Fall. (1 John 1: 2-3) Jesus received the food of heaven that satisfies the soul by living wholly for the will of the Father. (John 4: 34) As He walked by the divine will, the Spirit continued to fill Him with a divine love, joy and peace that comes down from heaven.

Jesus revealed how all people will live when the Kingdom-life of God has been fully established within their hearts. They are empowered to continually conform to God’s divine will as they share with Him in His life of perfect love. The children of God’s kingdom are all enabled to live as one with God and with each other as they live under the control and power of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone who enters into this full salvation will be enabled to display the same “light of life” from heaven that Jesus revealed through His mortal body. (John 8:12) These children of light will also begin sharing with the Son of God in the power of His throne. The children of God’s kingdom are to both tell others about the Kingdom-life that is now at hand and use the power of prayer to help restore His kingdom within the hearts of people in this world.

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be

Your name. Your kingdom come... (Matt. 6: 9-10)

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me {and enters into the same Kingdom-life of perfect love}, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father {in order to be a source of the Kingdom-life to all of mankind}. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:12-13)

After entering into the Kingdom-life that comes down from heaven through the Son, Christians are to enter into the Lord's work of furthering the kingdom of God. The Son brings glory to the Father by establishing this life of perfect love within the hearts of His followers. By entering into a fully sanctified state, the children of God are enabled to display the Father's image of love. The Father becomes glorified in the Son as the members of His body do the greater works of furthering this Kingdom-life in the world through their prayers.

Believers who are willing to deny themselves and take their self-centered flesh-life to the cross {the sin nature that everyone receives from Adam's family line}, will be enabled to enter into the "light of life" that Jesus displayed. It will enable them to display God's life of true righteousness and holiness {perfect love} through their mortal bodies.

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me {through the cross} shall not walk in darkness {the self-centered way of life that everyone receives from the first Adam}, but have the light of life {the Kingdom-life of perfect love}. (John 8:12)

If anyone desires to come after Me {into the eternal Kingdom-life of perfect love}, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me... Whoever loses his life {His self-centered way of life} for My sake will find it. (Matt. 16: 24-25)

If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, *as the truth is in Jesus*...put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4: 21, 24 Emphasis added)

Love has been perfected among us in this...because as he is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)

THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS VERSES THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT

Jesus can now give His "eternal life" in an abundantly full measure to every believer who follows Him through the cross. (John 10:10) We shall refer to this life of divine love as His *Kingdom-life*. If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him concerning His way of the cross, you will have an opportunity to find His Kingdom-life of perfect love from heaven. Then you will become a vessel of the same light of truth – the righteousness of God – that was displayed through Jesus Christ.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed {the Kingdom-life that comes down from heaven}, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe... Do we then make void the law

through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. (Rom. 3: 21-22)

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son...that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8: 3-4)

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him {and thereby manifest His Kingdom-life of perfect love}. (1 John 4: 9)

Yes, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Surrender your old self-centered way of life to the cross so that you may enter into both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His Kingdom-life of perfect love can then be fully established within your heart.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. (Rom. 6: 5)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ {with His Kingdom-life of perfect love} lives in me. (Gal. 2: 20)

The temple of our body can be filled with the same glory that the Father revealed through the Son when He walked in a mortal body. Once we have fully consecrated the temple to God for His exclusive use, the Son will fill it with the same glory that He received from the Father when He walked as a man in a mortal body.

And the glory {the life of perfect love} which You {the Father} gave Me {the Son} I have given them {as a promise to be received by faith}, that they may be one {united together in the divine nature of love} just as We are one: I in them, and you in Me; that they may be made perfect in one {in this world} that the world may know that you have sent Me. {When the world sees the disciples of Jesus Christ displaying His Kingdom-life of perfect love, they will know that He is the one true Savior and Lord.} (John 17: 22-23)

But we have this {heavenly} treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us...that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor. 4: 7, 10)

Every new believer will soon notice that the temple of their body is not filled with the glory of God when they first believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. This is why the New Testament teaches converted Christians to press forward in their faith until they have found the Kingdom-life of perfect love. Jesus Christ, as the long awaited Messiah, will establish this life within the heart of each believer when they have died to their old self-originated form of life {that life in which self is the originator or source of one's choices and decisions in life} and have learned to receive His life from heaven by faith, which brings us back under the control and power of the Holy Spirit, the way man was originally created to live.

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them..." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be

separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” {He will receive you into His Kingdom-life of perfect love.}

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1)

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection... (Heb. 6:1)

The Lord expects His followers to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) After becoming a Christian, we are to begin looking to Christ in faith to establish His own submissive nature within our heart. There needs to be a real salvation from the old nature that desires to live for itself according to its own desires and will. Only then will it be possible to live by God’s will here on earth as it is done in heaven.

While the Lord will one day reveal His glory to the whole world and have a kingdom where everyone shares with Him in His Kingdom-life of perfect love, we must not wait for His great Second Coming to enter into His Kingdom-life. Today is the day when we are to be saved from our fallen nature and display the glory of God. The Lord has provided a clear promise to reveal His life within each one of us if we will deny our flesh-life and take His way of the cross. (Matt. 16: 24-25)

I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live {in the Kingdom-life of perfect love}, you will live also {in the same life}... He who has My commandments and keeps them {which includes taking the way of the cross}, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself {as an indwelling life from heaven} to him. (John 14:18-23)

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Heb. 6:12 NIV)

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6: 2)

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...(Heb. 2:1, 3)

Again, Jesus does not reveal His Kingdom-life of perfect love within the heart of everyone who has become a member of the church. He says there will be “many” who are turned away from heaven even though they have called Him Lord and have performed great works in His name. (Matt. 7: 21-23) These are the ones who have remained self-centered and have continued in the self-seeking way of life. They have remained on the wide road that leads to destruction in spite of their profession of faith because they have continued to live by the desires of their flesh-life.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature {the self-willed nature} and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (Eph. 2: 3 NIV)

For if you live according to the flesh you will die {have a dying spiritual life}. (Rom. 8:13)

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it. (Matt. 16: 25)

We must remember that God, because He is love, is always serving the eternal good of His children by working to create perfect order in His eternal kingdom. As a part of this love, He must destroy everyone who refuses to share with Him in His eternal life of love. Those who choose to follow a self-seeking way of life will continue to be in conflict with God's Kingdom-life of perfect love. God's wrath will therefore remain on them until they depart from this wide road that leads to destruction. (Rom. 2: 6-8)

We should begin to see why performing a few benevolent works in the Lord's name, attending church faithfully, and even conforming to certain standards of righteousness will not save us from sin and hell. If we do not turn to the Lord to be saved from the self-centered nature that everyone receives from Adam, we will continue to find ourselves in conflict with God's Kingdom-life of perfect love. "For the sinful nature {the self-centered flesh-life} desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other..." (Gal. 5:17 NIV) We escape the wrath of God by choosing to enter into complete harmony with God through a participation with Christ in His Kingdom-life of perfect love.

Yes, there are still many people who are trying to serve God while refusing to die to their self-seeking nature. Their motive for serving God has continued to come from a heart that is self-centered in nature. And while they may try to serve both themselves and God at the same time, Jesus assures us that it is not possible to serve two masters. (Matt. 6:24) When they begin to come up against strong resistance to their personal will, they will inevitably choose to follow the self-seeking way of life rather than Christ's self-sacrificing way of life.

Darkness and sin will naturally rise out of a self-centered way of life. Self-seeking people keep their minds on their own selfish desires. We can determine if we are living by the self-centered flesh-life or by the Spirit by what comes out of our heart. You will note that those who live by the flesh will continue to be in conflict with Christ's Kingdom-life of self-sacrificing love.

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. (Rom. 8: 5)

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions...of which I tell you beforehand...that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is {self-sacrificing} love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:19-24)

Traces of selfishness will continue to be revealed even while serving God if the old self-centered way of life has remained alive and active. The scribes and Pharisees are examples of this kind of dedication to God.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish {living by standards that provide an outward appearance of righteousness}, but inside they are full of...self-indulgence. (Matt. 23: 25)

We can find people today who have made great efforts to conform themselves to certain standards in order to make themselves look holy on the outside. And yet, they have remained self-indulgent in nature because they have not followed Christ through the cross and permitted Him to establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their heart. Because Jesus never changes, we can know that He is still saying “woe” to everyone who is taking this same course of the Pharisees.

God’s word explains how fallen man must turn from his self-centered way of life. *God’s work of redemption is intended to make people holy to God and His kingdom.* His indwelling Kingdom-life of perfect love is what makes it possible for everyone to live entirely for God’s will. Everyone is able to live in true harmony with God and each other when they have died to self-will {the essence of all sin} and have entered into the good, pleasing and perfect will of God.

In contrast, if the self-centered way of life is permitted to live on, we can expect to periodically find contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition and dissensions taking place. They are the signs of carnal darkness. “Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

There is a difference between the unconverted man and the converted man. Those who are not converted do not fight against the selfish desires of the flesh. They naturally give in to them. In contrast, those who are born of God can no longer give way to this life of sin. While they will find there is still a sin nature causing trouble within their heart, they will use the Spirit to consistently fight against the desires of the flesh-life. They repress the remains of the self-seeking nature and its sinful practices.

Christians who have been properly trained will know that backsliding has begun when they start losing their first love and they find themselves becoming self-indulgent like the Pharisees. Those who have been built up in their faith will also know that it is possible to find Christ’s Kingdom-life of perfect love by putting to death the desires of the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh {the self-centered nature} you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. {You will find the Kingdom-life of perfect love.} (Rom. 8:13)

Yes, the path into Christ’s Kingdom-life of divine love passes along a narrow and difficult way, and “there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:14) After becoming a Christian and receiving the gift of the Spirit, the believer is required to use the Spirit to put to death the self-centered way of life that has been inherited from Adam.

Again, trying to serve God and live by His laws through human effort is not adequate. We are now in the age of fulfillment when the Kingdom-life of perfect love needs to be fully established within our hearts.

The law and the prophets {living by law} were until John {the Baptist}. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. {The law will naturally be fulfilled when the

Kingdom-life of perfect love has been fully established within the heart. }
(Luke 16:16)

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has {from His self-originated flesh-life} cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:13)

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13: 45-46)

THE ESSENCE OF DARKNESS

There is a carnal darkness that covers this present world. It comes from the inwardly focused flesh-life that developed in man after Adam chose to turn from God's will to self-will. Wesley Duewel says, "...when Adam sinned, he sinned God's holy presence out of his life and thus was no longer holy. He was guilty and void of God's holy presence... When the Holy Spirit leaves, a person has nothing but an empty spirit." (*More God More Power*; p.35) This inner emptiness is the sign of spiritual death.

When the eternal soul of man was separated from the eternal life of God, it became empty and unfulfilled. It has resulted in a self-seeking nature. Because this fallen nature is contrary to God's nature of perfect love, it spreads darkness over the world.

Fallen man desires to be his own god. He has chosen to follow a self-exalting and self-centered way of life. This is the life that Satan fostered on the world. Instead of looking to God for the one divine spiritual life that comes from heaven, he turns to the world and his own resources to develop a worldly form of spiritual life according to his own desires. "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." (Eph. 2: 3 NIV)

We can see how fallen man, as he lives by the flesh, attempts to lift himself spiritually through his own works. This is why he is always trying to improve his surrounding environment. Since he does not possess the supernatural life that comes down from heaven, which would enable Him to spiritually overcome this cursed world, he remains focused on the temporal realm. You will find that his hope for improving his spiritual life is directly linked to improving the conditions that surround him. However, because the curse on the world works to defeat his plans, he eventually finds that his efforts to improve his outward conditions do not provide lasting results.

It is a shame to see how many people within the church have ignored God's clear words on this matter. It is not difficult to see how they have continued to ignore many of His teachings even while claiming to believe in the infallible Word of God. For example, they insist that all Christians will have a spiritual life that keeps running dry. Rather than permit the Word of God to be the standard of truth (John 4:14; 7: 38), which would require most Christians to enter into a closer examination of how they are living, they compare themselves amongst themselves. And, as Paul has stated, this is not wise. (2 Cor. 10:12)

Every Christian who is still looking to the temporal realm for their spiritual sustenance should expect to find a returning sense of dryness within their soul. A close examination of their life will show how they are still responding to the desires of the

flesh. The flesh-life naturally looks to the temporal things it can see. The hope it has for improving its spiritual life is to be found in the temporal realm. It is in this sense that God's called-out people have exchanged the glory that is available from God {His Kingdom-life of perfect love from heaven} for what does not profit. In spite of all their efforts, they will continue to experience a returning sense of inner dryness while following this course.

“But My people have changed their Glory {the Kingdom-life of divine love that must come down from heaven to fill the soul} for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,” says the Lord. “For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:11-13)

Everyone who drinks this water {the temporal waters of this world} will be thirsty again, *but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst*. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to {a display of} eternal life. (John 4:13-14 NIV Emphasis added)

Those who truly turn from this world as the source of their spiritual sustenance and turn to God for His divine life from heaven will find that God is able to satisfy their soul. As Jesus has said, He will fill their inner being with His “living water.” When Christians are experiencing this inner sense of fullness, they do not need to spend time seeking to improve their spiritual life through the use of temporal things. The soul that is satisfied is set “free indeed” from the self-seeking ways of the world. This freedom from the carnal nature then enables the children of God to expend themselves for the good of God's kingdom, as Jesus did. It is in this sense that the welling up of Christ's “living water” from within their soul will enable them to display God's eternal life of perfect love.

Unfortunately, the people of this world have not trusted in God. They have not followed His clear instructions. We can even find born again Christians turning back to the self-seeking ways of the world. This looking back to the world for spiritual sustenance has taken them into a backslidden condition.

For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ {because they have refused to take their flesh-life to the cross}: *whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly...who set their mind on earthly things*. (Phil. 3:18-19 Emphasis added)

No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9: 62)

Remember Lot's wife. (Luke 17: 32)

Some people try to excuse themselves by saying that we cannot all be like Jesus and Paul. But this premise is in direct conflict with the teachings of the true Gospel. For example, Paul was able to see how the Corinthians had continued to follow the worldly course of building up their own little kingdoms in this world. Instead of taking Christ's way of the cross as he did, these converts were still seeking to find their spiritual life by

hoarding things in this world. Paul tried to turn the Corinthians from the self-seeking way of darkness in the same way he taught in every church.

You are already full! You are already rich! { You have gained much in this world.} You have reigned as kings without us... We are fools for Christ's sake... To the present hour we both hunger and thirst {physically}, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. {They sacrificed themselves for the good of God's kingdom as Jesus did.} And we labor, working with our own hands {so there would be no burden on others}... I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you... *Therefore I urge you, imitate me... as I teach everywhere in every church.* (1 Cor. 4: 8-17 Emphasis added)

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you {sacrificing ourselves for your good}, we preached to you the gospel of God. (1 Thess. 2: 9)

Brethren, join in following my example, *and note those who so walk; as you have us for a pattern.* (Phil. 3:17 Emphasis added)

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1)

Yes, every Christian is expected to enter into this self-sacrificing way of life. God does not want His children seeking to become rich in worldly goods. While we should follow Paul's example by working hard to make sure that we are never a burden on others, God does not want us hoarding our resources for our own personal pleasures in this world. As John Wesley has taught, we are to earn all we can and save all we can {avoid spending it on our personal pleasures} so we will be in a position to give all we can. God's divine love can only be expressed through us when we are sacrificing ourselves for the good of His eternal kingdom, as Jesus did.

In contrast to the life of Jesus and Paul, there are many people within the church who have remained self-seekers. They have been accumulating their treasures on earth. They work hard, but they do it for the purpose of preparing for their future life in this world. They have taken a course that is in direct conflict with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after {because they do not believe in the promises of God}, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God {His Kingdom-life of perfect love}, and all these things {the basic necessities of life} shall be added to you.

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have {your unneeded possessions and wealth} and give alms {by helping people in need}; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12: 29-34)

And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years {of retirement}; take your ease; eat drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:19-20)

Jesus Christ has promised a hundredfold return for everything we give up for His sake. (Matt. 19: 29) This means that we can receive a ten thousand percent return on our investment that we can enjoy throughout eternity. If a banker offered someone this kind of return, they would sell everything they possessed in order to multiply their assets. If we truly believe in what Christ has taught, we would do the same for Him. Those who are truly living for eternity will treat the things of this world as nothing in order to obtain what He has promised.

In spite of what the word of God teaches, we find the church filled with people who have set their mind on earthly things. They are still working to build up their own little kingdoms so they will have their security in this world. Because there are so few following the example of Jesus and Paul, the darkness of the world has overshadowed the light that should now be revealed through the church.

God's perfectly ordered world now finds itself embroiled in a multitude of conflicts because individuals continue to live by self-will for their personal pleasures. It makes it impossible for true harmony to exist. Whenever two conflicting wills come into contact with each other, we can expect to find more discord and disorder.

We would find the same kind of harmony in this world that exists within the kingdom of heaven if everyone was truly submitted to God's divine will. Yes, the kingdom of heaven is "at hand." This Kingdom-life can now be established within the hearts of men and women because of what Jesus Christ has already accomplished. We can share with Him in His submissive and self-giving nature. It is a divine nature that enables us to always live for the will of God. On the other hand, darkness will continue to cover the world as long as there are demons and people living for themselves according to their independent wills.

In God's ordered world, everyone was to live under the control and power of the Holy Spirit. Since there is only one Spirit, and because He is always in harmony with the one divine will, He has the capacity to keep everything in perfect order. But He cannot do His work until individual believers have permitted the Son to establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their hearts. Only by submitting to God's good, pleasing and perfect will is it possible for everyone to become as one with each other. "For as many as {die to self-will and} are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Rom. 8:14)

Man has tried very hard to make this world a better place to live. We can find politicians laboring to improve the structures within our governments, economists and social workers laboring to improve our living conditions, and psychologists laboring to cure our spiritual problems. While these efforts may provide a temporary and limited improvement, they cannot produce the deep and lasting change that is needed. Everything that is done through man's efforts will continue to fall short of a real utopia because these works of the flesh simply cannot reach the root of the problem. If the heart remains bad, and people remain self-seekers, the evil will remain.

The carnal darkness that is now covering the world has its source in the pride that leads man to direct his own affairs. Living independently of the one true God, he becomes a god unto himself because he thinks he knows the best way to live. This self-exaltation and self-will has resulted in many independent little kingdoms. And every little king, because each one thinks his way is best, has a tendency to try to impose his will on

others. This is why we now find so much discord in a world that God created to have perfect order.

Jesus Christ came into the world to display the Kingdom-life of perfect love that He can now share with every believer. He did not assert Himself in the sense of choosing to live by His own will. He said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 6: 38) He was able to receive and reveal the Kingdom-life of heaven that truly satisfies the soul because He chose to live by the will of His Father in heaven. Again, He said, “My food {or spiritual sustenance from heaven} is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” (John 4: 34) *He did not sin, because He chose to lay down His own will and yield to the will of His Father.* He received a supernatural sustenance from heaven as He lived in the Kingdom-life of heaven.

It is in this same sense that God is also able to save us from sin. The Son has the power and the authority to enable us to become partakers with Him in His submissive nature. He desires to establish His Kingdom-life within our heart so we can always respond in love to God’s revealed light.

{The Son came} To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies {including the self-centered and self-willed nature}, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness {in perfect love} before Him all the days of our life. (Luke 1: 74-75)

As the living Father sent Me, and I live {in the Kingdom-life of heaven} because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live {in the same Kingdom-life} because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven... He who eats this bread {by living under the control and power of the Holy Spirit} will live forever. (John 6: 57-58)

The fundamental nature of sin and evil is to live independent of God’s will. The world is covered with darkness because most people are still choosing for themselves how they will live. Their guilty conscious may lead them to avoid gross sins and manifest a self-produced form of righteousness like the Pharisees, but they are still self-centered and self-willed. Their self-seeking way of life will inevitably manifest itself in a walk that is in conflict with God’s nature of self-giving love. Everyone who continues to follow this way of life will therefore remain under God’s wrath. (Rom. 2: 6, 8)

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees {men who strictly conformed to the outward laws of God while holding onto their self-indulgent nature}, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5: 20)

The self-centered nature, which is naturally carnal, will inevitably manifest itself in many different forms of sin. This is why Jesus identifies the heart of fallen man as the seedbed of evil. He said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Matt. 15:19) As long as the heart still has a trace of self-seeking within it, it will have a tendency to manifest some form of selfish sin. “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” (Jam. 3:16)

Every social problem that occurs in this world can be directly linked to this inner corruption of the heart. It results in a way of life that is diametrically opposed to God's nature of self-giving love. This is why God must use His divine power to completely renew the very nature of man in His work of establishing His Kingdom-life of perfect love within the heart.

Those who are not seeking to be saved from this fallen nature have not turned to the Lord for the one true salvation that He now offers. Yes, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

The self-centered nature that Satan fostered on the world needs to be done away with before the Kingdom-life of perfect love can be fully established within the heart. The Lord has made it possible to be saved from the old fallen nature. Those who are willing to become vessels of His overcoming life of perfect love will receive an "abundance of grace" and a "gift of {true} righteousness" (Rom. 5:17) that will enable them to reign over the self-centered nature that everyone receives through Adam's family line.

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

Knowing this that our old man {with the carnal nature} was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. (Rom. 6: 6)

For if by the one man's offense {spiritual} death {and sin} reigned through the one {Adam}, *much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life* {in the Kingdom-life of perfect love} through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17 Emphasis added)

Every individual needs to examine their own heart to determine if they are still holding onto their independent will. It will manifest itself in a pride that tends to produce disputes, bickering and strife when it has been crossed. "For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3: 3) It is a clear sign that the flesh-life remains alive and active. It has not yet been taken to the cross. The Lord's Kingdom-life of perfect love has not yet been found.

But whoever keeps His word {which includes taking His way of the cross}, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2: 5-6)

Once there has been a real death to the pride that leads to independence, and we begin to live like dependent little children in the hands of God, we can begin trusting in Him to work out all things for our good. He knows how to lead His children for their ultimate good and provide for their basic needs. Everything in life can then be seen as coming through the permissive will of our sovereign God. While we may not always understand what God is working out in some of our trials, we can rest in the peace and joy that comes from the Spirit when we are fully trusting in Him.

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like {dependent and trusting} little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18: 3 NIV)

For the kingdom of God is...righteousness {perfect love} and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...to be conformed to the likeness of his Son... (Rom. 8: 28-29)

Jesus wants His followers to realize in advance that it is not easy to enter into His Kingdom-life of perfect love. He said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life {the eternal Kingdom-life of perfect love}, and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:14) He instructs His followers to first sit down and count the cost. (Luke 14: 28) Dying out to the self-exalting and self-seeking ways of the world will involve some suffering. But the Kingdom-life of perfect love that will be established within the heart is well worth the price that needs to be paid. *The ones who overcome will find a heavenly life that satisfies their souls as with the richest of foods.*

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh {by dying out to the self-seeking and self-willed way of life}, has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (1 Pet. 4:1-2)

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory {His Kingdom-life of perfect love} by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while {in dying out to the flesh-life}, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

The Lord is able to manifest His life of righteousness and peace and joy within our heart when we are no longer living for ourselves. Those who have enough faith to fully surrender their lives to God, and then completely trust in Him to work out all things for their good, will find His life of perfect peace. The peace of God that transcends all understanding and the joy of the Lord that is inexpressible and glorious will begin to fill their heart when they have become vessels of His life of love.

PRESSING INTO THE LIFE OF PROMISE

Jesus Christ can now come to individual believers “according to the power of an endless life.” (Heb. 7:16) He comes in His Kingdom-life of perfect love to purge out the old carnal nature, which is the root of sin. “Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him...” (Heb. 7: 25) These fully saved Christians actually share with Him in His divine nature as they live by the power of His indwelling Spirit. (1 Pet. 1: 3-4) This is the life of promise {the Promise of the Father – Acts 1: 4} that all believers need to receive through their responsive faith.

When God delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt He did not intend to leave them in the desert wilderness. He took them out in order to take them into a very special life of promise. But the people themselves were required to press forward in their faith until they had received the life that God had promised. These lessons were written down to reveal how this principle applies to Christians in this age of fulfillment. (1 Cor. 10:11)

We can therefore find the author of the Hebrew Epistle telling New Testament believers to press forward in their faith. Every Christian is expected to die out to their self-originated way of life and enter into a faith that permits them to live through the eternal spiritual life of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest {a place where we live through the Son's Kingdom-life of perfect love}, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Heb. 4:1-2)

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection {where the Kingdom-life of perfect love is established within the heart}, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God... Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:1, 12)

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord... For whom the Lord loves He chastens...for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. (Heb. 12: 5-6, 10)

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord. (Heb. 2:1-3)

How will we stand before our Maker on the day of judgment if we have continued to reject the full salvation that Jesus Christ has come to reveal within our heart. While we all need to first become reconciled to God through the Son's shed blood, this is not the complete salvation the Lord has provided for us in this life. He saves us from sin by revealing His Kingdom-life of perfect love within our heart. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved {from the fallen-life} by His {indwelling} life." (Rom. 5:10)

Jesus has very specifically stated that we can only find His life of promise when we have lost our flesh-life. (Matt. 16: 25) We therefore need to examine ourselves to determine if we have died to self-will and self-seeking in the same sense that Jesus did. "The life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin {all self-will}, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:10-11) We cannot expect to "find" His eternal life if we do not deny ourselves and follow Him through the cross. We therefore say again, "Let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it."

As a spiritual type, the sins of the Jews were washed away when they were miraculously taken through the Red Sea. Furthermore, they experienced a real deliverance from their previous bondage to the Egyptians. But even after being miraculously delivered from their old life in Egypt, they still had a tendency to rebel against God's plan to lead them into the life of promise. There was a corruption within

their heart that caused them to lust after the worldly things they should have left behind in Egypt. Lacking faith, they fell short of the fruitful land of promise and remained in a wilderness experience.

In a similar sense, God's called-out children in this age of fulfillment can fall short of the life that God has prepared for them. God does not use His mighty hand to lift them into His Kingdom-life of promise in due time because they have not had the kind of responsive faith that fully yields to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

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... For indeed the gospel {the good news of the life of promise} was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith {a responsive yielding to God's will} in those who heard it. (Heb. 3:18-19; 4: 2)

God performed a second great miracle in the lives of His called-out people when they were finally prepared to enter into the land of promise. The Word of God explains how the Jordan River was "cut off" and backed up to "Adam." (Josh. 3:16) As a spiritual type, God is telling us that He will cut off the carnal nature {by a circumcision of the heart – (Rom. 2: 29), made without hands – (Col. 2:11)} and remove the corruption that entered into the heart of man at the fall of Adam when we enter into His Kingdom-life of promise.

It is in this sense that full salvation is a supernatural life from God. *We cannot produce it through our own efforts no matter how hard we try. Resolutions and discipline will not do it.*

While human love will motivate people to improve their relationships with others, it will inevitably remain tied to a selfish motive. This inner carnality will continue to cause conflict both within and without. No matter how hard people strive in their own strength to live by unselfish love, they will still find their self-centered nature producing its evil effects. Even a little bit of the self-centered nature within the heart will cause a selfish bias and bad fruit. *The unguarded words that occasionally come out of the mouth of even regenerated Christians will reveal the existence of this inner corruption.* This is why we must not fall short of the life of promise.

The Kingdom-life of perfect love that Christians are expected to reveal comes from a supernatural work of God. It is not something we can produce through our own efforts. It is because there are so many people within the church who are still attempting to live by their own human efforts that the Kingdom-life is seldom revealed. Only Christ's life of perfect love can do away with the carnal nature. And we have to assume that this old carnal nature still has a trace of life within the heart if unloving words are still said on occasions.

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit... For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matt. 12: 33-34)

Evil will remain within the heart until it has been completely filled with the Son's Kingdom-life from heaven. Man will need to discover that in spite of all his scientific discoveries and clever conferences to advance the welfare of man, he simply does not

have the power to deal with the selfishness that is found in the fallen nature. No policy can change an evil heart into a good heart. No theory will remove the corruption. No social reform will make the heart unselfish and fully sacrificial in nature so it may express itself in a heavenly love.

All through the ages people have tried to build up their towers to establish the city of God. But regardless of how they have arranged their bricks in new and different patterns, they have not reached the love and peace and harmony that is found in the kingdom of heaven. All of these human efforts are mere babble. We cannot reach up to the city of God through a work of the flesh. This Kingdom-life must come down out of heaven from God and be established within the heart through a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and *He will dwell in them* {with His Kingdom-life from heaven}, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them... (Rev. 21: 2-3 Emphasis added)

But you have come {present tense} to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven...to the spirits of just men made perfect {in love}... (Heb. 12: 22-23)

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “*I will dwell in them...*” Therefore “come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you {into the Kingdom-life of heaven}... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1 Emphasis added)

The works of man and all his humanistic thought processes are discredited! Man’s efforts to create this heavenly life of harmony will always fail. While He is required to deny himself and submit His flesh-life to the cross, “It is the Spirit who gives life {the Kingdom-life from heaven}; the flesh {human effort} profits nothing.” (John 7: 63)

Unfortunately, most people, including many Christians, will look at you as if you have taken leave of your senses when you speak of turning from self-will so you may enter into the kingdom of God and live wholly for the will of God. They do not believe that we can be completely delivered from the old nature that desires to live according to its own will and pleasures. But of course, God’s word soundly refutes these erroneous beliefs.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death {to the flesh-life}, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection {His Kingdom-life of perfect love}, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him {a crucifixion of the old self-centered man}, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin... But now having been set free from sin {the self-centered and self-willed nature}, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness... (Rom. 6: 5-6, 22)

We believe the testimony of David Updegraff will be beneficial at this point. He describes his state after spiritual regeneration had taken place within his heart. *Only those who are truly born again hate carnality within the heart.* He therefore speaks of his deep need to be filled with the Spirit and life of God:

I hated pride, ambition, evil tempers, and vain thoughts, but I had them, for all that, and they were a part of me. Not as acts to be repented of and forgiven, but as dispositions lying behind the acts, and promptings thereto, natural to the “old man” and inseparable from his presence in my being. I began to ask God, with a measure of faith, to “cast him out.” Along with this desire there came a great hunger and thirst to be “filled with all the fullness of God.” I longed for a clean heart and constant spirit.

I went upon my knees with the resolute purpose of “presenting my body a living sacrifice to God.” There passed quickly before me the obstacles in the way, and the things to be suffered for Jesus’ sake... Selfishness, pride, and prejudice joined forces and rose in rebellion, while the “old man” pleaded for his life. But I could not, would not, draw back. “Vile affections” were resolutely nailed to the cross, and those things that “were gain to me”—denominational standing, friends, family, business, possessions, time, talent, and reputation—were irrevocably committed to the sovereign control and disposal of my Almighty Savior.

With my all upon the altar, I had no sooner reckoned myself “dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God,” than the “Holy Ghost fell” upon me. Instantly I felt the melting and refining fire of God permeating my whole being. I had entered into rest.

There is only one hope for this world. Each individual will need to surrender their entire being to the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of permitting Him to establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their hearts. *It is only as we die to our own will and begin living by God’s divine will that we can enter into the Kingdom-life of promise and begin revealing His glory in this world.*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory {His Kingdom-life of perfect love} by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while {in dying out to the flesh-life}, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

A KINGDOM WHERE LOVE REIGNS

The apostle Paul has described in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians the divine love that Christ has come to reveal within our hearts. Again, this perfect love does not come from the efforts of man. It comes down from heaven and enters the heart through a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Gal. 5: 23) This definition of divine love merely serves as a means for examining ourselves to determine

if we have been “filled” with God’s Spirit of love. Let us therefore listen to God’s Word and surrender to the light of His truth. Anything within the heart that is opposed to this nature of love will need to be surrendered to the cross of death.

Love suffers long {it removes all impatience} and is kind {it leaves no room for unkindness}; love does not envy {all jealousy and resentment is banished}; love does not parade itself {boasting and self-assertion disappear}, is not puffed up {the prideful desire for honor finds no place in the heart}; does not behave rudely {disrespect and foolishness is eliminated}, does not seek its own {all selfish sin and self-seeking dies when self dies}, is not provoked {self-centered anger and fleshly wrath will not be seen}, thinks no evil {brooding over wrongs and uncharitable feelings are gone}; does not rejoice in iniquity {finds no fulfillment in self-will}, but rejoices in truth { finds all its fulfillment in Christ}; bears all things {it does away with a complaining spirit}, believes all things {there is no mistrust within the heart to destroy fellowship}, hopes all things {despair, anxiety and despondency vanish}, endures all things {humbly submits to the will of God}. Love never fails... (1 Cor. 13: 4-8)

The apostle John expanded on God’s definition of love when he said, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” (1 John 3:16 NIV) We can use these inspired words to examine ourselves for the purpose of determining our spiritual condition. Have we truly submitted to this one salvation that Jesus offers?

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the {one true} faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you {with His life of self-sacrificing love}—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Cor. 13: 5)

While we may be reconciled to God through Christ’s shed blood, this is not the salvation of the Lord. He saves us from the old nature by His indwelling life of perfect love. And if we are not looking for this “much more” of salvation once He has revealed more light on the subject, we will eventually find ourselves drifting away from a reconciled state. (Rom. 5:10)

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light {perfect love} and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness {the self-willed way of life}, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light {the self-sacrificing life of love that He displayed} as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another {with God}, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1: 6-7)

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability... They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will. (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in {a self-sacrificing} love to one another and to all...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness. (1 Thess. 3:12-13)

The divine love that comes from the life of the Son is willing to suffer and give of itself sacrificially for the good of others. Because this life of love has its source in Christ, and it flows like a river through the heart of fully sanctified Christians, it will express itself consistently in the same way, year after year, without failing. "Love never fails."

The life we are to receive from Jesus Christ has been described in the Scriptures as "rivers" of "living water." A river flows without ending. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow {never ending} rivers of living water." (John 7: 38) Because the supply is everlasting, the fruit of Christ's Spirit never needs to fail once the heart has been purified and we have learned to live through Christ.

The fruit of the Spirit is {Christ's self-sacrificing} love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5: 22-23)

Christ's Sermon on the Mount describes the kind of love that people will display when the kingdom of God has been fully established within their hearts. These teachings can only be carried out by people who are currently "filled" with the divine love that is found in Christ's life. Nothing would so woefully fail as an attempt by human governments to implement this way of life through legislative laws, or church governments by ecclesiastical pronouncement. Failure is inevitable until the heart of man has been purified and "filled" with God's Spirit.

God's nature is perfect love. And He will begin to display His spiritual image and His glory through our mortal body once He has manifested Himself within our heart. (John 14: 21) Yes, "The life of Jesus may be manifested in our body." (2 Cor. 4:10) This is how God has planned to have many children conformed to the spiritual image of His Son. As His children, we were "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8: 29)

Jesus has been called the Second or Last Adam because He walked in the light of truth that God had intended for the first Adam to manifest. After emptying Himself of His own glory to become a man, the Son received and revealed the life of His Father {the heavenly glory of perfect love} through a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. He too received the Kingdom-life of heaven by faith. Thus, even while living as a man, He was enabled to reveal the life of the Father—His glorious image of love—in this world. Similarly, we are to receive our life from Him.

And the Word {the Son} became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory {the heavenly life of love}, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of His fullness we have all received {as a promise to be appropriated through our responsive faith}, and grace for grace. (John 1:14, 16)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. {We are to receive the blessings that are contained within the divine life of

Christ in the same way He received these spiritual blessings from the Father while walking in a mortal body.) (Eph. 1:3)

God originally created human children for the purpose of displaying His glorious life of love in the world. “He chose us in Him {to receive our life from the Son} before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Eph. 1: 4) As the highest order of His creation in this world, we were to be the most complete reflection of His image of love. His heavenly life of love—His Kingdom-life—was to be seen in all our actions.

Christians today now have the opportunity to have God’s Kingdom-life of love made complete within their hearts. We are living in the age of fulfillment. We are therefore in a position to be conformed to the image of the Son. Yes, because of what Jesus has already accomplished at the cross, we now have access to the “glory” that will reveal God’s life of perfect love through our mortal bodies.

God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, *to which He called you by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (2 Thess. 2:13 Emphasis added)

And *the glory* {the image of love} which You {the Father} gave Me {the Son} *I have given them* {as a promise to be appropriated through faith}, that they may be one {in the nature of divine love} just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one...that the {perfect} love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17: 22-23, 26 Emphasis added)

But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete {in love}, lacking nothing... Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved {in the desert testing period}, he will {be taken into the land of promise and} receive the crown of life {the Kingdom-life of perfect love} which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (Jam. 1: 4, 12)

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself {the Kingdom-life from heaven} to him. (John 14: 21)

God’s glory is found in His spiritual image. And we know that “God is love.” (1 John 4:16) This is the glory that He now desires to reveal through each of His children. And praise the Lord, He has given every believer access to this glorious life of love. “For you are the temple of the living God {a temple that is to be filled with His glory}. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them...’” (2 Cor. 6:16)

While this crown of life is stored for us in the heavenly realms within the life of Jesus Christ, the Spirit can now begin to reveal His divine life within our soul. And even though we can only enter into the Pentecostal firstfruits of the life of heaven, the glory we do receive will make us like God in His life of love in this world.

He {the Spirit} will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine {the Kingdom-life} and making it known to you. (John 16:14 NIV)

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared {in the heavenly realms} for those who love him”—but God has revealed it to us {within our inner being} by his Spirit. (1 Cor. 2: 9-10)

Wesley Duewel has said, “Some of God’s saintly children have not only gone from glory to glory in holy Christlikeness of personality (2 Cor. 3:18), but God has so indwelt them that their lives and even their faces have become at times radiant from His presence. We should not be surprised that those who draw very near to God and live in utmost fellowship, intimacy, and communion with Him sometimes reflect on their faces the radiant glory of our ascended Lord. Just as Jesus, God’s Son, is the radiance of God’s glory (Heb. 1: 3), so we can with unveiled faces “reflect the Lord’s glory” as we “are being transformed into his likeness with every-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (*More God More Power*; p. 92)

How can we truly love our neighbors as God does apart from sharing with Christ in His nature of self-sacrificing love? I may be attracted by the sentimental idea of loving them, but the old carnal nature will cause my love to evaporate when my neighbors act in ways I don’t like. I will need a much stronger power than is found in sentimental human love.

Let us therefore believe in Jesus. He has come to fill our hearts with His Spirit of love so we may display His life of love in everything we do. Each one of us now has an opportunity to become “one spirit with Him.” (1 Cor. 6:17) We have access to “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1: 3)

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth {the self-centered and self-seeking way of life}, and deep darkness {of self-will} the people; But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory {His life of self-sacrificing love} will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1-3)

Even denominational differences will cease to be a barrier to the harmony that can exist when Christians are truly participating with Christ in His Kingdom-life of love. We can all become one in life and nature. Even though we will never regiment one another into the same point of view, we can all share with the Lord in His self-sacrificing nature. The world would not find our different beliefs a stumbling block if they could see each one of us laying down our lives for the good of each other.

John Wesley’s thoughts seem relevant here: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.” While God has not promised to perfect our knowledge in this world, He has made it possible to have our hearts perfected in love.

Let us also point out that Christianity is not a system of correct doctrinal beliefs. It is much more than believing in mere words. It is the Kingdom-life of God, being revealed through the children of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. “For the kingdom of God is not in word {talk} but in power.” (1 Cor. 4: 20) “For the kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

True Christianity involves finding Christ's life of divine love. We find His risen life by losing the old flesh-life. (Matt. 16: 24-25; Rom. 6: 5-6) We can therefore say that Christianity is an invitation to share with Christ in the "firstfruits" of His heavenly life, not simply a system of beliefs that revolve around the acceptance of certain religious doctrines.

John Fletcher was a man in Wesley's era who has provided some very clear teachings on this subject of perfect love. We believe it would be helpful to include some excerpts from his treatise on Christian Perfection at this point.

Christian perfection is a spiritual constellation made up of these gracious stars,—perfect repentance, perfect faith, perfect humility, perfect meekness, perfect self-denial, perfect resignation, perfect hope, perfect charity for our visible enemies, as well as for our earthly relations; and above all, perfect love for our invisible God... We frequently use, as St. John, the phrase "perfect love," instead of the word "perfection;" and understand by it the pure love of God, shed abroad in the heart of established believers by the Holy Ghost, which is abundantly given them under the fullness of the Christian dispensation...

"The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou may live."... This promise, when it is received in its fullness, is undoubtedly the greatest of all the "exceedingly great and precious promises which are given to us, that by them you might be partakers of the Divine nature, that is, of pure love and unmixed holiness..."

To make you believe this important promise with more ardor, consider that our Lord spent some of His last moments in sealing it with His powerful intercession... And what is it that our Lord asks for these believers? Truly St. Paul asked for the imperfect believers at Corinth, "even their perfection;" (2 Cor. 13: 9); a state of soul which Christ describes thus: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they may be made one in us, etc., that they may be one as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one..." Our Lord could not pray in vain: it is not to be supposed that the Scriptures are silent with respect to the effect of this solemn prayer, an answer to which was to give the world an idea of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven: a specimen of the power which introduces believers into the state of Christian perfection: and therefore we read, that on the day of Pentecost, the kingdom of Satan was powerfully shaken; and the kingdom of God, "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," began to come with a new power...

Upon the whole, it is, I think, undeniable, from the first four chapters of the Acts, that a peculiar power of the Spirit is bestowed upon believers under the gospel of Christ; that this power, through faith on our part, can operate the most sudden and surprising change in our souls; and that, when our faith shall fully embrace the promise of full sanctification, or of

a complete circumcision of the heart in the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, who kindled so much love on the day of Pentecost...will not fail to help us to “love one another” without sinful self-seeking, and as soon as we do so, “God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfect in us.” (1 John 4:12; John 14: 23)

A real belief in Jesus Christ will cause us to depend on Him to be the source of our life. This is the essence of faith. Those who have been perfected in love have learned to live through Him. It implies living as dependent little children who realize how it is necessary to depend on someone else for everything.

I am the vine, you are the branches. {The branch is totally dependent on receiving its life from the vine.} He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit {from the Spirit}; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15: 5)

It is the Spirit who gives life {the Kingdom-life of righteousness and peace and joy}; the flesh profits nothing. (John 6: 63)

There are many people in the church like the rich young ruler who would like to have the kind of life that Jesus displayed. (Matt. 19:16-30) This young man came to Jesus and asked how to enter into “eternal life.” He was referring to the quality of life that Jesus displayed through His mortal body. (1 John 1: 2) And like the young ruler, these people are willing to obey certain laws in exchange for eternal life. By keeping their relationship with God at a law-keeping level, they are able to save their self-life. But while they would like to enjoy the peace and joy that people enjoy in the kingdom of God, they do not necessarily want to follow Christ through the cross for the purpose of becoming vessels of His life of self-sacrificing love. They therefore turn away from the “eternal life” that He is now offering to all believers.

Jesus says there will be “many” who honestly thought they were saved but end up being turned away from heaven at the Judgment Seat. (Matt. 7: 21-23; 25:11-12) He will say that He did not know them for the simple reason that they were not willing to forsake all from their self-life in order to become a vessel of His life of perfect love.

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has {from the flesh-life} cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14: 33)

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

Christianity is nothing more – nor nothing less – than the life of God coming down from heaven, through the Son, and being revealed through the bodies of fully consecrated believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every believer will need to fully surrender to God for the purpose of becoming a vessel of Christ’s Kingdom-life of love if they hope to enter into His “eternal life.” This divine life, once it has been established within the heart, will then provide a natural reflection of the love described in First Corinthians Thirteen. This indwelling life will also enable these perfected Christians to fulfill all the requirements that Jesus described in his kingdom teachings within His Sermon on the Mount.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son...that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8: 3-4)

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life {the Kingdom-life of perfect love}, truly righteousness would have been by the law. (Gal. 3: 21)

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called {as is every regenerate “called out” believer}... (1 Tim. 6:12)

There is only one way to improve the conditions of this world. We must take this gospel of the kingdom to individuals. They will need to be shown how to enter into Christ’s eternal life of love. Everyone who is willing to die to his or her old self-centered and self-sufficient way of life, a life that everyone has inherited from Adam, will “find” the Son’s resurrection life.

If God’s “called-out” people—every member of the church—would seek to have Christ’s Kingdom-life fully established within their own heart, the face of the earth would begin to change. The life of heaven would begin to shine as a light in the world.

You may become blameless and pure {in love}, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. (Phil. 2:15-16 NIV)

I have come that they may have life {the firstfruits of the Kingdom-life from heaven}, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things *you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* (2 Pet. 1:10-11 Emphasis added)

DISCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM

Christ’s teachings revolve around His kingdom. It is not easy to describe its meaning. Moffit calls it the “realm” of God. It relates to the “reign” of God. It can also be expressed as, “The regime in which love rules.”

We are not being irreverent when we say that even Jesus found it difficult to describe the “life” that His followers would need to receive from Him. Even though He was revealing this Kingdom-life of divine love through His own mortal body, He still struggled to make this profound message about the kingdom of God clear to the minds of His disciples.

In fact, the divine life we are expected to receive from heaven exceeds anything the mind can comprehend. The only way we can “know” this heavenly life is by depending on the Spirit of Christ to supernaturally reveal God’s nature of divine love within the heart. (1 Cor. 2: 9-10; John 16:14)

According to the apostle Paul, this life of love “surpasses knowledge.” In other words, the life of God can only be known by entering into a participation with Christ in His divine nature.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being... And I pray that you...may have power {from the Spirit}...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.* (Eph. 3:16-19 NIV Emphasis added)

The kingdom of God that Christians are to display through their lives is not something that can be developed through the works of the intellect and human effort. Its meaning cannot be communicated by mere words. It is a self-sacrificing nature that must be revealed within the heart by the power of God’s Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to enable someone to be “filled to the measure of the fullness of God.”

Of course, this does not mean that we will contain the infinite God. But we can become like Him in love and display His glory—His spiritual image—when the temple of our body is “filled” with His Spirit. Through a faith that fully yields to being taken into His life of promise, we can truly become “one spirit with Him.” (1 Cor. 6:17)

Again, we use Wesley Duewel’s words to describe the true meaning of Pentecost. He said, “The holy Shekinah, the fiery glory cloud, was removed symbolically from the Old Testament temple just as Ezekiel prophesied (Ezk. 11: 22-24)... Ezekiel foresaw in his vision that one day the Shekinah glory would return (43:1-5). This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the glory came to the upper room and then divided into separate tongues of fire that rested on the head of each one who was filled with the Spirit (Acts 2: 2-3). No longer was God’s glory indwelling a building; now it was indwelling each consecrated believer. The Shekinah is to be personalized in the life of each sanctified, Spirit-filled believer... This amazing Bible truth is not just a beautiful poetic statement or figure of speech; it is a true spiritual reality. God means just what He says: we can be transfigured.” (More God More Power; p. 82)

Duewel also said, “Christ’s transfiguration on the mountain was not the shining of heaven’s light upon Him. It was God’s glory radiating from Him. The transfiguration of the Christian is not a halo sent from heaven to crown you. It is a radiance from the holy Trinity indwelling you. It is the radiance of the Father’s presence, the Christlikeness of the indwelling Son of God, the glory of the Holy Spirit expressing His natural fruitfulness personalized in your life.” (More God More Power; p. 81)

The true Gospel message will tell people how they may have the Kingdom-life of God established within the temple of their body. This is the gospel that Jesus taught. “Jesus came preaching...the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’ ” (Mark 1:14-15)

The people of God were expecting a Messiah when Jesus came with this message. But their thought processes were still tied to the temporal realm. It prevented them, as it prevents people today, from understanding the meaning of Christ’s teachings. They were

unable to relate to His spiritual truths because they were still thinking in terms of a physical kingdom.

Jesus told His followers that some of them would see the kingdom established by the power of the Holy Spirit before they physically died. However, we need to realize that it would be a kingdom that He established within their hearts. He would come to them individually with His own Kingdom-life from heaven.

Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Matt. 16:28)

A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live {in the kingdom-life}, you will live also {in the same life}... *He who has My commandments and keeps them* {taking the way of the cross}, it is he who loves Me...and *I will love him and manifest Myself to him* {as an indwelling life from heaven}. (John 14:19, 21 Emphasis added)

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation {of the outward world}, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is {to be established} within you. (Luke 17: 21 NIV)

Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste {physical} death till they see the kingdom of God {His overcoming Kingdom-life of perfect love} present with power. (Mark 9:1)

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry...until you are endued with power from on high. (Luke 24: 49)

The only way to truly understand the Gospel is to see how it relates to the kingdom of God. This kingdom that comes down from heaven is the dominating thought in Christ's teachings. "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)

In fact, Jesus spoke of the kingdom far more than He spoke of the church. Of course, the development of the church—His body here on earth—is a part of this central idea. His "light of life" from heaven was to be revealed through the church as individual members permitted Him to establish His Kingdom-life of perfect love within their own hearts.

The church is a fellowship of men and women who have been called out from the self-seeking ways of the world so they may be taken into this life of promise. Each member of Christ's body is to reveal the nature of God's kingdom here and now. Because the life originates in the Father and comes through the Son to the individual members of His body by the power of the Holy Spirit, every "believer" can become "one" in life and nature with our Triune God. (John 17: 22-23) Jesus said, "Because I live {in the Kingdom-life}, you will live also {in the same life}. At that day {when you are clothed with power from on high} you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." (John 14:19-20)

It is rather strange that we have heard so little from the church about the kingdom of God. But when we see how carnal she has remained, which has prevented her from

revealing the true “light of life” from heaven, we can better understand why she has lost sight of her inheritance.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him...in the heavenly realms... (Eph. 1:18-20 NIV)

Christians today have access to a divine power that will enable them to be raised spiritually into the heavenly realms where they can begin sharing in every heavenly blessing that is found within Christ’s Kingdom-life. (Eph. 1: 3) Yes, when it comes to filling our eternal souls with the life of God, He “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...” (Eph. 3: 20 NIV)

The creeds of the church do not mention Christ’s Gospel of the Kingdom, even though it was more on His lips than any other teaching. The Thirty-nine Articles elaborate on various doctrines that Jesus did not clearly express, but they are silent when it comes to His teachings about the kingdom of God.

It is therefore not surprising to find how this phrase has very little meaning to the average Christian. People who diligently study their Bibles must suppose it means something. They see the phrase constantly used in the Scriptures. But they seldom, if ever, seek out an understanding of its real meaning.

If pressed, most Christians would say the kingdom of God is some far-off, desirable state that will be ushered in when Christ returns in His full glory. They somehow believe that His physical return in glory, along with a demand for everyone to obey His written laws, will establish His kingdom of righteousness in the world. But they neglect to take into account the defect in man’s heart.

The kingdom of God, that Jesus so frequently spoke about, cannot be implemented by imposing stronger laws through a more righteous government. Attempting to force heavenly laws on a people with a fallen nature will not overcome carnal darkness. God’s purposes cannot be fulfilled without a complete removal of the carnal nature from the heart through a real participation with Christ in His divine nature of love.

In other words, the kingdom of God cannot be forced on people. It is only available to those who are willing to present themselves to God in a way that will permit the Son to reveal His Kingdom-life through them. Only by living through the Son is it possible to display God’s life of perfect love and fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law. (Rom. 13:10; 1 John 4: 9; Rom. 8: 3-4)

There is no basis in the New Testament for depending on outward laws to reform the social order of the world. Even if the best possible reforms were implemented, the old carnal way of life would remain. Self-seeking and strife would continue to rise out of the fallen nature. Selfishness, bitterness and hardness of heart would be just as prevalent. An outward system of laws cannot overcome this evil within the heart. As we have quoted from James, “where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”

Again, the Kingdom-life of God, the New Jerusalem, must come down from above as an indwelling life. Those who are willing to lose their old flesh-life will find Christ's Kingdom-life. (Matt. 16: 25) Those who refuse to follow Christ's instructions, which includes denying themselves and taking His way of the cross so they may find His Kingdom-life, will remain forever separated from His divine presence.

We do not have to wait until some future age to begin enjoying the firstfruits of this life from heaven. Christ has come to enable each one of His followers to enter into an abundantly full measure of His "life" in this world. (John 10:10)

We are speaking of a way of life where Christian love abounds; a life where the atmosphere of positive good will comes with every breath; a life where the primary desire is to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. It is a life where pride, selfish anger, jealousy, envy, lust, gossip, backbiting and self-seeking are completely purged out of the heart by the pure and living water that flows like a never-ending river from Christ's life of divine love.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,
proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Rev. 22:1)

Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him *will become in him a spring of water welling up to* {a display of} *eternal life*. (John 4:14 NIV Emphasis added)

There are several kinds of life described in the Bible. There is physical life {bios, Greek} that everyone receives at birth. Then there is life {psuche, Greek}, which is sometimes used when referring to the lower form of life that is developed through the works of the flesh. And finally there is true spiritual life {zoe, Greek}, that comes from heaven. Whenever the Scriptures refer to the "life" we are to receive from the Son, it is referring to the "eternal life" {aionios zoe, Greek} that originates in God. As the apostle John has explained in his first Epistle, Jesus displayed the eternal life in a mortal body. (1 John 1: 2-3) And we are expected to display this same heavenly "life" in this current world as Jesus did. (John 8:12; 1 John 2: 5-6) Again, "the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." (2 Cor. 4:10) His life of love is to well up from within our inner being like a never-ending river and become a display of the firstfruits of the eternal life.

This life becomes all embracing because of the way it sacrifices itself for the good of others. It displays a heavenly "light" that reveals the nature of God. Everyone will recognize its goodness even though they may not understand all of its workings and how it has its source in God.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light {the Son's life of love from heaven}, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (John 3: 21 NIV)

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. {God speaks, and the Holy Spirit reveals this perfect love that surpasses knowledge within our inner being, so we may display the life and image of the Son through our mortal body.} But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Cor. 4: 6-7)

This abundant measure of God's grace, as it provides the "gift of righteousness" and enables the believer to "reign in life," will provide sufficient power to completely overcome the self-centered nature that everyone receives from Adam. (Rom. 5:17) You will find these fully sanctified Christians manifesting a life of self-sacrificing love in everything they do. (Acts 2: 44-47)

This is the message that Paul taught to the early church. He also said that God's called-out people could receive His grace in vain. For example, there were many Christians within the Corinthian church who were not becoming Christlike in love. They still needed to surrender themselves to the work of grace so that Christ would be able to establish His Kingdom-life within their hearts.

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. (2 Cor. 8:1-2 Emphasis added)

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)

There are many Christians today who have been receiving the grace of God in vain. They have not fully surrendered themselves to be vessels of the Lord's life of love. Like the Corinthians, they still have a tendency to live for themselves. It is their "psuche" life that separates them from the eternal "zoe" life that God intended for man to possess. This form of life {psuche} comes from the world and its things. The Bible reveals how fallen man uses the flesh (sarx, Greek) to develop a "psuche" form of life. Because this lower form of life is dependent on temporal circumstances for its support, it is very unstable. It is that up and down life that the people of the world, including many in the church, just naturally experience. This {the "psuche" life} is what Jesus chose to lay down in order to share with His Father in the eternal "zoe" life. It is also the life we must "lose" if we are to find His eternal life {zoe}. (Matt. 16: 25)

If this message is speaking to you, we encourage you to begin yielding to the grace that you have already received. "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." (Eph. 5:1-2)

Everyone who has truly died to self, and has begun to live for the good of others as Jesus did, will continue to expose the remaining selfishness in the lives of people who are still yielding to their flesh-life. *There is a distinct aroma in the life of sacrificial love. When we find others becoming offended by it, and justifying their "right" to live for their self-centered purposes, we can know they remain lost in carnal darkness.* "For we {as those who reveal God's life of love} are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death {as we expose their self-centered nature by the way we live}, and to the other the aroma of life {as we reveal the hope of entering into the heavenly Kingdom-life} leading to life." (2 Cor. 2:15-16)

Those who enter into our Lord's Kingdom-life of perfect love will find that the saints of all ages, all races, and even all denominations speak the same language. Everyone has the same basic message. It is "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from

generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery...which is Christ in you..." (Col. 1: 26-27) We naturally give all glory to God for what Jesus Christ is doing through our lives by the power of His Spirit. The divine nature of love that is established within our heart is truly a gift from God through a work of His grace.

For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God ... because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Cor. 9:12-15)

The kingdom of heaven knows no barriers. Rivalries and bitterness fall away. It is the kingdom of forgiveness and mercy, where all that rankled is forgotten, and the unity of perfect love prevails over all. "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul." (Acts 4: 32) Let us therefore listen closely to the voices that are now attempting to lead all members of Christ's body into His Kingdom-life from heaven.

There are still many people in the church expending their labors in an attempt to further the kingdom of political opinion, the kingdom of social aspirations, the kingdom of economic progress, the kingdom of intellectual development, the kingdom of professionalism, and the kingdom of ecumenical harmony. But as we listen to all these different voices, it is like the jarring noise that occurs when the knob of a radio is rapidly turned through a score of stations. We will never find true harmony in what these people are trying to do.

Let us therefore listen to the voices that teach of Christ's Kingdom-life of perfect love—the life that comes down from heaven through faith. This is the true music of the soul. "They may be made perfect in one..." (John 17: 23) *Those who are truly yielding to the leading of Christ's Spirit will be able to recognize this truth when they hear it.*

We need to be encouraging every member of Christ's body to begin this pilgrimage. Yes, it will cost everything from the flesh-life. No one will find the resurrection life of Jesus Christ without first dying out to their old self-centered way of life. Jesus was speaking the truth when He said, "Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." But also remember that "the kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) This heavenly Pearl is well worth the price.

THE SUNSHINE OF THE KINGDOM

To pass from the Old Testament into the New Testament is indeed like passing from darkness to light. The early disciples, because they were raised under the bondage of trying to fulfill God's laws while still possessing a self-centered nature, would have found new hope in Christ's teachings about His indwelling life. The kingdom of love with its natural service to God and man, once it was established within their hearts, would be turned into a spontaneous expression of a new inward nature. They would not need to strive to produce the life. Jesus Christ Himself would reveal His holy Kingdom-life of love through them.

Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, *when I show myself holy through you before their eyes...* I will put my Spirit {with a nature of divine love} in you and move you to follow

my decrees and be careful to keep my laws { which will be the natural response of the new nature }... I will save you from all your uncleanness... (Ezk. 36: 23-29 NIV Emphasis added)

The idea of a “kingdom” was not strange to the Jews. They had the promises of God in the Scriptures. They were therefore expecting God to inaugurate His kingdom of peace and righteousness and prosperity. “He shall break in pieces the oppressor.” (Ps. 72: 4) “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.” (Isa. 35:1) “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” (Isa. 40: 5) Passages like these were given throughout the Old Testament dispensation. While they could not comprehend how the Lord would introduce His kingdom {they looked at everything from a temporal or physical perspective}, they knew the kingdom would be recognizable when it was established.

The people of God earnestly listened to Jesus when He came preaching about the kingdom of heaven. He said the kingdom was at hand. He Himself was a visible expression of the Kingdom-life that was to spread over the earth. And His parables were used as pictures to help explain the different aspects of the kingdom.

Of course, there will always be people who cannot understand the meaning behind His teachings. *God has chosen to hide the secrets of His kingdom from everyone who tries to approach Him in the pride of their own independent intellect.* Jesus said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.” (Matt. 11: 25) We will therefore need to be very careful in how we approach God and His truth.

God will only reveal the mysteries of His kingdom-life to those who come to Him as dependent little children. There will need to be a real turning from the “pride of life,” which is the independent nature that Satan fostered on the world, before the door to God’s kingdom will be opened. Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as {dependent} little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18: 3)

It is commonly thought that the rich young ruler only needed to surrender his money and his possessions to enter the kingdom. But this mammon alone is not the main issue. God requires people to give up everything that will prevent them from living by a real childlike trust in Him. *God will not permit any of man’s independence and self-sufficiency to enter into His kingdom. Unless the believer is truly converted {including a real renewing of the mind} and becomes childlike in his dependence upon God, he will not see the kingdom of heaven. The rich young ruler was unwilling to place himself in a position where he had to live wholly by faith in God.*

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews said to Christians, “There remains therefore a rest for the {called-out} people of God. *For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works...* Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest...” (Heb. 4: 9-11 Emphasis added) We are to make every effort to enter into this rest where we live under the control and power of the Holy Spirit. It is a place where we die out to the independent and self-sufficient ways of the flesh. It is in this state of weakness in self, where we begin to live by total trust in God, that we are enabled to perfect the power of His Spirit in our lives. (2 Cor. 12: 9)

God delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt for the purpose of taking them into a special life of promise. However, they had to pass through the desert wilderness before they would be prepared to enter into their promised inheritance. They first needed to be stripped of all their resources. The resources they had taken out of Egypt would need to be depleted before they would be in a condition to enter into the land of promise and partake of its glorious fruit. This lesson teaches us that the independent and self-sufficient people of this world will never taste the heavenly inheritance that Christ is now offering to His followers.

We cannot afford to overlook this spiritual principle. God's called-out people cannot by-pass the desert wilderness and go directly into the life of promise after their new birth. There needs to be a real stripping and emptying process that takes place before they will be in a position to be "filled" with Christ's Spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit {those who have lost hope in their own strength}, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5: 3) "Blessed are those who {continue to} hunger and thirst after righteousness {as they go through a breaking down process while passing through this dry and barren land}, for they will be filled." (Matt. 5: 6) If they do not turn back to their old carnal ways {of self-effort, and trying to find spiritual fulfillment from the temporal realm} and quench the Spirit during this time of testing, the Lord will fully establish His Kingdom-life within their hearts in "due time." (1 Pet. 5: 6, 10)

Once we have laid down our old independent way of life and have come to God like dependent little children who are prepared to follow wherever He leads, the Lord will begin to reveal the secrets of His Kingdom. Again, there are many people within the church who have not been enabled to understand these teachings about the kingdom of God. It is their pride and sense of self-sufficiency that causes God to hide the mysteries of His kingdom from them.

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" (Luke 8: 9-10)

We can depend on Christ to reveal the mysteries of His kingdom to those who have fully entrusted themselves to Him. Everyone who remains self-sufficient will be weeded out as the meaning of His teachings is hidden from their view. The ways of the Lord will not sound reasonable to self-sufficient people. The true disciples of faith, however, will be prepared to respond to His revealed light no matter how difficult His teachings may sound.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said {from a position of pride}, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him {in His way of life}. "You do not want to leave too do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him {with a heart of childlike humility and dependence}, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6: 60, 66-68 NIV)

The gospel of the kingdom will therefore always begin with Jesus' statements: "Come unto me" and "Follow me." It will require a real faith in God before we will be prepared

to turn from the self-directed ways of this world. But there is no other way to follow Jesus in the way He requires. “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has {from His self-originated form of life} cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14: 33)

God has provided man with a free will. But He did not give us the right to live independently of Him. Jesus, as the Son of Man, demonstrated how God had planned for man to unite his will with the divine will. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me...” (John 6: 57)

God planned for His children to fully yield their will to His good, pleasing and perfect will. As each child shared with Him in His life and will, He would keep everyone “perfect in one.” (John 17: 22-23) Each one of us would be enabled to eat the spiritual food from heaven that sustains the “eternal life” within the soul as we walked in union with God’s will. Like Jesus, fully sanctified Christians can say, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” (John 8: 34) If we therefore hope to enter into the Kingdom-life of God, which is the Paradise of God that needs to be revealed within the eternal soul, it will be necessary to die to the flesh-life that asserted itself at the Fall.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men... I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes {the flesh-life} shall inherit all things {the Kingdom-life of heaven will be revealed within his eternal soul}, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. {He will walk as Jesus did}. (Rev. 21: 6-7)

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them {in the same sense that God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden before the Fall}...” Therefore “come out from among them {the fleshly ways of the world} and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” {He will then receive you into the Kingdom-life of promise.} (2 Cor. 6:16-17)

To him who overcomes {the flesh-life} I will give to eat from the tree of life {the Son’s eternal life}, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. (Rev. 2: 7)

Like Abraham, we can be credited with Christ’s righteousness from the moment we are “fully convinced” that God is able to fulfill what He has promised to do in our lives. (Rom. 4: 20-24) If we physically die while pressing forward in our faith {while we are expectantly waiting for God to do what He has promised}, we can expect to go to heaven and share with our Lord in His eternal life. On the other hand, *if we turn from the faith that expects to be delivered from the self-seeking nature through a participation with Christ in His life of perfect love, we should expect Him to turn us away from this Kingdom-life on the Day of Judgment. People who refuse to be saved from their self-seeking nature have effectively rejected the truth that is in Jesus Christ.* (Rom. 2: 6-8) They reveal how they do not want to be saved from their fallen life and enter into His Kingdom-life.

Even though Jesus requires complete submission to His teachings, He knows the heart will remain defective in Christians who still have a carnal nature. They will find themselves on occasions stumbling into sin. It may be a temper that rises up, or some

unkind and unloving words may be expressed when their will or plans have been crossed. God is faithful in exposing the remains of the carnal nature. But He still expects them to continue to walk in the light of all known truth. For those who are willing to fully yield to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit during this time of testing, there is a provision for being taken into the life of promise and being cleansed from all unrighteousness.

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 {by continuing to respond to all known truth} as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another {with God}, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins {if we stumble in our journey during the time of testing}, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1: 6-9 Emphasis added)

Many have tried to enter into the kingdom of God by simply setting out to obey the teachings found in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. While these teachings describe the Kingdom-life, the remains of an inner carnality will prevent the attitudes of the heart from always being in complete conformity to God's high standard of love. Any remains of the self-centered nature will keep these followers of Jesus separated from the Kingdom-life of promise. The only way to become "filled" with our Lord's life of love—God's glory—is to be fully sanctified by the Spirit through our belief in God's Word. "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all..." (Rom. 4:16)

Many Christians seem to think the kingdom-teachings found in Christ's Sermon on the Mount are for some future dispensation because the commands are too difficult to be fully obeyed by human effort. While we do agree that it is impossible for Christians to become perfect in love through human effort (Matt. 5: 48), these teachings need to be obeyed in this age of fulfillment.

Christ never intended for people to use the flesh as the means for displaying the life found in His kingdom. While there are some Christians today who attempt to be holy to God through their efforts to keep His laws, they will inevitably be required to sear over their conscience when it comes to some of Christ's kingdom-teachings. The works of their flesh will simply not have the power to love in the self-sacrificing way that Jesus requires.

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect {in love} by the flesh {trying to be righteous by human-effort}? (Gal. 3: 3)

It is the Spirit who gives life {the Kingdom-life of perfect love}; the flesh {human-effort} profits nothing {It cannot produce divine life} . (John 6: 63)

Christ spent three years teachings His disciples about "life" in the kingdom of God. But their corrupt inner nature prevented the responses of their heart from always being in harmony with His teachings. The carnal nature has a natural opposition to the selfless life that is found in God's kingdom. They could set their will to obey the Lord, but their inner nature was still corrupt. This is why Jesus said they needed to wait until they were

clothed with power from on high. The fire needed to come down from heaven to purify their hearts before the temple of their bodies could be filled with God's life of love. Only then could the Lord reveal His Kingdom-life of perfect love—His glory—through them.

Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power. (Mark 9:1)

Every Christian who strives to fulfill God's laws through their own efforts will end up becoming like a self-righteous Pharisee. They will set up certain outward standards to live by—standards that fall far short of perfect love—which they then use to judge others with a critical spirit. These people will remain far from Christ's Kingdom-life of perfect love.

People who are still behaving like “mere men” will not display the “light of life” from heaven. They will have a carnal nature that reveals the remains of self-centeredness. “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and *behaving like mere men?*” (1 Cor. 3: 3 Emphasis added) This is the old way of life that will need to die before Christ's Kingdom-life can be found. (Matt. 16: 24-25) There needs to be a real participation with Christ in His divine nature before it is possible to become as “one” with each other in love. (John 17: 22-23)

SOME PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

People in the Old Testament dispensation could be forgiven for their sins. But they could not have the undivided kingdom of God established within their hearts. This Kingdom-life is what separates the Old Testament period from this age of fulfillment. The Hebrew writer has explained this truth at the end of his chapter on faith. Referring to people who had lived by faith in the times of the Old Testament, he said, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise {the Kingdom-life of promise – the Promise of the Father}, God having provided something better for us {in this age of fulfillment}, that they should not be made perfect {in love} apart from us.” (Heb. 11: 39-40)

Christians in this age of fulfillment should never try to excuse their sinful nature based on the sins they are able to find in the lives of Old Testament saints. Nor should they try to excuse themselves based on the lives of the apostles before Pentecost. The Kingdom-life of perfect love did not come down from heaven and enter into the hearts of God's children until the disciples were clothed with power on the day of Pentecost. This was when Christ first revealed the kingdom of God in power. (Mark 9:1)

While this revelation of God's life within the soul is still only a “dim” vision of what we will “see” when we leave this world, the life of God can be known in personal experience. God's light of life is infinite in relation to what we can know as mortal beings. We can therefore grow with ever-increasing glory even after the Kingdom-life of God has been revealed within the heart. (2 Cor. 3:18)

We can also say that a heart filled with the pure love of God does not make a person “all knowing.” The first disciples still had much to learn after their hearts were purified. It is not difficult to see how they made some obvious mistakes in judgment. And, as Peter

has shown, it is also possible to drift away from God's life of perfect love and stumble into sin. (Gal. 2:11-18)

The Kingdom-life within the hearts of the first disciples provided them with the needed power to live wholly for the kingdom of God. The enemy within—the carnal nature that had sided with the temptations of the devil—was purged out as they received their life from Christ by faith. They could all say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live {the Kingdom-life from heaven} in the flesh {in this human body} I live by faith in the Son of God. (Gal. 2: 20-21)

The heart will remain “pure” in love while it remains “filled” with Christ's Spirit. It will require a constant dependence on Christ and a complete yielding to His known will if we are to continue walking in the light as He is in the light. (1 John 1:7) *God's grace is sufficient to hold us in His life of divine love while we remain yielded to Him.* (2 Cor. 3: 5-6) But we can still be tempted by the devil. It is possible to go back to living for ourselves and to turn from God's known will. As in the case of Adam, this sin will separate us from His divine presence until we confess the wrong and turn back to all known light.

“Get up, sanctify the people...O Israel; you cannot stand {in victory} before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing {anything not fully and irrevocably devoted to God} from among you.” (Josh. 7:13)

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another {with God}, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son *cleanses us from all sin.* (1 John 1: 7 Emphasis added)

The establishment of the kingdom of God within the heart is the point when we become “spiritual.” However, it is merely the threshold of a spiritual life in the heavenly realms. This Kingdom-life has infinite room for growth. In fact, it is only by having the carnal remains {of the self-centered nature that seeks to have its own way} removed from the heart that we may grow from “glory to glory” without ever losing ground. (2 Pet. 1:10-11) In other words, we do not become “perfected” in the sense that growth is no longer needed.

After Paul described how he counted everything as loss in order to know more of the infinite life of God, he said, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” (Phil. 3:15 KJV) He was simply saying that “spiritual” Christians have become “complete” or “perfect” in love. The fully sanctified heart is completely separated to God. It desires to live for God and His purposes alone. Because “Christian perfection” relates to a heart that is filled with God's pure love, it is able to express itself without selfish interests. While this love from the Son's life will keep the old self-centered nature purged out, it is still dynamic and able to grow.

In this same lesson Paul spoke of counting everything that came from the self-originated life as loss so he could know more and more of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. Yes, the heart is able to expand even when it is already filled with the Kingdom-life of God. As the heart is enlarged, it is able to contain more of God's infinite life. Like the mustard seed, the kingdom of God therefore has room for much growth within every soul. (Matt. 13: 31-32)

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price are two stories that picture the kingdom as a valuable treasure. They help us see how there are some people who earnestly look for the Pearl, and others who discover the Treasure without making a specific search. However, regardless of how people come to the point of seeing the kingdom, they are still required to give up everything in order to obtain what they have discovered.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13: 44-46)

If these parables were truly understood, there would be more Christians pressing into the kingdom of heaven. It is not difficult to see how few are actually enjoying the reality of what these truths represent. Most Christians have not even seen the Pearl {the possibility of possessing our Lord's Kingdom-life of perfect love}, let alone come to the point where they are prepared to "sell" everything {from the self-originated life} in order to buy it.

The church has remained ineffective because she has not understood Christ's teachings about the kingdom of God being so near. She has not been able to advance the Lord's Kingdom-life in this world because there are so few who have actually obtained the heavenly Pearl and Treasure. The world looks on and quite naturally assumes there is nothing worth finding within the church. However, when the world does see Christians revealing the light of life from heaven, we can expect to find many more people who are willing to "sell" everything in order to enter into our Lord's Kingdom-life of promise.

These sanctified believers will possess the kind of serenity that continues to prove itself when the rest of the world is still finding itself worried and upset about many things. These children of the kingdom will not be quarrelsome, bad-tempered or difficult to live with. They will be found continually giving of themselves for the good of others.

Christ's Kingdom-life truly energizes the life of a Christian. These fully sanctified believers will be found expending their lives in the work of furthering the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul has provided an example of how far we are willing to go to promote the Gospel of the kingdom once we have found this life.

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our hands {so as not to be a burden on anyone.} Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed; we entreat... (1 Cor. 4:11-13)

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, *struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* (Col. 1: 28-29 NIV Emphasis added)

For the kingdom of God is not in word {talk} but in power. (1 Cor. 4: 20)

A heavenly love and joy and peace, established within the soul, are the treasures offered to believers here and now. No wonder the Bible refers to this promised life as the

Gospel of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is good news indeed! “For the kingdom of God is...righteousness {divine love} and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17)

Here is one more thought. Do not overlook the fact that a discovery of the Treasure and the Pearl led to an immediate response. There was no putting off the preparations that were needed in order to obtain the goal. “When he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” There was no delay in doing what was needed.

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Heb. 6:12 NIV) Even after seeing what has been offered through the gospel message, there are many who neglect to press forward in their faith until they have experienced the blessing. Consequently, they end up drifting away from this heavenly calling.

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away... How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord...? (Heb. 2:1, 3)

The law and the prophets {living by law or human effort} were until John {the Baptist}. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it {by faith and by yielding to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as He leads us through the cross}. (Luke 16:16)

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself {the indwelling Kingdom-life} to him. (John 14: 21)

Even though Christ speaks of a narrow way and a hard path that leads to His Kingdom-life, it remains true that the invitation of the King is to a feast. The Father and the Son are waiting to manifest the firstfruits of their eternal life of love within the soul of everyone who will pay the full price. “If anyone loves Me, *he will keep My word* {by yielding to the way of the cross}; and My Father will love him, *and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*” (John 14: 23 Emphasis added)

Truly, when the believer permits God to fully establish His Kingdom-life of promise within the heart, the “soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods.” (Ps. 63: 5 NIV) The presence of God’s indwelling life enables these sanctified Christians to begin enjoying a continual banquet feast.

Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘*Come, for all things are now ready.*’ {in this New Testament age of fulfillment} But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground {as a new property owner}, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused {because my concerns are for the property}.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen {as a new business owner}, and I am going to test them. I

ask you to have me excused {because my business must come first}.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come {because my spouse doesn’t like the Lord’s will}.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ {He receives those who sense a need and are willing to turn from the self-seeking ways of the world to eat at His table.}... For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.” (Luke 14:15-24 Emphasis added)

This parable shows that God is calling us to a feast. *The life being discussed is not “heaven some day.” The Lord says, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Today is the day of salvation. He wants each one of us to begin enjoying this banquet feast within our inner being while we are walking in this world.*

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them... He who overcomes {the self-seeking ways of the world} shall inherit all things {margin: “I shall give him these things”}, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (Rev. 21: 3, 7)

To him who overcomes {the old flesh-life} I will give to eat from the tree of life {the spiritual life of the Son}, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Rev. 2: 7)

God is not calling us into a life of burdensome duty, or to things that are dull and monotonous and gray, but into a life of righteousness and peace and joy. (Rom. 14:17) The firstfruits of the very peace and joy that is found in Christ’s heavenly life can be revealed within our soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1: 3) “I shall give him these things.” (Rev. 21: 7 Margin) “My peace I give to you.” (John 14: 27) “That they may have My joy fulfilled in them.” (John 17:13) “*This is the bread which came down from heaven...* He who eats this bread {He who sustains himself on the spiritual life that is now available from heaven} will live forever.” (John 6: 58 Emphasis added)

The men in the story who turned away from the feast so they could carry on with their own personal lives were not willing to make the full surrender that would permit them to enter into the presence of God. Every “called-out” person in this age of fulfillment, even after entering into Christ’s church, will need to use this lesson to examine their own lives. Is there some property {or some other possession}, or a business {or some ambition or plan}, or even someone in your family who has been preventing you from selling all so you may obtain the heavenly Pearl? Have these temporal things been preventing you from fully submitting your body to the Lord in a way that will permit Him to direct your every step and reveal His Kingdom-life of sacrificial love through you? Have you been chasing after your own goals rather than turning to the Lord for the purpose of entering into His plans? If this is true of you, then God is also angry about your refusal to come to the banquet that He has already prepared. “Then the master of the house, being angry, said... ‘For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

God invites many to His banquet feast through the new birth, but very few actually come to Him with the wholehearted surrender that will permit them to enter into the

Kingdom-life He has prepared. “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matt. 22:14) “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life {the Kingdom-life of promise}; and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:14)

The poor and the hungry had a great sense of need. They are generally more willing to respond to Christ’s request. Unlike those who have found plenty of sustenance by feeding on the things of the world, it is easier for the poor to surrender the remains of their self-life to the cross so they will be in a position to be lifted into the heavenly feast that God has prepared. “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6: 20)

Of course, being poor is not the condition for entering into our Lord’s Kingdom-life. But, as the rich young ruler demonstrated, it is nearly impossible for people to live by a real childlike faith in God while they still have temporal things that can be used for their spiritual sustenance and security. Their possessions prevent them from surrendering themselves in a way where they can be led wherever Jesus calls and in a way that truly expresses His life of sacrificial love. Let us therefore learn this lesson well, and respond to the Lord and His Word before it is too late.

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have {the things you have accumulated in an attempt to find some fulfillment and sustain yourselves spiritually} and give alms {share your accumulated resources with others in need}; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12: 32-34 Emphasis added)

How hard it is for those who have riches {those who have accumulated possessions in this world} to enter the Kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man {a man who can depend on his own resources to hold himself up spiritually} to enter the kingdom of God. (Luke 18: 24-25)

Jesus is offering this banquet feast to every soul. But unless we stop using the temporal things of the world to mask our need, we will never experience the kind of hunger that is willing to surrender all from our self-life in order to enter into the Kingdom-life of promise.

Jesus is saying that He is ready to provide the one thing that will truly satisfy the soul. But people do not believe it. They prefer to try everything else first. *God will therefore bring famines into the lives of His people in order to prepare them to seek out His life of promise. They will need to experience a deep sense of disappointment, frustration, disillusionment, dullness, unhappiness, meaninglessness, and despair before they will be ready to deny themselves and completely surrender their bodies to be a vessel of Christ’s life of divine love.*

It is in the kingdom of God that you will find true fulfillment. When you are enjoying a heavenly fellowship with the Lord and sharing with Him in His divine love, joy and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit, you will have all that your heart has ever desired. Again, this is the firstfruits of the life of eternity. Why not draw near? Why make so many excuses? Why not come and take what is offered? Why not begin now?

We will close by looking at the story of the ten bridesmaids. This parable provides another stern warning to Christians who are waiting on the Lord for His return without first paying the full price for His kingdom-life.

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But he answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (Matt. 25:1-13)

The scene is an Eastern wedding celebration. The climax of the wedding festivity is the moment when the bridegroom comes to take the bride to his house. Suddenly, the voice of the watchman is heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Five of them suddenly realize they do not have the oil that is needed to reveal true "light." It would be necessary to obtain "oil" in order to be prepared to go with the bridegroom. Unfortunately, they end up being too late to enter into the marriage feast. And yet, because they are "foolish virgins," they honestly believed they had a right to go with the Bridegroom. We find them knocking at the door, saying "Lord, Lord, open to us. We were specially invited. We also served the bride. We were special attendants." But He responds by saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."

The basic message of this parable can be found in the words, "Be ready!" You must have the oil of the Spirit for your lamps before you can manifest the sacrificial life of love that is found in the kingdom of light. It is not enough to be waiting for the Lord as a member of the church. Even holding positions of service in the church will not be adequate when the work is being done in the flesh with a selfish motive. There are many people within the church who are now doing "great things" for the Lord. But Jesus will tell them plainly that He never knew them. (Matt. 7: 22-23) In contrast to His nature of divine love, their hearts have remained self-centered, self-seeking, self-sufficient and self-directed.

The parable leaves the impression that all ten virgins were carrying on with their personal lives when the warning came. But there was something different about the two groups. The ones who possessed a sufficient supply of oil represent Christians who are living by the Spirit. They are enabled to manifest the Kingdom-life of Jesus Christ in all

their activities. As they walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, they can be found revealing Christ's light of sacrificial love, even when working in secular jobs or raising families at home. In contrast, those who have neglected to pay the full price by pressing forward in their faith until their hearts have been purified and filled with the Kingdom-life of God, will find themselves drifting back into a self-seeking way of life. You will find strife and disharmony within their lives when their personal wills have been crossed. There will be a selfish motive in their actions, even while working for the church. They can be identified by the way they are still seeking a reputation, honor or recognition for what they have been doing for the Lord. They will "lack" the true "light of life" {which is selfless rather than self-seeking} from heaven.

We should note that all ten bridesmaids were waiting on the Lord as "virgins." It seems to imply that a cleansing had taken place through the work of justification and spiritual regeneration. They were all members of the church, waiting for the return of the Lord. But the foolish virgins were not walking by the Spirit when He came. The true fruit from Christ's Spirit was not being revealed through their lives when He returned for His pure and spotless bride. This is why Jesus did not know them.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief... Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? *You ought to live holy and godly lives...* So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, *make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.* (2 Pet. 3:10-11, 14 NIV Emphasis added)

The fruit of the Spirit {that needs to flow like an endless river from within the heart} is {Christ's} love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5: 22-24)

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming... Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing {manifesting the fruit of the Spirit as he lives for the good of others}. (Matt. 24: 42, 46)

Each of the virgins had a lamp. It seems to represent the regenerate heart. Everyone who experiences spiritual regeneration will also receive some oil with their lamps. The oil {of the Spirit} enables them to begin their Christian walk with a wholehearted devotion to the Lord. It will keep a light of "first-love" devotion to the Lord burning in their lamps for a while. But if they are not careful, the light will eventually burn out.

In another place, Christ says to some hard working members in His church: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent... To him who overcomes {the flesh-life} I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Rev. 2: 5, 7) This *was not* a warning to Christians who were completely neglecting Him. He also said to these same people: "You have persevered and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary." (v. 3) But He was still ready to spew them out of His body—the spiritual church—for losing their first love. "Self" had come to the forefront of all their service.

Again, even a regenerate heart needs the oil of the Spirit in order to live sacrificially for the Lord. Many Christians grieve away the Spirit after experiencing the new birth. They end up yielding to the “lusts of the flesh and of the mind.” (Eph. 2: 3) Even though they faithfully attend church meetings, make bold professions of faith and serve where needed, they generally live their lives for their own pleasures and desires, according to their own will.

This is why the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews said, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” (Heb. 12:14-15) He was writing to Christians who still had a need to press into the Kingdom-life of God. He then uses Esau as an example of someone who gave up his birthright in order to have a little temporal pleasure for himself in this world.

We receive the “birthright” at our new birth. But this is not the “blessing” of the Kingdom-life. This is why God’s Word commands us to pursue holiness—an undivided devotion to the Lord—so we may “find” the life of our Lord and “see” His kingdom of love fully established within our heart. (Matt. 16: 24; John 16: 21; 2 Pet. 1:10-11)

The wise virgins’ act of turning the foolish virgins away confronts us with another stern truth. We learn that our first duty is always to the Bridegroom. Our relatives and friends will often ask us to turn away from our undivided devotion to the Lord in order to be their source of “spiritual life.” But we cannot be their source of life. Their only hope is to find the oil that comes from the life of God. We cannot give them this “light of life” from heaven. All we can do is explain the teachings of the Gospel of the kingdom and point them to Christ as the source of the “light”.

This lesson also reveals the great danger of depending on the initial new birth experience as our hope of heaven. Are we now walking in the Spirit? Have we fully presented ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices so He may turn us into vessels of His life of self-sacrificing love? If not, He is going to say that He does not know us. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

God now desires to give everyone the beauty of His holiness and the glory of His life of perfect love. We plead with you to give Him an opportunity to bless you. His indwelling life will provide a deep satisfaction and joy and peace within your heart. As Jesus has said, this life that comes down from heaven is your only hope of ever having your eternal soul truly satisfied.

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me {will follow me through the cross and die to the self-life and}, as the Scripture has said, *out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* (John 7: 38 Emphasis added)

Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. {It is this satisfied soul that makes it possible to overcome the self-seeking ways of the world and display the self-sacrificing life of Jesus.} Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to {a display of} eternal life. (John 4:14 NIV Emphasis added)

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.
Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you {with His submissive and self-sacrificing nature of love} – unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Cor. 13: 5)