

WRITINGS OF DOMENIC MARBANIANG

by Domenic Marbaniang

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Domenic Marbaniang, compiled for study and devotional reading.

46 Chapters

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01.00. Exporations of Faith - Hebrews 11

EXPLORATIONS of FAITH Studies of the Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11 DOMENIC
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01.002. Introduction

Introduction

Hebrews 11:1-40 has been one of the most inspiring chapters of faith in the Bible throughout the history of Christianity. The book of Hebrews itself is the sacred saga of God's self-revealing of Himself as the salvation of the world through faith. The power of faith in God is indubitable. The horror of doubt is unimaginable. In My Confession, Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and former atheist, confessed that it was faith in God that finally brought true meaning into the confused and crumbling structure of his life. A few years before faith had come to his aid, his life had started to seem meaningless and absurd to him, a feeling that was almost destroying him from the inside. He felt that he had no reason to either live or do the things he was doing.

...five years ago, a strange state of mind began to grow upon me: I had moments of perplexity, of a stoppage, as it were, of life, as if I did not know how I was to live, what I was to do, and I began to wander, and was a victim to low spirits.... These stoppages of life always presented themselves to me with the same questions: "Why?" and "What after?"

I was perfectly disconcerted, and knew not what to think. Another time, dwelling on the thought of how I should educate my children, I ask myself "Why?" Again, when considering by what means the well-being of the people might best be promoted, I suddenly exclaimed, "But what concern have I with it?" When I thought of the fame which my works were gaining me, I said to myself:

"Well, what if I should be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Molière – than all the writers of the world – well, and what then?"...

I could find no reply. Such questions will not wait: they demand an immediate answer... but answer there was none.

I felt that the ground on which I stood was crumbling, that there was nothing for me to stand on, that what I had been living for was nothing, that I had no reason for living....

Tolstoy described this sense of meaninglessness as "some irresistible force" that was dragging him onward "to escape from life." Many do try to escape this situation by indulging in materialistic pleasures or pursuits. Drugs, parties, shopping, television, games, etc provide easy means for escaping the seriousness of life. However, this indulgence is not without its boredom and vexation of spirit; while the flesh is being indulged in its passions, the spirit is suffocated. After much study of this problem, Tolstoy found that it was true faith in God alone that gave him meaning in life. He said,

I remembered that I had lived only when I believed in a God. As it was before, so it was now. I had only to know God, and I lived; I had only to forget Him, not to believe in Him, and I died.... To know God and to live are one. God is life. The question that Tolstoy didn't attempt to answer was "Is there really a God?" To him, as well, as to many believers that is not the beginning point. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth said that the existence of God is not a thesis to be proved but a fact of

revelation that has to be accepted by faith. The believer doesn't believe simply that God exists: he believes in God. The confrontation with God through faith is the most real one because God Himself is the author and source of all reality. It is a matter of fact that the Bible doesn't begin with an attempt to prove God's existence: it begins with faith in God. But faith and truth must be properly connected or else the result would be false belief.

FAITH AND TRUTH The faith of God (faith that is particularly related to God) is the most assured, trustworthy, irrefutable, truthful, and credible fact of Biblical experience. Therefore, the psalmist calls someone who denies God as a fool (Psalms 14:1). He is a fool not just in the sense of being unintelligent but in the sense of being wicked in sin since he knowingly denies what he irrefutably knows to be the truest fact, viz. the existence of God. He is also a fool because he thinks that by stating so he can escape the penetrating eyes of God. It is like a child who covers his eyes with his hands and then thinks no one is watching him. The importance of faith as inevitable for any relation among humans and between them and the universe is evident from the fact that the Romans worshipped Faith as a goddess, honoring her with temples, altars, and sacred rites, as Augustine mentions. But this deifying of Faith desacralized it since all worldly instances of faith among humans would be referred to originating from her in the same manner that all instances of love were related to Eros or Cupid. Secondly, this deifying of Faith desacralizes faith in the sense that it finds its source and end in the goddess herself and thus is rendered powerless to be the means of relating with the infinite and true God of all creation. Obviously, this Roman worship did signify in a sense the high value of faith in human society. However, Augustine rightly censured the deifying of it as being illogical, false, and vain. He calls faith as a part of justice, which is one of the four cardinal virtues, viz. prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance; and then questions why temples and altars were dedicated to faith but not to fortitude, temperance, and prudence. Someone might answer that they need not be worshipped separately since they are worshipped in the form of the goddess Virtue. But, he asks, if they could so be worshipped in the form of Virtue (of which faith is a part but is still worshipped separately) then they could thus worship the true God also. In other words, if the Romans could worship all the different virtues as the goddess Virtue then they do not need so many deities after all. The worship of the only one God would suffice all. Thus, the deifying of faith was both irrational and meaningless. But the deifying of faith as Faith didn't end with the Romans. It has emerged in the popular positive thinking philosophy that looks at faith as if it were a god or a deity, possessing infinite power to accomplish anything. Now positive thinking in relation to divine revelation is healthy. But positive thinking in relation to positive thinking itself is baseless. The Bible doesn't call us to faith in Faith but to faith in the truth of God; ultimately in God.

There is a popular saying in India that if one stubbornly believes a stone to be gold, it will become gold for him. I believe this is a dangerous belief that confuses truth with imagination. For instance, if a man boarded a train that was headed towards Chennai and kept on believing strongly that it is heading towards New Delhi; will the train change its direction just for the sake of his strong faith? What about the faith of the other passengers? Obviously, here faith deprived of truth is false. On the other hand, if there is a truth and it is not believed on, that truth becomes useless to the unbeliever. Thus, faith must be combined with truth in order to be productive. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews says regarding the Israelites: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"

(Hebrews 4:2).

Faith, obviously, then is only productive when it is faith in the truth. While faith in temporal truths (like faith in the laws of physics or in some economic theory) has only temporal value (i.e. as long as one remains in this world or as long as this world remains); faith in the truth of God has eternal value and significance.

There are many faiths in this world. That doesn't mean that all of them are true. For when two statements contradict each other, either one or both of them are false. They can't be true at the same time. For instance, if I say that my pen has only blue ink and someone else says that my pen has only black ink, we have run into a contradiction. For since I said that it has only blue ink, it cannot have any other color of ink. Either I or the other person is right; or both are wrong (the pen may have red ink); but both cannot be true at the same time. Similarly, there are many differences in belief about God, man, and the universe. Either one of them is true or none of them is true. This is an undeniable assumption behind all valid reasoning.

Pluralism and Exclusivity of Truth

Pluralism, or the belief that all religions are equally valid ways to God or ultimate reality, has become an attractive philosophy in our times. This is so because pluralism seems to facilitate religious toleration and peace among people of different faiths. Certainly, the rise of militant religious sects and fundamentalist movements has created more terror and pain than peace among humans. It is disheartening to see that religion has become more a trouble-making element than a spirit-healing medium in modern times. Each group or sect claims to possess the truth and this orthodox holding on to belief is what is said to generate intolerance among people.

Therefore, some have opted for pluralism as the better answer. However, pluralism fails to accord with the logical law of non-contradiction stated earlier. Two opposing beliefs cannot be equally true. However, some will say that they can be equally justifiable. That is to say, one is justified in believing certain things if his reasons for believing it are justified in his eyes. This is to reduce faith to mere subjectivity, a problem which we illustrated earlier with the example of the man on the train. Faith segregated from truth can be both useless and dangerous. The law of non-contradiction must apply to truth. Even pluralism must accept this to maintain its assertion that its claims are true (implying that views opposite to it are false). Therefore, pluralism cannot be considered to be philosophically sound.

Criteria for Truth

One cannot also absolutely state that there is no way to measure the truthfulness of religious beliefs. Of course, some philosophers known as the logical positivists held that since religious beliefs were empirically unverifiable, they were meaningless or empty of meaning and therefore signified nothing. However, this view is self-conflicting since this principle of logical positivism itself is not empirically verifiable. There must be a way to measure the truth or else truth will have no meaning. The question is what is that measuring rod?

Philosophers generally agree on a set of laws as criteria of truth like the law of internal consistency (truth must not be self-contradictory), the law of correspondence (truth must correspond to reality), the pragmatic law (truth must be successful in the end; it must work), and the law of coherence (a

statement of truth must cohere with other statements of truth). For instance, it is evident that the tribal belief about the sun being a god who needs blood to rise up in the morning neither corresponds to reality nor coheres with the set of scientific discoveries (not hypotheses) known to us. Therefore, it is a false belief. Similarly, the view that God is everything and everything is God (pantheism) involves internal inconsistency since by calling everything God, not only the distinctness of God is lost but also truth as opposed to falsehood is lost to this "everything". Likewise, the view that all experience is an illusion since plurality is false and reality is one (monism) fails all the tests since it neither corresponds to experienced reality nor is internally consistent (all is one is utterance possible only if more than two exist, at least the speaker and the statement) nor does it have any pragmatic value, added to its lack of coherence with available data. Polytheistic beliefs have largely been proven as mythical, failing the correspondence and coherence tests, in addition to the difficulty involved in grounding these beliefs into some explanatory framework: pantheism and monism have been tried in India. Other religious beliefs like beliefs about man, the universe, morality, and salvation can be evaluated in this manner.

However, mere religious belief and faith in God must be distinguished from each other. While religious belief is belief in a set of doctrinal statements, faith in God is a personal commitment to and reliance on God. Religious belief can be strong and orthodox owing to one's strong binding with the religious community and submission to such authority or feelings of communalism. However, the justification for such beliefs is never found in an encounter with the truth of God. Faith, on the other hand, has only to do with statements of belief and forms of religiosity in so far as they make the relationship with God meaningful. Faith is primarily related to God in His self-revelation. It is not mere belief that such and such statement is true but is a commitment to God by the acceptance of the truth of God. One may believe, for instance, the statement "God exists" and yet not submit to Him in faith. The expression "believe that God", therefore, is not the same as "believe God". For instance, James says "You believe that there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble" (James 2:19, MKJV; italics mine). Then again he says "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness" (James 2:23, MKJV; italics again mine). Religious beliefs about creeds and traditions, therefore, cannot amount to faith in God. Those beliefs do not imply a relationship with God. But if one has faith in God that faith revolutionizes one's total life since it connects him to God. This is the faith which the writer of Hebrews talks about in chapter 11 and which we seek to understand. But before we do that let's take an overview of how beliefs, truth, and reality are related to each other. This, however, will be a little tedious one to some who do not wish to bother themselves with philosophical stuff. In such a case, the reader may skip to the next section without much loss if he or she wishes to and may come back to this whenever he or she likes. THE GRID OF INTERPRETATION

All knowledge is the product of interpretation. Every interpretation is governed by pre-understanding. Pre-understanding is composed of pre-beliefs. For instance, when the islanders of Melita saw a viper curled around Paul's hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, being saved from the sea, Justice has not allowed to live" (Acts 28:4). Their interpretation of the event was based on several pre-beliefs like the belief in Justice (as a god perhaps), the belief that murder is unjust, and that Justice will never absolve anyone. However, when later they found out that Paul had neither been infected nor killed by the viper, they decided that he was a god. Their conclusion followed from the implicit belief that only a god

could survive a viper's bite. These pre-beliefs formed their pre-understanding and governed their interpretation of the event. Such pre-beliefs themselves are products of earlier interpretation. A set of beliefs regarding the world, man, God, life, and morality makes a world-view. Thus, one's world-view is the framework in which one tries to understand newer things which are soon assimilated in that world-view to modify it. The chief sources of beliefs are direct perception (sense-experience, intuition, and feeling) and verbal testimony (hearsay, literature, oral traditions, etc). The process of interpreting direct perception and verbal testimony in order to form either opinion or belief is inference. Opinion is the result of incomplete interpretation. Belief is the result of complete interpretation. Opinion is based on guesswork and speculation to fill the gap of information required to finish the process of inference. Belief is based on inference from data considered to be sufficient for the interpretation. When the process of inference is faulty, the resulting belief will be false. But given the conditions that the pre-beliefs (premises) are true and the inference faultless, the resulting belief will be true. False belief is related to unreality since what is believed is not real. True belief is related to reality. Opinion is intermediate since it is incomplete inference. True belief is known as truth.

All inference is based on reason. Reason is the logical foundation of inference or reasoning. Reason doesn't provide the data for belief or opinion: it provides the rationally irrefutable assumptions (or rules) of inference: e.g. the law of causality, the law of calculation (quantity, number), the law of necessary relation, etc. When one tries to force reason to provide data for interpretation, the result is absurdity; because it can only provide the rules and not the data for interpretation. For instance, we all lack the empirical data (from direct perception) to infer the size of the universe. However, if one turned to reason from experience to imaginatively speculate the size of the universe, one would draw the nonsensical conclusion that the universe is neither finite nor infinite; because the mind can neither conceive an infinite universe nor a finite one. If you don't believe me then try imagining first that the universe is finite (or has a boundary); you can't, since the mind says there must be something or at least some empty space beyond that boundary. But then, again try imagining the universe as infinite; you can't, since the infinite cannot be limited in any conception in order to imagine the infinite one must infinitely keep imagining it because infinity surpasses boxed imagination. But since the universe, unlike transcendent concepts or ideas, is an object of spatio-temporal sense-experience, its infinity cannot be imagined. Thus, the resultant conclusion is absurd. However, some rationalists such as the Hindu non-dualists (monist) have accepted this to be true, thus denying the reality everything we experience. Obviously, then to avoid such absurdity one must not look to reason as the source of beliefs but only as the provider of the rules of inference. Similarly, the result of illogical or irrational interpretation of empirical data leads to false conclusions. For instance, I see a little boy eating a banana; then I see a monkey eating a banana; I conclude that there is no difference between the boy and the monkey because both of them eat bananas. The conclusion is false because there is no necessary relation between the two phenomena: a banana is not a necessary relation. However, if I see smoke rising from a nearby building, I immediately infer from it that there must be fire there; because smoke and fire are causally related. Thus, experience and reason must work together to produce knowledge. However, it is also true that most of our beliefs are not based on direct experience. We learn them from our parents, friends, teachers, books, TV, movies, etc. They are secondary information. All such information is processed by the interpretive grid of the mind as it seeks to relate it to the already existing framework of beliefs. The processing of new information leads to the modification

of the framework by correction, development, or strengthening of the existing knowledge. However, one's intentionality can sometimes interfere in the right processing of the information, in which case the interpretation may lead to twisted meaning and distorted truth.

Faith and Knowledge

Obviously, one's way of looking at life is largely determined by one's pre-understanding. It influences one's way of thinking. One's framework of beliefs, or worldview, determines to a great extent one's interpretation of reality; for reality is never taken as it is – all belief is interpreted reality since reality by itself and in itself lacks meaning. Meaning is always found in a relation of things; that relating of things is interpretation. But meaning imposed (eisogesis) is not true meaning; for instance, a man may see a man picking a candy from a store and say he was stealing it, when in fact he may be the owner of the store. Meaning discovered (exegesis) is the only true meaning. False beliefs can lead to false conclusions. For instance, to an atheistic existentialist this universe is absurd, human life is absurd, and all toil is an illogical enterprise.

However, the worldview of an atheist is itself composed of several beliefs that are the result of interpretation – mainly of secondary information (i.e. chiefly through mimesis, i.e. imitation of popular beliefs or flowing with the cultural milieu). The historical development of the atheistic cultural milieu in the Universities needs no particular reference here. It all took impetus from the Enlightenment as we know. With each new interpretation, the atheistic grid of interpretation was modified. The modifying atheistic worldview took many forms: nihilism, fascism, Marxism, evolutionism, scientism, existentialism, etc. Thus, beliefs determine interpretation until the framework itself is doubted and a revolution in the pattern of thinking is secured, as we saw what happened in Tolstoy's life.

There are several different worldviews in the world: e.g. Hindu karmic worldview, Hindu reformed worldview, Buddhist worldview, spiritualist worldview, occult worldview, liberal worldview, Pentecostal worldview, secular worldview, MTV culture worldview, etc. Each way of looking at life is distinct in itself. Each framework has developed its own method of contextual interpretation as well. Here we see two aspects of interpretation: rational and contextual. While rational interpretation is absolute involving the laws of reason, contextual interpretation is relative, i.e. relative to the framework; for instance, the karmic interpretation of time, liberal interpretation of the Bible, etc.

Such plurality of interpretive grids makes pluralism very attractive. But pluralism, or the belief that all belief-systems are valid ways in themselves, is an interpretive grid that attempts to overrule the others without their consent. Therefore, its ruling is objected by most who deny their way as equal to the others. Test of correspondence, coherence, consistency, and pragmatic value do help to a great extent; however, their significance is overruled by particular world-views; for instance, the non-dualist view admits neither the reality of the phenomenal world nor the effability (able to be expressed in words) of ultimate reality; thus, disannulling all the above stated tests of truth. But none of the views can violate the fundamental laws of logic without violating themselves. For instance, the law of non-contradiction doesn't exist, I at the same time deny myself the right to make such a statement since by making that statement I assume that its contradictory statement "the law of non-contradiction" exists is false. But to accept such opposites is to assume the law of non-contradiction which was being denied earlier. Thus, this law is inescapable. Even if someone

said that knowledge is not mental but transcends the logical limits of the mind and so cannot be expressed in language, such assertion itself assumes the law of non-contradiction; thus, the fundamental nature of rational rules is established.

Inconsistency or incoherence within the framework due to an acquirement or realization of a particular truth can cause doubt eventually leading to a faith-crisis. This faith-crisis is helpful, if accompanied by honesty, to revolutionize one's way of thinking. However, one may also choose to be committed to the prior belief-system and reject the truth that now presents to him by suppressing it or trying to destroy it. But when mixed with truthfulness (honesty), faith-crisis can lead to truth. Thus, doubt when accompanied by a will-to-meaning propels investigation and facilitates openness to truth.

Rationality of belief is a fundamental responsibility of man. For that determines the nature of his decisions. True faith is never irrational (i.e., in conflict with itself and in conflict with rational acceptability), though not limited by reason. Common faith, however, is quite different from the faith of God as will be seen. In fact, the faith of God is more rational (coherent to one's framework of knowledge and convincing to the heart) than the rationality of other beliefs. That is the reason why the writer of Hebrews says that faith in God is substance and evidence; not just conjecture and interpretation

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. To not have faith in God, the Bible says, is to be foolish not only because it is moral dishonesty but also because if one can't believe in God then one doesn't have any rational reason to believe in anything else.
2. Truth that is not believed in is useless; belief that is not true can be dangerous!
3. If truth was as diverse as tastes are then courts of justice, legislative bodies, and universities would go berserk as rules of logic and all speech become meaningless.
4. Faith in God necessarily requires commitment to Him.

01.01. Chapter 1: Beyond Uncertainty

CHAPTER ONE Beyond Uncertainty "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) The chapter begins with the statement, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Greek word for faith used here is *pistis* ("strong belief," "persuasion," "conviction") but it seems to reflect the Hebraic idea of *emun* or *emunah* (from Heb. *aman* meaning "to build up or support"; *emeth*, "truth", is another derivative of it). This *pistis* (*emun*) is not just undeniably related to the truth (*emeth*) of God but is also the ground and support (*aman*) of all spiritual experiences, as we will see shortly. Obviously, what the writer here has in mind is true faith in God and His revelation. It is not blind faith or herd-mentality faith. Faith in God is of ultimate kind and is, therefore, both unique and absolute. Since it is not concerned with contingent things of this world it is also not like the belief in the contingent things of the world. Further, belief in God is foundational to our common-sense assumptions about this world as both moral and rational. Anyone who denies God must also deny the existence of absolute morals and absolute truth, for both lose their foundation if their foundation is found within this world itself. It would be like trying to place a ball on that ball itself. Without an unchangeable transcendent ground, there can be no absolute point of reference (as in outer space where all bodies hang in positions relative to each other). The unchanging nature and character of God is the foundation of true morality and His veracity is the foundation of all reasonability and truth. Therefore, divine existence is the surest fact of reality as the psalmist also says that it is only the fool who says in his heart that there is no God (Psalms 14:1). Since God is the final cause, ground, and reason of this universe and all human experience, faith in God is also final and ultimate. It is this reason why God can accept no excuse for unbelief from the unbeliever. For the faith of God (Mark 11:22) is both distinctive and final; it is the ground of the ultimate form of experience which is divinely given.

BETWEEN NOW AND ETERNITY In the Greek (in which the New Testament was written), the order of words gives emphasis to "things hoped for". These "things" are firstly, "hoped for", but also "not seen" as Paul clearly explains it to the Romans that "hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?" (Romans 8:24, ASV).

Hope is defined as "expectation and desire"; thus, "to hope" signifies wanting something to happen and believing in its possibility. Thus believing and hoping are connected as the now to the future. We believe in the present what we hope about the future; the future being invisible at the present. The future possesses the goal and meaning that integrates our present life and gives us a reason to move forward. Thus, faith is that which binds history together with meaning. One tends to look at history as general and particular. General history deals with the history of the world: its origin (also including the origin of time), its progress, and its destiny. Here, we are not just talking about History as a study-discipline but history as the whole of events in general – past, present, and future. Particular or specific history, on the other hand, deals with some particular object like a people, phenomenon, or an individual: thus, we have Indian history, history of religion, and autobiographies. According to the Bible, general history is not absurd but intrinsically and

teleologically meaningful. In other words, it is through and thoroughly meaningful to the end. Its processes are meaningful and its end is also meaningful because the processes are controlled by God and the end is determined by God. Therefore, every event that occurs in history can measure its significance by referring to God's general purpose for His creation. This does not proclaim the teaching of determinism or fatalism but of the judicious governance of this world by God. To fall short of God's will and purpose means to lose the true meaning of life and degrade to inauthentic existence – a life that is not seriously concerned with its reality and focus or one that suppresses the truth of God by giving in to the faith-destroying voices of unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). This kind of life has two kinds of responses towards the future: false hope and hopelessness. False hope is hoping in things that are unreal in the sight of God; for instance, the hope of the demons to defeat God. This is a false hope because it is not based on a reality sanctioned by God. Their faith, therefore, lacks a solid basis and their hope has no real anchor. It is also, therefore, both useless and dangerous. Obviously, false faith leads to false hopes.

Answer to Hopelessness

Another kind of response is seen in the sense of hopelessness. It is the single-most greatest assailant of joy in modern times. In the absence of hope, people lose all sense of living. The fact is that when faith is renounced, hope is also lost with it. When one can't believe anything, one can also expect nothing. I think that's the reason why our present (postmodern) age of relative truths and values has led to more sighs of despair than ever. With nothing to hold on to and no solid ground to stand on, there remains no sure expectation left. The euphoria of relativity only leads to the evaporation of hope because the uncertainty of present is chained to the uncertainty of future. Faith in absolutes provides the rail track for the train of action to move on towards the destiny of hope, towards 'things hoped for'. Thus, faith is the substance or ground of things hoped for. An example of this is found in the life of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Reporting his frustration with a life lived without divine reference, merely 'under the sun' (a phrase that signifies a materialistic and godlessly rationalistic lifestyle), he writes:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? ...I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.... I tried cheering myself with wine.... I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself.... made gardens and park.... made reservoirs.... owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem.... amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.... So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me (Ecclesiastes 1:2; Ecclesiastes 1:14; Ecclesiastes 2:3-8, Ecclesiastes 2:11,17, NIV). To this writer, most probably King Solomon, a loosening of faith in God led to spiritual bankruptcy and life lost its ultimate focus. Terrestrially speaking, this world had no final meaning for him once death took him into its bosom. To the materialistic mind there is no difference between the death of an animal and the death of a man. One may believe in the spirit and its survival after death but his materialistic orientation breeds more frustration than hope.

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 3:19, NIV).

Thus, when ultimate faith is lost, ultimate hopes also evaporate. Therefore, the Preacher admonishes the young to remember God and submit to Him in reverence in the blossom of youth, before old age dawns on them with feelings of worthlessness and a wasted life (Ecclesiastes 12:1; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Another clear example of the relation between faith and hope is found in the book of Job. Job was a sincerely devout and pious believer. However, Satan finding occasion came before God and accused him of utilitarianism (that Job feared God only because God provided for and protected him). God allowed the trial of Job. One thing to note here is that God allows trials into the lives of His children not to destroy and debase them but to prove that their faith is pure. If we can believe that then the devil is plundered and victory is ours. In the case of Job, the devil's main accusation was that Job was a utilitarian; he followed God because God gave him what he wanted. In other words, he wanted to say that Job's faith was not spiritual but natural and carnal. According to him, Job honored God for natural and carnal reasons and not because he loved God in spirit and in truth. Such response is animalistic, instinctive, and natural. Even a dog is faithful to its master. The nature or being of God didn't matter much to him. What God did for him was more important to him than who God was. Bluntly, the devil was saying that God was not being worshipped because He was worthy of it but because people were getting their fill of desires. Once these materialistic blessings were removed, he said, Job would turn against and curse God to His face (Job 1:11). Even Job's wife agreed to this as the expected response for misery (Job 2:9). But Job did not flicker because he knew that though circumstances might change, the nature and being of God is beyond the shadow of a change, and that his faith was anchored not in the appearance of circumstances but in the constancy of God. His faith was not a response of the flesh that sought physical motivation to go on; it was the ground of his existence. Therefore, he says "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). If Job didn't have faith in the truthfulness and faithfulness of God, suffering for him would have been both pointless and absurd. Everything would be madness. But it was faith in God that infused in him a hope for the future. However, this hope was not of some materialistic, utilitarian fulfillment but of a spiritual encounter with God Himself. As he says,

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27, NIV).

Apparently, it is not just a hope of resurrection that is expressed here: it is the hope of seeing God "with my own eyes". Job's faith was not based on space-time instances, but on the eternal reality of God Himself, a vision that connected his now to eternity. THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH The Greek word for "substance" used here is hypostasis (ὑποστασις), from which is derived our English word "hypostasis", which means, in metaphysics, "essential nature or underlying reality." Literally, it meant "that which is placed under", that is the ground beneath something on which the thing gains a firm foothold. It is in this sense that the Septuagint (LXX) uses it for "standing" in Psalms 69:2, where the psalmist says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing," or place

for the foot to rest. The word is used five times in the New Testament; thrice as "assurance" or "confidence", once as "person" or "essential nature", and once, i.e. here, as "substance". Obviously, a word can be used in more than one sense, as for instance the word "ground" in the English language can be used to mean "the surface of the earth", "a piece of land", e.g. a playground, "the basis for some action or belief", e.g. moral grounds or grounds for belief, or "a preliminary coat of paint applied to a surface", among many other things.

I believe that the three basic meanings of the Greek word *hupostasis* may together help us to understand a greater import of the text. The three forms are as follows:

Faith is the ground or basis of things hoped for.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Faith is the assurance or confidence of things hoped for.

Faith as Foundation

Firstly, faith is "the ground of things hoped for." It is on the basis of faith alone that God can give to us what He desires to give us. However, faith can only be a basis because of God's Word (Truth of God). The faith that is not based on God's Word is not foundational about the things of God. It leads to somewhere else. But the faith that is connected to God's Word is the ground for experiencing the things of God. There are many instances in the Scriptures that illustrate this truth. The Israelites perished in the wilderness and couldn't enter the Promised Land due to their unbelief (Jude 1:5). Moses could not enter the Promised Land because of his unbelief in the word of God (Numbers 20:12 ; disobedience is a form of unbelief). Jesus could not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief (Mark 6:5, 6; Matthew 13:58). Scripture tells us that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will not be saved (Mark 16:16). It is on the basis of faith that we receive healing (Matthew 9:22), salvation (Zephaniah 2:8), the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14), and eternal inheritance (Acts 26:18). Obviously, faith is the inevitable condition for the appropriation of divine gifts, not because God is incapable of acting without our faith but because faith is the spiritual relation between a heart that willingly receives and the heart that willingly gives. However, the text also has a second implication: that faith is the ground upon which things are hoped for. We can only hope of better things because we have, first, faith. As has already been seen earlier, if I can't believe in someone, I can't hope anything from him. I can't have hopes of victory, for instance, from an army that I don't believe to be capable of victory. Without faith there is no hope, without hope there is no vision, without vision there is no strength, and without strength there is no thrust. In other words, faith determines a lifestyle by providing both vision and inspiration, and also a reason to live.

1. Faith as Ontological Basis of Spiritual Blessings. By ontological basis is meant that it is not just a mental assent but is also a real and solid basis for spiritual blessings. In fact, faith connects knowledge of truth with the reality of the truth itself. In that sense, it is the basis of the things hoped for. Faith is a real act of commitment to the truth, a space-time event that pierces through time to eternity. Therefore, an act of faith has inevitable results. When Moses acted out in faith on God's word and struck the Red sea, it was inevitable that it split into two parts. When the blind man obeyed Jesus and washed his eyes in the pool of Siloam, it was inevitable that his eyes be opened. This is so because faith is the basis of things hoped for. The faith of God is an act directly

related to God and not this space-time world; therefore, it pierces through space-time and catches hold of the hem of God's garment unleashing His power and blessings in this temporal frame. That is why miracles are possible, despite the general laws of nature. Peter walked on water by the faith of God that sees God as the Lord of creation and not limited by its phenomenal functions, its natural laws, or the way things happen. God is the source of all created reality and all phenomena owe their existence to God. His infinite power spans the difference between being and non-being and brings things out of nothing. Therefore, He is Lord of all creation. For God, nothing is impossible. An act of faith connects to the will and power of God. Therefore, Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed...nothing shall be impossible to you" (Matthew 17:20); for through faith what is possible to God is also possible to the believer.

2. Faith as Epistemic Basis of Spiritual Experiences. Faith not only connects to the will and power of God; it also connects to the knowledge of God. It is both mental consent and commitment to the truth proclaimed by God. Therefore, it is the epistemic basis of spiritual knowledge. The experience of faith is the experience of divine truth. This is very obvious in the Scriptural assertion that the natural or carnal man cannot receive the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). They have no personal significance for him. There were many people who saw and heard Jesus during His physical ministry in this world; however, it was very few who really believed and, consequently, experienced Him. Let's compare two perspectives here: the first, of the high priest and the second, of Jesus' disciple, John:

(1) And the high priest answered and said unto him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus saith unto him, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy" (Matthew 27:63-65).

(2) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14). The contrary experiences of the high priest (feelings of desperation, fury, anguish, discomfort, and rage) were governed by his refusal to believe the confession of Christ. He could never know Christ because he could not believe Him. On the other hand, John saw Jesus as the Son of God who came and dwelled among us. The high priest accused Him of blasphemy; but John saw Him as being full of grace and truth. The high priest could not know God because of his unbelief. Thus, faith is considered to be essential to knowledge. To know means also to believe. This is very true also in relation to statements about this temporal world. For instance, if someone says that he knows that the earth is spherical, it also means that he believes the earth to be spherical. Further, knowledge is composed of truth; therefore, knowing something means also to believe in the truth about that thing. To believe in falsehood does not constitute knowledge. For instance, one may believe that the earth is flat, but since this belief doesn't correspond to reality therefore, it is obvious that this person doesn't really know what the earth is like but is, on the other hand, deceived about it. False belief doesn't constitute knowledge; it constitutes ignorance and deception. True belief alone, therefore, is knowledge. Evidently, then belief is elemental to knowledge. There is a difference between sensory experience and spiritual knowledge because spiritual knowledge is not given to us in the form of sense-perception but must be received on the basis of faith alone. For instance,

the knowledge of Christ's atonement on the cross is not derived from a sense-observation of the crucifixion – there were many who saw the crucifixion but only few who truly understood it. It is based on faith in God's revelation and a communication of this conviction to the heart of the believer by the Spirit of God. Therefore, the nature of this revelation is spiritual, transcending all limitations of language and thought though not contradicting them. Evidently, then, faith is the basis of spiritual experiences. Therefore, the Scripture says:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

Faith as Substance

Secondly, faith is "the substance of things hoped for." In other words, the things that we hope for are, at present, composed of and given to us as faith. Therefore, whenever we have faith we also have the things we hope for in the form of faith now. That is why Jesus said "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). He doesn't ask them to believe that they will receive it in future but to believe that they have already received it in faith. In other words, if someone has faith in God for something, he already has that thing. I believe this is so because God is not conditioned by time but if something is "yes" in Him then it is eternally "yes" and the same in future, present, and past. Thus, it is not whether that thing will be real to us in the future but whether it is already real in the sight of God that is significant. We may have those things later on, but if God has already said a "yes", then there is no doubting about their reality which we experience in the form of faith. Faith itself, thus, becomes the evidence, as we shall see later, of things yet unseen. But more than just being evidence, faith is the fact of our having what we are hoping for. It is in this spirit that we know that we are the children of God, that our citizenship is in heaven, and that the devil is a defeated foe. Obviously, all these facts will be physically manifest only at the last day but they are readily known as facts by us now without any doubt. That is faith: to know the future in the present as true. Therefore, a man of faith doesn't live his life regretting about the past or worrying about his present but he is elated by faith to see the hopes of the distant future as a timeless reality and lives his life in accordance to the reality of those facts in the sight of God (Php 3:7-10). That is one reason why unbelief in God's revelation is sin; because it attempts to falsify God (1 John 5:10). It attempts to deny what is true and undeniable in the sight of God. Therefore, the unbelievers cannot inherit the kingdom of God since they cannot see it and know it now. Weighing the ultimate value of spiritual faith, it has infinitely greater value than the temporary escapism of drug hallucinations, day-dream fantasies, and entertainment. These may provide temporary escape from the inescapable void of the future inherent in the blank realities of the present that the unbeliever experiences, but can't liberate the soul in reality, engendering more vexation of spirit than peace. Life, as a result, becomes more banal, confused, and dissatisfying. But faith connects the life of the believer to the eternal realities of God and, therefore, his spiritual experiences possess the value of a far greater reality that the world can't counterfeit.

Faith as Conviction

Finally, faith is "the assurance of things hoped for." The assurance or certainty of faith is based on the finality of its object. Finality refers to that which is both foundational and terminal. By

foundational is meant that which is basic and necessary. Terminal refers to that which is the end and finality of something, its destiny. Now, it is evident that God is the foundation and terminal of faith since He is the Beginning and the End of all reality; for everything consists and subsists by Him (Isaiah 41:4; Isaiah 48:12; Colossians 1:7 ; Revelation 21:6). In other words, all that is real and true has its source in Him and has Him as its final end as the Word says about the Son of God "he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17). This world cannot be the final source and end of faith since it is contingent and therefore not final in itself. Secondly, since we ourselves are part of this world, to trust in this world would amount to trusting in nothing (objective); for, it would be like a man trying to walk on his boots. Therefore, God alone is the foundation and end of faith. Faith begins and ends in Him. It is the reality of God where the world finally collides and comes to an end. There is nothing conceivable by reason, experience, or faith beyond Him. Therefore, the faith of God is final. As seen earlier, God's finality for faith is also seen in His not just being the beginning and the end of all things but also in His being the only eternal, infinite, all sufficient, unchanging, absolute, necessary, and relational being. The last attribute, relationality, is essential for faith to be able to relate to God and find its finality in Him. Relationality means that God has an infinite relational possibility, implying also His eternity of relation to someone. If God didn't have such eternal relation then relationality would not be an essential attribute of Him. But if relationality were not an essential attribute of God then faith cannot in anyway relate to Him in reality or essentially. Therefore, relationality must be an essential attribute of God for faith to be possible. However, relationality cannot be an eternal attribute of either a finite deity (polytheism) or monad deity (unitarianism); the former is not eternal or infinite and the latter has no relations except after the creation of this world, which is logically impossible since it presupposes an infinitely lonely god who finds the possibility of relation only through creation, indicating his insufficiency and contingency. It is only in the Christian concept of God as a Trinity that one finds eternal relationality. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternally related to each other in love. Thus, finality of faith presupposes the finality of God as an eternal, infinite, all sufficient, unchanging, absolute, necessary, and relational being. If such were not the conception of God, then faith in a contingent, fluctuating, finite, self-contradictory, and unrelated god will and must not be final. If someone finalizes his faith in such a god that lacks such attributes, his faith is incoherent.

Faith is being assured and confident about the reality of things hoped for. Since this faith is distinctive and final, being based upon the absolute and unchanging nature of God, this assurance is also unshakeable and final. That is the reason why a man of faith is at peace with himself; he is not alarmed at the appearances of contradicting situations because he knows that the thing he is hoping for is assured in the sight of God (Isaiah 26:3). This gives him confidence in confessing and living out his faith. This drives away all fear and discouragement. Fear is a sign of unbelief; that is the reason why cowards cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Revelation 21:8). Those who are not bold enough to confess their faith do not have that faith. This is because the possession of faith also means the possession of assurance and confidence, since faith is the assurance of things hoped for. The assurance of hope is stronger than hope alone. For in it hope is combined with confidence. It gives greater strength for meaningful living. It is not like a man who embarks on a journey without a roadmap, but as a man who boards a train with its destination clearly signified on it. Thus, faith is being assured and confident about things hoped for. This assurance, however, is not passive but coterminous with accepting the reality of God and His truthful nature. Thus,

whenever one believes God, he is also assured of the promises of God for his life. It is this assurance that gave Peter boldness to tell to the cripple, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6, MKJV); and the man leapt, stood up, and walked because his healing was a fact which Peter knew beyond a doubt. Miracles only exist for those who can believe in them. If we can't be assured about the possibilities of God then we can be assured about nothing else. Therefore, the faith of God is distinctive and admitting no excuse.

FINAL EVIDENCE The second part of this statement is parallel to the first. It modifies the first clause. Thus "substance" is "evidence" in the same manner that "things hoped for" are "unseen". A significant truth of revelation here is that faith doesn't need further evidence for its existence than its presence itself. Since it is the final ground of the things hoped for, it is also the evidence of the things hoped for. It is not based on anything else. It is the basis for everything that we know and experience. Attempts to base faith on rational or empirical proofs, i.e. on logic or experience, adds nothing to it. These may help to justify beliefs but cannot be the source of faith. One must not search for evidence for faith. Faith itself must be seen as the evidence for everything else. In fact, it is through the eyes of faith that meaning and the meaningfulness of divine truths is discerned. One proceeds from faith to the things and not from things to faith. The Greek word for 'evidence' is *elegchos* (■λεγχος), which can either mean 'proof' or 'conviction'. A conviction is an unshakeable belief in something without need of proof or evidence. This talks about the finality of this kind of faith. It doesn't need evidence. The other meaning implies that having this faith itself is the evidence that the unseen things hoped for are true. That you can have faith for the things you hope for is the surest evidence of their reality and possibility.

There are, however, certain criteria to measure the authenticity of such faith since this could easily lead to superstition and false belief. First of all, the believer must possess a sound mind. This is necessary in order for faith not to be based on illusions or delusions; one knows that there are many in the lunatic asylums that have strong faith about many things which are not true. Secondly, faith must be open to reason; in other words, open to verification and falsification or, at least, justification. Faith is justified belief; by this is meant that the believer must always be able to give a justification for his faith as the Scripture says "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you..." (1 Peter 1:15). This doesn't mean that faith follows evidence; nor that evidence strengthens faith. On the other hand, it means that faith in itself is neither irrational nor without evidence, but is full of proofs though not based on proofs; therefore, an evangelist is never short of proofs – in fact, he might often be astounded by the proofs of his faith. Thirdly, this faith must be connected with righteousness and peace. This is so because the faith of God cannot contradict the character of God. By righteousness is meant not only that this faith is internally consistent (possesses integrity), but also that it is legally consistent (conforms to the righteous Law of God). At the same time, it engenders peace (good relationship with God and removal of fear and doubt). Fourthly, and most importantly, it must not contradict the written Word of God, i.e., the Scriptures, which reveal God. By this is meant that it must not contradict the real import of Scriptures – this doesn't apply to false interpretations of Scriptures; faith has nothing to do with them.

Now, to say that faith is the "evidence of things unseen" means that the invisible things are proven by faith. Evidence may be classified into two categories: rational evidence and empirical evidence.

Rational evidence is expressible in the form of arguments or reasoning. Empirical evidence may be divided into two further groups: primary evidence and circumstantial evidence. Primary evidence is based on first-hand witness (e.g. the disciples saw the risen Lord). Circumstantial evidence is evidence not drawn from direct observation (e.g. the empty tomb). Faith is neither rational nor circumstantial evidence; it is primary evidence. In other words, faith is neither a set of arguments nor a set of data that needs interpretation and verification. On the other hand, the experience of faith itself is evidence of things unseen because it is the experience of a knowledge that is revelatory, illuminating, and convicting; it is the experience of the truth of God. To have the faith of God, therefore, means to possess the truth of God. Thus, though the things hoped for are invisible to us now, they are clearly known to faith.

Faith as evidence is also source of knowledge. Undeniably, faith is a voluntary act or else personal responsibility and even truth would be mythical. For if man doesn't know by exercise of his will then his knowledge is determined; but if determined then there is no possibility of verifying that knowledge to know whether it is true or false. Man would only know and believe what he is programmed to believe. But faith as voluntary act is the precursor to knowledge as Jesus said, "If any man desires to do His will (God's pleasure), he will know (have the needed illumination to recognize, and can tell for himself) whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking from Myself and of My own accord and on My own authority" (John 7:17, Amplified). Thus, the will-to-believe is the condition for the knowledge of truth. If anyone is unwilling to accept the truth, then all evidence is meaningless (perhaps detestable) to him. Therefore, faith as evidence (Sanskrit, *pramana* meaning also source of knowledge) is also source of knowledge.

One question that may arise in this connection regards the source of faith. Obviously, the source cannot be either reason or experience. For that would mean that faith is based on them and is not itself the final evidence. Further, any amount of reasoning cannot produce the absolute assurance that faith possesses. Thus, reason cannot be the basis of faith. In fact, as the French mathematician Blaisé Pascal argued, to say that one believes on the basis of reason is to beg the question. For, one needs to first believe in reason itself before believing in its results. That is to say, reason itself is originally based on faith. Reason cannot be based on reason for that would evidently beg the question. The same also extends to experience. One can doubt the reality of everything about experience, as the French philosopher René Descartes showed. Consequently, faith itself cannot be based on experience. One chooses to believe in experience; one doesn't have faith out of experience in the ultimate sense. Thus, experience can only be the source of knowledge when it is based on faith. Faith can only be final when it is not ultimately based on reason and experience. All knowledge of this world, therefore, deriving from reason and experience is not final. There is always some element of doubt that is admissible. But the faith of God, as has already been seen, is fully assured and final. In fact, this faith of God is that which stabilizes knowledge by giving meaning to both reason and experience. That is the reason why, disbelief in God, in its final form, leads to a sense of absurdity, hopelessness, skepticism, cynicism, and nihilism. The source of faith then can be neither reason nor experience. What then is the source of faith? It is an encounter with the revelation of God as the Scripture says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). This doesn't mean that one has faith as soon as one hears God's voice; but, one exercises faith only when face to face with the revelation of God. In fact, one may choose to even reject the revelation. Faith is a choice, it is

not automatically produced. When one encounters the revelation of God one has the choice of accepting it or rejecting it. The nature of both the encounter and choice is spiritual and not rational or physical. Therefore, the choice is also a moral one. Further, the truth revealed is spiritual and so physical events (e.g. miracles etc) cannot be regarded as final proof of it. The truth itself is its proof and is known only by someone who responds in faith. The one who rejects it remains unprofited by the encounter (cf. Hebrews 4:2). The one who accepts it, however, is immediately ushered into the reality of God and, thus this faith becomes the substance and evidence of the unseen things one hopes for. As long as reason and experience are held on to, uncertainty and temporality holds the scepter; but faith unchains one from the infinite sequence of evidence and takes one beyond uncertainty to the substance, the ground, the confidence, and the evidence of the things of God. The value of this faith is not measurable by human standards: it is only measured by God. The possession of this solid faith of God earned the elders a good report and testimony (Hebrews 11:2). This was so because they possessed the thing they hoped for in the form of faith even though the fulfillment was scheduled only at the last day. They were undaunted by the present circumstances but were faithful to the end because of the assurance they had in God. Their faith was their evidence of the things still invisible to us, and by it they obtained a good testimony, God Himself testifying about their faithfulness. Their choice took them beyond uncertainty to obtain a good testimony from the Father. In view of what we have seen this far, it is obvious that the source of all frustration, fear, anxiety, boredom, vexation, emptiness, loneliness, and hopelessness is either the weakening of or the loss of faith. Of course, the world presents us with the crisis of faith: reasons for not believing in God. But the world has no substitute for the faith of God. To trust in the world or in man is to sink with the ship. Soon the loss of faith gives way to conscious or unconscious escapism. The means of escapism are not few and the worldliest are the most evil ones as well, hurting self and society. But they are also false ones along with the reality of their being temporal as well. They do not and cannot give eternal solace. It is the faith of God alone that gives true meaning, purpose, and reason to life.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. One can only know and receive spiritual knowledge by faith.
2. In matters of faith, faith alone is evidence; although, it is not separable from reasonability.

01.02. Chapter 2: Zero Reinterpreted

CHAPTER TWO Zero Reinterpreted "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God..." (Hebrews 11:3)

One distinctive tenet of Christian faith is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or creation out of nothing. Contrary to many other cosmogonies, the Bible teaches us that God did not create this world out of some primordial substance; the universe is not eternal, but God created the world out of nothing. This is contrary to the natural principle that something cannot come out of nothing. Obviously, this doctrine, though unpalatable to reason, is acceptable to faith. This is not meant to say that faith contradicts natural philosophy, but that it transcends the natural and, therefore, can connect to the reality that gives significance to this universe.

It is not our purpose here to examine the many prevalent cosmologies of the world. However, it must be stated here that no cosmology that deals with the ultimate nature of reality can be absolutely based on reason or scientific inferences alone. This is so because neither the beginning nor the eternity of time is rationally conceivable. Similarly, neither the limits nor the infinitude of space is rationally conceivable. For instance, one Greek philosopher once asked his students what would happen if he stood at the end of the universe and threw a javelin; will it go anywhere? Obviously, an end was inconceivable. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant called it one of the antinomies of reason. Another antinomy relates to whether the universe has a cause or it is uncaused. Neither of the options is mentally conceivable. One may suggest theories regarding origins but can never rationally or scientifically prove beyond doubt that his theory is true. Theories "are always being changed to account for new observations," as Stephen Hawking says, and a complete unified theory that could explain the universe is still non-existent. Of course, many a philosopher proposed a quintessence of the universe, but his view still remains a theory. Further, no one can claim hold to such infinite knowledge that admits no deficiency and thus provides all the data necessary for a perfect deduction. But even if a beginning or non-beginning of the universe were 'proved', it will still be rationally and empirically unsatisfactory since the antinomy would still remain. Consequently, it is on the basis of faith alone that cosmogonies exist. Nevertheless, the truth or falsity of a claim can always be verified. For instance, one is very well sure that the myths that talk about the earth standing on a bull's horn or on the back of a giant tortoise are no longer tenable.

Creatio Ex Nihilo The writer of Hebrews tells us here that it is by faith that "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God". In other words, through faith we gain the understanding of how this world began, that "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," i.e. the world was made out of nothing. However, someone else might by faith understand that the physical universe is the body of God. But then, how does one know which of the two is right? In fact, can anyone know which of the two is right or one can only hope or believe that one of them is right? The writer of Hebrews, obviously, is not concerned with this problem. To him what matters primarily is that by faith we understand that the universe was made out of nothing. However, on

the basis of the fact that faith is the substance of things hoped for, one can evaluate the value of a particular faith by looking at the nature of hopes it entertains. In atheism, for instance, hope doesn't exist; in monism, hope is an illusion; in pantheism, hope is absurd (since good and evil ultimately become one); in polytheism, hope is uncertain (the gods are finite and might be overpowered by demons after all). Evidently, though tersely stated, none of the non-Biblical religious philosophies is seen to possess the worth of belief. For, if one needs to believe a cosmology, its anticipated hope must also be ultimately meaningful. If not, then the belief is not of any worth at all. It's neither worth living for nor worth dying for.

Obviously, the doctrine of creation out of nothing implies that the world, as it is, is basically composed of nothing since it was made out of nothing. Without the creative power of the word of God, this world would have remained nothing; in other words, it would not even have existed. Theologians call all created reality as contingent since it owes its existence to something other than itself, i.e., to God. Thus, the world is ultimately nothing by itself and in itself. Therefore, idolatry and witchcraft are detested by God since, while the former holds that God can be represented in contingent forms, the latter holds that this universe itself contains the power to meet the gap between being and nothingness, both of which are false beliefs and expressions of false pride and presumption; thus being vain shows, they lead to nothing but eternal separation from God. Faith, however, takes one beyond the fringes of nothingness by reposing in the absolute possibilities of God.

INFINITE POSSIBILITIES The strong optimism of the faith of God is that it has the infinite power of God on its side and is, therefore, able to see infinite possibilities where natural eyes fail to see even a glimpse of hope. Only infinity spans the difference between being and nothingness. To put it the other way, the difference between zero (0) and one (1) is infinite. Therefore, it takes infinite power to bring out something out of nothing. Obviously, the faith that can understand and perceive the world as created out of this zero-state (not some singularity), is the faith of the most immense kind. In fact, it is the faith that can do anything because for it anything is possible. If the God I believe in is able to produce the world out of absolute nothing then He is able to do anything for me. Therefore, I can never be a miserable man as long as I believe in God. It is this faith that gave Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego the boldness to refuse the worship of King Nebuchadnezzar's image, though threatened with death. They told the king,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Daniel 3:16-18, NIV). The faith of these three men was final: whether God saved them or didn't save them from the burning furnace, they were going to trust Him alone because they knew their God. There is nothing utilitarian about this faith. It's not based on some selfish desire of comfort or security but is final in itself as they said "we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter." It is the faith that defies the world and glorifies God. The infinite power of God, which is also inexhaustible, is unlike the contingent physical force inherent in this universe. Even magic can't compare with it. Though it is believed by some that magical powers exist and that magicians can produce objects out of thin air, the magicians themselves deny it. As Gaudapada said "dream and magic are seen to be unreal." Only God who possesses infinite power can bring things out of nothing. In fact, only God can

possess infinite power since He alone is a necessary being and above all exhaustibility, definitions, and determinations of contingency. Therefore, nobody who clings on to some power of this physical world (be it mana, chi, or sakti) can possess the infinite power akin to God since whatever power he possesses is conditioned by contingency and so will always remain finite and thus infinitely incapable of creatio ex nihilo. Thus, only the eternal God who transcends this universe can create things out of nothing by His infinite power. Obviously, then the faith of God inevitably transcends the rigors and conditions of this contingent world. Therefore, events, circumstances, and appearances of the world do not matter to the one who has the faith of God. He is not alarmed by them because his faith is above them all. It is transcendental. The Concreteness of Faith But it is not abstract. The concreteness of faith is already evident in its being called the substance of things hoped for. Further, this power is not something undemonstrated now. This world itself is an example of God's immense power as the Word says, "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm" (Jeremiah 27:5). To the early Christians as to many believers today, the infinite power of God is not an abstract hope but a concrete reality. The resurrection of Christ, for instance, witnessed by over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:4-9) was evidence of this great power of God which Paul describes as "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:19-20). In fact, the Bible says that it is this power that is also active in us today: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21). It is also the hope of all believers that as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead by His great power, so will He also raise us up at the last day as the Scripture says "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power" (1 Corinthians 6:14 ; cf. Philippians 3:10). This infinite and inexhaustible divine power working in us, i.e. actively and dynamically present within us, produces the signs, wonders, and miracles that we see today and that are inexplicable on natural terms (cf. Hebrews 2:3-4 ; Romans 15:18-19). This power is not produced in us (as some think of the term *dunamis*); it is actively present in us. It is only through faith that one can bring into concretion the possibilities of this divine power. However, one must understand that this is not some mystical, occultic, or magical power that can be controlled by us. This is God's power that is active in us only because God is active within us (cf. Philippians 2:13). And He works according to His sovereign good will and purpose. It is only when faith attunes with God's will expressed in His word that miracles take place. This power cannot be counterfeited. The Egyptian magicians tried to counterfeit Moses' miracles but could not stand before him for long. At last, they conceded saying "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). The devil cannot counterfeit it, since he himself is contingent. Therefore, the Scripture says that "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). The boldness of a man of faith, consequently, is quite different from the boldness of worldly men and even demons. Worldly confidence is false because the world is nothing in itself and by itself. One who puts confidence in the world or its things is like a man clinging to a falling tree. The man of faith knows that the world is a finite scheme of things that will soon pass away, but he who follows God's will abides forever (1 John 2:17). All the hopes and dreams cherished by worldly men will perish with the world on the last day of Judgment when unbelievers will be confined to infinite contingency and nothingness (not of non-being but of existence; i.e. where

existential frustration and emptiness would be hellishly painful, they being separated from the life, power, and goodness of God). To believers the faith of God presents great optimism, not necessarily this-worldly, but of God. As this chapter unravels, the difference between this-worldly optimism and divine vision will be clearly seen. Jesus Himself when answering Pilate said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:32, NIV). The fact that believers go through trials and suffering and that there are martyrs for the faith is evidence that Biblical optimism is not this-worldly, ultimately. This, however, doesn't mean that God has no power over this world. God does deliver His people from troubles but this deliverance is not that final kind of deliverance which a believer is optimistic about. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but then Lazarus died again. Yet, since the believers hope is not limited only to death, it is far superior to the hopes of this world, as Paul says "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). This optimism, therefore, is far greater than what the world can imagine.

Indubitably, also then faith is not the opium of the masses as the Socialist thinker, Karl Marx, thought. It is not something that dulls rational thinking in hope of some future heaven, thus leaving the present to its fate. The Bible is very clear about this that God is truly at work in us even now. The experience of God is not a strange phenomenon to believers. They are in the fellowship of light. Answered prayers, miraculous deliverances, supernatural blessings and the turning of people to God are evidence of the present reality of divine power working in us. Moreover, it is a fact of faith that it is God working in world history to bring about the completion of His will. This is indicated by what we'll next see as God's framing the worlds by His word.

WORLDS IN THE MAKING The Greek word *aion* (αἰών), translated here as "worlds", can mean "an age", "the universe", or "eternity". It basically carries the concept of being in time. This takes us further from looking at the world only at its beginning to looking at the world in the whole of time (past, present, and future). To put it differently, we are looking at this contingent world taking shape in time. Obviously, the expression "the worlds were framed by the word of God" doesn't simply mean that time was framed but that something was framed in time, that something spatio-temporal took a particular shape by the power of the word of God; thus, were the ages framed or fitted together.

Evidently, then, this is not limited to just the creation of the world but extends to also the shaping of history by the providence of God. This is also indicated by the usage of the word *rhema* (ῥήμα) for "word", meaning "spoken word" or "command" in specific situations. In other words, faith sees history as only meaningful in connection with the will of God. In light of what this chapter is going to speak about, viz. the heroes of faith, it may be seen how history was shaped when different individuals at different moments in time responded to the voice of God. God could only shape the ages because people responded to Him in faith. This doesn't mean that He is not free to do as He wills, but that when people responded to Him in faith, they became part of His grand design and thus became part of sacred history. Apart from God, they would have been reduced to chaotic nothingness. But faith in God took them beyond their limitations and turned their chaotically oriented world into divinely structured histories. By submitting to the Great Architect, they ensured the beautifying of their lives. The framing of ages was by the specific word of God "so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." *Creatio ex nihilo* also applies here to the shaping of ages in the progression of time. The faith-heroes brought things into existence out

of nothing by their acts of faith in the revelation of God. The impossible was made possible by the faith of God. For instance, as will be seen in Abraham's case, the birth of Isaac was the result of faith in the promise of God. This child of Abraham, in accordance to the promise, later became a nation and a blessing to many nations. Similarly, Moses triumphed over his own inabilities by his faith in God and thus was able to lead the Israelites to the borders of the Promised Land. The things that we see now in present history were not made of things which do appear. That is to say, they were not products of visible natural processes or human talents. They are results of God's interventions in history on behalf of those who trusted in His nature, power, and purposes and were obedient to His will. The Bible makes it very clear that it is God who controls the world. It is He who, for instance, "rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will" (Daniel 4:25, MKJV). But someone would ask, if this is true then why does God seem to be so silent while crime, wars, and violence prevail everywhere? This question is natural to the heart that has lost its touch with the heart of God. One can only doubt God when one's heart is overruled by the visible realities of this world and has lost sight of the "things hoped for". Indubitably, the question has been asked several times by servants of God themselves. But the answer has always come in being assured of the final end of all this. For instance, observe what Asaph says in Psalms 73:1-28 :

I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.... They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth.... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.... Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds (Psalms 73:3-12, Psalms 73:17; Psalms 73:27-28, NIV).

Now, this reasoning will be unacceptable to the unbelieving mind. But to the man of faith, this is not reasoning: this is fact. Further, God can only judge the world for the crimes it has committed. All tribunals have the same purpose: to judge criminals for their crimes and not for their potentiality for crimes. And man is only free to do as he likes in this framework of the kingdom of man. Earthly judgment (at the most capital punishment) is given by earthly tribunals (Romans 13:4), by the act's consequences (Proverbs 18:7 ; Proverbs 11:19), and sometimes by God (Jeremiah 14:12). The final judgment, however, will be unlike earthly judgment: the punishment is eternal damnation (Matthew 25:46 ; Mark 3:29). But the question will be asked, "Why doesn't God prevent crimes if He is a just ruler?" The answer is that this is not God's prerogative in the kingdom of men. Man is responsible for it because man started it when he chose to disobey God and was cast out of God's garden. The casting out of the garden to a world of thorns and thistles represented God's abandoning of man to his discretion. It is only His mercy that grants man the opportunity to choose God and become part of the redemption plan which He has drawn in order to finalize the purpose of creation. At present, however, God is only related to the governance of this world as far as His purpose of His kingdom is concerned. That is what is evident from Jesus' statement that "My

kingdom is not of this world." God intervenes in human history in accordance to His final purpose. It is only in this way that He frames the ages. Thus, the phrase "the fullness of the time" in Galatians 4:4 refers to a point in the divine blue-print of time when Christ was ordained to be born. Despite the fact that the world continued to see several evils in the course of time, the time-table of God was not affected since God was in perfect control of His processes. Similarly, God is in perfect control of this present world and His sacred history is unaffected by the evil of men. However, anyone who responds to God in faith becomes part of this history and heir of the blessings of His kingdom. And, since the believer is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, he can claim heaven's protection and blessings over his life, though the final and complete manifestation of this is still awaited (cf. Php 3:20 ; Php 4:19; Hebrews 1:14 ; Psalms 34:7 ; Revelation 11:15). Consequently, anyone who enters the world of God's history becomes His partner in the establishment of God's kingdom and thus affects the way this world runs. To quote one example, the conversion of the African tribes did put an end to demonism and cannibalism there and opened them up to the blessings of God. African history since then has been different. This doesn't mean that Africa is totally saved. But this definitely means that it is not the same anymore. Its history has been shaped by the word of God and is continually being shaped as men of faith respond to God's call.

FAITH BEYOND PHENOMENA The word for "things that do appear" is phainomenon (φαινόμενον) which is in the middle voice and is used in this form only once in the New Testament. It comes from the word phaino which means "to shine", "to show", and "to appear". The English word derived from this Greek word is "phenomenon" meaning "thing that appears". A literal rendering of the Greek text would be: "Not out of things that appear (phainomenon) were the things that are seen (blepomena) made." To the Greek mind, phainomenon simply was an appearance or resemblance and not necessarily the actual image of the thing. For instance, a spoon standing in a glass half-filled with water appears to be bent though not really bent. Perhaps, in using the word phainomenon here the writer of Hebrews also wishes to say that faith doesn't look at the things that are now apparent to us as the real basis of this visible world. As appearance cannot be the final basis of knowledge, so can it not be the final object of faith. In other words, faith is not controlled by "things that do appear" or phenomenon; on the contrary, it is controlled by the word of God since the worlds were framed by it and not made by the "things that do appear". In fact, they have appeared out of nothing only because God commanded them to be. The apparent can often confound faith. For instance, as Peter began walking on water by faith in Christ's word, his eyes turned to the winds which appeared to him to be strong (or stronger?) and his heart lost confidence and began to fear. Consequently, he began to sink (Matthew 14:30). Obviously, what was apparent to him was in actuality false; not false in the sense that it didn't exist but false in the sense of his perception of it. Things don't appear as they show themselves to be; on the contrary, they appear to us as we take their appearances to be. It is we who impose our meanings on the things around us. It is our intentionality that determines our conception of things. The problem of faith is not the world around it but the way one sees and thus makes it appear to be to oneself. Truth can never create doubt or fear; it can only liberate (John 8:32). Where the meaning imposed is false, the belief is also false. The modern world presents before faith more complications to deal with. While in the pre-technological era it was mythical stories that presented a distorted picture of reality, in modern times it is the bombardment of pictures and virtual reality through television and cinema that distorts reality and presents a false phainomena. The images may be too convincing,

yet they drive one away from reality; in fact, they influence the mind to look at things in a confusing manner; for instance, that God is not in control, that smoking is very fashionable, that vengeance is right, that adultery is fun, and thousands of such lies. Thus, with myriads of false objects before the mind, faith can lose sight of reality if it doesn't stand aright and hold on to the truth unwaveringly. The pictures may be destructive or seductive. Bertrand Russell once said that "Japanese novelists never consider that they have achieved a success unless large numbers of real people commit suicide for love of the imaginary heroine." That is the power of imagination. It is not surprising then that the devil showed Jesus the glory of the world and proposed to give it to Him if He would only fall and worship him. He somehow conceived that the way things were presented or made to appear could destroy the faith of even the Son of God. Of course, by showing things in the wrong light he tries to first create doubt and then destroy faith. For once the carnal mind takes hold of imagination, faith will inevitably recede. Hadn't David known and experienced the power of God and Gehazi seen Elisha raising up the dead? But both of them fell into sin when their faith was broken on the altar of appearances (cf. 2 Samuel 11:2-5; 2 Kings 5:20-27). The vision of faith transcends the fake realities of this world. Natural interpretations of the world are never the object of faith. This is why the conflict of faith can sometimes be a tensed one when the mind is wavering between what the natural mind perceives to be and what the Word of God declares to be. The natural mind cannot receive the things of God because they are beyond its understanding. In fact, they might even appear to be absurd to it (1 Corinthians 2:14). For instance, when Jesus told the mourners at Jairus' house that the girl was not dead but asleep, all of them jeered at Him (Luke 8:52-53). But He put them all out, took the girl by her hand and called her saying "Little girl, arise!" And she immediately arose. There was no denying the fact that the girl was dead. But the vision of faith does not terminate with natural facts. It also does not entertain the negativity of those that cannot glorify God because of their lack of faith: that is the reason why He put them all out. The natural fact was that she was dead. The spiritual truth was that she was asleep; because faith is the substance of things hoped for and sleeping anticipates waking. Faith could see beyond the natural appearances of things. What didn't appear to be here was that she was alive. What faith could see here was that she was alive, though sleeping. The word that Jesus spoke brought this faith into visible reality. Thus, "not out of things that appear was this thing that was seen made." To conclude, one must remember that faith is never self-induced imagination. On the other hand, it is given by God in the sense that the vision of faith is the revealed truth of God. To walk after the imagination of one's heart is evil (Genesis 6:5). Similarly, to walk against the truth of God is also sin (Romans 1:18). For instance, to say that one cannot be justified by faith in the blood of Jesus is to commit the sin of unbelief and transgress against the righteousness and truth of God. It is not what one is able to imagine or conceive of that is vital to faith. The most important thing is how far one can believe in the truth declared by His Word. True faith cannot be less than final since to believe God is to believe in His infinite power and possibilities. Thus, nothing is impossible for those who can believe in God.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. The God who created this world out of nothing has infinite power to work on our behalf.
2. Faith doesn't look at appearances; it walks according to divine revelation.

01.03. Chapter 3: Effacing Evanescence

CHAPTER THREE Effacing Evanescence

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain... and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4) The names that Adam and Eve gave their children reveal something of what they thought about life. When their first son was born, they named him Cain (qayin), meaning "possession", as Eve said "I have gotten a man from the LORD" (Genesis 4:1). When the second son was born they named him Abel (hebel), which means "vapor" or "breath". Probably, by this time they had begun to see the evanescence of life and the reality of death that consumed man as a vapor. The word hebel, in fact, is the motif of Ecclesiastes Hebel (vanity) of hebelim (vanities), says the preacher, all is hebel (vanity). The word signifies temporality, transitoriness, ephemerality, impermanence, meaninglessness, effervescence, and vanity. By naming their son as Abel, Adam and Eve indicated their perspective of man as a perishing creature. The view is not unfounded. It was their sin that brought this calamity on man. "Dust thou art" God had said "and unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 3:19). Ever since then callous death has held sway over kings and paupers alike, having sympathy on none. It stands as a great taskmaster exacting of men all toil and labor to stall its fury until it suddenly strikes taking its toll. The vanishing strength of a hero, the fading beauty of a queen; the ebbing tide of desire and the melting texture of pride soon screech to halt at grave. With such pessimistic identity for a name, could Abel survive the plot of life? Yet, death was crueler to him. His elder brother Cain killed Abel out of jealousy and hatred. However, before this tragic end Abel had already obtained witness, says the Word, "that he was righteous" (Hebrews 11:4). This was the testimony of no man but of God, and that was regarding his offering and his gifts to God, by which though being dead he yet speaks.

One of the greatest privileges that a believer has is the opportunity to give to the Lord. Abel's offering was both sacrifice (thusia, θυσία) and gifts (doron, δῶρον). The phrase "gifts and sacrifices" is used three times in the book of Hebrews, each time in connection with the priestly offerings in the temple (cf. Hebrews 5:1 ; Hebrews 8:3-4; Hebrews 9:9). For instance, Hebrews 5:1 tells us that "every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." The phrase "both gifts and sacrifices for sins" indicates that the two are not the same but different from each other. "Sacrifices for sins" refers to the blood sacrifices offered for the remission of sins, whereas "gifts" refers to free-will offerings. However, it is not evident that this distinction really existed in the pre-Mosaic age. According to Moses' Law, sacrifice for sins was mandatory while gifts were voluntary. However, it seems that since such a law had not yet been established, the sacrifice that Abel brought was voluntary and, as such, also his gift, it being a voluntary act of faith: if this is true then Abel's sacrifice of the fattest of the firstlings (the best of the best, cf. Genesis 4:4) combined the essence of worship and service in one. The shedding of blood, in sacrifice, was considered to be necessary for the remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The sacrifice was indispensable, since the gifts meant nothing unless reconciliation with God was first effected. To us in the New Testament, there is no more need for sacrifice of animals since Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all as the sacrifice

for our sins (Hebrews 9:28 ; Hebrews 10:14). However, though imperfect in effectuality (that's why they had to be offered again and again) animal sacrifice was indispensable to the spirituality of the Old Testament. Its significance consisted in its function as a type and foreshadowing of the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:1-14). Abel's offering of a blood sacrifice revealed his acknowledgement of his sin and his need for redemption. It is evident to us now that what is a past event for us now (viz. the sacrifice of Christ) was to the Old Testament saints a thing hoped for and something yet unseen. It was by faith that the sacrifice of Christ became a reality to them through the animal sacrifice and they were declared righteous because they hoped for and experienced it beforehand by faith. Thus, Abel received the testimony of being righteous by faith in not his own righteousness but in the righteousness of God. This recognition before God is far superior to this-worldly reputation and honor. Abel's life may have seemed short, vain, and extinguished in men's eyes; but in the sight of God he bears the testimony of a worth that is eternal. He was justified and declared as righteous in the sight of God. However, the value of Abel is not contained in the category of his sacrifice but in the commitment of his heart to God. In fact, the tearing apart of an animal in sacrifice meant nothing if the heart lay not broken already on the altar of God in total surrender.

WORTH IN WORSHIP

It was not that Abel alone brought his offering before God; Cain too brought his own. However, God respected Abel's offering but not Cain's (Genesis 4:4-5). It is obvious, that bringing an offering to the Lord is more than a physical act; it is a spiritual act and the Bible makes it very clear that a broken and a contrite heart is far valuable before the Lord than a herd of animal sacrifices or tons of grain offerings (Psalms 51:17). Evidently, since Abel's sacrifice was not made mandatory by some law, it was his voluntary offering and thus superseded the mere rigors of religious ritualism or legalism. It was his worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Worth of Giving The worth of a gift is measured not by the content of the gift but by the intent of the giver's heart. One may remember the story of the poor widow who dropped into the treasury of the temple only two small copper coins, while the rich walked by dropping bags of money into it. Jesus looked at all this and said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43-44). That talks more than words can say about this poor widow's faith in and commitment to God. It's very easy to share a piece of bread with somebody when one has two. But what if he has only one? Added to this is the question of whether the temple treasury is really in need of those last two coins of this poor widow. She could have argued, as many believers today argue, that the temple is already very rich and financed by stout pockets; therefore, she need not part with the last of her coins. Thirdly, legally the widow was the one that needed to be supported by gifts (Deuteronomy 14:29; Deuteronomy 16:11; Deuteronomy 24:19-20), and she was not under any legal compulsion to cast her two mites. But she did, not because she was forced to but because she wanted to; not because God or the temple needed it, but because she needed to; and she cast her everything into God's treasury – all she had to live on. That is the faith that honors God and attaches priceless worth to worship. That is the same reason why the Scriptures say about Abel that by faith he "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain". It is already evident that Abel brought the "firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" while Cain only brought "of the fruit of the ground an offering" (Genesis 4:3-4). It

is very clear from this that Cain was neither concerned about the distinctness of God's altar nor the value of the offering. He just brought something in the way of a vacant ritual. And that is how God treated his ritual. His grief over his being rejected was, therefore, unexpected. And so God said to him, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:6-7, NIV). But Cain was no longer for the listening anymore. He turned to his brother, took him to the field and slew him there. By now his hypocrisy had revealed its cruelty. Therefore, the Word says that Cain murdered his brother because "his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). But why were his brother's works righteous and his evil?

Evil and Good The murder itself was evil, but preceding it was the evil of Cain's heart. But, I think we should define the word "evil" before judging Cain. As a Biblical way of answering it, let's draw a primary definition of it as "something that is evil in the sight of God". That is not to say that the definition of evil is not rationally possible; for, then this would beg the question since it will be necessary again to explain why something is evil in God's sight. But to be evil in God's sight and to be rationally evil are the one and the same thing for reasons that'll be explained now.

God is perfect being because He has no deficiencies, for if He had any He would not be infinite and, therefore, not God. Therefore, to avoid self-contradiction and self-destruction of the concept it is necessary to assert that God is perfect being and lacks nothing. To lack nothing means to lack no good thing since lacking anything good would amount to deficiency and, consequently, imperfection. Therefore, God lacks no good thing. In other words, He is the embodiment of infinite goodness. Therefore, evil is that which falls short of His perfection. In other words, the evil that is seen as abrogating some virtue of reason is in fact evil that opposes the character of God. Therefore, evil is also that which is evil in God's sight and what He calls as evil since He is the perfection of wisdom and judgment. Secondly, God is the active source of all this-worldly reality. He created it and sustains it. Therefore, there is nothing in this world that can go against Him and retain an independently justifiable standing. Consequently, all rational definitions of ultimate value conform to the source, God. Thirdly, God is the finality of the best and the one above whom nothing else can be conceived of. In other words, He is the finality of rationality. This doesn't mean that He is limited by reason if reason be truly limited – I mean reason in itself and not the limited reasoning capacity of man; in fact, Jesus is called the Logos of God, meaning reason, intelligence, and word. And since God is the final point of reason, therefore, the rational definition of anything cannot contradict God's definition of it. In fact, God's definition can transcend the rational definition, but the rational can never disqualify the divine definition. Therefore, evil is what is evil in God's sight.

Now, evil is seen as the opposite of righteousness; thus, to fall short of righteousness is to do evil. But the Bible makes it very clear that righteousness has never and can never be the product of human works but is the work of faith as is said "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Hebrews 11:4). Clearly then, Cain's works were evil because they were not according to faith and Abel's were righteous because they were done by faith. The faith of God decided the acceptability or unacceptability of any action before God. But why must faith be the criteria for righteousness?

Righteousness by Faith This is so because, firstly, faith is the fundamental condition and voluntary determinant of all moral action, and, secondly, faith is that which connects one to the righteous works of God. Moral actions are moral only in so far as they are exercises of morally intelligent and volitional beings. That is why neither animals nor lunatics can be incriminated. Morality is the intelligent acceptance of God's definition of good and evil. The reason for such acceptance has been explained earlier. This intelligent acceptance constitutes faith in God. Immorality is the intelligent rejection of God's definition of good and evil. This intelligent rejection constitutes unbelief in God, which is also rebellion. The sin of Adam and Eve was their choice to renounce their faith in what God defined to be good and evil, thus renouncing their faith in God. Eve believed the lie of the serpent and the power of the tree (symbol of nature; cf. Romans 1:18-23). Adam followed Eve and thus the whole mankind was condemned because the consequence of their false faith was naturally irreversible. Therefore, they were cast out of the Garden of God. All this was due to their unbelief in and rebellion against the divine prescription. Thus, it is on the basis of faith alone that moral actions become possible. Consequently, if one has faith in God his faith will inevitably manifest through his actions (James 2:17-18). Therefore, faith is the fundamental condition and voluntary determinant of all moral action. Further, faith connects one to the eternal righteousness of God. If I have complete faith in the present government, for instance, I will definitely believe that whatever it does is right; thus, I'm connected to its 'righteousness'. Faith in this-worldly things need not be complete since nothing here is perfect and final; however, as seen earlier, the faith of God admits no shadow of doubt and so it is in perfect conformity to the will of God; consequently, it is connected to the righteousness of God and all God's works intended to fulfill the righteousness of God (which includes our salvation plan through Jesus Christ). Therefore, it is by faith that one is declared to be righteous.

Faith as Worship

Faith gives God the worth that is truly His because it believes who God is as He reveals Himself to be. Therefore, the faith of God is the worship of God. When the devil came to Jesus and told Him that if He fell down and worshipped him, he would give Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, Jesus rebuked him saying, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). The devil had asked for a divine impossibility. It reveals his frustration in running out of tactics to deceive or allure our Lord. Jesus not only knew the truth; He is the truth of God, the finality of divine revelation. Therefore, He can't be deceived. However, the devil might have thought that he could confuse the Lord by turning His eyes to the visible appearances of this-worldly reality. Thus, he wished that the phenomena would somehow thwart His faith. But the Lord rebuked him saying, "Go away, Satan: for it is written...." He countered the devil with the Word of faith and reminded him of the divine command "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The Greek word for "worship" used here is *proskuneo*, which literally meant to prostrate oneself in homage or reverence. The word for "serve" is *latreuo* and refers to the kind of service that is given in the temple. Observe the connection between worship and service here as always: only a worshipping heart can truly serve the Lord. In other words, sacrifices and offerings that do not come from a worshipping heart do not matter at all. The devil was asking the Lord to fall (obviously, from the truth) and prostrate before him in subservience to him. This involved giving the devil the worth that only belonged to God, which constituted false worship. Any worship that is not rightly directed to God is false. That is the

reason why idolatry is also false since it falsely represents the God of creation and doesn't glorify God as God, but worships and serves the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:21-25). But true worship gives God the worth that truly belongs to Him. It is for this reason that Jesus told His disciples that "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29). In other words, it is in believing on and accepting the One sent by God that one truly serves Him. Therefore, the faith of God is the true worship of God and service of Him.

Now, true worship not only glorifies God but also gives the worshipper the true honor that comes from God as the Lord said "for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). Jesus said to the Jews "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). Their lack of faith deprived them of the worth and dignity that comes only from God. The honor of this world, however, is as evanescent as the world itself as the Word says "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25). Therefore, it is in submission to the truth of God by faith alone that one finds true dignity and worth.

God accepted Abel's offering because Abel gave by faith. The Bible says that God had respect unto Abel and to his offering (Genesis 4:4). It was not just the offering that was respected but Abel himself was first accepted because of his absolute faith in God. The Hebrew word for "respect" is sha'ah and means "to gaze and look at", which implies "to have respect for and consider something worth looking at." Thus, God considered with respect Abel's sacrifice but He didn't even look at Cain's offering. Cain's offering was as if directed to nobody. God didn't consider it worth any attention. This was so because only faith attracts the attention of God; and it is faith alone that gives worth to both the gift and the giver, because it is through faith alone that one connects himself to the realities of God. Thus, Abel conquered the evanescent worth of this world by putting his faith in God and giving himself in worship and service to Him; thereby, obtaining a testimony that still speaks though he is dead. He obtained that eternal worth and honor that comes from God alone.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Only one who approaches God with can appreciate His true worth in worship.
2. Through faith in God one comes to a right standing with Him – which is, righteousness.

01.04. Chapter 4: Climbing the Clouds

CHAPTER FOUR Climbing the Clouds "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death" (Hebrews 11:5). The seventh from Adam, Enoch was also a prophet. In fact, he was the first man who ever prophesied about the second coming of Jesus Christ (Jude 1:14-15). He was also the first man in Scripture who never saw death: he was taken away to heaven alive. The writer of Hebrews tells us that he was translated (i.e. to heaven) so that he should not see death; which also implies that death has no power in heaven where God rules. The process of decay and ageing inherent in the spatio-temporal and entropic (decreasing energy) world is absent in the transcendental and spiritual world of heaven. It was known to the contemporaries of Enoch that he walked with God (use to have a close fellowship with God) and that God took him; not just as a matter of conjecture but as a fact, which reveals that he bore a very strong witness of piety and the grace of God during his days on earth. The reason why God took him and not the other saints is not a matter of debate opened to us by God. Remember that "the secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). However, Augustine saw a foreshadowing significance in Enoch's translation with reference to his being the seventh from Adam and his being called Enoch (meaning "dedication", i.e. to God), who prefigured the dedication of the heavenly city in contrast to Cain's son Enoch who represented the earthly city dedicated to the world. In his own words, his opinion is argued as follows: For that line also of which Seth is the father has the name "Dedication" in the seventh generation from Adam, counting Adam. For the seventh from him is Enoch, that is, Dedication. But this is that man who was translated because he pleased God, and who held in the order of the generations a remarkable place, being the seventh from Adam, a number signalized by the consecration of the Sabbath. But, counting from the diverging point of the two lines, or from Seth, he was the sixth. Now it was on the sixth day God made man, and consummated His works. But the translation of Enoch prefigured our deferred dedication; for though it is indeed already accomplished in Christ our Head, who so rose again that He shall die no more, and who was Himself also translated, yet there remains another dedication of the whole house, of which Christ Himself is the foundation, and this dedication is deferred till the end, when all shall rise again to die no more. And whether it is the house of God, or the temple of God, or the city of God, that is said to be dedicated, it is all the same....

Obviously, Augustine regards Enoch's translation as akin to the translation of saints on the Last Day, which means that he will never die again in accordance to the Word in Hebrews 11:5 . However, some have opined that he will have to return to die a mortal's death as appointed for all men (cf. Hebrews 9:27), and this would be during the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 11:2-11). For instance, the church father Tertullian said that the death of Enoch and Elijah was postponed till the time comes that by their blood they may extinguish Anti-Christ. Others do not think that this needs to be so. In fact, they say, Moses and Elijah would best fit the interpretation of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 than Enoch and one of them. Moses and Elijah represented the Law

and the Prophets and the miracles of Revelation 11:1-19 are similar to those done by them during their ministry. They will "represent the Jewish Christian community at the end of history." But, since Moses' death is already mentioned in the Bible, some have thought that Enoch would better fit the picture with Elijah than Moses would. The complications of such interpretation need not be dealt here since we are presently concerned with Hebrews 11:1-40 and not Revelation 11:1-19. However, there seems to be good reasons for also saying that Enoch need not come back to the earth to die a mortal's death after all since the word 'translated' may also mean that the change was not just a matter of place but also the bodily salvation or transformation of Enoch, in which case he, having donned immortality, cannot die again as Revelation 11:1-19 predicts; in which case, further, one of the witness of Revelation 11:1-19 cannot be Enoch or even Elijah.

Translation before the Final Day

There are strong reasons to suppose that Enoch's translation also meant his transformation, though this doesn't prove that it might have happened that way. It might be that he was taken to heaven and is awaiting the consummation of ages when his body will finally be saved, though this seems less probably the case. The Scripture tells us that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50) meaning that someone who is not born again by the Spirit of God has no part in the kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3, John 3:5-6). That which is born of flesh (man) is flesh (Adamic, see 1 Corinthians 15:48) and that which is born of the Spirit (God) is spirit (sons of God; heirs of His kingdom). Now the final part of regeneration, absolutely needed to qualify one to inherit the kingdom of God, will be seen at the last day when the dead in Christ will rise to a glorious resurrection and the living will be transformed into the image of the Son of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 ; Php 3:20-21). In either case, there is a spiritual transformation of this mortal body and it puts on incorruption and immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Without such transformation there can be no part in the kingdom of God. This final transformation is also called 'the manifestation of the sons of God' (Romans 8:19) which is the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21) and the final adoption, i.e. "the redemption of the body" (Romans 8:23). It is the moment when "the sons of God" will be manifested or revealed (apokalupsis) to the world. That is why, the Bible says: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2, NIV). Obviously, this is an event scheduled to take place at the consummation of ages in the future, in which case, one may say, Enoch could not have experienced it prior to the time. Further, the Scripture is very clear that the firstfruits of this resurrection is Jesus Christ, whose resurrection is the ground for the resurrection of those who put their faith on Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23). In which case, Enoch could not have been transformed when Christ had not even been born. But this fixation of events in time disregards the eternal significance and dimension of the work of Christ. It limits the effects of Christ's work to the time following Him as if His death and resurrection was similar to any temporal work. However, the Bible makes it very clear that the sacrifice of Christ was not a mere temporal work; it had an infinitely deeper spiritual dimension. Jesus offered Himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), that is why His sacrifice could bridge the infinite chasm between man and God created by sin; that is also how He disannulled the penalty of eternal punishment in the moment of sacrifice. He alone could be our sin-offering that takes away the sin of the world and the source of our new life since He as God was infinite in being and, therefore, able to atone

infinitely and also defeat death, bringing out a new creation out of it through the resurrection. His sacrifice was not just a physical event; it was a spiritual event that spanned all time by transcending it. That is the reason why its effects are undiminishing and equal through all time – past, present, and future. That is how the Old Testament saints were saved and that is reason for which the transformation of both Enoch and Elijah could not have been an impossibility. In such case, their transformation would have preceded Christ's resurrection in time, but not in sequence. The firstfruits was Christ and theirs was only based on the work of Christ. Anyway, the Word definitely says that "by faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death" meaning that he will also not die anymore and the Word of God is true without doubt.

Now before his translation (i.e. being carried over to heaven) he had this testimony, says the Word, that he pleased God. This testimony, according to the writer, is proof of the faith of Enoch since "without faith it is impossible to please Him"; therefore, it is evident that Enoch was taken to heaven by faith. This, however, doesn't mean that if anyone had faith to be taken away, he or she will be taken away (of course, all should have the blessed hope). Enoch was taken away by God's choice, not Enoch's choice. It is not said that he believed and prayed for him to be taken away, but it's clear that he had faith in God and walked with God. However, there is room to wonder if Enoch, himself having the prophetic vision of Christ's return with his saints, ever wondered what it would mean to be translated in an instant to glory. Yet, that was what he himself experienced because he knew beyond doubt that Christ's return with the saints was a fact ordained in history, implying the knowledge that death was not the final end of God's people.

WALK TO WONDERLAND The Bible says that Enoch walked with God for over three hundred years (Genesis 5:22) and then, suddenly, one day "he was not found" because God took him away to heaven. The Septuagint (LXX) renders "And Enoch walked with God" as "And Enoch pleased God" (euerestesen de Enoch to Theo). The writer of Hebrews is, obviously, quoting the Septuagint when saying about Enoch that "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." To walk with God meant to please Him since to walk with Him meant to walk in conformity to His desire and will. The opposite of walking with Him would be walking against Him, which is characteristic of unbelievers. The characteristics of this walk are explicit in the words "seek", "come to", and "please Him".

He's near Us The writer says that without faith it is impossible to please God; for he who comes to Him must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The Greek word *ekzeteo* (ἐκζητέω) literally means "to seek out", the word being a compound of *ek* (out) and *zeteo* (to seek). This reveals not just the inquisitive and investigating nature of the faith of God but also the imperative to 'seek out' the truth or keep seeking till the true answer is found. Why should there even be a concern to seek for something unless it already exists by nature of the design of things? This, obviously, is the unsolved problem of secular philosophy. For instance, if immortality is mythical, why should man have the desire to seek for it? But the imperative of seeking God is infinitely stronger than the quest for immortality? In fact, an immortality deprived of the experience of God would be blank and void or, to be more specific, hellish. There, definitely, exists a deep hunger for the absolute source of eternal life, who is God, and this can be fulfilled by the experience of the true God alone. However, if someone supposes that neither God nor immortality existed then this hunger will have to be explained in contingent terms as some, for instance, have tried to do when they have related it to the natural instincts of sex, reproduction,

and evolutionism. But, obviously, both God and immortality are far beyond the contingent constrictions of this world, and so to explain this hunger in contingent terms doesn't solve the problem at all, and it is also incomprehensible to believe how contingent objects of this world were meant to satisfy this abysmal hunger. It is irrational to suppose that something can be satisfied by something not meant for it.

Obviously, the signs of this hunger are present in every religion of the world. However, the Bible tells us that in many of these cases the real appetite for God has been suppressed by magnifying false passions of this world (cf. Romans 1:18-31). It is like a drug addict who loses his true appetite to the craving for drugs. Certainly, such false procedures cannot help us in the path of truth. One must truly seek the Lord and Him alone primarily, in order to find Him. For faith must not have a false object; its object must be truth and truth is one. Even Krishna in his liberalism and generosity for world religions shows his reserves in this matter. Observe some of his words, for instance, from the Bhagavad Gita: By whatever way men worship Me, even so do I accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in My path (IV. 11).

Whatever form a particular devotee wishes to worship with faith – concerning that alone I make his faith unflinching. Endowed with that faith, he worships that deity, and from him gets his desires, which are indeed granted by Me alone. But that fruit of these men of little understanding has an end; the worshippers of gods go to the gods, (but) My devotees come to Me (VII. 21-23).

Even those devotees of other gods who worship (them) endowed with faith, worship Me alone, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), though in an unauthorized way (IX. 23). The words "that fruit of these men of little understanding has an end," "(but) My devotees come to Me," and "devotees of other gods...worship Me alone...though in an unauthorized way" demonstrate the exclusivist tendencies of Gita's pluralism. One can't be rational and still escape being exclusivist with regard to truth somehow. All ways cannot, therefore, be the same and lead to the same goal as Krishna himself confesses that "the worshippers of gods go to the gods, (but) My devotees come to Me."

Therefore, God alone must be the object of the faith of God that seeks Him and must find Him in order to rightly resolve its desperation. This also means that the seeking must be on the right track and the finding must be of the real one. Man's religiosity (a term that denotes man's nature of seeking for God) doesn't absolve him from his responsibility to the truth. This responsibility involves a rational evaluation of our beliefs. That is what Paul intended to say to the Athenians on the Areopagus when he said: The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is served with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives life and breath and all things to all. And He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also certain of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Then being offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like gold or silver or stone, engraved by art and man's imagination. Truly, then, God overlooking the times of ignorance, now He strictly commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:24-30, MKJV).

Notice that it is God who ordained the times and habitations of men so that they may "seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one

of us." In such case, therefore, "we ought not to think that the Godhead" can be represented in forms of human imagination. Consequently, God calls men to repent from all false procedures of religion. Thus, "seeking out" (ekzeteo) God is mandatory and obligatory for man. The phrase "seek the Lord" has profound meaning in Hebrew tradition as is evident from its usage in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:29 ; Ezra 6:21 ; Psalms 34:10 ; Psalms 105:3-4; Proverbs 28:5 ; Amos 5:6). It doesn't mean searching for God as if He is lost or unknown to us. In fact, the seeking is because God is already present in the knowledge a priori though, perhaps, in a vague way. That is why Paul says to the Romans about the gentiles that they were guilty because "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21). Biblically speaking, God is not totally unknown to the human spirit. That is why when the Gospel is presented to him, he instantly recognizes the truth. However, this doesn't mean that the preaching of the Gospel doesn't face the problem of hindrance caused by the blindness imposed by the devil through falsehood communicated through false religion and tradition (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4). But when the Gospel is preached, one who has faith immediately accepts it not because he rationally grasps it but because he spiritually recognizes it by faith. Therefore, Paul, talking of his conversion, says: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood"(Galatians 1:15-16). Obviously, for Paul the instant of the revelation dispelled all previous antagonism against the Gospel of Christ from his heart and he didn't need to consult people in order to seek confirmation or understanding of it.

It is like a baby hungry for milk, who when given it immediately recognizes it because the hunger was unalterably connected to the milk beforehand, i.e. a priori. Thus, when Paul preaches to the Athenian crowd at Areopagus, he doesn't say that they were ignorant of God; instead, he recognizes their religiosity (i.e. their a priori understanding of God manifest in their worship of Him as the Unknown God) and says to them, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). Evidently, though vaguely, some knowledge of God was already present to them even before Paul had to preach to them. They knew that this Unknown God existed and was involved in human history. Thus, their seeking of God was not related to the investigation of whether He existed or not. In fact, such a quest would be rather impossible for that would require them to check all parts of the universe which would require infinite time and lead to infinite knowledge, of course; something that was the most impossible. And still, even if one was unable to find material proofs of Him in this world, this could not disprove the hypothesis that He existed as some other form of being. Obviously, faith in God must precede seeking God. Therefore, the seeking is not at all in order to find out whether God exists or not. It begins with and from faith. That is why the writer of Hebrews says that "he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:5, MKJV). Thus, seeking God doesn't refer to searching for Him as if for someone lost or unknown to us. It is obvious that God cannot be lost and if He were really totally unknown to us then how would we recognize that it is He when we find Him? It is we who have become blind (groping for Him in the darkness) though surrounded by Him all the time. Thus, "seeking out" doesn't refer to trying to know whether God exists or not. It starts with the faith that God exists and rewards His people. Seeking out God diligently is, then, an act of faith. The phrase "seek the Lord" usually occurs in the Old Testament in the sense of seeking God to see His power and glory (Psalms 63:1-2), to know His will in a

particular matter (2 Samuel 21:1), of worshipping Him (Exodus 33:7 ; 2 Chronicles 11:16), seeking to follow His will (1 Chronicles 28:9 ; 2 Chronicles 14:4-7), and seeking God for an answer to prayer (2 Chronicles 20:3 ff; Psalms 34:4). The Bible requires that we seek God not casually but "diligently", i.e. with all the heart and soul (Deuteronomy 4:29). This flows from a sense that nothing but God can satisfy the infinite hunger for love and holiness, as Augustine confessed "Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee." David seeks God desperately in Psalm 63 as a man thirsty for water in a parched and dry land. Thus, whether it is seeking God in prayer, worship, study of His Word, or knowing and doing His will, it should be whole heartedly and persistently. The Word tells us that God is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). In fact, unless one believes this he can neither seek God nor come near to Him. This implies that faith is personal. It is not faith in some blind, cosmic power but in a personal God who attends to the calls of those who trust Him. Unless one has this faith one cannot please God or walk with Him. Of course, there is no sense of talking about pleasing or walking with some blind and impersonal cosmic power. The believer is personally related to God through faith. Further, one must also remember that God only rewards those who diligently seek Him. Obviously, a reward has no meaning if some effort has not been made to get it. The word "reward" itself means return, recompense, retribution, and requital. Thus, it can only follow some action towards it. Evidently, then faith is also active and full of the efforts of faith. Therefore, Jas. tells us that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). The effort of faith that God rewards is the effort of seeking to know and do His will. That alone is the true form of worshipping and honoring Him (cf. Romans 12:1-2). All such labor will never go unnoticed and unrewarded as the Scripture says "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love" (Hebrews 6:10). This, it must be remembered, is not a preaching of salvation by works of the Law; because "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20, ASV). No man can be justified by the works of the law for "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). In other words, man already stands condemned before the court of God. Therefore, he can't point to some or many of his good works and claim justification in the same manner that a thief cannot claim justification by referring to some of his works of generosity. And so the Scripture says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10), and again "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Thus, by the works of the Law shall no man be justified; instead, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Galatians 3:22). The one who bases his righteousness on the literal Law of God, therefore, stands condemned since he cannot keep the Law. The works of faith, on the other hand, are never intended to prove self-righteousness but to demonstrate and work out one's faith in the goodness and righteousness of God. It is the intent and act of seeking to know and do God's will, therefore, that constitutes the core of a seeking faith. And such faith will be duly rewarded.

Space Is Not the Limit The second element of this walk with God is coming to Him or approaching Him as is indicated by the words "he who comes to God" (v. 6). However, coming to God doesn't imply going to certain places where He may be found as if He could be found only in certain places. God is not limited by space. In fact, the rational law "objects occupy space" doesn't apply to Him, even for the sake of both rational and empirical consistency; for to say God is connected to space as material things are connected to it is to say that space is co-eternal with God, which is

attributing to space a quality that can only belong to God; secondly, knowing now that space is a material dimension, we cannot apply it to God who is the source of all kinds of being, including space-time. God's infinity exceeds the material limits and dimensions of space-time. He is above and beyond this all. He fills both heaven and earth, as King Solomon said at the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, "Behold, Heavens and heaven of the heavens cannot contain You! How much less this house which I have built?" (2 Chronicles 6:18, MKJV). God, not being limited by space, is omnipresent, i.e. everywhere. Therefore, coming to God is not to be understood in materialistic terms. Coming to God doesn't mean to visit a temple or holy place. God is approachable anywhere; one only needs to draw near to Him in spirit and truth (John 4:21, 23) and He will draw near to him (James 4:8) for He is found of them that seek Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). God is the "exceeding great reward" of all who seek Him in spirit and truth (cf. Genesis 15:1).

There are several things, however, that this act of approaching entails; and one must be able to know them in order to see the significance of the faith of God that draws one closer to God. First of all, faith gives us access into the presence of God. It is faith that bridges the chasm between God and man and brings him close to God. It is evident that a distance exists between God and man; that is the reason why, it is necessary for man to come near to God "though He is not far from each one of us". The problem about this distance is man himself. It is man's sin that puts up a wall between God and man (Isaiah 59:2). This separation is not a physical separation; it is a spiritual separation (also referred to as spiritual death) and is characterized by a violent enmity against God in the spirit (Colossians 1:21). This is an undeniable malady in man; in fact, the Bible calls denial of sin as self-deception (1 John 1:8-10). The fact of this human malady (evil tendency) is not just a Christian doctrine. For instance, Glaucon in Plato's Republic tells the story of a young shepherd named Gyges who, one day, found a ring that could make him invisible. Soon, he entered the palace by means of it, seduced the queen, murdered the king and took the kingdom. "Suppose now that there were two such magic rings," says Glaucon, "and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice." Then, proceeding to prove that all human show of justice doesn't prove man to be just, he argues: No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a God among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever anyone thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust.

Studies in the psychology of evil, in the past few decades, have shown that crime escalates where anonymity prevails, proving the internality of human sinfulness and tendency towards evil when things seem conducive. This inherent tendency towards evil is what is described in the Bible as the carnal mind set on the things of the flesh and sold under sin (Romans 7:14) and set in enmity against the Law of God; therefore, in enmity against God (Romans 8:17). For us in the New Testament, this unsurpassable wall of separation is broken down by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who satisfied the demands of the Law in His flesh and brought us into fellowship with God (Zephaniah 2:14-16). Only His sacrifice could do that as only He, being the embodiment of infinite deity and untainted by Adamic guilt through the virgin birth, could be a true mediator between God

and man as the Scripture says:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having a high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Thus, we know that it is through Jesus Christ that we have access into the presence of God (Zephaniah 3:12) as Jesus Himself said "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6); which also implies that Enoch and all saints could only have access into God's presence through the effects of Christ's atoning sacrifice for their sins and the sins of the world. Their conscious acceptance of the revelation of God and submission to His will was in line with the acceptance of the finality of this progressive revelation in Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2). Therefore, their faith in God's will and purposes was faith in Jesus Christ as the Scriptures tell us several times, for instance, regarding the Israelites: For also we have had the gospel preached, as well as them. But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it (Hebrews 4:2, MKJV).

And, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And all were baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4, MKJV). In fact, the Scriptures tell us that salvation in the Old Testament was through Christ alone, who in His pre-incarnate form as Spirit, preached to the them in various ways (Hebrews 1:1) the Gospel of His death and resurrection. It was Christ who through the Spirit, for instance, preached to the people then, "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared"; but they disobeyed and are now kept in prison for the Day of Judgment. For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, indeed being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit; in which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, to disobeying ones, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared (in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water); which figure now also saves us, baptism; not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who is at the right hand of God, having gone into Heaven, where the angels and authorities and powers are being subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:18-22, MKJV).

It must be remembered that when we talk of Christ's death and resurrection and His Gospel, we talk of spiritual things (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:13) that transcend the rigors of time and space; thus, it says "but made alive in the Spirit; in which also He went and preached...in the days of Noah." In other words, the Gospel of the Spirit of Christ, though not as clear to them as to many of us, was the same bringing salvation to the saints in the Old Testament as well.

About which salvation the prophets sought out and searched out, prophesying concerning the grace for you; searching for what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ made clear within them, testifying beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow (1 Peter 1:10-11, MKJV).

What was a shadow to them is now a reality to us, and what is now a shadow to us will be a reality in the days to come; yet, we walk in the fullness of the assurance and partake of the goodness and mercies of God: that is faith, the ability to go beyond the shadows and experience the eternal and spiritual blessings of God in Jesus Christ. The strength of this faith in the Old Testament can be seen in the fact that never once did any of the men of God claim forgiveness of sins on the basis of a sacrifice or offering they brought before God. They knew that whatever they brought could not atone for their sins. They needed the grace of God and a way that God would provide (Lamentations 3:22 ; Daniel 9:9). They were at His mercy. In fact, the Law had no stipulation of forgiveness for intentional sins. Anyone seen breaking the Ten Commandments was condemned to death. No sacrifice could atone for him. But the prophets preached repentance and forgiveness by the grace and mercies of God. Therefore, without any doubt, salvation in the Old Testament was by faith alone; and God's way of salvation is Jesus Christ (cf. Numbers 15:28 ; Deuteronomy 19:4 ; Exodus 21:12 ; Exodus 21:15-17 ; Exodus 21:29; Isaiah 1:18 ; Psalms 51:7 ; Micah 7:19 ; Luke 2:25-32). In fact, there is no doubt that the fellowship with God in the Old Testament was, in fact again, the fellowship of Christ (Matthew 22:41-45). Thus, even the Old Testament saints could have access into the presence of God by faith in God's grace and salvation. On the basis of the Law or their own works of righteousness, they could never have fellowship with God since only the high priest was allowed into the Holiest Place of the Sanctuary, once a year, and that too with the blood of a sacrifice. No one else had this privilege (Hebrews 9:7). In fact, we could never have gained access beyond the veil of separation in the Sanctuary of the Law. But in Jesus Christ, we through the Spirit have unrestricted access into the presence of God (Zephaniah 2:18).

Secondly, faith gives us the boldness to approach God (Hebrews 10:19). It is like the boldness of a child who can approach his father without any fear or hesitations. We do not just have the access but also the boldness to come before God. The boldness comes from the faith in the revelation of God's love towards us as the Scripture says: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3). It is the awareness of God's longing towards us as His children and our irresistible need of Him that draws us to Him. Boldness is the absence of guilt and anxiety. Guilt is the sense of having failed infinitely, existentially, morally; anxiety is the sense of insecurity and infinite threat. Guilt is infinite regret because the past act cannot be undone for infinity. Anxiety is infinite apprehension because it is uncertain of any hope beyond the horrific end that is at hand. This anxiety might not necessarily be concerned with death but with the fear of an irrecoverable and hopeless experience. Guilt prevents man from coming before the presence of God as it makes one ashamed of himself for failing to be right and thus be pleasing in the sight of God (see Luke 5:8 ; Job 42:5-6). Anxiety from sin-consciousness produces the hesitation that prevents man from coming boldly to God (Genesis 3:10). Faith in the Word of God gives us boldness as it shows the goodness and mercies of God towards us. God reveals His love to us so that they who accept His love will find forgiveness of sins and healing for the past as well as assurance for the future. We have expressively seen God as Love in the face of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (1Joshua 4:8-9). Similarly, Enoch and the other saints saw God as Love in God's revelation of Himself as "Jehovah! Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6, MKJV) because God is One and is revealed to us (whether in the Old or the New Testament) only in the face of Jesus Christ (John 1:18 ; 14:9; Genesis 32:30 ; Joshua 5:13-15 ; 2 Corinthians 4:6 ; 1 John 5:20). Thus, faith in God's revelation of His love casts of all

guilt and fear as the Word says "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment....There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." (1 John 4:17-18).

It is a tragedy, however, that there are some who have lost their consciences and exhibit a kind of impudence with disdain for the Law of God (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Such impudence and insolence is nothing but false boldness that leads to fall (Proverbs 16:5 ; Proverbs 16:18). As seen earlier, disdain for God's Law as sign of rebellion is the result of carnal mindedness. It is all about a willing-to-believe or inclination of heart towards anything that decides the "rationality" or "intelligibility" of that thing. Therefore, to one who chooses or is drawn to disbelieve in the Law or authority of God, God's Law looks irrational, unfair, and absurd to him. Such persons will have no guilt-feelings since their consciences are dead to the Law of God. Obviously, such persons cannot find peace and joy in the presence of God. Yet, God is merciful to allow time and opportunity to repent and His love strives with the sinner's spirit with the hope that he will turn his ways to God as the Word says "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4). However, the Bible warns us not to take the patience and mercies of God lightly:

And, O man... do you think this, that you shall escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, and the forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But according to your hardness and your impenitent heart, do you treasure up wrath for yourself in a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each according to his works; indeed to those who with patience in good work are seeking for glory, and honor, and incorruptibility, everlasting life. But to those who indeed disobeying the truth out of self-seeking, and obeying unrighteousness, will be anger and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man who has worked out evil.... (Romans 2:3-9, MKJV). But those who accept God's love into their lives are "born again" by the Spirit of God and are adopted as sons in the family of God, and as such have child-like confidence before their heavenly Father. One cannot deny that there are times when the heart will say "You should not have done it" or "Your sins are too great to be forgiven", and with such thoughts condemn us. But the Word says, And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God (1 John 3:19-21). In other words, it is possible that our hearts continue the natural way of condemning us even when our sins have already been blotted out. In such cases, faith must take the stand to affirm that the witness of God's Word is greater than the witness of one's heart. And when the heart that is steadfast in God no longer condemns, one has boldness before God; for with the removal of guilt and anxiety also comes the child-like boldness to approach God. Remember that Jesus never condemned Peter for failing Him thrice; He never mentioned it: He only asked him whether he loved Him (cf. John 21:14-17). Peter replied in the affirmative and Jesus told him to take care of His sheep (the church). Peter need not be obsessed with his failures as if that was all to his life and as if God expected him to be righteous in his own power; he only needed to trust in God and be confident that God is not against us but for us if we love God and commit ourselves to His will (cf. Romans 8:33-34). Thus, faith gives us the boldness to enter the presence of God. By faith in God's love and rich mercies Enoch walked with God in fellowship, and, obviously, experienced each day the insurmountable blessings of His grace until, one day, his time merged into the eternity of heaven.

Attunement The Bible tells us that Enoch "pleased God" (as seen, the LXX rendering of "walked with God"). Thus, walking with God is equivalent to pleasing God as the inspired Word confirms. And "without faith it is impossible to please Him"; therefore, Enoch pleased God not because of his works but because of his faith. The necessary connection between faith and pleasing God is revealed in the words "impossible" and "must" as follows: But without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him [out] (Hebrews 11:6, Amplified Bible).

Evidently, one cannot get around faith to please God. It is the only way available The opposite is the way of flesh which can never seek to please God. Therefore, the works of faith are in variance against the works of the flesh. The works of faith flow from a heart that is attuned with the heart of God; the works of flesh flow from selfishness. The flesh cannot please God because it is bound and enslaved to its immediate desires and cravings (Romans 8:8). Therefore, when the flesh tries to keep the Law of God, it externally keeps it only to suit its selfish intentions as Glaucon says in The Republic, "all men who practice justice do so against their will, of necessity, but not as a good." Such compulsive law-keeping is abominable in God's sight since it doesn't come from a heart of faith; in fact, carnal worship (i.e. worship by flesh for immediate desire fulfillment) is never worship of God but the worship of an ideal of the flesh, which is idolatry. This is how the unspiritual Israelites and priests could go and worship in the temple while also doing wicked deeds everywhere; the flesh fooled them to believe that God was not concerned with all their evil deeds as long as His rituals were met, similar to the gods of the heathens. That was their false picture of God created by the flesh. This ultimately led to total departure from even the godly form of worship as the flesh found situations conducive to idolatry (Isaiah 1:13-14; Ezekiel 8:8-17 ; Psalms 94:7 ; Isaiah 29:15), because obedience to the flesh is the same as idolatry and the worship of the flesh (Jude 1:16-18).

One cannot walk with God unless one's heart is already close to God. The show of walk is not true walk. For instance, a love letter can be written by both a lover and a computer; however, it is the letter of the lover alone that pleases the beloved, not because it has better display of words, but because it comes from the lover's heart: the computer, on the contrary, having no heart, only makes a show of love in words that have been programmed into it; therefore, it is incapable of love and its "love letter" is meaningless. Similarly, someone who doesn't have a heart after God cannot walk with God. Therefore, as has been seen, seeking precedes pleasing God in this walk of faith and seeking never ceases. The word for "to please", used here, is euaireteō (εὐαίρεστέω), whose noun form is euairetos, a combination of two words eu (good, well) and airetos (agreeable, fitting, pleasing); thus meaning "to please entirely" or be "well pleasing". The word airetos is used in Romans 8:8 where it says, "they that are in the flesh cannot please (airetos) God" meaning that they who live fulfilling their fleshly desires all the time cannot agree with God or fit His ways; in other words, they can neither walk in agreement with Him nor please Him; for to walk implies also to be in agreement with as the Word says "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). Through the combination of eu with airetos, euairetos attains the meaning of being in total agreement with or being perfectly or well attuned with God. It is understandable that God cannot accept less than euairetos in anyone's approaching or relating to Him. That is the reason why the Scripture uses euairetos and not just airetos when talking about

pleasing God by faith. The sense is that they that are carnal minded cannot even agree with God, far be it that they can be perfectly pleasing in His sight. But the man of faith goes beyond mere agreement to a total satisfaction of divine will and pleasure. Obviously, this is not humanly or fleshly possible; it is only possible by faith and a self-giving in trust into the hands of God in total commitment. It is like the burnt-offerings of the Old Testament in which the sacrificial animal had to be totally offered and burnt on the altar. It is that which is wholly pleasing to Him. That is also what the Word calls for when it says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable (euarestos) unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1); and again, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable (euarestos), and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). The walk of faith that pleases God must be selfless and wholly dedicated to God. But such qualities are internal and not external. That is why Romans 12:1-2 talks about reasonable (logikos, rational or logical) service and renewing of mind. For, unless one's way of thinking is governed by the faith of God, his walk cannot be pleasing to God. In fact, a willing committal of self in holiness and conformity to God's will is the only kind of service that God accepts as rational (logikos); all other forms of religion are meaningless before Him. It is only when the mind is renewed that the body can be offered as a living sacrifice to God (for God has no use of the dead; He needs the living to serve Him in spirit and truth). Jesus said that the internal of a vessel needs to be cleaned before the external is cleaned (Matthew 23:26). The internal must be purified by faith in God's Word and the love of God. Obviously, the tenth commandment, "Do not covet", deals with the internal aspect of man's moral life. It is the only law that prohibits something that is externally invisible until it manifests itself in visible forms of violating the other commandments. Only the one who covets really knows if he is coveting or not. That is why when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked Him what he must do to get eternal life, Jesus told him to keep the commandments, namely "do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your parents, and love your neighbor as yourself." He didn't mention the first three commandments of honoring and worshipping God; neither did He mention the last commandment "do not covet", instead of which He said "love your neighbor as yourself" since love would never violate any of the commandments but would go beyond them to fulfill God's will and, thus, honor Him; for if one cannot love his neighbor then one cannot love God either (1 John 4:20-21). The hideous nature of covetousness is what constitutes the anti-love element of sin in the human heart. It is the enemy of love; therefore, both of them cannot co-exist: either one must win or the other. Therefore, the carnal mind is said to be in enmity against the Law of God. But true love fulfills the whole Law of God in spirit and truth as the Scripture says:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves another has fulfilled the Law. For: "Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not lust;" and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love works no ill to its neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13:8-10, MKJV).

Love doesn't just think about the letter of the commandment; it looks beyond it to its spirit. It is covetousness that looks to the letter in order to find a way to get around it and fulfill the desires of the flesh (cf. Mark 7:10-13). Therefore, the Law was rightly given to the sinners in order to condemn them (1 Timothy 1:9-10; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7-8). It is only ludicrous when sinners

use this same Law of God to accuse each other (Romans 2:1). Remember the incident of the Pharisees bringing a woman caught in adultery to Jesus and trying Him with the question of what to do with her since the Law of Moses commanded to stone adulterers to death. There were several side-tracking complications like, for instance, the whereabouts of the man who also, obviously, was caught in the immoral act. However, Jesus didn't act like a normal scribe would have; he stooped down and started writing on the ground as if they had come to Him with a meaningless question. But when they insisted He stood up and told them "Anyone who is without sin among you may cast the first stone at her." On hearing this, and convicted by their consciences, everyone of them left the scene except the woman (John 8:10). Evidently, though their external adherence to the Law might have been visible to all, their conscience did not testify that they were sinless (because lust or covetousness ruled their internal thoughts) and they knew that they were equally condemned by the Law as the woman was. In such case, their bringing her to Jesus and making a show of being protectors of the Law was absurd. In the case of the rich young ruler, he was prompt to say that he kept all those commandments that Jesus had talked of from his childhood and inquired whether he lacked anything yet. Jesus answered him saying "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. And come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21, MKJV). The Bible tells us that the man went back sorrowful because he had great possessions. Obviously, this man could not get over his covetousness for the things of the world despite the fact that he was externally keeping the commandments. For the sake of such worldly desires he even disregarded the treasures of heaven. But he could not do anything else because his mind was set compulsively on the flesh and so he could not see the things of God nor place his faith in the promise of Christ "You shall have treasure in Heaven". Thus, it is obvious that though he was saddened by how he was proven wrong, yet his deep love for worldliness disabled him from submitting himself to God completely. Therefore, it is not the external compliance to the Law but an internal sacrifice of self and perfect attunement with the will of God that is the first step towards pleasing God. Certainly, such attunement is only possible when actions flow purely out of love for God and His ways. It is God's love alone that can break the spell of covetousness from our hearts and get us beyond the letter (or fetter) of the Law to a free and pure service of God; for the only kind of service that is acceptable before God is the service of faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6). It was in this sense that Mother Teresa told Malcolm Muggeridge that the world lacks faith because of so much selfishness and so much gain only for self, but faith to be true must be a giving love, and love and faith go together. The one thing that the young man lacked was the faith of God that operates by love. He neither cared for the poor nor for God, and he could trust neither because of his lack of faith. Teresa's perspective is the contrary as she says: "Our life of poverty is as necessary as the work itself" and then again "Only in heaven we will see how much we owe to the poor for helping us to love God better because of them." Obviously, it is not an attraction towards some utopian treasures or pleasures in heaven but the love of Christ that drew her to serve the poor. It was because of this that Muggeridge says, "Every day Mother Teresa meets Jesus", i.e. at not just the Mass but also in "each needling, suffering soul she sees and tends." Her own confession of this faith in God is overwhelming as, in her, love and action combine in her faith. She says:

Faith is a gift of God. Without it there would be no life. And our work, to be fruitful and to be all for God, and beautiful, has to be built on faith. Faith in Christ who has said, 'I was hungry, I was naked, I was sick, and I was homeless and you did that to me.' On these words of his all our work

is based.

Obviously, faith here goes beyond the carnal craving of those who look at the reward of faith as some carnal pleasure and luxury in heaven. In fact, the Bible never talks of such reward. The reward of the faith of God is God Himself; for, it is God alone whom faith seeks and approaches and finally pleases. Therefore, the apostle tells the believers to do whatever they do, heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men (Colossians 3:23); for our attitudes and intentions matter more than our words and actions. The "LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). There will be many on the Day of Judgment who'll say to Jesus that they did mighty works of wonders in His name, but He'll deny them since it is only those who do the will of God that are known by Him in an intimate way that pleases Him (Matthew 7:21-23). Lusts and passions may come (uncalled for many times) but it is the resolute act of faith that alone overcomes the world (1 John 5:3-4). Thus, one can see how by faith Enoch pleased God and was translated that he should not see death. His faith possessed the qualities of completeness, absoluteness, and finality leaving no possibilities for a turn around. It was incessantly inquisitive, infinitely intimate, and inextricably integrated with God's will; therefore, it was testified of him that he pleased God, and so will it be of everyone that blends his life completely with the fire of God's will on the altar of His love, by faith to the glory of His grace (Zephaniah 1:6) who is the only One who can be absolutely trusted forever. Amen!

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Through faith one inherits the eternal salvation of God which is eternally available to all in the past, present, and future, through Christ Jesus.
2. To walk by faith is the same as pleasing God.
3. Faith recognizes God's truth in the same way that a thirsty man receives pure water.

01.05. Chapter 5: Ship without Sails

CHAPTER FIVE Ship without Sails "By faith Noah...prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7). The action-nature of faith is recurrently stressed throughout this chapter in words like "by faith Abel offered", "by faith Noah built an ark", "by faith Abraham went out", and so on. In each case, faith is known by its works which is the only way it can be known, as James challenges the hypocrites: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18, NIV). Faith is both internally consistent and empirically verifiable; that is the reason why a trial of faith is possible (cf. 1 Peter 1:7). Faith is internally consistent in the sense that within itself it is free from any shadow of doubt, ambiguity, or contradiction with regard to truth: obviously, faith can only relate to its object if it has no double-mindedness about it. Secondly, faith is also empirically verifiable, i.e., you can always verify the presence or absence of faith in a pragmatic way. For instance, Peter's beginning to sink in the water revealed his shattering of faith by buckling under fear (Matthew 14:30-31). The internal variance surfaced in external difference. Therefore, the Scripture says that one is as he thinks in his heart (Proverbs 23:7), which also means that one's quality of conduct is defined by one's attitude of thinking. Eventually, one's experiences are determined by one's attitude towards truth, especially the truth of God. This attitudinal difference was what distinguished the warriors of faith from the victims of flesh (or circumstances). As far as physical structure, mental capacity, and emotional stability was concerned one could not make a huge difference between both of them. However, history is witness to the fact that their differences lie in what each has done to history. In Noah's case, history was reinvented when God invented Noah's ship without sails; and he put the design together with wood, pitch, and nails. The Biblical portrayal of Noah's time is a pathetic one. Here is first mentioned that God repented for having made man and was very grieved at heart because of what man had made of himself (Genesis 6:6). The literary picture "God repented" expresses the depth of grief man had caused God by his evil works. Man was doomed to death by the sentence of Justice; and yet, the dark influence of evil was so tense and dense in the human heart that the light of God's grace seemed a dismal ray obliterated by the wrench of wickedness (cf. Genesis 6:5-7 ; Romans 1:18; Romans 1:32). For it does say that Noah preached righteousness to these people (2 Peter 2:5) and that the Spirit of God strived with them (Genesis 6:3), in case they might turn their ways to God but they were indurate with a stone-like coldness to the mercies of God. It is reasonable to assume that God gave up striving with the people before deciding to destroy them and apparent from His plan revealed to Noah. In which case, it is also reasonable to assume that Noah was a preacher of righteousness not merely after getting the mandate to build the ark but even before it. But the world had now become a bag filthy refuse. Even those who came from a godly background had corrupted themselves by disregarding both God and conscience (Genesis 6:2-4). The Bible says that every imagination of the thought of man's heart was evil continually (Genesis 6:5). In other words, there were no intervals of evil. Good had lost both its voice and hold over men's hearts. Man's heart had become an unceasing lab of evil designs and inventions. It is not easy to imagine Noah's day in our age with scores of Christian T.V. channels, radio programs, magazines, books, churches, ministers, godly believers, Christian artists, statesmen, and other Christian presences

besides: in Noah's day, it was Noah alone and his family; the whole world had fallen beside and turned wicked beyond repair – no government, no rules, no human rights protection, no conscience; good was absent and evil was ubiquitous. One can only imagine how hostile everything was against faith. But in face of all this, Noah obtained the witness of having found favor in God's eyes, of condemning the world, and becoming a heir of God's righteousness by faith. His faith, like the ark he was going to make, didn't need sails to propel it forward; in fact, the winds of this world could never be kind on the sails of faith – they would only seek to sink it down. But Noah's faith was set to sail on the winds of God's grace, whom he obeyed without a question.

RUDDER OF REVERENCE The Scripture says that "by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7). The phrase "moved with fear" is actually one word in the Greek, *eulabetheis* (εὐλαβηθεῖς) which is in the middle voice and carries the meaning of conducting oneself carefully, cautiously, and circumspectly with reverence towards God. This is not the kind of fear that arises out of the animal survival instinct. The animal instinct for survival that every living organism has produces the emotion of fear in man. When faced with danger, such fear triggers large amounts of adrenaline into the bloodstream and prepares the organism for immediate action. Obviously, Noah's fear was not this kind of instinctual fear because there were no visible signs of danger around him for the many years while the ark was being built; in fact, he was moved with fear after being warned of God of "things not seen as yet". Thus, it was not this animal kind of fear. On the other hand, it was also not anxiety, or fear of some unknown thing with a sense of an inability to control the future and feelings of hopelessness. Noah's fear was not fear of the unknown because God had already revealed to him that He was going to destroy the world with a flood and had also shown him His plan of saving him by the ark (Genesis 6:13-17). Obviously, then anxiety was not the kind of fear that he had. To the contrary, his was a reverential fear of God that circumspectly defined his lifestyle. The fear of God was his motivation for obeying God diligently. This fear of God proceeded from faith, i.e. the faith of God; for it says "by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear." In other words, this kind of a fear of God can only proceed from faith in God. It is unlike the fear that the demons have (James 2:19); for though they believe that God exists they do not have the faith of God and so have no reverence for Him; instead, they shudder and tremble at His presence out of an instinctual fear related to their concern for themselves and not a regard for God. The word for "warned of God" is again one word in the Greek, *chrematistheis* (χρηματισθεῖς) and is used 9 times in the New Testament, each time referring to a revelation, a warning or a labeling by God. Thus, for instance, the wise men were *chrematisthentes* in a dream that they should not return to Herod (Matthew 2:12); Cornelius was *echrematisthe* by an angel to send for Peter (Acts 10:22); the disciples were first *chrematistai* as Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26); and Moses was *chrematistai* to follow the blueprint of the tabernacle that was shown to him by God (Hebrews 8:5). Evidently, God spoke to Noah through one or more of His many ways. It may have been through a dream or a vision or through an angel; we are not certain how; but, it is clear that Noah never doubted God's revelation. He believed and obeyed God. The revealed truth, indubitably, was prophetic as it says "of things not seen as yet", i.e. of things to come. The fear, as has already been seen, was not a fear of portended evil that drove Noah to build the ark. It was a fear that came from an apprehension of God's mission-related revelation by faith. That is to say that God's word to Noah came with a mission for him to complete; Noah took that mandate and cautiously (fearfully) worked out the task. For Noah, as for any of us, it is the fear of God that gives

direction and meaning to life. It is the rudder that drives our lives forward towards God's goal; propelled by the arms of faith.

True Reverence is Obedient

Only reverential fear can obey God first before even seeking to understand the rationality of the commandment. It is so since only the word of the Lord has ultimate sense and significance for a heart of faith. All that is needed is that the commandment be clear; every other thing is only secondary. A classic example of this godly fear is found in Abraham. When God asked him to take his only son Isaac to Moriah and offer him to God on one of the mountains that He would specify, Abraham obeyed without any questioning whatsoever (Genesis 22:2-3). The reason was not because Abraham believed in human sacrifice but because he knew the promise of God that God would make a nation from Isaac (Genesis 15:4-5; Genesis 21:12). This faith was what made him tell his two servants near Mt. Moriah to tarry there as he and the lad go to worship and will come back to them (Genesis 22:5). He didn't say "we'll go and I'll come back" but "we'll worship and come back to you" because he knew that even if Isaac died God will have to raise him up to keep His promise which He could never break. This faith is also obvious in his answer to his son when he asked "Father, we have the wood and the fire but where is the lamb for the offering?" Abraham answered, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son" (Genesis 22:7-8). The movies paint a false picture of this episode when they show that Abraham was filled with grief when God gave him this command. The Bible never tells us this about our father of faith. Abraham never doubted the voice or character of God for even a split of a second. Neither was God's command grievous to him for he knew the finality of the faith of God who never fails in perfection. People of the world submit to the orders of their captains and leaders by faith that they know better or have the right to command their obedience; yet, none of these leaders are perfect. If worldly men could so be feared and obeyed, even if it be for the sake of smooth governance, how much more should our faith be obedient to the only wise and true God. Abraham believed God and acted in reverent obedience to Him; therefore, God testified to him saying "now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me" (Genesis 22:12, MKJV). And Abraham looked and saw before him a ram caught in a thicket by its horns; he took it and offered it as a burnt-offering instead of his son. This is the kind of godly fear that prompts obedience to God's command.

Godly fear is a sense of awe and reverence from a vision of God's holiness, power, and love. The world knows two kinds of reverence: true reverence and faked one. True reverence is that which comes from the heart while faked reverence is hypocritical. It is axiomatically true that no one who really knows God can ever fake reverence before Him. Only they will attempt to deceive God who do not know Him as the maker and discernor of hearts (Psalms 94:7-9). Therefore, the opposite of godly fear is ungodly rebellion. It is inevitable that Noah, being moved by godly fear, constantly warned his generation of the judgment to come on earth while he reverentially prepared the ark (2 Peter 2:5). However, none of them but his family responded to the message of God. Their stance was that of open rebellion. It reveals the condition of their sinful heart that had lost its capacity to either blush or bristle at the divine indictment (cf. Revelation 9:20-21). They could not fear God because they did not believe Him. And they did not believe Him because they did not want to fear Him. That is the contradiction of human rebelliousness; man demands of God to give him evidences so that he can believe in Him, but if the same were demanded of him, his answer would

beg the question and run into a whirlpool of blank reasoning. A true atheist is never rational; for if he were he could not be an atheist, since denying God is equivalent to making a universal statement which is only possible on grounds that the maker of the statement possessed universal or infinite knowledge, which being not true, the atheist's belief in God's non-existence is rationally unsustainable. An atheist, therefore, is not an atheist by virtue of rational deduction but because of his unwillingness to believe in God. In fact, no one can be rational and deny God; even the agnostic is being careless if he keeps on saying that he doesn't know whether God exists or not. This doesn't mean that God is known by reason, but that faith in God is necessary to sustain reason and ultimately the rationality of life. Therefore, the Scripture says about the unbelievers that though "they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21) as the Word also says in Genesis that "the imaginations of the thoughts of their heart was evil continually." But the loss of reason also means the loss of sense and meaning.

Two disturbing characters in the Bible who ended their lives in suicide were King Saul and Judas Iscariot. Both of them were chosen by God. Both of them saw the power and majesty of God. Yet, both rebelled absurdly against God (1Sam. 15; 1 Samuel 18:28-29 ; 1 Samuel 28:6-7 ; Matthew 26:14-16). The former fell on his own sword after realizing he could no longer fight against the armies of God (1 Samuel 31:4). The latter fell into remorse after betraying our Lord and hanged himself to death (Matthew 27:3-5). In either case, they chose not to come back to God and humbly seek His forgiveness and mercy. Their rebellion was rebellion because they knew God earlier and showed their submission to Him, but later giving in to their own fleshly lusts they lost sight of God and fell into the irrational and unnatural desires of the flesh: the one wanted to retain a kingdom that God had taken away from him and the other acquiesced to sell the Messiah for just 30 pieces of silver; if this was not irrational then irrationality will need to be redefined. Consequently, their failure to cope with the senselessness of their own rebellion drove them to suicide. Any work or mission that has not the sanction of God is ill-driven and ultimately senseless. For it is bound to self-destruction since no one can rebel successfully against the Source of life and intelligence; no one can fight against truth and remain intact as the Word says "Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9, NIV). In fact, we can have some hope for the man who cuts the branch on which he sits but never for one who thinks that he can rationally rebel against truth. Therefore, without godliness it is impossible to rationally cope with life.

Faith Makes Sense

Noah's construction of the ark, obviously, made no sense to most people of his day. Similarly, serving God seems nonsensical to many in our own day. Jesus said that our days would be like the days of Noah (Luke 17:26); for as the people of Noah's days never took the words of Noah seriously, so does this generation disregard the Gospel of Christ. In a vigorously materialistic age, all godly work is naturally set to be despised by worldly men as it is done. But the man of faith knows that God's work in this world is more important than the world itself, a view that'll cause constipation to materialists. While people everywhere were building houses and making future plans, Noah was building the ark. He knew the futility of their works while they thought that he was crazy. We can only imagine the milieu of Noah's ministry since the Scripture only tells us that the people of his generation were disobedient or unbelieving (1 Peter 3:20). Obviously, people had

many reasons to give for disbelieving in Noah's preaching. There had neither been a universal flood before nor were any signs of such an impending flood visible. If God wanted to save people, He could do that without an ark for nothing was impossible for Him. Why would He need a human to help Him in constructing the means of salvation and wait till the work be over? There were no signs or miracles as proofs of God's existence and He never appeared to any. If a flood were to come it would be predictable, and several such arguments could have been brought to disannul Noah's preaching. But God is not interested to provide evidences for and answers for the questions of those who have made up their mind not to believe. The people's own wickedness and the revelation of divine wrath through Noah's preaching were evidence enough as the Word says "Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them" (Ezekiel 2:4-5, NIV). That is the reason even why Jesus didn't give a defense of Himself at His trial; in fact, Herod had wanted to see some miracle but Jesus didn't answer him (Luke 23:8-9). God doesn't fulfill the desires of the unbelieving heart but if there is someone who seeks Him in spirit and truth, God readily answers him (Psalms 91:14-15). It is only an irreverent heart that demands of God answers to its carnal questions. In fact, all such rebellious talk and action will be judged in the Day of Judgment as is said "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 1:14-15).

If one wishes to live a real life he must give himself to serve God through obedience to His Word; for the pursuit of worldly gain at the loss of one's own soul is a foolish business as Jesus said "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36); the proverb also says likewise that "riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Proverbs 11:4). For the purpose of a thing is not determined by the thing itself but by its maker who made it with a purpose for himself or for someone else. Similarly, the Scripture says that God made the universe through Christ and for Christ that He might be the head over all things subjected to Him by the Father (Colossians 1:16-18). Rebellion is the self-imagination and determination of one's meaning for oneself; it is the rejection of God's definition of what life was meant to be. But all such determinations are foiled by death and will be proved false on the Day of Judgment. It is therefore crucial for us to stop hardening our hearts and listen to the voice of the Spirit today (Hebrews 3:7); for the Spirit strives with us through the preaching of the Gospel convincing, convicting, and calling us to repentance (Genesis 6:3 ; John 16:8 ; Hebrews 2:3-4) as the Scripture says:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart... (Psalms 95:6-8).

It is only in obedience to this Spirit of grace that our lives can really make sense. This was what distinguished Noah from the people of his day. He knew his Maker and knew the logic of life in the service and worship of his Maker.

SAIL OR SINK! By his act of faith Noah condemned the world (Hebrews 11:7). It is not well known how big the world then was; though it may be supposed that there was just one large land mass

surrounded by sea on all sides and the world was undivided. It may also be calculated that there were above or less than 1 crore (10 million) people on the earth. Whatever be the case, it is apparent that the news of Noah's message and ship-engineering was in wide circulation in those days from what the Scriptures tell us about Noah's preaching to and condemning the world for their disobedience (cf. 1 Peter 3:20). The statement "by the which he condemned the world" can be taken in at least three senses.

First of all, Noah's faith condemned the world by convicting it and proving its just deserving of divine judgment. His life and message was a sign of their doom. The contrast of his life with theirs revealed their alienation from God. The disobedience of the people and their rejection of God's grace were grounds for their condemnation. Noah's display of unflinching faith in God condemned them by leaving them no excuse for disbelief. If he could believe God beyond all uncertainty, they could also have done the same. But their disobedience meant their doom. There were no alternatives left.

Secondly, Noah's faith condemned the world by proving them all wrong at the end. While they died in their self-invented prisons of false beliefs and practices, Noah and his family were saved by an obedient faith in God. To the world seeing is believing. To Noah believing was seeing. Therefore, being warned of things yet unseen, moved with fear, he built the ark, by which act of faith he condemned the world and himself became heir of the righteousness that is by faith. Noah's faith won the battle of beliefs at the end. Indubitably, our world does rest on faith. Much of the information that one possesses and acts upon is a matter of belief. Much is assumed as a matter of faith in our relationships, our work, our dreams and our plans. One can't shirk the reality of faith aside since very less can be done on the basis of knowledge acquired by pure reason or direct experience; but much is done on the basis of faith. However, the directing and acting out of faith cannot be an irresponsible business. One must not believe lazily or blindly as if he has no alternative but this before him, and one must not also believe in things out of social pressure or for maintaining the status quo. For no one is a slave of any other man's opinion. We have seen how whole nations led into false thinking, prejudice, and war-justification during World-War II. Most Germans had fallen into believing Hitler's lie about the purity and supremacy of the German race and the vileness of the Jews. The irresponsibility of belief in this matter was cataclysmic. Albert Einstein, himself a Jew writing to the heroes of the battle of the Warsaw ghetto, said: The Germans as an entire people are responsible for these mass murders and must be punished as a people if there is justice in the world and if the consciousness of collective responsibility in the nations is not to perish from the earth entirely. Behind the Nazi party stands the German people, who elected Hitler after he had in his book and in his speeches made his shameful intentions clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding. The Germans are the only people who have not made any serious attempt of counteraction leading to the protection of the innocently persecuted. When they are entirely defeated and begin to lament over their fate, we must not let ourselves be deceived again, but keep in mind that they deliberately used the humanity of others to make preparation for their last and most grievous crime against humanity.

Obviously, Einstein's mind could not absolve the German crime of (whether irresponsibly or willingly) submitting one's faith to undeniably inhumane beliefs and values. Speaking out of his experience of the shame and terror inherent in the War (one must remember that over 6 million Jews were killed in Hitler's concentration camps), he is not at all considerate to those who acted

on such morally shocking terms. Those who did that stood condemned in the sight of Justice. Similarly, by an irresponsible and willing self-giving to the dictates of the flesh and rebellion against God, the world of Noah's time stood condemned before God. But Noah's submission to God in faith justified him.

Thirdly, Noah's faith condemned the world by showing that salvation is not by works but by faith. Only faith can seek the help of God. Pride, on the other hand, seeks to find its own way because it imagines of itself as being something while forgetting that it is nothing. The Bible says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). God can only give grace to the humble because only the humble seek God's grace. The proud cannot bow down before God but consider themselves as equal to God in the choice of what is good and evil. That was the deception into which Eve fell and is referred to as the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6); for the devil thinks that he is not anything less than God himself (Isaiah 14:12-14). In this the devil and all who bear his mark of perdition stand condemned. But "blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Thus, the world was condemned because of its insolent rejection of God and His grace. As a result of this, they were destroyed.

There were also other godly men in the days of Noah. Both Noah's father and grandfather were living while the ark was being made. Noah's father, Lamech, died when Noah was 595 years old, i.e. five years before the flood came and Methuselah died five years later, i.e. in the year that the flood came (see Genesis 5:25-31; Genesis 7:6). We understand that Lamech was a godly man from his calling his son Noah, meaning rest, saying "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed" (Genesis 5:29) which signified beforehand that God would bring rest to the earth through Noah, a prophetic foresight revealing the foreknowledge and fore-plan of God. This prophetic legacy, definitely, was carried down in the family line from the time of Lamech's grandfather, Enoch, who was a prophet and walked with God. It reveals the godly upbringing of the children. Lamech's father, Methuselah, himself was a living prophecy to the people, his name carrying at least two different meanings with prophetic significance: "dying" and "darted" or "sent forth or sprout forth", prophetically signifying that "it will be sent out as a dart when he dies". Accordingly, in the year that Methuselah died the flood was sent like a dart on the earth as fountains of the deep burst forth and the firmament cracked in to send down torrents of rain deluging the earth. Thus, God had not left man without a witness; the warning was already given as these men became living symbols of God's impending judgment on the world; but the world had no more ears to hear or eyes to see since sin covered their ears and eyes with deceptive sounds and visions; therefore, their condemnation was made obvious by the faith of Noah.

God knew beforehand who needed to be saved; He also knew who will not be saved (i.e. all the others who were disobedient). Therefore, in accordance to His foreknowledge He gave the design and the commandment to Noah: "I am surely going to destroy them and the earth. So make yourself an ark.... Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you" (Genesis 6:13-14; Genesis 6:18, NIV). Even the exact dimensions and material of the ark were specified. In fact, God foreknew what He foretold. Similarly, regarding the people of the Anti-Christ during the Tribulation, God has foretold that they will not repent but will be destroyed by His wrath (Revelation 16:2; Revelation 16:8-21). The same is true also of the devil and his angels for whom

there is no possibility of repentance. The Bible never asks to pray for the devil and his angels! God also forbade Jeremiah from praying for the rebellious house of Israel (Jeremiah 7:16 ; Jeremiah 11:14 ; Jeremiah 14:11-12). There was no chance or possibility of their repentance; therefore they were doomed beyond hope. Their unbelief had passed the extent of becoming irreversible and they had made themselves immune to God's grace by hardening their heart beyond repair. Obviously, here we find the instance of absolute unbelief or the maturation of unbelief. In the same manner that faith can grow to the position of becoming irreversible; unbelief can grow into irreparable demonic degeneration. Therefore, believers are warned several times in the New Testament to beware of false confidence created by the fleshly mind. For instance, Peter says, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17). Similarly, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1 Timothy 1:18-19). Also, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). All such warnings are given to believers to keep them from falling from their faith in God knowing that any concession to sin can be fatal to faith. The Scripture also commands the Church not to appoint newly converted Christians in leadership positions saying: "Not a novice lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6). To commission novices in leadership positions within the church, though they may be successful elsewhere, is like sending untrained and inexperienced soldiers to command forces at battle frontlines, which is a fault that lies not on the part of the soldiers but on the part of those who carelessly appoint them so in the Church of God. And whatever is done to the Church of Christ is more serious than any other business in the world for the Church is the body of Christ and to be careless with regard to it is a great offence (1 Corinthians 3:9-10). Therefore, it is the sacred duty of each believer, not to be indifferent or ill-disposed towards each other but, to build each other up in the faith through the love of Christ and the ministration of the Word (Zephaniah 4:31-5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 ; Jude 1:20-21). But above all, the responsibility rests in the believer himself to hold on to faith and preserve the genuineness of his first love towards God. And the Scripture assures us that God "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). If one knows His Lord and both loves and is loved by Him, it is before Him that He stands or falls; and our Lord is faithful to lift us up if our hearts stay resolute on Him even in our weaknesses (Romans 14:4 ; John 21:16). By faith Noah didn't just save himself but also his family as the Scripture says "By faith Noah, being warned of God... prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world." God didn't give this commission to other families as well, though He could do so and there could be many arks instead of just this one. But the fact of the ark is this that it was only constructed because the rest of the world stood condemned. All humanity had corrupted its way before God (Genesis 6:12). But as head of his family, Noah was faithful in his house before God. He was faithful before God as a steward of the family of God and a priest unto Him. Therefore, he alone among all the men of the world got the honor of worshipping God at His altar in the new world (Genesis 8:20). Noah's family was his church and the ark symbolized God's grace and salvation by faith since all the world outside of it stood

condemned when God's wrath fell on the earth. One can imagine what would have happened if Noah too disobeyed; for instance, no one would be here to write these words about him since humanity would have been wiped out. Human responsibility in his salvation is symbolized here in Noah's building the ark "to the saving of his house". Indubitably, Noah was saved by faith but this faith could only save because first it prepared the ark. This is what the Scripture refers to as working out one's "own salvation with fear and trembling" (Php 2:12) along with the assurance that it is God who works in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (v. 13). In other words, God's work in us must be met by a faith that is active. God has no use of spiritually careless and slothful men who try to push on God all the blame for their failures. The Bible warns us saying "be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). Noah inherited the promise of a new world because he labored and did his best to finish the ark in accordance with all that God has said. He had no time for questions and doubts about the workability of the design given by God, he believed and acted on faith because He knew his God. Therefore, he inherited the promise of God and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

BEYOND THE BILLOWS By faith Noah "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." The Scripture attests that no one can be justified before God except by faith. It never says that one is made righteous by faith but that one is declared righteous or testified as being righteous, or becomes heir of righteousness by faith. The only place where the phrase "made righteous" is used is Romans 5:19 ; but even there the Greek word *kathistemi*, used for "made", means "to designate", "to appoint", or "to ordain" indicating that it is not because of one's worthiness or merit but by grace that one is designated as righteous. Noah is said to have become heir of the righteousness which is by faith which indicates that there are two kind of righteousness: one of works and one of faith; and the Scripture states that no man is justified in the eyes of God by the works of the Law. There is only one righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, we understand that Noah inherited Christ's righteousness by faith (Romans 3:22 ; Romans 10:4). The Bible tells us that Noah's salvation through the ark symbolized the baptism (figuratively) that now saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:20). In other words, Noah's passing through the flood and becoming the father of a new world foreshadowed the gift of a New Creation (in which righteousness dwells, 2 Peter 3:13) that those who believe inherit through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this righteousness that Noah was made heir of by faith.

Jesus said that "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6) and, again, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). The word "righteousness" (Greek *dikaioσύνη*, δικαιοσύνη) means "the quality of being right and doing right" or the "state of being just". It comes from the word *dike* meaning "justice". Two other derivatives from *dike* are *dikaioi* (just or righteous) and *dikaioo* (to justify). Thus, to be righteous means to be just, to be justified, or to be in conformity to justice. Plato defined justice as "the having and doing what is a man's own, and belongs to him" In other words, justice as a condition is a man's possessing what is his own; as an act, justice is giving to a man what is his own (if it is taken away from him). In this sense we talk about economic justice, political justice, and social justice. In each of these cases, justice is the removal of inequalities among men and securing of their natural rights. This is sought to by

trying to purge unjust laws by resort to reason and to initiate activities that will restore and administer justice to the people. That false interpretations of a just law can create unjust laws is a fact that is well known. Jesus, for instance, rebuked the Pharisees and the Jews for making God's Law void through their traditions (Matthew 15:2-6). Thus, justice, reason, truth, righteousness, and God's Law are related. The traditional way of looking at righteousness is to connect it to some law or principle of right and wrong; thus in Judaism righteousness means conformity to the Mosaic Law, in Hinduism righteousness means conformity to dharma (caste duty), and in Islam righteousness means conformity to the Shari'ah (God's Law revealed to Mohammed), whose primary tenet, however, is faith in Allah which is the essence of the Law. In all these, interpretation of Law is important in order to distinguish between what is just (righteous) and what is unjust (unrighteous). Justice is considered to be retribution or reward for conforming to or not conforming to the Law. Now this Law is above the laws and interpretations of men. For instance, our governments have hundreds of laws for citizens to abide by. When the laws of a nation conform to the standards of justice, they are considered to be just laws; but when not, they are considered to be unjust laws. In other words, the particular laws of a nation or people are also measured by the absolute Law of God. While in Hinduism and Buddhism justice is administered through the impersonal principle of karma (what one sows that he reaps), in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ultimate retribution is always in the hands of God, who is considered to be the only wise and just ruler. The rulers of this earth are themselves accountable to God. In any of the cases, the retribution of unrighteousness (sin, iniquity, evil or wickedness) is severity. Even the ethical imperative of ahimsa (non-violence) in Jainism is not without himsa (violence) in terms of retribution. The reward of righteousness, on the other hand, is life in heaven or supreme bliss. However, it is commonly accepted that such perfection of righteousness is hard to achieve in this present evil world (the Hindus call it kalyuga or the age of darkness and unrighteousness). Therefore, deliverance from sin and justice (just retribution) is sought in ways other than trying to establish one's own righteousness (which is impossible). The different ways include practices like trying to earn merit through religious rituals, devotion, or fulfillment of some particularly difficult mission that will earn a place in heaven. However, the Bible makes it clear that all such ways do not match the penalty demanded by the justice of God which is nothing less than eternal death.

Righteousness and Justice

Obviously, unrighteousness or sin is sin against the righteous Law of God or the justice of God. In the Bible, the word "righteousness" is often related to justice in the kingdom of God. Justice is administrative and retributive, in the sense of giving to someone what is properly his own or what he justly deserves. To the just, justice administers good and to the unjust, justice administers evil; if the scheme is not so then evil will be exalted as the Scripture says: "The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men" (Psalms 12:8, NIV) and the element of falsehood and lovelessness will freely gain ascendancy in God's world. But God as just God will not permit evil forever. At the time appointed all things will be brought to judgment. Some, however, misunderstand the Day of Judgment as the day when people will be condemned for their sins. But, the Scripture makes it very clear that the moment one breaks the Law of God one already stands condemned in the Law's eyes. And the Law of God is impartially rational and true. It never fails. It discerns the innermost things of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12) and nothing is hid from the eyes of God. Thus, the predicament of man is not that he is guilty and will be condemned at the

Judgment Seat of God but that he is already condemned because of his sins and the irrevocable sentence is already passed over him. This sentence is based on the righteous decree of God (Romans 1:32, Amplified) which is irrevocable. The decree is that those who do such things are worthy of death, i.e. eternal separation from the life, presence, and goodness of God. And since the decree is irrevocable (for the laws of God are just and perfect), there is no way for a person to be saved from it.

One may say, however, that God being Sovereign has the authority to pardon the sin of those He will. And so all one needs to do is repent and believe in God and the merciful God will pardon him. But while it is true that God is merciful and that He is willing to pardon sins, yet it is also true that it will be false for Him to treat someone who has stolen something, for instance, as one who has not stolen anything. In other words, God cannot treat a sinner as a righteous (as justified). If God did that He would be false though He were merciful in judgment. Therefore, God's sovereignty to forgive sins cannot justify the wicked; the guilt still remains. However, if the guilt remains then the forgiveness (even if given) cannot be infinite. And if it is not infinite then it is not ultimately real; therefore, God cannot forgive sins infinitely without being false (overlooking of sins on earth doesn't mean absolution from eternal damnation) – and God cannot be false since He is infinitely perfect and positively all-sufficient. Therefore, the only way one can expect to escape the judgment of God is to be justified; but, obviously, a sinner cannot justify himself of his past sins even by repentance. However, God provided a way of escape for those who would come to Him in faith. That way of escape is Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that He willingly offered Himself as the ransom for our sins (1 Timothy 2:6) so as to redeem us from all sin and present us holy and blameless before God (Zephaniah 1:4). However, He can only present before God the one who comes to Him in faith and repentance accepting His sacrifice as that which purges his soul and conscience from all sin before God.

Jesus died and rose again from the dead for the justification of sinners. Those who die in their condemnation due to their unbelief in Christ will be resurrected at the end of time with a body fitted for eternal torment and separation from God. But those who come to God in repentance are made partakers of Christ who partook of death for our sins so that by the offering of His sinless body a glorious resurrection would be obtained for those who trust in Him. Anyone who is in Christ is justified by faith in Christ and there is no condemnation over him (Romans 8:1). As in Adam all die (1 Corinthians 15:22), meaning that death has become part of our being adamic by nature; in Christ all those who believe shall be made alive in a glorious resurrection. The Scripture compares the death of a person with the death of a seed. If one sows a mustard seed, for instance, one obtains a mustard plant. Similarly, when a sinner dies he is sown to a resurrection of condemnation which ends up in the eternal fire of hell. But when one who believes in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ dies, he is sown to a resurrection of glory which inherits the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:42-58). Thus, death in one's sins is the door to hell while death in Christ is the door to eternal life. But how does one get into Christ from Adam? The answer is by being born again (John 3:3) by faith in the eternal and imperishable Word of God (1 Peter 1:23-25) so that one is made heir of the promises of God's Word by faith. This doesn't mean that we stop bearing this adamic body. But that this body will be transformed at His coming into His likeness (Php 3:21) and the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Now to those who ask the question of how Christ's death could possess any "mysterious or miraculous virtue" to redeem man from his sins (its power, presence, and penalty), the Scriptural answer is as follows (only two basic aspects of it are given here; there are many more):

1. By the Authority and Power of the Word of God. It is by the decree of God that one is condemned; likewise, it is by the decree of God that one is justified. The just decree of God has appointed Christ as the Judge and the merciful decree of God ordained Him as the Savior. In history, the decree of judgment met the decree of mercy in the willing and substitutory sacrifice of the Messiah for the sins of the world by which sinners are reconciled with God. God's Word appears to us in two forms: the Law and the Gospel. In the same manner that condemnation is by the Law (its pronouncement), justification is by the Gospel (its promises). The Gospel is the free gift of Christ's fulfillment of all that is required by the Law to justify us before God. Thus, as Adam's sin condemned us and made us inheritors of corruption, Christ's righteousness makes us heirs of incorruption by faith: both by legal pronouncement, for the unbelievers the pronouncement of condemnation and death, while for the believers the pronouncement of justification and life. (John 3:18 ; John 8:11 ; Romans 5:16-18). Apart from Christ, however, the sinner has no hope for there is no other way by which one can be saved. Therefore, justification is by faith in the Word of God.

2. By the Condemnation of Sin in His Flesh (Romans 8:3). The just requirements of the Law that Christ fulfilled were not just His obedience to the Law of God but all requirements pertaining to the legal means of securing our salvation. Thus, for instance even His sacrificial body was prepared according to and by the Will of God (Hebrews 10:5). This means that Christ was sinless and not under the condemnation of Adam since, first of all, He preceded Adam in existence and then also He as Son of God could not have sin. Adam's sin could only be imputed on those originating from him. But Christ being born of a virgin (possessing adamic body) by the power of the Spirit, thus taking the form of a human, was not under Adam's condemnation of flesh and spirit. Therefore, in His flesh sin was condemned in the sense that He, by His obedience to God in the flesh (i.e. as the Man), condemned sin as having no power over Him and those who come to Him by faith. Then through His sinless offering on the cross He condemned sin in His flesh (destroyed the power of sin) by demonstrating its incapacity to kill Him for it had no power over His sinless body (He was not killed but He offered Himself to God, John 10:17-18) nor over those of whom He was the substitutory price. Thus, He put an end to sin itself in His flesh (removed the presence of sin) by nailing it to the cross. The old race (adamic) is still under condemnation, being both mortal and sentenced to eternal punishment. However, He being ordained the sin-offering for us, sin was condemned and judged in His flesh so that we could be heirs of His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). His condemnation of sin in the flesh constituted the fulfilling of all righteousness. Through this offering up by the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), He eternally vanquished sin and death, thus also disannulling the penalty of eternal damnation by bearing away its infinite intensity and density by His death (He paid off and cancelled the penalty of sin; Colossians 2:14). The New Man in the resurrection is the glorified Christ and the Law of God pronounces the blessing of life eternal and glory to all those who put their faith in Him so that His power works in us to finally save soul, spirit, and body because the Spirit of God's power operates by the Word of God by which the heavens and earth were made and which by mixture with our faith has the same power in us. The act of faith is the event that connects one with God's power available to us. The door was opened by Jesus; it is the act of faith that enters it. Therefore, justification is by faith alone and so is Christ's

righteousness imputed to us.

Thus, the Bible provides a distinctive perspective of divine justice and mercy in which man is saved by faith in Christ. Evidently, Noah could not have known much about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But he had faith in God and, though he passed through the Flood, and eventually died, he became an heir of the righteousness that is by faith, so that in the final resurrection he will, in Christ Jesus, rise up to incorruption and immortality. This was so because Jesus, who came much later than Noah, paid the price for Noah as well and provided the basis for the new creation of God. Christ is truly "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Thus, God took Noah beyond the billows into the realities of the Resurrected Lord. The faith of Noah teaches us several things: that faith in God is inseparable from the fear of God, that promptness of action is characteristic of faith, that faith stimulates diligence in work, that one's faith impacts the people it comes in contact with, especially one's family, that justification is by faith, and that by faith we inherit all that is secured to us in Christ. We also learn the truth that because of our faith we are also signs of God's warning to our generation so that the world is without excuse if it rejects the righteousness and salvation of God that is by faith alone. We are His witnesses.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Faith and fear of the Lord go together. One who approaches God by faith also does so with reverence in his heart.
2. One who believes also obeys.
3. A man of faith brings conviction to the lives of people.

01.06. Chapter 6: Unquenchable Flame

CHAPTER SIX Unquenchable Flame "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out... not knowing whither he went." (Hebrews 11:8)

Unquestioned obedience is what distinguishes Abraham's faith from anyone else's in the Bible. Never once has it been mentioned that he questioned or took a second thought about God's commandment. This doesn't mean that he never had difficult times in his life; but that through all this he never once doubted the sacredness of God's truth. He was unflinching in faith: his flame never dying. The writer of Hebrews underscores three facets of Abraham's example of faith for our edification. They were his forsaking his old land, his dwelling in tents in the Promised Land, and his offering up of Isaac his only begotten son in obedience to God. Let's now turn to see what these events of his life reveal about the faith of God.

UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE The nativity of Abraham, Ur of Chaldees, represented the unconscionable dark chillness of his age. Steeped in idolatry, nature-worship, and the occult the city swelled with a populace that prided itself of the wealth and power that accumulated on it due to its advantageous location by the Euphrates. The massive ziggurat (a pyramidal temple), about 70 ft high and 210 by 145 ft at the base, still visible at the site, was dedicated to the moon god Nanna. Each of its bricks were baked and inscribed with the names of the building kings or those who repaired the tower in later times, probably meant to obtain merit from the moon god. The Bible tells us that at the time when God called Abraham, his father worshipped other gods, implying that they were idolaters (Joshua 24:2). This is not to mean that the worship of the true God was no longer in existence; for there is always a remnant in the salvation-history of God. Melchizedek, for instance, a contemporary of Abraham was called the priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:18), to whom also Abraham gave his tithes. Yet, it was also quite true that traces of true worship had almost faded.

Abraham's call to inherit God's promise reveals God's incessant working out of His salvation plan. Jesus said "My Father works until now, and I work" (John 5:17, MKJV). It reveals the depth of God's love and His care towards us. It'll only take eternity to understand the depth of the love of the Almighty and All-Sufficient Creator who gives all of His self to save sinners in conflict with His purposes. But while the world slumbers and sleeps or goes about doing its own earth-bound temporal works, God is incessantly at work, striving with men and women through His spirit, to bring them into His saving grace. The fact is that God is not in need of us: we are in need of Him. But He like a mother loves her baby and attends to her all the time, has attended to us in history. And when we were yet weak and incapable of saving ourselves, Christ died for us to ransom us from our sins (Romans 5:6).

Conviction without Conflict

Abraham instantaneously responded to God's call by faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us that "he went out, not knowing where he went." There is no doubt that as soon as God's word came to

Abraham, it was met by a heart prepared to receive the word like a good ground ready for the seed. The word met with a heart that anticipated and desired divine intervention since only such a heart could receive the revelation of God by faith (remember the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Matthew 13:3 ff.). This tells us about the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual preparedness of faith before meeting with the word of God. Perhaps, Abraham was already a godly man despite his father's idolatry and knew God's voice so well that he recognized it immediately the moment he heard it and so responded to it in faith; or perhaps he had heard God for the first time and as soon as he heard Him, he was convicted that God was true. This second experience would be similar to Paul's (then Saul) when, as on his way to persecute the Christians at Damascus, he was met by the vision of Jesus. Immediately, he was convicted and became convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ (whom he considered to be false just a few minutes ago). Paul's response at this moment of encounter is captured in the words "and he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). His reaction was a mixture of fear and astonishment and also a deep conviction from Jesus' words "I am Jesus whom you persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5, MKJV). There was obviously no rational investigation. Conviction was instantaneous. He himself confessed "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and having called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me... immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:15-16, MKJV). He didn't have to go through some tests of truth or justification of beliefs before accepting God's revelation. The conviction was immediate and beyond doubt. The similar might have been the experience of Abraham. When he encountered God, faith sprung to meet God's truth without hesitation, though, as in Paul's case, ambivalent emotions such as a mixture of fear (numinous) and surprise (awe) might have accompanied the event. Yet, it also will be understandable that what is convincing to some might not be convincing to others. For instance, many might have seen the star that was seen by the wise men, but it was only they who were convinced of it as being the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews. To others it might have had no such significance. In any case, whether it was Abraham, Paul, or the wise men conviction is the product of a preparation of faith.

Now, one might be antagonistic to the truth, as in Paul's case before conversion, yet be prepared for it because of a seeking-faith that is honest at core. A seeking-faith is also restless since it discerns that something is either missing or wrong with the framework of beliefs it is holding to (its present world-view). The frustration may be experienced as some internal voidness or frustration with self or things around or inability to rationally connect with the world. This can be referred to as the pre-faith crisis or the crisis that is an aspect of faith in preparation (i.e. before seeking-faith finds perfect solace in truth). This state of faith may be figuratively referred to as a state of hunger and thirst for the truth; as a hungry and thirsty faith. We have seen earlier that this kind of faith intuitively recognizes the truth the moment it perceives it as a child recognizes the milk he is hungry for. The only danger is that this seeking may meet with a false object (which may be even fatal). The Scriptural answer to this problem is that while in the case of humans there may be some fault, God never makes a mistake in this regard. The Scripture says: If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"(Luke 11:11-13). And again, "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). This is true since God is with

us and all around us though we do not see Him and it is God who put this quest for Him in our hearts as the Word says: "He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also certain of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:26-28, MKJV). Therefore, we are assured that God will not allow a falsehood to deceive His children but being close to us will Himself answer the heart that seeks Him with faith. But the principle is clear. One only gets according to the desire of his faith. This is so because it is the desire of faith that determines the acceptance or rejection of truth. Therefore, the sinners who keep trying to suppress the truth of God by means of false religions and false actions are given up by God to evil (Romans 1:28 ; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). However, if there is anyone who truly seeks God, then he is known of Him as the Word says that the Lord knows them that are His (2 Timothy 2:19) and that those that belong to Him (which is known by their honest craving for Him) recognize His voice (John 10:27). Further, Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin reveals the heart of God in seeking and saving them that are lost (Luke 15:3-10 ; Luke 19:10). Scripturally speaking then, one cannot doubt that God answers a faith that truly seeks Him and, obviously, when a heart of faith encounters God in revelation the conviction is beyond any doubt. A clear example of this seeking-faith that finds a convicting answer in divine revelation and promptly responds to it is found in the confessions of St. Augustine. Obviously, in his case the search was for a prolonged period of time. In Book Six of his Confessions, he writes: Where wert Thou, 'O My Hope from youth,' and whither hadst Thou retired afar off? Hadst Thou not made me and distinguished me from the beasts of the earth, making me wiser than the fowls of the air? I was wandering about through the darkness and over slippery ways, seeking Thee outside myself, not finding the God of my heart. I had come to the depths of the sea. I lost confidence and was in despair of finding the truth.

Here, Augustine quotes the fact of man being created distinctly from animals in that he is imbued with rational faculties that enable him to obtain wisdom. Yet, he finds himself groping for God in various moods, cultures, and philosophies of the world; sometimes almost as a rebel of God yet, internally thirsty for his Maker until there came a time of crisis in his life when he doubted whether truth could be found. The problem was not that God was difficult to be found. But the days of his internal incoherence and frustration prolonged as his flesh kept preventing him from submitting himself completely in faith to God. This went on until one day he was broken by his own doubts that stood between him and God's will. While in such brokenness, he heard the voice of a child from a nearby house repeating over and over: 'Take it, read it! Take it, read it!' Immediately, he saw that the child's voice was truly God's commandment for him to open a book and read the first passage that he would find. So he hurried to the place where he had left the copy of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Snatching it up, he opened and found the words in Romans 13:13-14 where the Word commands to walk as in the day not in revelry and drunkenness nor strife and jealousy, but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and take no thought for the lusts of the flesh. As soon as he read it, said Augustine, "all the darkneses of doubt were dispersed, as if by a light of peace flooding into my heart." Clearly, here conviction didn't occur in a blank soul; it occurred in a soul that was already desperate for God. And obviously, the depth and intensity of the desperation determined the depth and intensity of the faith. One can't fail to see here that when true conviction breaks the spirit of man, it touches him with a touch that ends all conflict inside. Therefore, God's conviction

evokes instant response. Abraham's pre-faith experiences might or might not be as Paul's or Augustine's; however, when God's word came to him, he was ready for it and accepted it without doubt or hesitation to the point that he didn't even worry to ask God where he was meant to go. He was asked to go and that was all that faith needed to set it on the go. He went without doubt, without conflicts. Therefore, he is known as the father of all that have faith. No Regrets, No Returns! The divine commandment to Abraham came in the words "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1, NIV). The command came with the promise to make of him a great and blessed nation (Genesis 12:2-3). Abraham's leaving did not signify a setting out on a trip to some foreign land in order to return back after sometime. It was a total departure from the land that was his own, from his father land. We know from the story of his life that he never returned to Ur of Chaldees again. When he left it once, he left it forever. Obviously, faith had brought in a total disconnection with all of his past that he left behind and Abraham never lost his faith. This shows us the irreversible endurance of Abraham's faith. His faith didn't die because he didn't let it slip away (Hebrews 2:1) or let it grow weak through despair (Romans 4:19) or wreck it through carnality and debilitating of conscience (1 Timothy 1:19). This doesn't mean that faith has no battles to win. The Scripture warns us not to be slothful but to be diligent in faith (Hebrews 6:12 ; Judges 18:9). Faith is not only to be guarded (Revelation 14:12) but also to be contended or fought for (Jude 1:3); for it is only by fighting that one keeps one's faith (2 Timothy 4:7). The crisis of faith is a condition brought in by at least three faith-assassins: doubt, desire, and division.

1. Doubt. Doubt is helpful in the pre-faith condition by narrowing one's direction towards truth. That is to say, as doubt breaks all the false beliefs of the past one by one, a person is set in the direction of knowing the truth. In this sense, doubt is the precursor of faith. However, the moment faith is torched by truth "all the darkneses of doubt are dispersed", to use Augustine's expression. Doubt no longer has any place but its place is taken by the certainty, peace, and repose of faith. But even in the pre-faith condition, doubt cannot be segregated from seeking faith. Absolute doubt, in the sense that the possibility of truth is hung in perpetual doubt, can never come to truth for though it may see it face to face yet its doubt would prevent it from recognizing it as so. A mind committed to doubt can never submit in faith to truth. Therefore, absolute doubt is the greatest enemy of true faith.

There are chiefly seven Greek expressions that have been translated as "doubt" in the New Testament (KJV): aporeo (John 13:22) meaning "to be perplexed"; diaporeo (Acts 2:12 ; Acts 10:17) meaning "to be thoroughly perplexed"; meteorizo (Luke 12:29) meaning "to suspend as in mid-air"; airo psuche (John 10:24) meaning "to keep the soul in suspension as in air"; dialogismos (Romans 14:1 ; 1 Timothy 2:8) meaning "to reason" or "to argue"; diakrino (Matthew 21:21 ; Romans 14:23) meaning "to judge differently" or "to discriminate"; and distazo (Matthew 14:31 ; Matthew 28:17) meaning "to waver". We can learn of the different ways in which doubt finds intrusion in one's life by looking at the usage of these words.

First, doubt appears in the form of perplexity or a loss of answer. This is indicated by the word aporeo. For instance, when Festus introduces Paul the prisoner to Agrippa the King, he says that the Jews were accusing Paul of some questions related to the Jewish religion; but since he was not well acquainted with this religion he was at a loss of answer or doubt (aporeo) how to judge him (Acts 25:20). Obviously, the KJV would have done better to translate the word as "was

perplexed" or "confounded" instead of "doubted". But, still it is also true that perplexity is a condition of doubt since it contains the element of uncertainty. Festus lacked the confidence to judge Paul because he was confounded by the complexity of the problems that this trial presented to him. Therefore, he doubted about this matter of judging Paul. He was at a loss of answer. An intense form of this perplexity is indicated by the word *diaporeo* which means to be thoroughly (dia) perplexed. Perplexity indicates the condition of doubt as dilemma. It is the condition of neither knowing nor not knowing. It is the condition of being totally unable to understand something that seems to be significant and demanding an answer. Undeniably, faith does sometimes come across situations that confound and perplex it for a want of answer. There are things that can happen to us that we can't explain by any rational means, for instance. Or, there can be a question put forth before faith which it immediately lacks an answer for, though it knows that there must be some answer to it. However, in many cases when complexity presents itself to us the temptation is to turn away to simpler things. This is a natural instinct. One tries to avoid unwanted complications, especially when they appear insoluble or even too demanding. One tends to walk around the problem and if incapable of, tries to turn on it. This is what happened with those disciples who turned away from Jesus because they felt He was becoming too complicated for them to get along with (John 6:60; John 6:66). But when Jesus turned to the twelve and asked them if they would also go away, Peter gave an answer which is a classic response to this dilemma of faith. He answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life" (John 6:68, MKJV). Peter understood the fact that there cannot be a turning away from something without a turning away to something else. There is no middle ground. Peter knew that this was an either/or situation. One could choose Christ and eternal life or choose to relinquish both. He made the wiser decision to stay with Christ despite the inability to understand several things. A more practically existential situation confronted Job, as seen earlier. It was practically existential because the absurdity or perplexity of the suffering that he went through was thoroughly personal and its answer too evading (Job 7:1-21). Yet, he knew that there could be no turning back from God. God was where his world came to an end. God was his no-returning point. Therefore, despite all the confoundedness of his suffering, Job held on to God in faith. And when his wife reprimanded him for holding on to his faith and told him to curse God and die instead of bearing the brunt of this absurd life, he answered her saying "You speak as one of the foolish ones speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10, MKJV). In other words, he in turn demanded from her an explanation for considering experience of evil as sufficient proof for turning away from God, even if such evil came from God. The finality of his faith in God could admit no doubt in God.

Another way in which doubt presents itself to us is suspense. The word comes from the Latin *suspensus* meaning "suspended" (akin to the Greek *meteorizo* and *airo psuche*, see above). The word indicates a condition of uncertainty fraught with intense curiosity, fear, or anxiety. Jesus told His disciples to stay away from such a condition (Luke 12:29). Feelings of anxiety due to uncertainty may come to suspend our souls in doubt, but they should not be allowed to take hold of our lives; in other words, worry or anxiety should not become the condition of our lives. For such anxiety can easily lead to despair and a total shipwreck of faith. Similarly, unwanted curiosity can also be fatal to faith as seen in Eve's case. For when the devil told her that the forbidden fruit was forbidden not because God sought her welfare but because He didn't want her to be like Him, she immediately was convinced by his words (Genesis 3:4-6). Her curiosity regarding the forbidden

fruit led her obey the devil's lie. If God has forbidden us something, there is no danger greater than trying to conduct a scientific analysis of the forbidden thing. It is no surprise then why the Ephesian believers burnt all books of curious and magical arts when they accepted the Lord (Acts 19:19, KJV, Amplified). This is so because such curiosity can lead to a departure from faith. It is in this regard that the Mosaic Law commanded the Israelites to destroy all images and things related to false belief to prevent their influence from corrupting the Israelites (Deuteronomy 7:3-5). The images represent the symbols of false beliefs that stand against the faith of God. They are doors to disbelief. Therefore, sympathetic curiosity towards what is logically known to be wrong must be avoided. By "logically wrong" is meant those ideas that contradict the rational sense. For instance, in the story of Eve she turned towards the illogical belief that she could become like God (who is spiritual and infinite in wisdom) by eating a physical fruit and to the false idea that God was either jealous or afraid of her becoming like Him; as if she could become like Him and that God was afraid of His own creation. Similarly, the sympathy towards idols is absurd since an idol is not only a lifeless object but also symbolic of the vanity and falsehood of man. Therefore, one must guard oneself against any fear or excitement that is both irrational and godless. The third kind of doubt is more intriguing. It appears in the form of reasoning or argumentation and is indicated by the word dialogismos meaning that form of argumentation that is controversial, unending, or false. It is in this sense that it is sometimes rendered as "imagination" for its speculative nature is averse to any conclusion. In other words, dialogismos is doubt that expects no final answer. The imagination keeps going on finding no final ground to stand on; thus, hanging suspended (meterorizo) in curiosity and doubt all the time. I think our age understands this form of doubting better than any age before since, in our age, it is this kind of a scholar that is highly appreciated while the one who claims to have the answer is labeled as fundamentalist and narrow-minded. While in the past the wise man was he who had more answers and fewer questions, now he is one who has more questions and fewer answers. The modern wise man is like the Greek sophist who excelled in clever arguments but had no belief in absolute truth: his arguments generated more doubts than solutions. Our English word "sophistry" comes from this "sophist" and means "clever, misleading, and deceptive argument". Obviously, this form of doubt or methodological skepticism is deliberate, proceeding from the bias that detests absolute solution to any problem. That is the reason why the Scripture warns several times to keep away from such love for show of cleverness and unhealthy disputing that signifies pride and rebellion instead of humility (Php 2:14 ; Romans 14:1 ; 1 Timothy 2:8 ; cf. 1 Timothy 6:3-5). The next kind of doubt is diakrino meaning "to judge by analysis" or "to make a difference". In relation to doubt it means "to make a different judgment", "to think otherwise", or "allow for some other possibility as well". It is in this sense that it is used in Matthew 21:21 when Jesus tells His disciples "Truly I say to you, If you have faith and do not doubt (me diakrithete), you shall not only do this miracle of the fig tree, but also; if you shall say to this mountain, Be moved and be thrown into the sea; it shall be done." (Matthew 21:21, MKJV). Similarly, James says: "let him ask in faith, doubting nothing (meden diakrinomenos). For he who doubts (diakrinomenos) is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed" (James 1:3, MKJV). Obviously, this kind of doubting is antithetical to faith since it introduces a rival element (a foreign particle) into one's framework of belief. This kind of double-thinking is what leads to distazo or to the inability of holding on to faith, thus becoming unstable (as in Peter's case when he walked on water and then started sinking due to fear); for the natural thoughts of the mind are set in conflict against the supernatural truths of God leading to a weakening of faith. The imbalance and

instability caused by diakrino can be compared to an airplane (on flight) that loses its balance due to some technical failure to keep up with the laws of aerodynamics. That technical failure may be compared to diakrino when the plane wobbles between the law of aerodynamics and the law of gravity, for instance. The loss of balance is due to the plane's inability to totally comply with the law of aerodynamics. The problem is solved if the airplane keeps to the purpose of its design, which is to be in air till it lands safely on the ground; the tragedy is when it fails to do that by giving in to anti-elements. Now, the anti-element may not be false in itself; for instance, the law of gravity is true as well as the fact that Peter could not naturally walk on water. However, in matters of faith the natural must submit to the supernatural and not vice versa. Even as the airplane is designed to fly in air, a man of faith is designed to sail on the winds of God's promises. Abraham was a man of faith. He was not a man of a double-opinion or double-thinking. Therefore, there were no regrets about his obedience to God; neither was there any possibility of a return for him. The Scripture testifies about him that "he staggered not (ou diekrithe) at the promise of God through unbelief (apistia); but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Romans 4:20). Apistia is the antonym of pistis which is faith. Thus, Abraham didn't allow an anti-faith element to make him double-think about and doubt the promises of God.

2. Desire. The second enemy of faith is false desire. Desire is the drive of the human will. Therefore, it is always seen as desire to do something or to get something in the sense that the mind is set on that particular thing, ultimately leading to action in that direction. In this sense, to will something is to desire that thing. In fact, the Greek word *thelo* is translated as both "to will" and "to desire" in the New Testament. However, in human experience, desire is often ambivalent as the Scripture says: "For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the [Holy] Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], so that you are not free but are prevented from doing what you desire to do" (Galatians 5:17, Amplified). And again, "I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but the evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing" (Romans 7:19, Amplified). Obviously, there are two kinds of desires at work here and the either one gives in to the other in the struggle for letting out. One is lawless; the other, lawful. One is brutish; the other, rational. One is carnal; the other, spiritual. One is godly; the other, ungodly. One is sinful; the other, holy. While spiritual desire is rationally sound, emotionally stable, and conscientiously clear; lawless desire bypasses reason, corrupts the feelings, stalls the conscience, and captivates the memory. That is the reason why the Scripture says, "Beloved, I implore you as aliens and strangers and exiles [in this world] to abstain from the sensual urges (the evil desires, the passions of the flesh, your lower nature) that wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11, Amplified). The fatal blow of desire is its luring the mind to justify wickedness. This is when faith is jettisoned and deception sneaks in. Sometimes even a whole nation can fall prey to the rule of passion by rebelling against truth. In his Republic Plato quotes Damon as saying "when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them." We may not totally agree with Plato's view against musical innovations; but when one sees the unrestrained wand of passion displaying gestures of rebellion in any art-form, one cannot but suspect that values are being redefined. The Word warns, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). The simplicity of Abraham despite the blessings of God on his life is evident from his contentment to live in tents all the days of his life (Hebrews 11:9). It is also evident from

his contentment with what only God gave to him and not desiring even a shoe lace by any other means. He made a covenant with God to never be blessed except he was blessed by God; therefore, when the king of Sodom came to him offering the spoils of war, he replied: "I have lifted up my hand and sworn to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor and Maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a shoelace or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:22-23, Amplified). Abraham knew God's promise of blessing to him and wanted nothing more than that. That is faith. The Scripture warns us that they who are minded to be rich fall into temptation and many foolish, irrational, and hurtful desires that lead to perdition (1 Timothy 6:9). One example of it is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the prophet, who ran after Naaman the Syrian and, in the name of his master, took from him stuff that his master had refused; but when Elisha questioned him where he had gone, he replied "nowhere". This man had seen even the dead raised through Elisha's prayer and still found the courage to lie to him. His conscience and memory were smeared by lust and greed to the extent that he believed that everything was okay despite his sinful act (2 Kings 5:20-26). Similarly, David when captured by the lust for Bathsheba forgot all bonds of wickedness. He not only committed adultery with her (breaking God's covenant) but also got her good husband ruthlessly murdered. This man, who once was so zealous for God in faith that he single-handedly defeated the giant Goliath, had now fallen prey to a woman's beauty (2 Samuel 11:1-27). One doesn't know what irrational justification his mind was framing in order to not lose the opportunity and companionship of lust. But it broke the heart of God. The same was also true of Judas Iscariot who sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver after being with Him for three and half years. It is foolishness to think that one's environment or conditions of living determine the strength of one's faith. Adam and Eve were in a perfectly sinless environment before they fell into sin. Lucifer was an angel of God. Judas, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the chief priests saw Jesus in person and yet went against Him. Many of us often imagine that if we were as close as the disciples were to Jesus much of our spiritual struggle would be solved. Many desire at least one vision of Christ in this life. But one must understand that all such spiritual and sacred experiences put together can easily be suspended by the onslaught of lust; for lust hijacks all emotion, intelligence, memory, and conscience. Therefore, one must guard himself of all ugly desire that, though seemingly fulfilling, is disastrous in the end.

3. Division. By division is meant the lack of real spiritual fellowship and communion with God. This causes alienation and distancing from the knowledge of God. As a result, faith suffers loss. Division manifests itself in three forms: discord, dissension, and disunion. a. Discord. Discord means a lack of agreement or harmony between two persons. While discord between men may be expressed or unexpressed, discord between man and God needs no expression since God knows what's in the human heart. Discord between God and man is a matter of perspective and will-towards-something rather than ratio-empirical disagreement (as in matters of scientific or philosophical research). This is so because the relationship is not of the nature of this spatio-temporal pluralistic world where things stand divided from each other in space and time. God is unlike the world and its objects; He is not far from us, as the Scripture says, and we live and move and have our being in Him (Acts 17:27-28), which means His presence is more real than the world around us. Therefore, discord or concord between God and man is unlike discord and concord between worldly things, in the sense that it is not primarily a matter of ratio-empirical dispute. It is a matter of perspective, a matter of faith. Discord with God is not justifiable since it is not based on rational judgments but on the choice of will propelled by desire. Therefore, the Word

says that God has given up those who, falling to evil desire and reprobate thinking, disgusted themselves by abominable practices (Romans 1:21-28). The Bible says that the carnal mind is unsubmitive to the Law of God (Romans 8:7). This lack of submission is not in the sense that it has some logical reasons for not submitting to God but in the sense that the intentions and actions of the carnal mind are opposite to the Law of God. The perspective-shift (from carnal to spiritual or vice versa) can be in a split of a second or gradual. It may be a reaction to a temptation or a moral decline through negligence. Whatever way, the perspective-shift is indicative of a shift from faith to practical disbelief.

b. Dissension. Dissension is the violent and aggressive form of discord in which the disagreement is vociferously expressed. While in the former case, discordant questions may not be expressed for fear of causing obstacle to the faith of others (see Psalms 73:15), in this case all shame and fear is set aside. The Bible uses different words to describe dissension; some of them are: murmuring, complaining, scoffing, mocking, blaspheming, strife of words, evil talking, perverse disputing, railing, speaking in hypocrisy, ungodly talking, etc (Php 2:14 ; Psalms 1:1 ; 1 Timothy 4:2 ; 1 Timothy 6:4-5; 2 Timothy 3:2 ; Jude 1:15-16). Jesus warned His disciples that on the Day of Judgment men will have to give an account of every idle word that they speak (Matthew 12:36). Dissension comes from a heart of unbelief. It was because of such vehement and vexing ungodly talks that the Israelites were destroyed in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:10). All their opposition was based on their lusts and whims and not on any logic. God had shown such wonders to them that He had never shown before. He foiled the skill of the Egyptian magicians, broke the strength of pharaoh and his forces, tore the Red Sea into two, and walked before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. I do not know of any nation on earth as a whole who had seen so much of God and yet disbelieved Him so much. They broke God's commands whenever they liked and spoke whatever came to their mouth against God's servants. Jude tells us that God destroyed them because of their unbelief (Jude 5).

c. Disunion. Disunion refers to a break-away from faith in God, thus from God. This is the severing of relationship with God. This disunion is the final end of a life of ungodly speech and action. It is the moral failure to hold on to faith and a good conscience and is characterized by a blasphemous lifestyle (1 Timothy 1:18-20). This is what the Scripture also calls as a departure from faith by giving in to seducing spirits and the doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1). The doctrine of the devil is nothing but ultimate rebellion against God and His truth. The life without faith in God is a life of falsehood. It is a life of self-opposition (2 Timothy 2:25). Therefore, says the psalmist, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (Psalms 1:5). The sinners who walk after ungodly counsel and associate to scoff at the revelation of God will not be justified (cp. Psalms 1:1). But the just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17). The Scripture warns believers against this alienation from God's truth. It is the sin that brings a division between God and man (Isaiah 59:2). The sin of willful commitment to unbelief and disunion with God is unpardonable. It leads to death (1 John 5:16). The book of Hebrews tells us that there is no chance of renewal for those who, after knowing the irrefutable truth of God, fall away from the faith (Hebrews 6:4-6); for it is evident in their case that their falling away from faith is self-willed and not because of weakness in understanding the truth. The truth was crystal clear to them. Similarly, Peter says that the final condition of those who turn away from the knowledge of Christ after having escaped the pollutions of the world is worse than the first; for, he says, it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then willingly turn away from it (2 Peter 2:20-21). Such a life becomes blasphemous, godless, and a willful opposing of the ways of God.

Now, there are three chief ways in which faith can be kept; they are: confession, conduct, and communion. Let's look briefly at each one of them and see how Abraham not only kept his faith but grew stronger in it by following these and by refusing false doubt, ungodly desire, and any sin-induced division. We do not say here that Abraham never made mistakes but despite of all his weaknesses and shortcomings he was justified before God because of his holding on to the Lord. He loved the Lord and no matter what he had to go through, he didn't stagger in faith, since he knew that he could never leave the Lord that he knew as the true and gracious God. For him there were no regrets and no turnings back.

1. Confession. Confession is the verbal establishment of inward belief (Romans 10:10). It is the public testimony of private faith. And when confession is heartily and confidently done, then the internal and the external dimensions of human experience are reinforced in the integrity of faith. Abraham's confession of faith is captured in his single statement to the king of Sodom. He said: "I have lifted up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:42-43). He confessed here that it is God alone who could have the absolute right of claim over all of Abraham's blessings, that his sustenance came from God, and that everything of him was God's and what was his was what God had committed to him. This shows his total trust in God and no side-glances at anything else. His mind was steadily focused on God and His promises. Of course, this doesn't mean that Abraham never sought any clarification from God. But whenever he did that it was in humility of spirit and never in the haughtiness of pride characteristic of the dissenters. For instance, when God told him that He would bless him with a seed that shall become a nation, the Bible says that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). But when God tells him in the next verse that he was going to inherit Palestine, he asked for a way to know how that would happen. He knew that he was living in tents here and that there were little chances that this tent-living could be given up soon since the land belonged to the different tribes that inhabited it. But God showed him how he would do it giving assurance of it by means of a covenant. He told him that his seed would go to a foreign land whom they shall serve but then return back in the fourth generation to take this land into their hands by punishing the inhabitants of it. Accordingly, the next two generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob too lived in tents, went to Egypt and returned after about 400 years to take the Promised Land. Obviously, there were things that Abraham didn't understand but he confessed what he knew and trusted God for things too difficult for his understanding. And God was faithful to reveal His counsel to Abraham. Similarly, spiritual facts like being saved, being forgiven of all sins, being heirs of Christ's righteousness and the Kingdom to come must be confessed again and again in faith or else the devil will gain place by introducing guilt-feelings, doubts, and fears in the heart of the believer. One must acknowledge one's sinfulness and inability to save oneself, submit to God, and then resist the devil.

Confession brings the mind in subjection to the line of verbal reasoning manifest in the assertion of faith-statements. It awakens the consciousness to the truths of God. It enlightens the memory with the optimism of divine assurance. It is the active choice of the believer to set his mind on the things of God. It is this reason why Christ confessed God's Word and His purposes by quoting the Scripture when the devil came to tempt Him. He told him that "Man shall not live by bread alone" when the tempter challenged His divine sonship. He need not prove anything to either the devil or

to anyone. By confessing the Scripture, Jesus declared to the devil God's counsel of sending Christ as man to this earth; and that this material world is not an end in itself – bread is not the ultimate thing: to turn stones into bread would mean to look at any object of nature with selfish intentions.

2. Conduct. Conduct is the factual establishment of faith. It is the behavior of faith. It is the phenomena of active faith. It is not mere asserting but the confirming of faith through action. It is the conformity of life with faith. It is the finalizing of the meaningfulness of belief. One can only live out that which one considers to be livable or meaningful and significant. Therefore, conduct is the establishment of faith in fact and in deed. There is not one instance in the Scripture where it is mentioned that Abraham disobeyed God. Whenever God told him anything to do, he immediately did it. We have seen his obedience of faith in regard to leaving Ur and also, at a latter point, sacrificing his only begotten son. His obedience is also seen in the case of sending Hagar away. When Sara told Abraham to send Hagar, his concubine away, we are told that this thing was very grievous in his eyes because of Ishmael, his son by Hagar (Genesis 21:11). However, when God told him to quit feeling grievous about this and do as Sara had said since God was in control of everything and was going to bless Sara's son, Abraham rose up early in the morning, packed up things for Hagar and Ishmael and sent them away, without grieving, having been assured of the promise of God regarding the maid and her son. Abraham's emotions were controlled and directed not by any worldly wisdom but by his faith in the truth and power of God. He knew His God very well and, therefore, he followed Him wholeheartedly. Of course, his half-truth about his wife (Genesis 12:13 ; Genesis 20:2) due to fear evinces his use of cleverness in escaping difficult situations instead of trusting totally in God's ability to protect him. Similarly, his giving heed to Sara in cohabiting with Hagar, according to their custom, in order to have a child was a hasty and humanly rationalized way (Gen. 16). But one must remember that, in the former case, Sara was truly his half-sister and Abraham's tactic was something to prevent a possible enemy's foil act. It was not motivated out of a failure of faith at all. Anyone who has read about the tactics that believers of the underground churches employed in order to prevent the enemy's success in sin should not be hasty to indict them as failing in faith as if God could not protect them. In fact, they did so because of their unflinching faith in God Whom they could at no cost deny. Obviously, no one generally stretches these things to such an extremity to say, for instance that footballers should give up their play tactics or army men should give up their war stratagems in order to walk according to faith. I am here only trying to prevent hasty and unjust accusation against Abraham; not to justify Abraham's actions. What for me is important about Abraham is that God never accused him of what most people accuse him. Even if he failed, God would not have accused him since God knew Abraham's faith and it is before his Master that he falls or rises, and even if he falls God is able to raise him (Romans 14:4). One will also remember that Christ never condemned Peter for denying Him thrice but understood the love that was in the depth of his heart. Similarly, in taking Hagar as wife, this might have been so because God's revelation of giving a son through Sara, specifically, is revealed only in Genesis 17:1-27. Further, Abraham's listening to his wife to give her as she desired should not be interpreted as wavering from faith; for, even in doing so there was no indication of his disbelief in God about anything; there could not be. In addition, God never treated Abraham's child through Hagar as the product of a mistake, but instead blessed him as well. At any cost, none of these things were indicative of any weakening of Abraham's faith; the truth being that in every instance of God's specific commandment, Abraham

was obedient without question, hesitation, or second-thought.

3. Communion. Communion is the relational establishment of faith; the personalizing of faith in relationship. One can only be one with someone one is at one with; and one can only be one with someone who is like that one, i.e. basically personal then other points of aesthetic and ethical agreement or harmony: therefore, communion is the personal relationship with God through the harmony of faith. Communion with God is the living out of the I-Thou relationship with Him. It is the establishment of the fact of faith as relationality and not just as subjectivity. Communion can never be one-sided. Communion can never be fantastical. Therefore, communion is the objective establishment of faith in a real divine relationship. When Abraham was 95 years old, God spoke to him saying "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). The command to walk before God was the command to be in perpetual agreement and fellowship with Him. The command to be perfect was the command to be wholeheartedly committed to God in this relationship. The Bible tells us that as soon as Abraham heard this voice (he was still called Abram till this point), he fell with his face prostrate on the ground. He didn't even speak a word. Anyone who reads the life of Abraham can see him not only as a man of few words but also as a man of diligence and great reverence for God. His communion with God was so close that the Scripture calls him "the friend of God" (James 2:23 ; 2 Chronicles 20:7); yet, it was only with reverence in heart that Abraham ever approached God. This can also be seen in the case when he intercedes for Sodom. His intercession is not like one demanding something from God by right though he was God's friend. For instance, when he enquires the second time he says: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27) and goes on to make his petition. Remember God's confession about Abraham just before this session; God said "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do... for I have known him" (Genesis 18:17-19, MKJV). God could trust Abraham as a friend could trust his friend. That was the depth of communion between them because God knew the genuineness of Abraham's faith and his absolute and indefatigable holding on to the truth of God. Abraham knew God and glorified God as God; therefore, he was blessed by God.

Thus, we see that through faith and obedience to God Abraham inherited the promises of God. The anti-faith elements of doubt, sinful desire, and division could not find place in his heart full of trust and faith in God. Abraham's words, actions, and feelings were all tuned up with the will of God. Therefore, he only kept moving onward and never turning back in his walk before God. While the world groped in the darkness of unbelief and falsehood around him, Abraham recognized God's call over his life and followed Him not knowing where he was going.

01.07. Chapter 6: Unquenchable Flame-2

CHAPTER SIX Continued....

GLORIOUS VISION The writer of Hebrews says about Abraham that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

One very important teaching of the Scripture is that we are all pilgrims and strangers in this world, implying that this world is not the final end of God's creation of man. While this perspective of Abraham and the patriarchs is not stated in the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews tells us that their humble dwelling in tents in the land promised to them signified that they looked for the promise of not an earthly city but the city of God. Abraham did reach the Promised Land but never possessed it. In fact, when Sara died, Abraham requested of the inhabitants to sell him a place for her burial, which signified that he didn't even have a place of his own to bury his wife. He lived as an alien in that land as he himself confessed "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" (Genesis 23:4). That is the reason he lived in tents like a nomad. Our father of faith never had a building of his own on this earth though he was definitely rich in other possessions. He neither built a house or a city for himself and the Bible never says that he sought one for his own. He and the patriarchs lived as strangers and pilgrims in this world (Hebrews 11:13), which meant that their journey, though begun in this world was not to end here.

Eternal Dimension of Faith

Faith assuredly has an eternal dimension to it. Eternality is a necessary characteristic of faith. This is so because faith is infinitely unsatiated in itself, by itself, and for itself. Therefore, it finds ultimate satisfaction in a categorical plunge into the infinite depths of God Himself. Obviously, faith in temporal objects has only temporal significance. However, the faith of God has eternal significance. All faith related to this world is nullified by death. Beyond the grave faith in temporal objects has no value. In fact, temporality gains its distinctive meaning from death itself. Temporality is both timeness and towards-deathness. In other words, to be conditioned by time is to be temporal. At the same time, one experiences death by only being in time; therefore, mortality (deathness) is only characteristic of temporal beings. But faith being trans-temporal is undaunted at death. Faith is joy and peace of eternal quality since it nullifies the carelessness of youth and the anxiety of ageing. The believing youth, therefore, is careful in his walk while the old look forward with anticipation. This also means that true faith is unattached to the world of temporal possessions, positions, and pleasures.

1. Faith Transcends Temporality. As long as one is constricted by space-time desires and purposes, faith can't progress. The vision of faith is transcendent. It looks beyond this world to the eternal realities of God. This is what characterizes a walk by faith that is not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). By sight is meant "with reference to appearances"; i.e. to the objects and events of this

temporal world. By faith is meant "with reference to God's Word"; i.e. to eternal facts secured by the promises of God. Faith obstructs temporal finalizations since it attaches itself to God's ultimate purposes. The final vision of faith determines the believer's lifestyle. The three kinds of vision, one must notice, are final, personal, and temporal. One sees all such vision with the eyes of faith alone. Final vision refers to the vision that God has regarding creation. Abraham saw the city of God as God's final architecture for believers; and he saw it with the eyes of faith. Personal vision is the personal calling of each believer in relation to this final vision of God. It is the high and heavenly calling for which God calls His people. For instance, Paul's calling was to be a witness of Christ's mysteries to the gentiles which included suffering for His name's sake. His satisfactory fulfillment of that calling enabled him to declare that he had fought a good fight of faith (Galatians 1:16 ; Zephaniah 3:6-8 ; Acts 9:15-16; 2 Timothy 4:7). All such visions have eternal consequences. Temporal vision, on the other hand, is simply setting up worldly goals and objectives that may not relate necessarily to God's calling and Kingdom. These may be goals defined by companies or institutions or a person's desire to get something like a house or a bicycle. Though through faith in God such temporal objects can be obtained, their validity or invalidity is determined by their connection to God's final will and His calling over our lives. In human eyes, success is defined in terms of human praise. And natural men naturally praise physically appealing things or things that cater to their wishful thinking of spirituality or hedonism. But God's praise is of truth; truth established by His Word. And it is by faith that one connects to this divine truth and vision despite of the direction of the waves of human thinking.

2. Faith Anticipates Immortality. The apprehension and vicarious experience of death stagnates any faith and hope that is temporally grounded. Those who trust on material things and the things of this world are, therefore, soon distraught. But the faith of God looks beyond death. It is by this faith that Job declared: "after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another" (Job 19:26-27, NIV). Similarly, David says "my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Psalms 16:9-10). The text obviously, has three meanings. Firstly, it means that God will protect David from all danger of death and will not abandon him to destruction: this has a temporal dimension since David had to ultimately die. The second meaning is as expounded by Peter in Acts 2:31 that David prophesied about the resurrection of Jesus Christ: this has a Christo-prophetic dimension as Christ is the basis of resurrection to life. The final meaning relates to David's resurrection himself. The word for "decay" is shachath which means pit, grave, destruction or extermination. David prophesies about himself that God will not let temporality consume him forever; for though we live in space-time we are not made to terminate with it. The divine assurance of resurrection and eternal life is the antidote to the fear of death. Faith frees the believer from the chains of this-worldly ambitions, from the anxiety of failure, of ageing, of weakness, and the dread of death.

3. Faith Instills Responsibility. A man of faith lives with eternity in mind. His life is, therefore, characterized by accountability and soberness. An unbeliever who doesn't take the future into consideration dallies away time in careless indulgences. He is unmindful of the danger lying ahead. He cannot see ahead because his eyes are set on the ground. The Epicurean slogan "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die" is true of them, for they truly do die in their sins. For as they live in their pleasures, they also die in their pleasures. Therefore, the careless souls will not

be justified on the Day of Judgment. The unbeliever doesn't have the light of God and lives in perpetual darkness until the day when death sucks him into the pit of everlasting darkness. But we are not of the darkness but of the light. And "since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1 Thessalonians 5:8-9, NIV). The combination of faith and love as a breastplate talks of the knowledge of faith as reflective and active in the accountability and care of love. Life is care only for faith that works through love. A carnal man cares for neither his soul nor for the souls of others. He looks at lust or passion as an end in itself and wallows in sin despite knowing of its evil. But faith and care (love) together with hope (knowledge with anticipation) helps in spiritual warfare. While the hope of salvation protects the mind from the false and destructive ideas of the world, faith and love protect the heart from deadly desires and fatal feelings. It is not enough to know with the mind. A drunkard knows that alcohol is destructive and still submerges himself in it because in him mental knowledge is not combined with active faith and care. If he truly loved himself, the drunkard would do anything to save himself. He would become sober and responsible. He cannot hope since he cannot act in faith and love. Therefore, as the mind and the heart must agree for agreeable action, hope and caring faith must agree towards the salvation of the soul.

One who lives with an eternal perspective will never allow the world to bind him either to the past or the present. One can't look forward by looking backward. The past may have been wrong, but it is just the past. To be chained to the past memories, failures, or pains is to lose sight of the great eternal. Similarly, to be chained to the present worries and worldly demands is to lose sight of God's eternal plan and purposes. While the past can disparage a man and the present debilitate him, faith lifts one above his feelings and circumstances to act, without hesitation, in accordance with the eternal purposes of God. Only a man of faith and eternal vision is, therefore, truly responsible.

Divine Architect

Hebrews tells us that Abraham looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). The same testimony is also given of the patriarchs that they lived as pilgrims and strangers looking for a city prepared for them by God, a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:13-16). The three active descriptors of God are important for our understanding of the vision of faith.

1. God is Builder of the City. The word for "builder" is *technites* (τεχνιτης) which means "artificer", "builder", "craftsman", and "architect". God is the one who drew the layout and built this City. This is not a garden like that of Eden but is a city that has a plan and structure unrivalled by and infinitely superior to all earthly cities built by men. One may wonder if God had intended this to be the vision of the patriarchs then why He should have led them into the land of Canaan after all to dwell in tents. The answer is that God did purpose to give Canaan to them as He did but that was just an intermediate plan related to the coming of the Messiah. The final vision is, of course, of this great city. To live in tents meant to have no permanent dwelling place on this earth; no permanent city, no permanent home. The city that God has built for His royal people is their only final abode. The city is built after God's own heart, desire, and design. It is false of believers to imagine wishfully about this city. One who submits to God by faith also submits to His plan and design since he trusts in God's wisdom and purposes. Commitment along the way in trust on God

is also commitment towards the end of faith, the reward that God gives to the faithful.

2. God is Maker of the City. The city has foundations, meaning it is permanent and not like the tents they lived in. The word for "maker" is demiourgos (δημιουργός) which was used by the philosophers Xenophanes and Plato for the Creator-God. The term is only used once, that is here, in the New Testament. Since Demiourgos is someone who works (ergon) for the people (demos), He is also seen as not just the maker of the physical city but also as the God who structured the city as a permanent dwelling place for His people. He is the governor of the City and the people for whom He has built the City. As Demiourgos or Demiurge, He is the sovereign Owner and Master of the City. However, the Bible makes it clear that by faith in Christ one becomes heir of God's Kingdom and citizen of this City of God. But the unbelievers will find no entrance into it (Revelation 22:15). Since God has built this City for His people, He is not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 11:16).

3. God has prepared this City for the Believers. The word hetoimazo (ετοιμάζω) in verse 16 denotes making full preparations or making ready. It signifies the completeness and perfection of God's work. Anyone who clearly realizes this will not lack anything in faith since he is assured of the fact that God's plan doesn't lack anything. Further, there is a futurist dimension to it. That is the reason why it is apprehended by faith and not by sight. It is yet to appear but when it appears it will overshadow all things. Finally, this speaks of God's total concern and love for His people. He prepares for them a dwelling place since He cares for them.

It is this vision of an eternal City that defines the lifestyle of the believer. The believer is not threatened by worldly forces nor confused by worldly wisdom because he has had a vision of God's established City in heaven.

UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only begotten son, Isaac, he did that without argument or doubts. Isaac embodied and symbolized God's promise to Abraham to make him a nation. By asking for Isaac, God was asking Abraham to lay at God's altar his whole sense of leaving his own nation and following God's vision to this point. In fact, many would consider this to be senseless. But Abraham was differently minded; for him sense and sensibility were related to the character of God and not the insufficient reasoning of man. Would anyone be willing to give away the ministry and labor he has invested so much of time and energy into? But Abraham didn't think of his life or the gifts as belonging to himself. Therefore, he was so beloved of God. He knew God and His promises as never failing and reasoned that though God had asked for Isaac's sacrifice He "was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19, NKJV), which God did, figuratively speaking, as the Scripture says. The difficulty with the divine demand of Isaac's sacrifice is that it seems heathenish and barbaric. God's demand of the promised son, however, has deeper implications. In fact, one must understand that God is vehemently against human sacrifice, since it constitutes murder (cp. 2 Kings 16:3 ; 2 Kings 17:31); but, at the end it was through the sacrifice of the Man Jesus that salvation was procured for mankind. This was so because Jesus was not sacrificed by men but He was appointed as a sacrifice for our sins by God and, He being the image and expression of God, gave Himself as an eternal sacrifice for our sins. While animal sacrifice possessed symbolic significance of Jesus' death, the heathen practice of human sacrifice was totally error-driven for it considered the sacrifice of other humans as possessing propitiatory or meritorious virtue, which it didn't.

Secondly, animals could be rightly purchased and owned but freedom is a human's birthright and, therefore, even a father has no right to sacrifice his son. But since God is Sovereign owner of all things, He can do as He wills. And so He appointed His own Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Similarly, now He asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; obviously, not because Abraham was owner of Isaac – he wasn't – but because God was the one who gave Isaac to Abraham and He had the right to demand him back. Job too had the same conception when he confessed in response to the death of his children saying "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21, NKJV). However, we are dealing with very delicate issues here. Any false step can bring disaster. We know of false cults that authorized child and human sacrifice in the name of religious authority. It is heinous to even think of God ever requiring such rituals and we consider such cults as inhumane and demonic. Obviously, God's demand of Isaac's sacrifice constitutes a far greater problematic of faith to the Christian than to someone from a superstitious heathen background.

We understand that Abraham was experienced enough to recognize God's voice when it came to him. We also understand that Abraham lived in an age when the Bible didn't exist in the final form as we have it now. Therefore, any experience could not be measured by the final standard of the written Word. Consequently, Abraham's faith rested in God's self-revelation of Himself through visions or personal appearances. But Abraham knew God's voice and didn't hesitate to obey it. I believe an understanding of Abraham's response in faith to God's demand helps us understand how to deal with the problematic of paradoxical faith. In fact, we observe that Abraham sacrificed Isaac by faith, which means that He believed God and His promises and the fact that Isaac could not die since God could not be falsified.

1. Abraham's Obedience Was Historically Grounded. The divine command was not without a precursor. The same God who was true to His promise in granting Him a son had now asked for that son. Abraham's obedience was clothed with a rich experience of God's faithfulness throughout his life. It was God who called him, God who blessed him, God who led him, and God who gave him Isaac. He and his wife Sarah knew God's faithfulness in a very realistic and personal way. It is testified about Sarah that she considered God as true to His word and that she by faith received strength to conceive and bear the child Isaac (Hebrews 11:11). God kept His promise without failure. Therefore, God could not be false to Abraham nor to Himself. Abraham knew that Isaac could not die because God's promise of making of him a nation could not be false and was not false. If God had asked for Isaac's sacrifice, there must have been some reason behind it. Evidently, that reason was not Isaac's annihilation or sacrificial consumption in death but something that related to God's good purposes.

2. Abraham's Obedience Was Personal. Abraham's obedience was to a personal command. God's personal commands must be distinguished from His general commands. For instance, Jesus asked the rich young man to sell his possessions and follow Him. This doesn't mean that every rich man should sell his possessions though all are called to follow Jesus. God has often told several men and women to do certain things that were specifically for them to do and not for others. Such commands are situational. For instance, Jesus commanded Peter to walk on water. This doesn't mean that Peter was given the gift to always walk on water and every believer should be a water-walker as if not walking on water demonstrated a lack of faith. In some situations God's specific or situational workings may appear contradictory to His will but it is not so. For instance,

God signified to the wise men of Christ's birth through a star. Obviously, God doesn't endorse astrology here but in that situation, He chose to reveal to them this event through a way that appealed to their rationality. Does this mean that God's acts are arbitrary, capricious, and indeterminate? Of course, not; the fact is that God speaks to each individual in a way that is so personal between God and that person that it might sometimes be not understandable to others. God judges man in accordance to his response to this personal work of God in his life. The principle behind the personal command must be, however, clearly understood. For instance, in the wise men's case, the principle was that God evidential communication comes in contextually true ways. The star that they saw was a truly divine sign and not something imagined by men. God gave it. It was not based on human studies of already existent stars. Similarly, the principle behind the command to sell all possessions is that God's command to love cannot be subsistent with a love for mammon. In Abraham's case, God was testing him (it was a test as the Scriptures testify) to see if he really revered God after his son was already born, after a significant part of the vision was completed, and after Abraham's line of descendancy was assured through Isaac. Did Abraham consider God more important than his progeny or a whole nation that was contained in Isaac in seed form? Abraham's obedience revealed the answer to the end that God testified saying "now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Genesis 22:12, NKJV). It was a personal test that Abraham passed.

3. Abraham's Obedience Was Optimistic. Abraham anticipated an optimistic result of obedience. He knew that the God who produced Isaac from the weakness of Abraham's loins was able to also raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). It was with this assurance that he told his two servants "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5, NKJV). He knew that he would not return without the lad. That was the confidence of his faith. Accordingly, he told his son on the way that "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8) when his son observed that they had everything except the sacrificial animal. His faith was optimistic. He saw beyond this sacrificial event, the historical future of a nation sprung up from Isaac. Therefore, Abraham was not grieved to obey God. I feel he actually was enthusiastic to see what God had in all this asking him to do this thing.

4. Abraham's Obedience Was Rational. The writer of Hebrews says that Abraham accounted (logizomai) or reasoned within himself that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead. His obedience was not based on superstitious belief but on the logical calculation of what God had done and what He was able to do. He was assured of both the faithfulness and power of God. It is like a motor-bike stunt man who calculates speed, time, and other factors before performing the final stunt. The stunt man's faith in these things may go wrong, but faith in God's righteousness and power cannot be deficient. If one chooses to believe in God one must believe Him fully or not at all. There is nothing like a partial belief in God. All partial belief is equivalent to unbelief or not knowing God as He is. Thus, Abraham's obedience was a calculated and well reasoned obedience.

5. The Demand Was Unique and Unrepeatable. God's demand for Isaac's sacrifice was both unprecedented and final in the history of man. God never before demanded such sacrifice and has never ever demanded it again. It was uniquely Abrahamic because of the nature of the promise, the symbolic figure of Isaac, the nature of Abrahamic faith, and the confirmation of a future history that was unique in itself through the promise of God as God said after this "By Myself I have

sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:16-18, NKJV). The sacrifice of Isaac, consequentially, possessed a symbolic meaning of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Isaac's return as if from the dead was the sowing of the seed for a greater harvest of many nations being blessed in him. Similarly, Jesus who was born in this genealogical line died as wheat falling to the ground to bring about a new race of God's sons from different nations of the earth. In Isaac was the Messianic line sanctified through this Abrahamic act of consecration through faith. God never wanted Isaac's sacrifice. He only wanted Abraham's consecration. Since the Messianic line was consecrated in Isaac, his sacrifice was also final with regard to its nature, i.e. as confirmation or finalization of the promised Messianic line in him. Years later, Christ would be sacrificed as a propitiation for the sins of the world by a voluntary and substitutory sacrifice. While Isaac's sacrifice was final in the sense of the consecration of the Messianic line; Christ's sacrifice was final with regard to the propitiation of sins and the consecration of a new race of believers for God. Therefore, we are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18).

Thus, we understand that Abraham's obedience was governed by several factors. First of all, he had a historical experience of God and therefore understood this divine demand from such historical perspective. Secondly, we saw that the demand was personal and specially related to him and his situation. Thirdly, Abraham's faith was optimistically assured by His understanding of the nature and character of God and so he was bold in obedience. Fourthly, we saw that Abraham's obedience was rational as he calculated the possibilities of God and the factuality of God's faithfulness and righteousness regarding Isaac on the basis of faith. Finally, we saw that this particular demand of God was uniquely Abrahamic only. It is both unprecedented and never demanded again. Therefore, this sacrifice is sealed with Abraham. That means that it is impossible for God to demand anything like that again from anyone. But Abraham's act of obedience sets an example of unquestioning obedience before us. Indubitably, today we live in the age of the Bible. God's written Word is in our midst, and the truths of which it is witness are the objects of our belief. If anyone claims that he has had a special revelation of God to which he is being obedient while being openly disobedient to the already revealed and written Word of God, then we know that such person's claims are all false. For there can be no personal and particular demands on anyone who has not yet learnt to conform to the general and universal demands of God's Word. All liars, hypocrites, seducers, and cheats who falsely claim divine authority while themselves being twisters of Scriptures are faithless and unbelieving in spirit. One must beware of them. But if someone is obedient to God's Word then he will also know in a rationally significant manner what God wills him to do in particular times. To summarize the chapter, Abraham's faith teaches us to be confident, instant, optimistic, rational, and unquestioning in our obedience to God. The enemies of faith are doubt, evil desire, and division. Faith is established verbally by confession, practically by conduct, and objectively by communion. It has an eternal dimension being infinitely dissatisfied with the things of the world: consequently, it finds repose only in the infinite depths of God's love and faithfulness. This kind of faith raises one from the fringes of temporal satisfaction, instills in one responsibility, and frees one from the fear of the future. It also rests assuredly in and conforms to the designs and plans of God the Divine Architect. Finally, faith is not mere blind belief but is

historically grounded, personally oriented, rationally established, and existentially confident. Therefore, true faith inherits the promises of God as Abraham did.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. One only gets according to his faith.
2. Doubt, lust, and pride are enemies of faith.
3. A man of faith confesses God's Word and lives according to it.
4. A man of faith is not earthly minded; he looks to the glorious vision of God's heaven.

01.08. Chapter 7: Great Salvation

CHAPTER SEVEN

Great Salvation "By faith he forsook Egypt...seeing him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27). The story of Moses from Nile to the Jordan is covered by four books of the Pentateuch, viz. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Though Moses himself never entered the Promised Land, yet he led the children of Israel to its borders. The Scripture testified about him that he was "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3, NKJV). Obviously, Moses did not have a domineering or imposing personality, as some think it vital for leadership. Neither was he very articulate as he himself confessed to God saying "I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Nevertheless, God chose him to be the leader of the Exodus. It was by faith in God that he defied the overwhelming power of Egyptian magic and military supremacy; yet, he prevailed because God sent him and God was with him.

FAITH LEAVES A LEGACY The writer says that "by faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Hebrews 11:23). One can observe here that often it is the faith of others that adds into our lives. In this case, it was the faith of Moses' parents that prompted them to hide him from the king and by this they invested into Moses the results of their faith. This is the blessing of a godly family: its children are blessed because they enjoy the blessings of their parents' faith. Similarly, the congregation who has a pastor rich in faith partakes of the blessings of his faith. Certainly, our actions are not without their ramifications. The ramifications of faith are blessings from generation to generation but the ramifications of unbelief are disastrous. What we believe and do impacts not just our lives but also the lives of the generations to come. Therefore, a study of history must not be disentangled from a study of culture and philosophy (in other words, of people's belief-systems). Ideas shape history through religion and culture. This means that what one believes in has far-reaching consequences. In Moses' case, it not only meant the channeling of divine providence through his parents' faith-action but also the provision of a leader for the creation of Israel's history as a nation. Though it was Moses who led the people out of Egypt and gave them the law and a religious-system, it was his parents that first contributed to this history-making through their faith in God regarding Moses. Obviously, they also left a legacy of faith for him as can be seen later on by his refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and taking up the path of suffering by faith. Faith is influence and faith is legacy because faith doesn't keep silent: it acts out. The writer of Hebrews underscores three elements of the faith of Moses' parents: sight, courage, and action.

Faith as Aesthetic The writer says that Moses' parents saw him as being a beautiful baby. The word for "beautiful" is *asteios* (ἀστέιος) in the Greek and is used only twice in the New Testament (Acts 7:20 ; Hebrews 11:23): both of the times to describe Moses. The word "aesthetics", meaning the philosophical science of beauty, comes from this word. The Jews believed that Moses was a very handsome person; so handsome, said Josephus the historian,

that people would stop to gaze at him when he passed by. However, it is understandable that it was not as much the physical beauty of the child as much as it was the spiritual fairness of their conscience that prompted his parents from taking the risk of hiding him. Inevitably, Pharaoh's soldiers might also see Moses but would not spare him; not because they could not appreciate his physical beauty but because their vision differed from the vision of Moses' parents. Their way of looking was just different. The Egyptians looked on the children of Israel with contempt. They didn't consider them to be a special people at all. And therefore, prejudice prevented any optimistic vision in them. That is the reason why they made slaves of them. But, Moses was Amram's and Jochebed's own son: he was special to them; and he was beautiful not just because of his being good-looking but because he was God's gift to them. Most importantly, both of them realized that the child, being himself dependent on them as a babe, could only be saved by their risk of faith. This is the either/or condition of faith. Either give up or stand against the tide. Parents and leaders need to realize this fact that often the future of their children or followers depends on whether they are or not faithful in fulfilling to the end the care entrusted to them. Their faithfulness is their mark of faith or the ability to see beyond all natural limits. Moses' parents obviously saw Moses as not just their son but as a son of the Hebrews, as belonging to the flock of God. He was not just born to them but to the people of Israel, the people who worshipped Jehovah.

It is important for parents, teachers, pastors, and leaders to reconsider how we look at each other. The Bible shows us the aesthetic way of looking at each other. Aesthetic, not in the sense of physical beauty which fades with time, but in the sense of looking at each other as being special and uniquely designed by God for His glory. This aesthetic view is not just about how we look at others but also about how we look at ourselves. Obviously, when the Bible says that we must love our neighbor as ourselves, it also implies that we must first understand what it really means to love ourselves. For if we miss that we also miss the second, namely loving our neighbor or as the Good Samaritan's story tells us, being a loving neighbor to someone. Self-despising is a sinful as despising our neighbor. For if it is false to judge others wrongly then it is also false to judge oneself wrongly. Extending from here, we need to realize that despising anyone else is nothing but practice of a false faith. This immediately tells us that faith is not just related to what we think of God, but also what we think of ourselves and our fellowmen in relation to ourselves and God. Obviously, knowledge of God or relationship with God is not one-dimensional. Even as the Jewish mystic, Martin Buber, saw relationship as compounded in an I-It or I-Thou perspective, we understand that any understanding of God through faith also involves a second dimension; that is knowledge of ourselves in relation to Him. Therefore, the command to love one's neighbor as oneself is not separable from the command to love God; and the Word asserts that someone who fails to love his fellowmen cannot be considered to be loving God (1 John 4:20). Faith, therefore, has double implications. What we believe about God is also related to what we believe about ourselves and how we treat ourselves with respect to God and the world around us. It is in this sense that I think the biblical aesthetic view-point of valuing each other's life, rights, and person becomes pivotal for authentic Christian living.

Faith as Courageous The Bible tells us that Moses' parents were not afraid of the commandment of Pharaoh (Hebrews 11:23). The Greek word for "afraid" used here is phobeo (φοβέω) which means to be intensely terrified, so much that the fear grips at the whole being almost to the point of a paralysis. The word "phobia" comes from the same root word. Pharaoh had commanded the

people saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive" (Exodus 1:22, NKJV). The interesting thing is that eventually Moses was anyway cast into the river but, obviously, not to be killed! The fact to be observed here is that it was because of faith that Moses' parents were not terrified of a human decree. No doubt, the Egyptians considered the Pharaoh to be a God but he was still a human. This doesn't mean that believers are not required to submit to earthly authorities; for the Scripture clearly states "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Further, "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1-2). Notice the Bible doesn't tell us to be afraid of the authorities but to be afraid of God. In fact, it asks "Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same" (Romans 13:3). This also means that if rulers begin to be a terror to evil works (i.e. that they make evil laws and ask the citizens to comply), then citizens need not comply with them since the authority to make such evil laws doesn't come from God. One doesn't need to be afraid of such commandments. Obviously, it is the faith that relates to the goodness of God that prompts submission to anything that is good and true. Earthly fears cannot take hold of the man who only fears God.

True faith is not terrorized by this-worldly threats. Jesus said, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). It would have been ruthless if the parents of Moses would have let their son cast into the river just so that their lives would be protected. Even parental instinct doesn't permit this. We know of instances from the animal kingdom when the mother would do anything in order to protect its little ones. It is only false religion and evil ideology that sacrifices the children for personal advantages. That was the case with the religion of Molech in which children were burnt alive so that their god would be appeased. Falsehood eventually corrupts nature and turns humans in unnatural beings (Romans 1:26). However, truth guards the heart against all evil by placing one's self in the right perspective in relation to God and man. Therefore, true faith drives away all false fears and self-centered apprehensions. It guards the conscience against evil and purifies the heart with right affections. It was the faith of God that gave Amram and Jochebed the courage to do right despite of the pervasion of evil.

True faith is not terrified by the world. When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon challenged the God of heaven and threatened to burn Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with fire if they didn't bow to his golden image, they replied "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18, NKJV). Obviously, their faith was not utilitarianism here. It is not like believing in that which seemingly is profitable. That was the error of Eve. She thought the tree of knowledge was profitable and believed the words of Satan. But profit or loss has nothing to do with the faith that has grasped reality. Therefore, the three Hebrew children fearlessly answered that whether they were saved or it cost them their life they would not bow to false worship. It is this kind of faith that is resolutely committed to truth that pleases God; for it is written that God is seeking for those who worship Him in Spirit and truth.

Faith as Active

Faith is not just courageous in its stand and confession but is also bold to take the initial step of action that pleases God. There is no doubt about faith being an antonym of fear. Peter walked by faith on water because he was bold enough to take his first step on it; but as soon as fear gripped his soul, he began to sink. Thus, faith, courage, and action are closely connected. The Scripture tells us that "by faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents" (Hebrews 11:23, NKJV). If his parents had just sat silent without doing anything, the story would have been quite different. But they acted out in faith. Evidently, as seen, faith without works is dead. The faith of Moses' parents was active.

Importantly, here, it says that it was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months. This tells us that acts of avoiding evil are not acts of unbelief but of faith when they are sagaciously done. There are many such instances in the Bible. For instance, Jesus tells His disciple to leave any city which as a whole refuses Christ's message and starts persecuting the messengers (Luke 9:5; cp. Acts 13:51). Jesus Himself avoided unnecessary falling into the enemy's traps (Matthew 4:12; Luke 4:30). Similarly, Paul escaped once through a basket when people were in wait for him, was prevented by the disciples from getting beaten by a crazy mob, and took measures to inform the authority of a group of Jewish fanatics who had vowed to not eat till they killed him (Acts 9:25; Acts 19:30; Acts 23:17-21). He also used his Roman citizenship as a privilege to prevent unnecessary torture, to appeal to the highest court of justice, i.e. to Caesar, and to get people understand that they cannot just by-pass laws to persecute the minority (Acts 16:35-40; Acts 22:25; Acts 25:11). Thus, it is obvious that the Bible desires Christians to be rational in their conduct of life, seeing that the Bible does allow the avoidance of persecution if it is possible. This also extends to avoiding any circumstance that is conducive to evil. Jesus taught His disciples to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13) and Paul tells us under divine inspiration to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). In other words, if we know that there are certain things that can lead us to evil, we must avoid them. For instance, a man who has quit smoking should avoid places and people that could be a temptation to him to relapse into that habit. Such avoidance is not sign of weakness but of the strength of faith. For instance, I strongly believe that if I touch a live electric wire with bare hands, I'm going to get a shock and so I'll avoid touching it. I'll avoid doing things that can harm me because I know and believe the truth regarding those things. Similarly, I brush my teeth to avoid tooth decay, keep myself and my surroundings clean to be healthy, and take proper food to have strength. However, if God told me directly not to do these things I would not do them. But as long as such specific commands do not come, it is my duty to abide by the principles that keep this universe functioning properly. Faith doesn't overestimate things unnecessarily. It abides by the truth. If God had directly told Amram and Jochebed that they need not hide their child then they would have done it, but where such a thing was not revealed they had to do what was wisest to do. Any act of unnecessary presumption could only prove fatal to both the child and the parents.

Moses' parents saw with the eyes of faith, were bold in their stand, and were prompt to act by faith since they knew and believed that which was pleasing in God's sight. One may say that any parent would have done that; what has that to do with faith? The fact, as has been seen, is that faith does play a major role in determining whether the child needed to be saved or not, whether there was any value to his life above theirs. More importantly, it rejected the Egyptian claim of the Pharaoh

as divine. Since Pharaoh was not God and had not given life to anyone, he had no right to get innocent babies killed. By their disobedience to his evil commandment they rejected the falsehood of an evil law. But they were also wise and not presumptuous in their action; and their faith was justly rewarded too.

FAITH DESPISES EARTHLY GLORIES The writer goes on to say that "by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26). It is interesting here that the writer refers to Moses' commitment as a commitment to Christ. One might ask how that could be since Christ was hidden in the Old Testament. The answer is that though Christ was not yet revealed in the New Testament manner, it was He who was with the Old Testament saints in their spiritual journey. It is in this sense that Paul says about the Israelites that while in the wilderness "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). In other words, they were partakers of Christ. Similarly, Peter says that unto the prophets "the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11). Certainly, since salvation is only found in Christ, the Old Testament saints were saved and redeemed by the blood of Jesus the Lamb of God who was spiritually slain from the foundation of the world. This commitment to Christ is important because it demonstrates one's association with and belongedness to the Kingdom of Christ. Therefore, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He rejected the rights, privileges, and honor promised by the world for the true glory and destination that God had for him. In doing this, he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. Obviously, this information is not from the Old Testament but from Jewish tradition. However, the inspired Word inscribes here as a truth about this warrior of faith. Moses renounced the royal palace and chose to identify himself with the despised and rejected people of God. Paul testifies about Onesiphorus that he was not ashamed of his imprisonment but sought him and did whatever he could to serve him (2 Timothy 1:16-17). Jesus said that whoever confesses Him before men on earth, him will He confess before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). Jesus Himself left the riches and privileges of heaven in order to fulfill the will of His Father in heaven (Php 2:6-8); and when the devil came to Him with the temptation of easy bread, worldly reputation, and earthly riches He rejected them all. He endured the shame of the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). One who has seen the riches of Christ will have no respect for the pleasures of this world.

There are three things mentioned here about the reasons that guided Moses' step of faith: the fact that these pleasures were temporary, that the riches of Christ were greater, and that faith had its recompense.

Finality is the Measure

Moses knew that the pleasures of sin did have an end: they were not perpetual. This is the ability of faith to look beyond the entanglement of the present. Those who lack faith get entangled in the lusts of the flesh which gravitates so much inwardly that all distant perspective is lost. The present desire is so much magnified that it obscures everything else. But faith has an eagle's perspective. It sees beyond the present. It looks at the end of all things. There are two ways in which Moses'

final perspective can be understood.

1. The pleasures lacked an intrinsic reality. They were pleasures only superficially but, intrinsically speaking, they were void of the essence of true pleasure. These were pleasures of sin; firstly, because they thrived over the affliction of the Israelites; secondly, because they were part of the process that enslaved the people of God. In other words, they were devoid of the reality of God. They not only lacked divine approval but also divine glory. In fact, they were disconnected from the goodness with which God created this world. They fell short of the end or purpose of all things intended by God. Therefore, these pleasures were also false and empty in themselves. They could never give any ultimate or enduring satisfaction and therefore were not worth having at all.

2. The pleasures lacked a prospective reality. They were only for a season: momentary, ephemeral, transitory. At the end they only left a bigger vacuum. The intoxication of the lust now over, bitterness engulfs the soul demanding to fall back into a greater intoxication than this. The void only intensifies at the end. The pleasure of sin can never give final satisfaction; it only drags one deeper into the snare of wickedness and evil invention. It plunges one into a thicker darkness each time befogging the mind against all reality of God. Therefore, a man of sinful pleasures can neither appreciate nor desire the things of God.

Thus, Moses refused to partake of the pleasures of Egypt that thrived over the affliction of God's people. Instead of going for such pleasures he chose to share with the afflictions of his people.

Value Relates to Person, to Christ

Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. One might wonder how reproaches could be considered to be richer. But if you love someone then you would surely understand that suffering for that loved one is far better possession than everything contrarily put together. No doubt, true value is personal and not materialistic. That is the reason why the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). It replaces the value of person with the value of money (the Judas Iscariotic syndrome) and in doing that it also replaces the love of neighbor with the love of self-satisfaction. Therefore, it is the root of all evil. Moses knew what really had value in his life: it was his relationship with Christ. The treasures of Egypt would not remain his forever – death parts one with everything on earth – but his relationship with Christ would be permanent. But even more truly, true value rests in love on which relationships are founded. There cannot be any true love between persons and things, since it is not reciprocal. Love of things (like money) is nothing but self-centeredness. Love has to be between persons. But is there anyone more than God who could be the true object of our love? Obviously, not; therefore, Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

Faith Has Its Reward

Finally, it says that Moses was looking to the reward. He had the end in his mind all the time. It would be a ludicrous scene to see a runner running without his eyes focused on the goal. Moses knew where to look at when making even the smallest decisions of his life. He had a rightly fixed perspective. He looked at the reward. The Greek word for "reward" is *misthapodosia* (μισθαποδοσι■α) meaning "due wages" or "recompense". 1 Peter 1:10 tells us that the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls. Jesus said "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole

world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). The fact is that whatever the world can give will only remain with the world, but when one gives himself to Christ, he becomes an heir of God's eternal, incorruptible, and indestructible inheritance. But an eternal inheritance is not just what Moses was looking at. He was looking at Christ the Finality of all things. This was also what Paul looked at when he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Php 3:8). For the man of God there is no greater reward than Christ Himself. For the Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, there is no greater reward than her Bridegroom coming back to her. Looking back at Abraham, one might not be surprised about his unconditional obedience if one saw that he took God for what He said, that He would be his "exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1). Moses walked in this faith and got his reward.

FAITH HAS NO TURNING BACK The Scripture tells us that "by faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). This Moses who once was even hesitant to return back to Pharaoh and the children of Israel is now bold in faith and fearless of the wrath of the king. He knew the fact that the wrath of man does not work out the righteousness of God (James 1:20). It was good for nothing before God; it was absurd before Him. God despises the wrath of man; He casts down the proud but exalts the humble. Moses knew his God. The friend of a lion is not afraid of a fox. But God is the Sovereign Lord of all things. Therefore, the man of faith, as Moses was, had no respect for the wrath of Pharaoh. Moses had seen God and talked to Him face to face; he had seen the invisible one (Ex. 4); so what could man's fear mean to him anymore?

Faith Keeps Moving On

Moses forsook Egypt. Obviously, this is not talking about the first time he fled from Pharaoh's wrath. If the writer of Hebrews is following the chronological order (because it mentions the Passover in the next verse), then this most probably refers to Exodus 28:1-29:

Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!" So Moses said, "You have spoken well, I will never see your face again."

It may be right to say that this was the point where Moses abandoned Egypt never to return again. Pharaoh never got to see his face again, not because Moses was terrified by his threat but because God took over the final scene as if with a storm. Moses need not plead before Pharaoh anymore. His job before him was done. What he needed now was to move onward. The man who walks by the Spirit continues in the Spirit. But there can be times when someone starts in the Spirit and ends up in the flesh (Galatians 3:3). Whether it be in our conversations with others, services, or daily work, it is important to remember that we are not debtors to the flesh to live according to its passions (Romans 8:12) since we are already dead to it and are now slaves of a new Master who is Christ. Therefore, it's important to be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit and walk accordingly for when one refuses to stop where the Spirit tells to stop and keeps continuing in the flesh (this may even happen with preachers) then disaster is sure to strike; for where the fruit of the Spirit is absent, the works of the flesh come into play. Moses was sensitive to the Spirit of God; and, therefore, knew that it was time to prepare for the final things and abandon Egypt.

Faith Endures

Moses endured or was steadfast, as the Greek also indicates, meaning he was unshaken in his walk and determination. There are at least two things that can be understood about this:

1. Moses had self-control. He didn't respond to Pharaoh's threatening according to his flesh, but chose to listen to God and follow His instructions instead. In fact, Pharaoh's anger had nothing to disturb Moses since he was actually working for God. His concentration on God's word and submission to Him enabled him to not only be fearless in such situations but to keep his reactions under control.
2. Moses stood strong. Moses was not weakened by the threatening of Pharaoh. The world does try to threaten God's people and thus weaken them as Sennacherib tried to do to Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:9-19). But Hezekiah turned to God and saw His salvation. Moses was steadfast in faith before God because He knew God was in control and the words of man could not prevail against the power of God. Therefore, later on, when the Israelites are terrified by the sound and sight of Pharaoh's chariots rushing against them at the Red Sea, he proclaims aloud "Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13).
3. Moses had strong hope. Obviously, one can't endure without much hope. Moses' hope was not in human strength or wisdom. It was in God. The God who had been with him this far would not fail. He had not only encountered God in the burning bush but had also seen the wonders that His hands had worked before his enemies. Therefore, his hope could not be moved. He was steadfast in it and continued with no retreats.

Faith has its Eyes on God

Moses endured, as seeing Him who is invisible (i.e. God). It was not just a whim of imagination; for he did see God with the eyes of faith. The God who is invisible is not inapprehensible. He is closer to us than our breath and He desires that we should "feel after Him and find Him" (Acts 17:27). It is only eyes of faith that can see God for He is discerned spiritually and not physically. Moses saw God and endured. Unless one can see one can't endure. One needs to see where one stands in relation to some point of reference to even know where he'll go from there. God was Moses' point of reference and His commands were his directions.

1. Seeing means knowing. Moses knew his God because he had seen Him. This implies that God had shown Himself to him since no man can see God by himself. One can't know God except by divine self-revelation. No amount of reasoning or mere sense-experiences can lead one to God. In fact, they can't lead one beyond the world. That is the reason why pure rationalism ends up in monism or idealism and pure empiricism ends up in naturalism or some kind of pantheism or polytheism. But Moses had God's revelation. He didn't blind himself against it but submitted to God's revelation and therefore was able to see the glory of God.
2. Seeing means focusing. Moses not only knew God but had his eyes fixed on Him, as we saw earlier. He didn't have any heroes or great men in view before him. He had no models. He just knew God. Of course, he was educated in the Egyptian learning and arts but they couldn't take the place of God in his life. God had given him a mission and that mission became his bread and drink. Other things didn't matter much to him anymore.

3. Seeing means anticipating. Moses' expectation was from God. He didn't try human methods and means at all. There are a host of man-made programs and devices today that people think are indispensable to ministry. Moses had no political connections, no negotiation charms, and no material means of influencing the world. His only strength and support was God. Therefore, he looked to God in anticipation to fulfill His work and will through him.

4. Seeing means waiting. Moses also waited as he looked towards God. He endured. He knew God had His proper time-table and way of working. He was not hasty. He waited till the ten plagues were over. A leader needs such patience very much. Everyone needs that. The farmer has to wait for the proper season for rain and harvest. The soldier has to wait and endure the training. Moses had to wait on God's timing. He could do that because God's word was always before his eyes. Therefore, he endured.

It was because of such openness to and commitment to God that Moses was able to move on steadfastly in the path chosen for him by God.

FAITH THAT DELIVERS

Finally, the writer says about Moses that "through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Hebrews 11:28). There is no doubt about the fact that this event significantly foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus the Lamb of God by which the sins of the world were remitted. Yet, if it were not for Moses' faith, the whole nation of Israel would have also fallen prey to the plague of the death of the firstborn. It is important to understand that leadership comes with greater responsibilities because it is possible for one leader to lead a whole nation either to God or to hell. One has many lessons from history to know how one leader could lead whole nations into great evils, but it is comforting to see that Moses was not disobedient to the divine command. He believed God and saw His salvation revealed for his people. The Passover and the Exodus The Passover was one of the most significant feasts of the Old Testament because it portrayed Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The feast is that it is a celebration of and not a ritual towards salvation. The most important thing about it was that it was celebrated the first time even before the Israelites were set free. That means that the feast was an event of faith. The stipulations about the Passover lamb were that it should be without blemish, a male of the first year, taken on the tenth day of the first month and kept until the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening (Exodus 14:3-6). It was, obviously, not known to Moses or the congregation then that this foreshadowed Jesus Christ. But we can see it now that it did. Jesus was, as this foreshadowed, crucified on the Passover day on the fourteenth day of the month called Abib or Nisan. He was the unblemished Lamb of God by whose sacrifice God has made forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life available for all those who believe. Every act of God's deliverance is related to the work of Christ. If the angel of death didn't touch the firstborn of Israel because they had the blood of the Lamb on their doorposts it was because, the blood foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. Moses' faith was not in the blood of the lamb as if it had some magical power in itself; it was on the plan of God's salvation. He sprinkled the blood and applied it to the doorposts because of God's infusing it with salvation-meaning. It was because of God that the blood obtained a salvific character. And, since the lamb was part of the plan as a shadow of Christ, the faith related to the Passover feast was reckoned for righteousness for those who believed. The writer tells us

that Moses kept the Passover by faith. The observance of the Passover involved the killing of the lamb, daubing the posts of the house with its blood, and eating of its meat roasted with fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; all the time bearing in mind to eat it while standing with clothes and shoes on, and a staff in hand, as if ready to go out (Ex. 12: 5-11). It was symbolic of the Exodus, the hurriedness that it depicted: roasted meat, unleavened bread, and traveler's suit on. It also was a departure with reminder of the bitter experiences they had had in Egypt (the bitter herbs); evidently, the Exodus can never be appreciated adequately without a remembrance the pain they had been undergoing while in bondage. Similarly, a believer can never appreciate well the salvation of God until he is able to see how miserable a life without divine deliverance would be. Moses' faith in keeping the Passover can be seen in the following ways:

1. His abandonment of a life of bondage. By observing the Passover, Moses made a definite break with not only his past, but also with the past of his people. The Passover was a threshold to a newness of life. It symbolized a departure from slavery to men and a returning to the service of God. The Passover completely severed the Israelites ties with Egypt; the yoke of bondage fell to the ground and Egypt had no power left in it to hold Israel in its clutches. It was an annunciation of and proclamation of the redemption of God by faith. The blood talked of death to the world; the unleavened bread talked about sincerity and truth and a newness of life. This breaking off with the old is reiterated by Paul when he asks the Corinthian believers to "purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). The old did pass away as the shadow of death passed from off their homes; the new had begun.

2. His acceptance of the divine means. Moses' observance of it demonstrated his acceptance of God's means of deliverance. The sacrifice of the lamb and other things would have looked weird to others but, though he might have not fully understood it yet, Moses scrupulously followed what God had commanded. He accepted the way chosen by God. The Bible says that the cross of Jesus Christ is foolishness to the philosophers (Greeks) and a stumbling block to the religious (Jews). The philosophers smile at it sarcastically and the religious scholars are offended by its simplicity (or perhaps its severity). However, to those who accept it, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24); for true power is that which can save endlessly and true wisdom is that which shows us the face of Truth. It is not a surprise that the Passover demolished the ancient wisdom and towering might of Egypt in just one night.

3. His activeness in fulfilling the divine command. Moses was prompt to observe the feast. As seen earlier, faith is not faith unless it acts; and the writer of Hebrews constantly emphasizes this fact throughout the chapter. The act of Moses, however, was not just personal. He was a leader and so his action required getting people to do what God had commanded. In fact, his action was meant not just for him but truly for the whole nation of Israel which God wanted to deliver out of the bondage of Egypt. That was the reason why he was sent to that land. While one might not be in the same position as Moses was still it is also true that each one of us is a leader in the sense that we do influence each other; and leadership is influence, as someone said. We are built into a nexus of relationships in a way that whatever we do has an impact on others in some way or the other. As was seen, the faith of Moses' parents did leave something for history: it left a legacy through Moses. Similarly, the Exodus is closely tied with Moses because he chose to obey God. It

is important to understand that our actions, no matter how great or how simple they are, have some impact in the scheme of things within our world. But it is the acts of faith that serve to shape the pages of divine history. The Sprinkling of the Blood The writer says that through faith Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. The sprinkling of the blood referred to the taking of the lamb's blood in a basin and sprinkling it upon the lintel and the two side posts of the door of the house with a bunch of hyssop dipped into the blood in the basin. The sprinkling of the blood testifies of many things; few of which are as follows:

1. Blood is the cost of faith. Faith did have a cost and that was the blood of the lamb. It cost the lamb's blood for the house to be protected from the scourge of death that ripped the back of Egypt that night. The lamb had to die for the faith to be active. This foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus. It was He who by His sacrifice made faith in Him possible and available for us. In the New Testament, this blood of sprinkling from the sacrifice of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, established the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:24) which is a covenant of grace and faith, not a covenant of works. The Old Covenant demanded obedience to the Law in order to be righteous. However, mercy is not absent from justice in the Old Testament and were recurrently see men and women justified not by the works of the Law but by faith. However, this only became possible for them because of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Now, since this faith cost the blood of the Lamb, who definitely was Christ (though symbolized by the Passover), it was equal to blood itself; which means that the one who puts faith in Christ and is bought by His blood no longer belongs to himself again – his life belongs to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20). Therefore, self-denial and spiritual crucifixion is mandatory for discipleship (Mark 8:34); because until faith equates the cost, its validity is null. A true disciple, consequently, is a sold property – he belongs to Christ; therefore, his life rests in the hands of his Master.

2. Blood is the sign of faith. The blood had to be daubed on the lintel and posts of the house as sign of the lamb that was slain for the house. It demonstrated the fact that the house belonged to the believers of Jehovah; so that when the angel walked through the land inflicting death to the Egyptians it passed over the house that bore the blood of the lamb. Similarly, it is only by the application of the blood of Jesus over our lives by faith that we are saved from eternal death and the judgment to come. The blood was to be sprinkled with a hyssop which spoke about the purity of the blood and of the fact that salvation is not by any human agency; there were no works of the hands attached to it. It was applied by faith through the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Thus, it was by the application of faith that was procured through the sacrifice of the Passover that deliverance and redemption became possible for the Israelites. Moses did lead the people out of Egypt, but he could only do that because of God's mighty arm and His grace over them. God's grace was revealed through His acts and the Israelites basked in it through their faith. The Exodus was one of the most important events in the experience of the people of God. It depicted the defeat of human wisdom, power, spirituality, and social system. It showed the bankruptcy of the gods of Egypt, the futility of its wisdom, and the paleness of its strength. However, it had great demands over Israel which failed to fulfill them on its wilderness journey. The redemption was obtained at a very great cost. It, first of all, cost the Egyptians their firstborn and also their possessions; then it cost the blood of a lamb for salvation from the judgment and redemption from

out of the land. This not only indebted the Israelites to God but made Him their legal owner since He bought them at a great price, and the payment was symbolized by the sanctification of the firstborn for the Lord; later exchanged for the tribe of Levi. They belonged to Him. Therefore, the commandment came to Moses saying: And it will be, when Jehovah shall bring you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to Jehovah every one that opens the womb ... all the first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. And it shall be when your sons asks you in time to come, saying, What is this? you shall say to him, Jehovah brought us out of Egypt by the strength of His hand, from the house of bondage. And it happened when Pharaoh hardened himself against sending us, Jehovah killed all the first-born of the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man, and the first-born of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to Jehovah all that opens the womb, that are males. But all the first-born of my sons I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon your hand, and for frontlets between your eyes. For Jehovah brought us out from Egypt by strength of His hand (Exodus 13:11-16, MKJV).

One can immediately see here that the blood of a mere animal or a lamb could not have equated the blood of all the firstborn of Egypt. However, it symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus who cancelled eternal judgment for us by giving Himself up in our place. Therefore, those who come by faith to Him do not any longer belong to themselves but belong to God. The Exodus not only sanctified the people of Israel for God but also established them as a testimony of His truth, grace, and power. It disqualified Egyptian spirituality as false, reached out to the people by grace, and brought them out with a powerful arm. Israel had to be a beacon of truth, grace, and power to the world. Instead, it succumbed to the falsehood of idolatry, craving of the flesh, and fear of the Canaanites; which only led to more pain than joy. God desires His people to walk in truth, love, and fearlessness. Often times, this does become difficult since we are surrounded by the contrary things all the time. However, His blessings never fail to those who adhere to Him in love and obedience through faith. In fact, they have an impact that reverberates through history. Men may come and men may go, empires rise and empires fall, words are written and words erased, thoughts arise and thoughts forgotten, but they who walk by faith and know their God go on forever: the gates of time can't close on them, the whip of darkness recoils away from them, the jaws of death tremble at their sight; this is the saga of the heroes of faith, who belong not to themselves but to the one who rules over their body, soul, and mind, who live not by sight but by faith, who care not for their lives as much as they care for God, who see the invisible, walk in truth, and run with power; "the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits" (Daniel 11:32, NKJV).

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. People of faith leave indelible marks on history.
2. A man of faith fears no man.
3. A man of faith doesn't hold on to earthly glories or riches.
4. God rewards faith in the present and will in the age to come.
5. Faith never shrinks back due to doubt or fear; it always keeps moving on.
6. Faith relies on God and not on circumstances.

01.09. Conclusion

Conclusion The journey of faith is marked by transitions of faith-scenes. Each choice of faith is a step forward. Voices and choices fill the avenues of this walk: faith chooses the voice of truth. The light of faith may flicker in the night winds of darkness, but it refuses to blow off; for it is made up of that which is invincible – the eternal Word of God. The faith that is made up of human words dies a mortal death, but the faith flamed by God's own heart will never die. His Word is His heart revealed to us. Therefore, there is nothing so personal about God than His revelation on this earth. His Word may be stern or it may be soft, it may be sweet or may taste bitter; yet, it is His Word that comes from His heart. Therefore, he who has set his heart on the Word of God has set his heart on God. He shall never fail.

Faith is final as the Word is final. It is the evidence. It is beginning and end of all evidences. He who can't recognize the truth of God when he sees it is blind; no amount of evidence will ever convince him. But he whose eyes have been opened sees the light and rejoices in the salvation of God. His Word is self-evidencing and self-disclosing. No man can either close it or disclose it. No knowledge can either prove it or disprove it; for it speaks directly to the spirit of man and commands his obedience. If one can't believe God one can believe in nothing else. The heroes of faith were not just heroes unto themselves: they were those who combined faith with the Word of God to shape divine history. History is divided into two opposite worlds: the world of faith and the world of rebellion. Evil rules over the world of rebellion and it doesn't know God: its history ends in condemnation and judgment. The world of faith is ruled by the scepter of His Word: it shall abide forever. The world of rebellion ridicules the world of faith; the flesh strives against the Spirit; but truth and light are in the city of God while darkness reigns with curdling chaos in the hearts of unbelievers. By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain, and obtained the witness that he was righteous; for Abel believed God for who He was and gave to Him the best of all. But Cain brought the common things to God and was not careful to sanctify Him (or recognize His ultimate distinction) through proper worship. A worship that doesn't sanctify God is abominable before Him; it is idolatry and sin; for God cannot be compared with anyone. Therefore, the Word commands: "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chronicles 16:29). The walk that pleases God is the walk of faith. The Scripture says that Enoch obtained the testimony that he pleased God before he was taken away. Is our life something that pleases God or something that seems to be a burden to Him? Does He rejoice over us or is He hurt by our ways? One can't please God unless one approaches Him in sincerity and truth; one can't approach Him unless one seeks Him; and one can't seek Him unless one believes that He exists and is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. "Seek the LORD, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:6) says the Word. Enoch sought God and obtained a life that is immortal. He never died. The flood of God's judgment covered the face of the earth with waters; it destroyed everything that had breath in it because the world had corrupted itself with selfishness, pride, and presumption. Unbelief only brings condemnation. But faith has a saving nature. It saved Noah and his family; for by faith he was declared to be righteous and he

also condemned the world by his obedience to God. His faith allowed no excuse to the ungodly. It exposed their falsity, condemned their rebellion, and demolished their pride; but it saved those who obeyed. In his time, Abraham saw human religion at its great heights. The giant Ziggurat at Ur, the temple of Nina, and the curious arts of astrology and witchcraft captivated human hearts. Money flowed in from trade to this commercial city and it had a strong political influence as well. But God took him out of it and called him to be a nation. Abraham never disobeyed God. He was always prompt at His Word. He obtained the heavenly vision and moved out without knowing where he was going. In fact, he did reach the land of Palestine promised to him but never saw it becoming his in his lifetime. He lived in tents along with his people and family there. He never had a building of his own (except, of course, the tomb that he bought for his wife). Yet, he believed God and drank in every Word that He said; and God imputed it to him as righteousness. Therefore, he is called a friend of God and the father of all believers. The Word tells us that his vision was not limited to this earth; he looked to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Abraham and Sarah believed God for His promises and God blessed them with Isaac in their old age. He believed in hope against hope and she received strength because she counted on God's faithfulness.

Moses' parents never knew what plans God had for their child but by faith they protected him because they saw that he was a proper child. We never know what plans God has for our children; but the eyes of faith recognizes how precious they are in the sight of God and treats them with honor, nurtures them with grace, and brings them up in the fear of the Lord; for faith leaves a legacy through its posterity. Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he learnt faith at home. He chose to suffer for Christ rather than enjoy the transient pleasures of sin. Anything separated from God is sin, for nothing can be holy apart from God. He looked to the treasures that are hid in Christ. By faith he forsook Egypt and was not afraid of Pharaoh's wrath, for nothing less than God can terrify the man who trusts in God. So, he endured as one seeing the invisible One. He led his people in the observance of the Passover and saved them from the angel of death. The magicians and armies of Egypt fell asunder before the might of Jehovah as this man of faith spoke on God's behalf. A nation was redeemed, a promise fulfilled, and history was made when Egypt shook off Israel from its clutches after being scourged by God. The story of the heroes of faith doesn't end here. The writer goes on to speak of the Israelites, of Rahab, of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets: "who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Hebrews 11:33-37, NKJV). Perhaps, these latter descriptions might not look heroic but the heroes of faith are not heroes because they look successful in human eyes; they are heroes because they triumph in faith and endure to the end: their faith is not broken by any power of man or the enemy. And what does this all encourage us to? Obviously, to be unshaken in our faith in God no matter how hard the rough winds of the world blow against us: the

house built upon the rock shall stand. The writer of Hebrews calls these heroes or warriors of faith as "a cloud of witnesses" that surrounds us. The scene painted here is that of a stadium; however, the runners (which are the believers) are not just surrounded by mere spectators: they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (martus) who inspire and challenge them to move forward towards the goal. Faith not only saves the one who believes; it also inspires, impacts, and influences others.

Pages can be filled with stories, messages, illustrations, and testimonies of faith. However, it is more blessed to live it than to merely talk about or even just listen about faith. Faith without truth and faith without action, both are futile. One must believe in the truth. There are some who just try to believe in faith (idolizing it) and preach a gospel of optimism about self-invented dreams and visions. However, faith is not at all about them. It is related to the truth of God's revelation. A mountain of faith in something God has not revealed cannot move a mustard seed; but a mustard seed of faith in something God has spoken can move a mountain. Thus, faith, truth, and action are related. Faith also works by love, for God is love and He who conforms to the Word of His heart will inevitably conform to His heart. This also means that faith is spiritual as the Word clearly implies when it states that the things of God are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14) and that we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Therefore, it is also mentioned as both the gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This remarkably differs from the imaginations and presuppositions of the human heart. It comes from God as a gift with the Word of the Spirit that He gives to us; and so, it has fruits unto everlasting life. Faith is that which defines our identity and relationship with God. To sum it all up in the words of the writer of Hebrews itself: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV). The heart of faith has no presumption, It simply trusts His Word.

It stands secure, and in His Promise Finds eternal worth. The eyes of faith will never tire, Though deeper gets the night;

They hope ignited by the fire Of God's Eternal Light. The dreams of faith are dreams of glory; Not earthly name or fame. A child may write another history, If he's of God ne'er ashamed.

Faith will worship God forever; For faith alone, in truth, sees Him.

Faith is an unceasing river Of praise and worship to the King.

Faith listens and faith obeys, Faith moves on and never stays, Faith is strong and faith grows stronger And never falters in His ways.

Faith offers its all to God Not a thing to itself left; For faith's true rest and meaning Are in the bosom of His chest.

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02.01I. Introduction

INTRODUCTION The Meaning of Theology

Theology is a study of Christian doctrine and faith. The Queen of sciences, Theology is an attempt towards a systematic exposition of and presentation of Christian doctrine. The Need of Theology

For a clear understanding of faith

As a rational and articulate defense of faith (1 Peter 3:15)

For a systematic presentation of God's revealed truths (2 Timothy 2:15)

As a guard against heresy and false teachings (Matthew 22:29; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 4:2-4)

For spiritual growth and maturity as Christians (Ephesians 4:14).

Divisions of Theology

Biblical (Exegetical) Theology: Often studied as Old Testament Theology and New Testament Theology based on an exegesis of the Bible.

Historical Theology: Study of the origin and development of theological perspectives in the context of their historical background.

Systematic Theology: Systems of theology or systematic arrangement of an presentation of doctrines.

Practical Theology: Application of Theology. Disciplines: Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, Christian Education, Worship (Liturgies), Evangelism, Church Polity (Forms of Church Organization and Government).

Different Theologies

1. Roman Catholic Theology – Authority of the Bible (includes Apocrypha) and the Pope's authoritative pronouncements *ex cathedra* (from the chair); saving grace communicated through the 7 sacraments; and Mary is merciful mediator between man and Christ.
2. Lutheran Theology – The 3 fundamental doctrines are *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), and *sola fide* (faith alone). Scripture alone is authoritative and salvation comes only by grace through faith. The Spirit uses an infant baptism to produce faith in them and bring them to salvation.
3. Reformed Theology - built around the central theme of the sovereignty of God. *Sola scriptura*, the sole authority of Scripture in matters of doctrine. Total depravity of all men, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of saints.

4. Arminian Theology – tries to preserve justice (fairness) of God. God's sovereignty along with human responsibility and freedom. Conditional election (predestination on basis of foreknowledge).
5. Wesleyan Theology – is essentially Arminian but has a stronger sense of the reality of sin and of dependence on divine grace. The ultimate standard for faith and practice is the Bible. Four means by which truth is mediated: Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Salvation is a 3-step process of grace: prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace keeps one from straying very far, and enables one to respond to the gospel. Justifying grace produces salvation in those who respond positively. Entire sanctification or perfection in love is the Holy Spirit's second work of grace.
6. Liberal Theology – Immanency of God. Unitarianism. Fallibility of Bible. Denial of Fall, original sin, and substitutionary nature of the Atonement. Christ will not personally return.
7. Existential Theology – 'Demythologizing' of Scripture – interprets everything supernatural as mythical. A statement about God is basically a statement about man. The Trinity is a myth. The historical Jesus is not very much known. Salvation is self-realization.
8. Neo-orthodox Theology – Hermeneutical. God cannot be known through proofs but only through encounter in revelation. Natural revelation, if it exists, is ineffective towards salvation. Revelation is personal not propositional. The Bible is human and fallible and is reliable only to the extent that God reveals himself through encounters with Scripture. Historicity of Scripture is unimportant.
9. Liberation Theology – Theology is not dogmatic but liberative. God is immanent and mutable, the God of the oppressed. Jesus was a messiah of political involvement. The Bible is not concerned with eternal truths but with specific history (often unreliable). The Exodus account proclaims liberation. Salvation is social change.
10. Feminist Theology – 3 Models: Rejectionists – reject Bible as patriarchal; Evangelical – The Bible teaches mutual submission and roles of women and men are complementary; Reformist (Liberation) – Discards Bible and Christian tradition as patriarchal and desires to overcome it through 'proper' exegesis.
11. Pentecostal Theology – Emphasis on the infallibility and finality of Scripture, salvation by grace, the baptism of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues, restoration of the five-fold ministry in the Church, the gifts of the Spirit, baptism by immersion, holiness, prayer and fasting, evangelism of the world, spiritual warfare, and return of Christ.

02.02. Bibliology (Bible)

BIBLIOLOGY (BIBLE)

I. Revelation Strong: {ἀποκαλύψις} 1)a laying bare, making naked 2)a disclosure of truth, instruction 2a)concerning things before unknown

2b)used of events by which things or states or persons hitherto withdrawn from view are made visible to all 3)manifestation, appearance (Strong)

General Revelation: Psalms 19:1-3; Acts 14:15-17; Romans 1:18-20.

Special Revelation: Concerned with the redemptive plan of God. Special revelation is both personal and propositional.

Bible: The Written Word. All historical information (genealogies, covenants, law, events), literature (prose, poetry), prophecy, exposition (e.g, epistles) connected with and necessary for the complete understanding of the redemptive plan of God that He desires and intends us to have.

Visions, Dreams, Prophetic Word. Must accord with the Written Word (Galatians 1:8-9).

The Lord Jesus Christ: The Finality of the Revelation of God (Hebrews 1:2-3)

Illumination: The Holy Spirit's revelation of the rhema to the human spirit, whereby man comes to an understanding of the Truth and responds to it through the help of the Holy Spirit's gift of faith. The subjective aspect of Revelation. This illumination accords with the totality of the Written Word and the Finality of Revelation in Christ (John 14:26; John 16:15). Necessary (1 Corinthians 2:11).

II. The Purpose of Writing (Woodrow Kroll)

Precision: The Bible records the exact words in which God wanted to communicate with us.

Propagation: The written word spreads the message.

Preservation: The words are preserved in writing.

III. The Reliability of Bible

Historical Veracity

Prophetic Accuracy

TeChristual Authenticity

Pragmatic – It works when put to practice.

Scientific Accuracy

Philosophical Consistency.

IV. Inspiration Theories of Inspiration

1. Mechanical or Dictation: The biblical author is a passive instrument in the transmission of the revelation of God. His personality is set aside to prevent its fallible intrusion.
2. Partial Inspiration: Only doctrines unknowable to the human authors are inspired. God revealed ideas which the writers penned in their own words.
3. Degrees of Inspiration: Certain portions of Bible are more or differently inspired than other portions.
4. Intuition or Natural Inspiration: Gifted individuals with exceptional insight were chosen by God to write the Bible. Inspiration is like an artistic ability or a natural endowment.
5. Illumination or Mystical Inspiration: Human authors were enabled by God to write the Scriptures. The H.S. heightened their normal powers.
6. Verbal, Plenary Inspiration: Both divine and human elements are present in the production of Scripture. The entire text of Scripture, including the very words, are a product of the mind of God expressed in human terms and conditions.

2 Timothy 3:16 (Theopneustos): God-breathed

Neither mechanical nor dictational inspiration but organic; i.e., the personality of the writers was involved. The writers were Spirit-borne, led, moved (Phero) (2 Peter 1:21)

The inspiration is verbal; i.e., it extends to the words and not just the ideas.

The inspiration is plenary; i.e., full –"All scripture..." equally.

V. Infallibility: It is open to verification and falsification and is entirely perfect in its communication of the revealed Truth.

VI. Inerrancy: It contains no errors. Complete Inerrancy: The Bible is fully true in all it teaches or affirms. Other Views: Limited Inerrancy: Inerrant in salvific doctrines; Teleological Inerrancy: Inerrant in accomplishing its purpose of reconciling man to God; Irrelevancy: The doctrine is irrelevant; the spirit or purpose of Bible should be considered.

VII. The Bible is eternal and complete.

VIII. Canon: Lit. measuring rod, rule. Canonicity, canonical, canonize. This word is derived from a Hebrew and Greek word denoting a reed or cane. Hence it means something straight, or something to keep straight; and hence also a rule, or something ruled or measured. It came to be applied to the Scriptures, to denote that they contained the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the standard of doctrine and duty. (Easton's Bible Dictionary).

5-fold Criteria: Authorship (Prophet, Apostle, Holy Man), Local Church Acceptance, Recognition by Church Fathers, Subject matter (Sound Doctrine), Personally edifying. The OT canon is accepted as accepted by Christ and the apostles. The NT canon is accepted on the basis of apostolic authorship and recognition of the same by Church Fathers.

During the 3rd Council of Carthage (AD. 397) 27 NT Books were declared canonical. St. Athanasius (AD 297-373) in his 39th Paschal letter (AD 367), listed the books of the NT as we know them.

VIII. Symbols of it used in the Bible

1. Sword (Hebrews 4:12) 2. Hammer (Jeremiah 23:29) 3. Seed (1 Peter 1:23) 4. Mirror (James 1:23-25) 5. Fire (Jeremiah 23:29; Jeremiah 20:9) 6. Lamp (Psalms 119:105) 7. Food (1 Peter 2:2) 8. Water (Ephesians 5:25-27) 9. Milk (1 Peter 2:2) 10. Meat (Hebrews 5:12) 11. Bread (Matthew 4:4) 12. Silver (Psalms 12:6)

IX. Other Names The Lord's Book (Isaiah 34:16); The Book of Truth (Daniel 10:21); Scriptures (John 10:35; Matthew 21:42); Holy Scriptures (Romans 1:2); Sacred Books (Daniel 9:2; Hebrews 10:7); The Oracles of God (Romans 3:2); The Word of God (Hebrews 4:12); The Living Oracles of God (Acts 7:38).

X. The Bible Influences our: Thinking, Living, Values, Destiny.

XI. The Bible has Authority over: Human Wisdom, The Church, Our Experience, The Christian.

Reliability

'As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their colour, sweet and bitter of their taste.' (John Calvin, Institutes)

02.03. Theology Proper (God)

THEOLOGY PROPER (GOD) I. The Existence of God

Arguments: From cause-effect (cosmological argument), from design-designer (teleological argument).

II. The Nature of God

Westminster Catechism: "God is Spirit, Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

III. Attributes of God a. God's Inner Nature (Unrelated Attributes)

(i) Spirit (John 4:24) (ii) Infinite – Immense in relation to space (1 Kings 8:27), Eternal in relation to time (Exodus 15:18; Deuteronomy 33:27) (iii) One (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 4:35, Deuteronomy 4:39; 1 Samuel 2:2; 1 Timothy 1:17) b. God in Relation to the Universe (Active Attributes) – (i) Omnipotent (Genesis 1:1; Genesis 17:1; Job 40:2; Amos 4:13; Matthew 19:26) (ii) Omnipresent (Genesis 28:15-16; Psalms 139:7-10) (iii) Omniscient (Genesis 18:18-19); 2 Kings 8:10-13; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Romans 8:27-29; 1 Peter 1:2) (iv) Wise (Psalms 104:24; Proverbs 3:19; Jeremiah 10:12; Daniel 2:20-21; Colossians 2:2-3) (v) Sovereign (Daniel 4:35; Matthew 20:15; Romans 9:21) c. God in Relation to Moral Creatures (Moral Attributes) (i) Holy (Exodus 15:11; Leviticus 11:44-45; Revelation 4:8) (ii) Righteous (Ezra 9:15; Psalms 116:5; Revelation 16:15) (iii) Faithful (Exodus 34:6; Micah 7:20; 2 Timothy 2:13; Revelation 15:3) (iv) Merciful (Titus 3:5; Psalms 32:5) (v) Love (Deuteronomy 7:8; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10) (vi) Good (Psalms 25:8; Psalms 85:5; Acts 14:17)

02.04. Trinity

TRINITY I. Essential Elements of Trinity 1. God is One.

2. Each of the persons of within the Godhead is Deity.
3. The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictions.
4. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal.
5. Each of the persons of God is of the same essence and is not inferior or superior to the others in essence.
6. The Trinity is a mystery which we will never be able to understand fully.

II. Natural Illustrations $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ (Nathan Wood) 1. Length x Breadth x Height = Space 2. Energy x Motion x Phenomenon = Matter 3. Future x Present x Past = Time 4. Space x Matter x Time = Universe 5. Nature x Person x Personality = Man III. Philosophical Rationality of Trinity

1. Provides the rational-eternal basis for moral categories - If God was not a Trinity, then categories such as love, joy, and goodness couldn't be absolute.
2. Provides the rational-empirical basis for epistemic categories - if God was not a Trinity, then the knowledge as a subject-object relationship, as analytic-synthetic distinction, and Truth as such couldn't find an original ground.
3. Provides the relational basis for interpersonal relationships. Therefore, Christ could pray regarding His disciples, "that they may be one, as We are" (John 17:11).
4. Provides the metaphysical ground for a pluralist reality, and unity in diversity of the uni-verse.

III. Scriptural Proofs

Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalms 2:7; Hebrews 1:13; Psalms 68:18; Isaiah 6:1-3; Isaiah 9:6; Genesis 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; John 1:17; Php 2:11; Matthew 3:16-17; Acts 5:3-4

IV. False Views of Trinity 1. Unitarianism – Father is creator, Son is creature, Spirit is impersonal.

2. Sabellianism – (Modalism) Father (OT), Son (NT), Spirit (Present).

3. Tritheism – Father, Son, and H.S. are three distinct gods.

02.05. Christology (Jesus Christ)

CHRISTOLOGY (JESUS CHRIST) I. Nature The Son of God – Deity The Word – Preexistence & Activity Lord - Sovereignty The Son of Man – Humanity The Christ – Official Title and Mission Son of David – Royal Lineage II. Offices Prophet – Mark 6:15; John 4:19; John 6:14; John 9:17 Priest – Hebrews 2:14-16; Hebrews 8:3; Ephesians 1:6 King – Genesis 14:18-19; Hebrews 7:1-3; Psalms 110:1-4; Zechariah 6:13 III. Work Matthew 1:21; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 IV. The 2nd Person Co-Eternal, Co-Substantial, Co-Equal With Each Of The Person Of Trinity (Nicea 345 AD) Christ's Two Natures: Unmixed, Unchanged, Undivided, Inseparable. (Chalcedon 451 AD) V. Christological Heresies (in bold, acceptable) 1. Ebionism – Denied deity and pre-existence of Christ.

2. Docetism – Denied His humanity; affirmed His deity; Jesus appeared human but was really divine.

3. Arianism – Denied deity; Christ was the first and highest created being homoiousia, not homoousia. He is subordinate to the Father.

4. Appollinarianism – Denied human spirit of Jesus. The divine Logos took the place of the human mind. Affirmed Christ's deity and real humanness (not complete humanness).

5. Nestorianism – Denied union of natures, the unity of Christ's person. The union was moral, not organic-thus two persons. The human was completely controlled by the divine. Distinguished human Jesus, who died, from Divine Son, who cannot die.

6. Eutychianism – Denied distinction of natures; monophysitist; the human nature was swallowed by the divine to create a new third nature. Maintained the unity of Christ's person.

VI. Kenosis – Php 2:7: Lit. to empty oneself, KJV: 'made himself of no reputation,' i.e., to take the form of servant, of man. The kenotic Christ means that Christ being the Son of God chose to stoop down to live a life of a servant, and being tested and found obedient in all, is now exalted above all creatures as the One in whom the will of God is finally accomplished; He is the embodiment and finality of divine will; and, therefore, worthy of rulership and judgement. Christ lost neither the divine consciousness nor the divine attributes, neither did he withdraw from divine activity in the kenotic event.

Other Kenotic Theories 1. Christ emptied Himself of Divine Nature.

2. Christ emptied Himself of Eternal Form (which He exchanged for a temporal one).

3. Christ emptied Himself of relative attributes, namely omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

4. Christ emptied Himself of the integrity of infinite divine existence. The Logos became assumed dual consciousness at incarnation: the divine continued apart from the human, while the human was unaware of the cosmic functions of Deity.

5. Christ emptied Himself of divine activity by turning over all His duties to the Father.
6. Christ emptied Himself of the actual exercise of divine prerogatives. He retained His divine consciousness but renounced the conditions of infinity and its form.

Sub-Kenotic Theories 1. Christ emptied Himself of the use of divine attributes though possessing them. He chose not to use them.

2. Christ emptied Himself of the independent exercise of the divine attributes. He worked in submission to the Father.
3. Christ emptied Himself of the insignia of Majesty, the prerogatives of deity, the outward form of deity.

VII. The Person of Christ

1. Preincarnate – Pre-existence (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1; John 17:5). Participation in creation (Genesis 1:26; Proverbs 8:30; Colossians 1:15; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:6). Christophanies (Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38; Hosea 1:7; Genesis 22:1-24, Genesis 31:1-55; Exodus 3:2; Exodus 14:19; Numbers 22:22; Judges 6:1-40).
2. Divine Nature – Divine Attributes (eternal- John 1:1; John 8:58; John 17:5; omnipresent- Matthew 28:20; Ephesians 1:23; omniscient- John 16:30; John 21:17; omnipotent- John 5:19; immutable- Hebrews 1:12; Hebrews 13:8). Divine Offices (Creator- John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Sustainer- Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). Divine Prerogatives (forgives sin – Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:47; raises dead- John 5:25; John 11:25; executes judgement- John 5:22). Identified with OT YHWH - I AM (John 8:58; John 12:41; John 8:24; John 8:50-58). Divine Names (Alpha & Omega-Revelation 22:13; I AM – John 8:58; Immanuel- Matthew 1:22; Lord- Matthew 7:21; Son of God- John 10:36; God- John 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20). Divine Relations (Image of God- Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; One with Father- John 10:30). Accepts Divine Worship (Matthew 14:33; Matthew 28:9; John 20:28-29). Claims to be God (John 8:58; John 10:30; John 17:5 – in such case, He is either liar, lunatic, or the Lord that He claims to be, but never can be regarded as merely a good moral teacher).
3. Human Nature – Human Birth (Matthew 1:18; Matthew 2:11). Human Development (Luke 2:50-52). Essential Elements of Human Nature (Human body – Matthew 26:12; John 2:21; Reason & will – Matthew 26:38; Mark 2:8). Human Names (Jesus - Matthew 1:21; Son of Man- Matthew 8:20; Matthew 11:18; Son of Abraham- Matthew 1:1; Son of David- Matthew 1:1). Sinless Infirmities of Human Nature (weariness- John 4:6; hunger- Matthew 4:2; Matthew 21:18; thirst- John 19:28; temptation- Matthew 4:1-25; Hebrews 2:18). Repeatedly Called a Man (John 1:30; John 4:9; John 10:38).
4. Union of Natures – Theanthropic – The person of Christ is theanthropic; He has two natures, divine and human, in one person. Personal – Hypostatic union, constituting one personal substance: two natures but one person. Includes the Human and Divine Qualities and Acts – Both the human and divine qualities and acts may be ascribed to Christ under either of His natures. Constant Presence of Both Humanity and Divinity- His natures cannot be separated.

5. Character – Absolutely Holy (His human nature was created holy –Luke 1:35; He committed no sin – 1 Peter 2:22; He always pleased the Father- John 2:22). Possesses Genuine Love (Laid down His life – John 15:13; His love surpasses all knowledge- Ephesians 3:19). Truly Humble – Php 2:5-8. Meek- Matthew 11:29. Balanced – ‘He was grave without being melancholy. He was joyful without being frivolous.’ Prayerful – Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12). Incessant Worker – John 5:17; John 9:4). Stern (Matthew 16:33; Matthew 23:13-36). Wise (Matthew 22:19; John 2:24; John 7:1). Compassionate (Matthew 14:14; Matthew 15:32; Matthew 20:34).

VIII. Impeccability of Christ

Definitions: Peccability – Christ could sin; Impeccability – Christ could not sin. Questions: If Jesus could not sin, how could He be truly human? Vs. If Jesus could sin, how could He be truly divine?

Points of Agreement: Christ’s temptations were real (Hebrews 4:15); Christ experienced struggle (Matthew 26:36-46); Christ did not sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; James 5:6; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 Peter 3:18).

Conclusion – Impeccability : Temptation implies possibility of sin in general (humans) but not in specific (Christ). For instance, the testing of gold implies the possibility of things not being gold in general, but not the possibility of pure gold not being pure gold. The end of testing gold is to distinguish true gold from false gold. Thus, Christ’s not falling in sin proves He could not sin. Since, Jesus is God and sin is rebellion against God, Jesus could not sin, for it is impossible for Him to rebel against Himself, unless His omniscience and omnipotence were brought into question. Thus, being human, He was tempted, but being divine and undivided in His moral nature, He was essentially holy and so could not sin.

02.06. Pneumatology (Holy Spirit)

PNEUMATOLOGY (HOLY SPIRIT)

I. Nature

Names.

Spirit of God – Person, Executive of the Godhead Spirit of CHRIST. Romans 8:9 – Sent in Christ's Name (John 14:26; John 16:14; Matthew 18:20; Romans 8:9-10) Comforter – John 14:1-31, John 15:1-27, John 16:1-33, John 17:1-26 Holy Spirit of the Holy One. Sanctification Holy Spirit of the Promise – Luke 24:49; Ezekiel 36:27; Galatians 3:14 Spirit of Truth – John 14:17 Spirit of Glory – 1 Peter 4:14 Spirit of Grace – Hebrews 10:29 Spirit of Wisdom & Knowledge Isaiah 11:2 Spirit of Life – Romans 8:2; Revelation 11:11 Spirit of Adoption – Romans 8:13

Symbols Fire – Isaiah 4:4; Matthew 3:11 Wind – Ezekiel 37:7-10; John 3:8; Acts 2:2 Water – Ezekiel 17:6; John 3:5; John 4:14; John 7:38,39 Seal – Ephesians 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:19 Oil - Psalms 92:10; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20 Dove– Matthew 3:16-17;

II. Personality 3rd person of the Godhead – Matthew 3:16-17; John 14:16 Has knowledge – Isaiah 11:2; Romans 8:27 Has feeling – Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30 Has will – 1 Corinthians 12:11

III. Attributes 1.Is Divine (Acts 5:3-4) 2. Eternal (Hebrews 9:14) 3. Omnipresent (Psalms 139:7) 4. Omniscient (John 14:26; John 16:13)

IV. Works 1.Active in Creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Psalms 104:30).

2. Inspired the Bible Writers (2 Peter 1:21).

3. Empowered the conception of Christ (Luke 1:35).

4. Convicts of sin (John 16:8; Genesis 6:3).

5. Regenerates (John 3:5-6).

6. Counsels (John 14:16-17; John 16:7-14).

7. Brings assurance of salvation (Romans 8:15).

8. Teaches or enlightens (John 16:12-14; 1 Corinthians 2:13).

9. Aids in prayer (Romans 8:26-27).

10. Resurrected Christ (Romans 8:11; 1 Peter 3:18).

11. Calls to service (Acts 13:4).

12. Seals the elect's salvation (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30).

13. Indwells the believer (Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19).

14. Works in the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

V. Baptism in the Holy Spirit It's a promise of the Father (Acts 1:3).

It's a promise of Jesus (John 16:1-33).

Baptizer – Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:11) Initial Sign – Speaking in Tongues (Acts 2:1-47, Acts 10:1-48) Meaning – Anointing, Filling, Being immersed Results – Power, boldness, guidance, miracles, gifts of the Spirit Means – Faith (Galatians 3:14), Laying of Hands (Acts 8:1-40) Prerequisites – Salvation, Desire, Prayer, Expectancy, Water Baptism VI. Gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-31) Gifts of Power – Faith, Healing, Miracles Gifts of Knowledge – Word of Kn. W/Wisdom, Discern./spirits Gifts of Speech – Tongues, Interpretation, Prophecy VII. Fruit Of Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) VIII. Offences Against the Spirit 1.Resisting the Spirit (Acts 7:51) 2.Insulting the Spirit (Hebrews 10:29) 3.Blaspheming (Matthew 12:31-32) 4.Grieving (Ephesians 4:30-31) 5.Lying (Acts 5:3) 6.Quenching (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

02.07. Creation

CREATION I. Theories of Creation Evolutionism, Deism, Dualism, Non-Dualism, Polytheism, Pantheism, Materialism, Panentheism.

II. Origin of Creation 1. The Six Days of Creation (Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-25; Exodus 20:11)

False Views: Gap Theory, Progressive Creationism, & Theistic Evolutionism- None of them have support from traditional hermeneutical history nor explicit Biblical support (except recourse to jumble of words and out-of-context interpretations) nor authoritative support from scientific discoveries or theories.

2. Creatio ex nihilo – Creation out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3). The world, therefore, is basically nothing in itself and by itself.

3. Free Creation – God didn't create the world out of necessity, but of His own free and sovereign will.

4. Creation of Darkness – Darkness is not co-eternal with God and, therefore, a created reality (Isaiah 45:7).

5. Creation of Space-time- God is not contained by space, neither does He move in time; space and time are physical dimensions (conditions) of material objects and are part of creation. It is, therefore, false to conceptualize a spatio-temporal God. Creation of Time (Psalms 90:2 – 'or ever thou hadst formed {Hb. Chul- to rotate, spin} the earth and the world').

6. Creation of Life- biological (flora and fauna). Unconscious and world-conscious creation.

7. Creation of Humans- rational, moral, volitional, spiritual. Self-conscious and God-conscious.

III. Nature of Creation 1. Spatio-Temporality: Linear Time; Space & Time are physical dimensions.

2. Contingency: Dependent on God 3. Plurality

4. Finitude 5. Uniformity: The Laws Of Nature 6. Open – the universe is not a closed system but open, and so miracles are possible.

IV. Purpose of Creation (Three Views) 1. Anthro-centricity – Man is at the center of creation and all is for him, the view of humanism.

2. Eco-centricity – Life (flora & fauna) is at the center of creation and eco-balance is necessary for sustenance of earth as habitat of life.

3. Christo-centricity – Christ is the center of creation and all is by Him, through Him, and for Him (Colossians 1:16), 'that in all things He might have the pre-eminence' (Colossians 1:18), to bring all things under the headship of Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

V. Man's Relation to Creation 1. Man is to have dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26; Psalms 115:16).

2. Man is steward of God's creation (Genesis 2:5, Genesis 2:15).

3. After Fall, nature turned hostile to man (Genesis 3:18).

4. Man was to rule by fear and violence; the age of innocence had ceased (Genesis 9:2-3).

Non-biblical Relations 1. Pantheism – Man is equal to all creation.

2. Asceticism – Physical world is man's enemy.

3. Utilitarianism – Man exploits nature.

VI. Divine Providence – The doctrine that God has not only created the world but also sustains it.

1. God is the reason behind the uniformity of the laws of nature (Job 38:1-41).

2. God rules over the world and controls its processes by wisdom and power (Job 38:41; Exodus 3:20; Job 9:10; Psalms 77:14).

VII. Problem of Evil – Theodicy – If God is both powerful and good then why is there evil in the world?

Non-dualism – Evil is an illusion.

Pantheism – Evil is part of the world.

Dualism – Good and Evil and two eternal forces.

Evolutionism – Evil is part of the struggle for existence. The Biblical Answer – Evil is the result of Adam's disobedience, whereby sin and death entered the world, sicknesses and demonic forces ran rampant ravaging human lives. God's answer is Christ by whom evil is conquered and the Kingdom of righteousness inaugurated. This is done through the atonement, whereby men are saved, and finalized at the second coming when salvation will be complete and justice fully dealt.

02.08. Angelology (Angels)

ANGELOLOGY (ANGELS) I. Nature of Angels 1. Creatures (Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:8-9; Colossians 2:18) 2. Spirits (Hebrews 1:14) 3. Immortal (Luke 20:34-36) 4. Numerous (Daniel 7:10; Matthew 26:53; Luke 2:13; Hebrews 12:22) 5. Sexless (Luke 20:34-35) II. Classification (1 Peter 3:22; Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:20-21) 1. The Angel of the Lord (Exodus 23:20-23, Exodus 32:1-35, Exodus 34:1-35; Isaiah 63:9) 2. The Archangel: Michael (Jude 1:9, Revelation 12:7); Gabriel (Luke 1:19; Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21) 3. Elect Angels – Stood true during Satan’s rebellion (1 Timothy 5:21) 4. Angels of the Nations (Daniel 10:13, Daniel 10:20; Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 2:15) 5. Cherubim – Connected with God’s retributive (Genesis 3:24) and redemptive purposes (Exodus 25:22) F. Seraphim – ‘Burning Ones’ (Isaiah 6:1-13)

III. Character 1. Obedient (Psalms 103:20; Jude 1:6; 1 Peter 3:22) 2. Reverent (Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:6) 3. Wise (2 Samuel 14:17; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Peter 1:12) 4. Meek (2 Peter 2:11; Jude 1:9) 5. Mighty (Psalms 103:20) 6. Holy (Revelation 14:10)

IV. Work

1. God’s Agents – Executors of God’s decree of judgments (Genesis 3:24; Matthew 13:39-41, Matthew 13:49; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23) 2. God’s Messengers (angels) – (Luke 11:20; Matthew 1:20-21; Genesis 28:12; Revelation 1:1) 3. God’s Servants (Hebrews 1:14; Matthew 4:11; Genesis 16:7; Psalms 103:20) V. Classification 2 1. Ministering Spirits 2. Warring Angels 3. Worshipping Angels 4. Messenger Angels VI. Angelic Appearances (3 Theories)

1. Simulation - Angels appear in different forms during which they reproduce the very nature and functions of the form they take. Critique: This is impossible for it would imply the essential transformation of angelic nature and confusion in the order of creation. Proof: Angels never appear in reality as animals or as females.

2. Restriction – Angels appear in different forms only superficially; essentially, however, they are restricted to their own angelic nature. Critique: This view assumes that angels use deceptive methods in their ministry, which is false.

Against both the theories, the fact that God neither uses deception nor is in short of instruments (when God needed a fish, He used a fish and didn’t transform an angel into a fish) counts.

3. Negation – Angels do not assume different forms but appear as they are, though in different dimensions of glory (Judges 13:3-5). It is, then, safe to infer from this that angels look like humans. In fact, Jesus said that in the resurrection men would be like angels (Matthew 22:30).

02.09. Demonology (Demons)

DEMONOLOGY (Demons)

SATAN I. Origin (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19)

II. Character

Adversary (Satan), Slanderer (Devil), Destroyer (Apollyon), Serpent, Tempter, Prince and God of this world (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 John 5:19; 1 John 2:16); Father of lies (John 8:44); wicked one (Matthew 13:19)

III. Activities

A. Nature 1. Opposes God's work (1 Thessalonians 2:18; Matthew 13:19; 2 Corinthians 4:4) 2. Snares the wicked (Luke 22:3; Revelation 20:7-8) 3. Presumptuous (Matthew 4:4-5);

4. Proud (1 Timothy 3:6) 5. Powerful (Ephesians 2:2);

6. Malignant (Job 2:4) 7. Subtle (Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3) 8. Deceitful (Ephesians 6:11) 9. Fierce and Cruel (1 Peter 5:8) 10. Can cause physical illness (Job 2:7) B. Sphere – Highest Circles (Ephesians 2:2) C. Motives – Intent on our ruin (John 10:10) D. Limitations – Only with God's permission – Time Limited (Revelation 12:12) E. Destiny – (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41)

DEMONS Gr. Daimon, daimonion – fallen spirits

I. Description: angels who fell with Satan (Matthew 12:24), divided into two groups: one group is active in opposing God's people (Revelation 9:14; Revelation 16:14) and another is confined in prison (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6), intelligent (Mark 1:24), know their doom (Matthew 8:29), have their own doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

II. Pictures: Scavenger Birds (Revelation 18:1-2) – unclean and dirty; Frogs (Revelation 16:13-14) – living in dark regions; Locusts and Scorpions (Revelation 9:2-3, Revelation 9:7-10) – torturing men; Serpents and Vipers (Luke 3:7) – totally, morally depraved in character.

III. Activities: Seek to hinder God's plan (Daniel 10:10-14; Revelation 16:13-16); inflict illnesses (Matthew 9:33; Luke 13:11-16), possess animals (Mark 5:13), promote false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1); influence nations (Isaiah 14:1-32; Ezekiel 28:1-26; Daniel 10:13; Revelation 16:13-14); possess unbelievers (Matthew 9:32-33; Matthew 10:18; Mark 6:13).

IV. Limitations: Limited by place like unfallen angels (Matthew 17:18; Mark 9:25), are used by God for His purposes when He desires (1 Samuel 16:14; 2 Corinthians 12:7); may be expelled and return back to the one from who exorcized (Luke 11:24-26).

V. Destiny: Will be cast along with Satan into lake of fire forever (Matthew 25:41).

VI. Expelling Demons

1. As a believer, you have Christ-given authority to cast demons (Matthew 10:1,8; Mark 16:17). It is Christ's power, not yours. You're only safe in Christ.
2. Christ cast them out by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28).
3. Prayer, fasting and total submission to God is required (Mark 9:29; James 4:7).
4. Pray for the gift of discerning the spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10).
5. Do not talk with demons, as a general rule (Mark 1:24). They are deceivers.
6. Cast them out in the Name of Jesus (Acts 16:18).
7. Do not close your eyes when casting out demons: you are commanding, not praying; demons are sometimes seen to be physically violent (Matthew 17:15; Acts 19:15-16).
8. Do not allow the demon to weaken your faith in God, His Word, and the power of Christ's Holy Spirit.
9. In every deliverance session, there must be order and discipline among the servants of God; let one minister in authority while the rest back him/her in prayer.
10. All amulets, charms, fetishes, and occultic objects must be removed before any deliverance can take place. The possession of such things provide strongholds for demonic oppression. (Acts 19:19).
11. The delivered must be guided into confession, repentance, belief, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit to avoid serious consequences of demonic return (Matthew 12:44-45). A life of holiness and keeping in the will of God is imperative (1 John 5:18).

VII. Can Believers be Demon-Possessed?

1. No, for they are ruled by the Spirit of God.
2. Yes, if they fall from faith and favor with God (e.g., Saul, Judas Iscariot); which obviously means they have forsaken faith and are no longer believers. Some would choose to say that such forsakers (or apostates) were never true believers; either way, a believer is not demon-possessed. Forsaking faith refers to making a final, decisive, and willful rejection of Christ in a way that repentance is impossible (Hebrews 6:4-6).
3. Christians must guard themselves against demonic wisdom (James 3:13-16; Acts 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 4:1-5).
4. Christians must be sober-minded, watch and pray (1 Peter 5:8).
5. Christians must resist the devil being steadfast in faith (1 Peter 5:9; James 4:7) on the basis of the blood of Christ and the wielding of God's Word (Revelation 12:11; Matthew 4:4). Know that Jesus is with you (Matthew 28:20).
6. Watch your words, temper, actions, and relationships (Ephesians 4:26-27; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

7. Live a Spirit-filled life (Luke 4:1, Luke 4:14; Jude 1:20-23; Ephesians 6:10 ff).

02.10. Anthropology (Man)

ANTHROPOLOGY (MAN) I. Origin Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-25

II. Nature Body – 2 Corinthians 5:1; Daniel 7:15 Soul – Intellect, Will, Emotion Spirit – Numbers 16:22; Numbers 27:16 Intuition, Conscience, Communion III. Imago Dei Kinship with God

Moral Character

Reason Capacity for Immortality Dominion over the Earth At Fall the image of God in man has been marred but not erased (Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9). Man has not lost his freedom of will and power of reasoning. However, they have been severely depraved by sin. Therefore, without the work of the Holy Spirit no man can be saved. No man can climb uphill to God (Exodus 20:26). God, in Christ, and through the Spirit, meets man where he is and reconciles him to Himself (Romans 5:8; Galatians 5:16; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

IV. Original Sin Pelagianism – Man's soul is created by God at birth and so is free from hereditary corruption.

Arminianism – Man receives from Adam a corrupted nature but does not receive Adam's guilt. This nature is corrupted physically and intellectually, but not volitionally. Prevenient grace enables man to believe.

Calvinism – 2 Views: Federal Headship (creationist view of origin of the soul) – The individual receives the physical nature from parents. God creates each soul. Adam was representative of all humanity and thus, when he sinned all humanity sinned. Natural Headship (traducianist view of origin of soul-Augustine) – The individual receives the physical nature and the soul from the parents. Thus, all people were present in Adam in germinal or seminal form. Each individual participates in the sin of Adam. Thus, each individual inherits Adam's sin.

Conclusion: Humanity suffers death as physically (naturally) born of Adam (natural headship); Christians receive eternal life as a gift, by faith, being born, not physically but, spiritually (spiritual headship of Christ) (1 Corinthians 15:45-50; John 1:13; John 3:5-6; 1 Peter 1:23).

02.12. Atonement

ATONEMENT I.OT Origin of Sacrifice 1.Ordained in Heaven. Revelation 13:8; Exodus 12:3,6; 1 Peter 1:19,20; Titus 1:2; Acts 2:23 2.Instituted on Earth. Genesis 3:1-24; Revelation 5:6-10 Mosaic Sacrifices – Law OT Sacrifices good; NT Sacrifices CHRIST – Better (Hebrews 10:17,18) II.NT

Atonement 'to cover' (Heb. Kaphar; Gk. Katallage) – Exchange, reconciliation, ransom, substitute, covering. (Jeremiah 18:23; Isaiah 6:7; Psalms 32:1) Propitiation 'removal of wrath' Romans 3:25; removal of enmity, Expiation – removal of sins Substitution Isaiah 53:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24

Redemption 'buy back by payment, release from bondage by paying a price' (Matthew 20:28; Revelation 5:9; Revelation 14:3-4; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:5; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:28) Reconciliation 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21; removal of enmity

Efficacy 1.Pardon. John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; John 5:24; Hebrews 9:22-28 2. Freedom. Romans 6:14; Titus 3:5-7 3. Deliverance from Death. 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 11:26; Romans 8:10, Romans 8:27 4. Life Eternal. Titus 1:2; Romans 6:22 5. Victorious Life. Revelation 7:14; Galatians 2:20; Revelation 12:11

02.13. Soteriology (Salvation)

SOTERIOLOGY (SALVATION) I. Nature

3 Aspects 1. Justification – Courtroom scene – declaration as righteous.

2. Regeneration (inward experience) – Adoption (outward privilege) – Household scene 3. Sanctification – Temple scene (Luke 2:37).

Subjective and Objective Aspects

1. Objective Aspect – Provided by the atoning work of Christ – Justification, adoption

2. Subjective Aspect – The work of the Holy Spirit – Effectual calling, conversion, regeneration, sanctification. On the cross 'Christ procured for us salvation; the Holy Spirit produces in us salvation.' Watchman Nee II. Justification – Romans 4:25

1. Declared (not made) righteous – imputation of Christ's righteousness and restoration to God's favor (Romans 3:22; Romans 5:17; Romans 13:21) 2. Change in standing 3. Removal of penalty. Romans 4:7; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 8:1 4. Forgiveness of sins. Colossians 2:12-13 5. Ground – Blood (Death) of Christ. Romans 5:9; Romans 4:5; Romans 3:25.

6. Means – Faith. Romans 3:34-35 7. Spring – Grace. Romans 3:24 8. Proof – Resurrection. Romans 4:25 III. Regeneration – New Birth 1. New Creation – 1 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:3-7; Galatians 6:15; 1 Timothy 3:5 2. New & Divine Life – John 3:3-7; Ephesians 2:15; 1 John 5:24; Romans 6:24; James 1:8; Colossians 2:12-13 3. New Nature – 2 Peter 1:4; Mark 2:21-22; 1 John 2:9; Colossians 3:10 4. New & Divine Impulse – Acts 26:19-22 IV. Adoption (Huiiothesia – 'placing as son')

Blessings Family Name. 1 John 3:1; Ephesians 3:14-15 Family Likeness. Romans 8:29 Family Love. John 13:35 Family Spirit. Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:13 Family Service. John 14:23-24; John 15:8

We Receive Chastisement. Hebrews 12:5-11 Comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:4; Isaiah 66:13 Inheritance. Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 1:3-5

Privileges Child-like confidence. Galatians 4:5-11 Boldness, Access. Ephesians 3:12

Fellowship of the Brethren. Ephesians 2:19; Ephesians 3:6; Colossians 1:7; Colossians 2:25; Romans 16:7; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24 V. Sanctification. Holiness 'set apart'

Implications Separation from the world Dedication to God

Steps Positional. 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:14 Progressive. Galatians 4:19; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Peter 2:2; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:14-15; Galatians 3:3 Prospective. Perfect. 1 John 3:2

Other Views of Sanctification

1. Wesleyan: Sanctification as 2nd Work of Grace that is result of total surrender and faith in the Holy Spirit and means perfection in love.
2. Keswick: Sanctification is a distinctive experience that marks the point where the defeated Christian is transformed into a victorious Christian in a total surrender and consecration to God captured in the phrase 'Let Go and Let God.'
3. Reformed: Sanctification is growth in holiness through spiritual disciplines.
4. Chaferian: At the point of conversion, Christ is accepted as Savior and a natural man becomes a believer, though being a carnal man; at sanctification, the carnal man accepts Christ as Lord and becomes a spiritual man.

02.14. Ecclesiology (Church)

ECCLESIOLOGY (CHURCH)

I. Nature 1. Name – Ekklesia – an assembly of called out ones Kuriake – that which belongs to the Lord 2. Christns are called – brethren, believers, saints, elect, disciples, Christians, those of the Way (Acts 9:2) 3. Illustrations The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Corinthians 12:27) The Temple of God (1 Peter 2:5-6; Ephesians 2:21,22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17) The Bride of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7)

II. Founding

1. The Rock (Matthew 16:18) – The Confession of Jesus being the Son of the living God (His Being) and the Christ of God (His Work – Ministerial Title) 2. Ephesians 2:20 – Apostles & Prophets (Christ – The Corner/Cap Stone) III. Membership – By faith in Christ and obedience in Water Baptism IV. The Work of the Church 1. Evangelisation – Matthew 28:19-20 2. Edification – Ephesians 4:7-16 3. Exaltation – Worship – 1 Peter 2:5-10

V. Ordinances

1. Baptism

Mode: Immersion Formula: Matthew 28:19 Recipient: Believer (Mark 16:16) Efficiency: Public Acceptance Meaning: Pictures of Salvation, Experience of Death & Resurrection with Christ, Regeneration 2. Lord's Supper Commemoration of Christ's Death: New Covenant Looking Forward to His Coming

02.15. Eschatology (Last Things)

ESCHATOLOGY (LAST THINGS) I. Key Terms to the Second Coming of Christ Parousia – 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; lit. 'being by' 'presence'

Apocalypse – 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:13; lit. 'revelation'

Epiphany – 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13-14; lit. 'appearance'

II. Rapture: Pre-tribulation- Christ will come for His saints before the 7-year. trib. period; afterward He will come with His saints. The first stage is Rapture; the second, Revelation.

Other Views: Partial Rapture – only believers who are watching and waiting for the Lord will be raptured at various times before and during the 7-year. trib. Mid-tribulation – the church is raptured in the middle of the tribulation period, prior to the Great Tribulation. Post-tribulation – living believers are to be raptured at the second coming of Christ, which will occur at the end of the Tribulation.

Daniel's 70th Week is the Tribulation period of 7 years (Daniel 9:24-27)

Signs – Matthew 24:1-51 : Wars, False Teachers, Persecution, Apostasy, Callousness, Return of Jews, Restoration of land (Isaiah 35:1); Trees plantation (Ezekiel 36:30); Inhabiting desolate cities (Isaiah 54:3); Federation of Nations (Daniel 2:44).

III. Millenium: Dispensational Premillennialism – Christ's revelation (2nd phase of 2nd Coming) will be followed by a literal 1,000 years. of reign on earth during which time the Abrahamic covenant will be completely fulfilled in Israel (Genesis 12:1-3). Its outworking is seen in the Palestinian, Davidic, and new covenants. The church shares the blessings of the new covenant, but does not fulfill its promises (Galatians 3:16). Historic, Classical, and Nondispensational Premillennialism – The rapture will occur at Christ's second coming and will be followed by an earthly kingdom of Christ. Church goes through the future Tribulation. Millenium is both present and future. Christ is reigning in heaven. Millenium not necessarily 1,000 years. Postmillennialism – The kingdom of God is now extended through teaching, preaching, evangelization, and missionary activities. Tribulation is experienced now. The world is to be Christianized and followed by a long period of peace and prosperity called the Millenium. This would be followed by Christ's return. Amillennialism or Realized Millennialism – There is no literal Millenium on earth after 2nd coming. The kingdom of God is now present in the world through His Word, His Spirit, His Church. Christ's return is a single event. Tribulation is experienced in this present age. Church is the new Israel.

03.00. Psalm 50, A Psalm of Asaph

PSALM 50 A PSALM OF ASAPH a c a l l t o w o r s h i p i n s p i r i t & t r u t h DOMENIC
MARBANIANG

2001

03.01. Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 50 is the first of the psalms in the Psalter bearing the name of Asaph in their inscriptions. It is one of the forty psalms (42-72) that form the second group in the Book.

AUTHORSHIP The titles of twelve psalms (50,73-83) bear the name of Asaph. The name Asaph means "collector." He was a singer with cymbals of brass in the Tabernacle of David (1 Corinthians 15:16-17, 1 Chronicles 15:19), a song writer, psalmist (2 Chronicles 29:30), a seer (Heb.chozeh), one who beholds, a prophet. Concerning the word chozeh, The Complete Word Study Old Testament indicates that 'of the twenty-two occurrences, eleven of them are associated with the name of a particular person, indicating his office as prophet (Gad, 2 Samuel 24:11; 1 Chronicles 21:9; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 24:25; Heman, 1 Chronicles 25:5; Iddo, 2 Chronicles 9:29; 2 Chronicles 12:15; Hanani, 2 Chronicles 19:2; Asaph, 2 Chronicles 29:25; Jeduthun, 2 Chronicles 35:15; and the prophet Amos). Used with the meaning of contemplation in Isaiah 47:13....chozeh and navi are contrasted in 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 29:10; Amos 7:12. Another word ro'eh is almost identical in meaning to chozeh (1 Samuel 9:9; 1 Chronicles 29:29). Navi means a spokesman (Exodus 7:1-2). Ro'eh and chozeh reflect that God sometimes revealed Himself to prophets by visions.'

Asaph was a Gershonite (1 Chronicles 6:39-43). In Numbers 3:25-26; Numbers 4:24-28, we find that the Gershonites were in-charge of the tabernacle, the tent, its covering, the hangings of the court, the curtain for the door of the court, their cords, and all the instruments in relation to their service. At the time when David decided to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were appointed singers to sound with cymbals of brass by the Chief of the Levites upon the word of David (1 Chronicles 15:16-19). Chenaniah, the master of the song, instructed about the song (1 Chronicles 15:22, 1 Chronicles 15:28). After the ark was brought in and set in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it, and the sacrifices were completed, Asaph was appointed the Chief of those Levites appointed by David to minister before the ark of the Lord and to record and to praise the Lord God of Israel. Asaph played the cymbals (1 Chronicles 16:4-6;cf.1 Chronicles 16:37). That same day, David delivered his first psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren (1 Chronicles 16:7). 2 Chronicles 35:15 (during the reign of Josiah, 640-604 BC) refers to the singers as the sons of Asaph. Ezra and Nehemiah record only the Asaphites as the singers (Ez.2:41; Ezekiel 3:10; Nehemiah 7:44; Nehemiah 11:17, Nehemiah 11:22; Nehemiah 12:35, Nehemiah 12:46 : 458-423 BC).

DATE

Since Asaph lived during the period of both David and Solomon's reign(1 Chronicles 6:31-32), we can decide his life-term as being between or around 1000-900 BC. Psalm 50, then, was composed somewhere during this time.

CHARACTERISTICS The following characteristics of the Psalm may be ascertained from the nature of the office of Asaph himself:

1. The Psalm was probably sung with instruments of music, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding (1 Chronicles 15:16).
2. The Psalm was probably sung at a high pitch with much rejoicing (1 Chronicles 15:16).
3. The Psalm is surely a record, a remembrance, a reflection upon; a mention, a declaration, a proclamation; a commemoration of the majesty, righteousness, goodness, and salvation of Yahweh and His covenant relationship with His people. The word for "record", *zakhar*, in the Hebrew text (1 Chronicles 16:4) indicates the above meanings. (cp. Psalms 50:1, Psalms 50:5, Psalms 50:7, Psalms 50:15-23).
4. The Psalm is also a thanksgiving and praise psalm (1 Chronicles 16:4; cp. Psalms 50:11-6, Psalms 50:14, Psalms 50:23).
5. The Psalm is also prophetic in nature and in harmony with the office of Asaph as a seer. This prophetic Psalm was, most probably, sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments (1 Chronicles 25:1). The seer--one who gazes intently--possesses three kinds of prophetic sights and we expect his prophetic psalm also to possess them; they are: a. A Prophetic Hind-sight -- Retrospective b. A Prophetic In-sight -- Introspective c. A Prophetic Fore-sight -- Prospective As the Psalm unfolds, we find how a retrospective glance at the covenant relationship is made, how an introspective exposure of each of the group's life is brought forward, and how a prospective look at the consequences is enabled. The introspective exposure can also be well-treated as a prospective analysis of a group-condition in the future, with, of course, a prediction of the consequences.

THEME This Psalm is "A Divine Introduction To The Meaning, Significance, And Gravity Of True Worship." The theme of the Psalm is "God calls for and desires a hearty, holy, honest, and high service to Him from His people while repudiating and warning the dishonest."

OUTLINE INTRODUCTION: The Divine Appearance (Psalms 50:1-3) A. A Call To The Heavens And The Earth (Psalms 50:4-6) A1. A Call To The People Of His Covenant To Realisation (Psalms 50:7-13) 1. That He Is Sovereign (Psalms 50:7-11) 2. That He Is Self-Sufficient (Psalms 50:12-13) *The Covenant Is A Covenant Of Grace.

A2. A Call To True Worship (Psalms 50:14-15) Through 1. Thanksgiving (Psalms 50:14) 2. Vows (Psalms 50:14) 3. Prayer (Psalms 50:15) 4. Glorifying Him After Receiving His Deliverance (Psalms 50:15) B. A Warning To Those Who Falsely Consider Themselves As Part Of The Covenant (Psalms 50:16) B1a. An Exposure Of Their Works (Psalms 50:17-21 a) 1. Rejection Of His Teaching (Psalms 50:17) 2. Accomplice With The Lawless (Psalms 50:18) 3. Godless Speech (Psalms 50:19-21 a) B1b. An Exposure Of Their Thoughts (Psalms 50:21 b) 1. That God Was As Lenient As Themselves *The Covenant Is A Covenant Of Judgement.

B2. The Exposition Of The Fact 1. That God Will Reprove Them (Psalms 50:21 c) 2. That God Will Set The Charge Before Them (Psalms 50:21 c) 3. That God Will Punish Them (Psalms 50:22)

CONCLUSION: The Essence Of True Worship (Psalms 50:23)

STATISTICS 1. Words (KJV) -- 399 2. Characters (KJV) -- 1,746 3. "God" -- 10 4. "Offerings" -- 1
5. "Offer" -- 1 6. "Offereth" -- 1 7. "Sacrifice(s)" -- 2 8. "I will..." -- 7 *Psalms 50:7 -- "I will speak...,"
"I will testify...."

*Psalms 50:8 -- "I will not reprove...."

*Psalms 50:9 -- "I will take no bullock...."

*Psalms 50:15 -- "I will deliver...."

*Psalms 50:21 -- "I will reprove...."

*Psalms 50:23 -- "...will I show the salvation of God."

** "Will I" as interrogative -- 1 (Psalms 50:13)

03.01. The Divine Appearance (1-3)

THE DIVINE APPEARANCE

(Psalms 50:1-3)

TEXT THE MIGHTY God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

Concerning the backdrop of the Psalm, Barton remarks:

' The exordium or beginning of this Psalm is the most grand and striking that can possibly be imagined -- the speaker GOD, the audience an assembled world! We cannot compare or assimilate the scene here presented to us with any human resemblance; nor do I imagine that earth will ever behold such a day till that hour when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, and shall gather all the nations of the earth from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other; when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and death and hell shall deliver up the dead that are in them.' The introductory sentences are indubitably awe-inspiring. Delitzsch, without concessions, entitles the section "The Theophany", and Kidner entitles the whole Psalm "The Judge Breaks Silence", while pointing out that the features (Psalms 50:1-5) recall Mount Sinai and the covenant. The solemnity of the Theophany is even more intensified by the manner of the presentation of the subject of the first sentence itself. "The Mighty God, even the LORD...." While Craigie considers the poetic form such that it may be too artificial to make fine distinctions between the names, Delitzsch understands the Divine name El as the name for God as the Almighty, Elohim as the Revered One, and YHWH as the Being, absolute in His existence, and who accordingly freely influences and moulds history after His own plan. Gemeren synthesises the significance of the names as: "The Creator-God (Elohim) and the Redeemer-God (Yahweh) are one God (El)." The KJV translates it "The Mighty God, even the LORD;" the RSV and the Amplified versions, "The Mighty One, God the LORD (Lord--Amplified); the NIV, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD...." As according to the KJV, if Elohim was meant to be conglomerated with El, this would be one of the few El-conglomerate names of God found in the Bible: El-Berith ("God of the Covenant," Judges 9:46), El-Elyon ("Most High God," Genesis 14:18-20), El-Olam ("The Eternal God," Genesis 21:33), El-Shaddai ("The All-Powerful God," Genesis 17:1-2), El-Gibbohr ("God's Strong Hero" or "The Mighty God" Isaiah 9:6), and, here, El-Elohim ("The Mighty God"). It can be noticed that in each of the cases above, El has been translated as "God" except in the last one, where it has been translated as "Mighty". Betty Isham and Don Stanton have this to say about El:

"EL is the most basic Hebrew word for "God." It is singular in tense, and it occurs about 250 times in the Bible. EL signifies "strong" and "first", and is the title that proclaims God as THE MIGHTY ONE, and "the First Great Cause of all."

Evidently, its meaning and usage seem to permit its being interpreted either of the ways.

Concerning Elohim, they write:

"It occurs about 2500 times. Elohim is the plural of Eloah, but it may appear along with verbs and pronouns that are singular as well as plural. It means the Mighty One (the One who is to be worshipped). It can also mean the mighty ones. Much the same as in the English - God/gods.

"Elohim is used 35 times in the account of creation.... The word contains the idea of creative and governing power, of omnipotence and sovereignty.

"Elohim (plural) is the Creator."

EI-Elohim would, then, be a superlative qualificative name for God; furthermore, intended to qualify the name following it: YHWH. It may be noted that the name YHWH is the specific, personal, and sacred name of God as revealed to the Israelites. God proclaimed His name to Moses in Exodus 34:4-7, a name the meaning of which has been a subject of much research and debate. Betty and Don assume the meaning of the name as derivable from the words that add up to form the name; they are: hawa, hayah, havah, chayah. The words carry the meaning of "being in existence" and of "living", which by implication would reveal YHWH as being the eternally self-existing One. They write:

'He exists in a sense in which no other being does. He is! And the cause of His being, is in Himself. He is because He is! Yahwah is absolutely self-existent, and He alone is the true and eternal, unchangeable Elohim.

"Before Me there was no elohim formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am YHWH; and there is no saviour besides Me. (Isaiah 43:10-11)."

Prof. Alexander, according to Barnes, renders the clause as "The Almighty, God, Jehovah, speaks," and remarks that 'the word "mighty" is not an adjective agreeing with the next word (the mighty God), but a substantive in apposition with it.' Barnes adds: "the idea is that he who speaks is the true God; the supreme Ruler of the universe." However the understanding of the names, the juxtaposition seems to indicate atleast three things,

1. Gradation. According to Hengstenberg, "In the relation of these designations there is a gradation. Elohim is more than El, to which its singular Eloah is equivalent. The plural marks the fullness and the richness of the Divine nature. Jehovah is the highest name according to its derivation -- it marks God as the only real Being -- and, according to the usage also, which ascribes to Jehovah the most glorious manifestations of God to and behalf of His people."

2. Specification. The names move from the general to the specific. El and Elohim were names which even the gentiles would use for God, but the name YHWH was only used by the children of Israel. This was the name which the Lord said was His name forever, and His memorial unto all generations (Exodus 3:15). This was no God which the heathens served. This was YHWH, Elohim of elohim, the awesome El (Deuteronomy 10:17) who brought these Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt into this promised land.

3. Sublimation. The magnificence, splendor, and majesty of this God is resplendent in the names themselves. He is the Mighty One, the true God of all creation, and the God who has revealed Himself to His people to the glory of His own Holy name. The sublimity of the subject is even more intensively revealed in the first verb of the Psalm: hath spoken. Here is a God of communication, a God who speaks: in direct opposition to the idols of the heathens. The tense of the verb, in the Hebrew Text, is in the Piel Perfect, which is an intensive, active conjugation expressing a causative idea. The Psalm writer wants to say that the true Supreme Lord has spoken, and He has spoken strongly, weightfully, and forcefully. Isn't that indicative of the prophetic nature of the Psalm itself?

"The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

Evidently, the voice of the Lord is incomparably more powerful and fiery than the voice of the lion, a creature of His. Elihu felt his heart as "wine that has no vent; like new wineskins" ready to burst, when filled with words of uprightness. Jeremiah felt as if there was in his heart a burning fire shut up in his bones. He said he was weary with holding it in, and that he could not. The fire was the word of prophecy that God had given him to speak. Asaph's implementation of the Piel conjugation does indicate that God's word cannot be escaped being heard and re-related. A speaking God, of course, would seem to be repugnant to the philosophical mind. What does it mean for an Infinite to speak? We must, however, content ourselves with the knowledge that the Infinite has spoken, regardless of whether our minds understand the real process of the phenomenon or not. If the Infinite could not act nor speak, as the monists suppose, then the origin of the universe cannot be assessed. Common sense agrees that the world we perceive is plural and so cannot be eternal: the factuality of time cannot be denied; which means that an infinity of the past cannot be held. For that would make the reality of the present an impossibility due to an infinite regression of the past. The world began when the One-Infinite-Transcendent Lord called it into existence out of nothing. This implies action by the Infinite; a phenomenon unscrutinizable by any space-time bound finite mind, and yet undeniable without damage to both sense-in-common and reason as well. Furthermore, our God is not the Deist's God who creates and then withdraws from His own creation. He is a God of concern, a God of care, a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God: He is also God The Ruler, The Judge; a God who speaks and calls the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. This active nature of involvement in God is expressly unfolded in the Psalm in the following manner:

1. He is a God of Revelation (Psalms 50:1-7).
2. He is a God of Relationship ("my saints...those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice," Psalms 50:5; "my people" Psalms 50:7).
3. He is a God of Reproof (Psalms 50:8, Psalms 50:21).
4. He is a God of Retribution (Psalms 50:21-22).
5. He is a God of Redemption (Psalms 50:15, Psalms 50:23).

"...and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof." The call has been interpreted as a triple summons extending through Psalms 50:5 by Craigie, as we have already seen earlier (see Outline under Introduction). He understands the first summons as a summons to

the "world" as a whole to observe what is about to happen. Delitzsch understands the purpose of the call as Jahve's summons to the earth "to be a witness of the divine judgement upon the people of the covenant." He goes on to add that this "summons precedes His self-manifestation"(Psalms 50:2). The expression "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof" has been understood by Craigie as more likely designating the passage of time; "for a whole day, from sunrise to sunset, the world is summoned as an observer of the events about to take place." He adds: "The summons must have been issued at (or just before) sunrise," interpreting it around its setting of the festival. He, however, doesn't deny the possibility of it meaning "from east to west; viz. the entire world." Delitzsch writes:

'The addition "from the rising of the sun to its going down," shows that the poet means the earth in respect of its inhabitants. He speaks, and because what He speaks is of universal significance He makes the earth in all its compass this audience.'

Gemerer points out to the fact that "His rule extends far beyond Israel to the whole earth, poetically described as "from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets." The Call reveals at least two characteristics of God: His Sovereignty and His Omniscience. As a matter of fact, He does iterate the truth in Psalms 50:10-12. As no part of the earth can escape the light and heat of the sun so no part of the earth can hide itself from the rule and the scrutinising eyes of the Lord Most High. The description of Zion as the perfection of beauty (Psalms 50:2) displays the importance, glory, and splendour attached to it due its being inhabited by the Lord. It is not just beautiful but is the perfection of beauty. Out of this Zion, Asaph says, God (Elohim) has shined. Barnes believes the meaning of this to be that "the great principles which are to determine the destiny of mankind in the final judgement are those which proceed out of Zion; or, those which are taught in the religion of Zion...." The verb shined, in the Hebrew Text, is an Hiphil perfect conjugation which is causative of the Qal. God has caused Himself by self-determination to shine out of Zion. This was the city which God had chosen, said Solomon in 1 Kings 8:48. Psalms 132:13 says: "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation." God chose it according to His own Sovereign Will and has shined out of it by the same. It was not the quality of Zion that made it magnificent and beautiful: it was the Presence of El, Elohim, YHWH the Great King that made it so.

"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King." The meaning of "shined" can be construed through a study of its usage in Psalms 80:1-3. There the expression "shine forth" is used parallelly with "stir up thy strength" with the purpose of a visitation to save His people. The expression here also can be interpreted by associating it with the promise of deliverance given to the true worshippers of God in verses Psalms 50:14-15, Psalms 50:23. And yet the Judgement connected with this deliverance cannot be overlooked. The Salvation of God cannot be understood apart from The Judgement of God. He saves His people from those whom He is going to punish, their enemies. If He saves one then He must also judge that one's contrary or else Judgement is not complete. Here, the contrariety is between the ones true to His covenant and the ones untrue to it. God by Himself shines forth out of His own chosen place, Zion, to judge His people for "judgement must begin at the house of God...." The timing of the event is not absolutely clear. Craigie's cultic interpretation of the Psalm moves him to associate the event with the former "from the rising of the sun...."

'At the moment the sun rose in the east (Psalms 50:1), God "shone forth" from Zion; thus the liturgy was timed to coincide with a natural event, which symbolized dramatically the theophany of the law-giving God of Sinai.' The prophetic nature of the Psalm, however, must not be forgotten alongside its informative and instructive natures. God has shone forth out of Zion in the past, He shines forth now (cf. RSV), and He will shine forth in the future (Revelation 21:22-27) at the consummation of world history.

"Our God shall come,..." Most modern versions read "Our God comes." His coming is like the splendour of the sun rising in the brilliance of its strength. The verb is cast in the imperfect tense, showing that our God is not merely waiting for a future moment, to come, but that He is already on His way. He shall surely come, "and shall not keep silence...." The silence of God has given rise to atleast two kinds of responses among men in general:

1. Carefreeness, recklessness, and irreverent autonomy among the rebellious.

2. Distress, discouragement, and discomfiture among the godly. The text promises that this silence would not be for too long. In fact, the wicked are, later, reproved of the tendency of leniency into which they had fallen in response to this silence of God (Psalms 50:21). The splendour and solemnity of His coming are well captured in the next part of the verse: "a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." The word tempestuous, in the Hebrew, is *saar* which means "to bristle with terror; to shiver; to fear, be horribly afraid; to have a feeling of sacred awe; to be agitated, be tempestuous; to be fiery like a tempest; to rush like a storm." The word is in the Niphal Perfect tense which is a reflexive of the Qal conjugation. The clause can also be paraphrased as "and it shall by itself be a frightening, horripilating, and raging tempest round about him." Fire is symbolic of judgement in the Bible. A consuming, purifying, and cleansing agent, it has also been used as a figure of holiness, righteousness, and righteous indignation (cf. Psalms 18:8; Psalms 97:3; Daniel 7:10). It is the agent of God's judgement on the ungodly (Genesis 19:24; Psalms 11:6; Isaiah 10:16-17; Matthew 3:10). God Himself is called a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). As T. Longman puts it: "When God comes in judgement, he appears in a threatening guise." The appearance of God on the judgement scene is indubitably accompanied by fear, terror, and dreadful panic to the rebellious.

"Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also to the gentile...."

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men...and every...man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

"For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" The fierceness, the tempestuousness, and the terror of the event is but a joy to His people; their Hero is come, and shall no longer be silent. The hypocrites, however, have reason to fear.

CONCLUSION The Lord God Almighty, the Ruler of heavens and earth is a God of revelation. He chose to reveal His name in Zion (2 Chronicles 12:13), whence His light of strength and salvation rises to enlighten the whole earth. True beauty in perfection can only be found where the Lord of

Creation finds a dwelling place; from whence He causes His light to shine forth. And that is what he has called us to be: to be a light to this dark world and to reflect the beauty of His glory (Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:18). This assumes greater responsibility and commitment to the truth. Our relationship with Him by His Covenant is what calls us to a greater accountability ("of the Jew first...") before Him. Therefore, Judgement must begin at the house of the Lord. This inclusion of Judgement (Curse) in the stipulations of the Covenant must not be overlooked. Isn't that the reason why we as members of the New Covenant are called to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Php 2:12)? The intensifying of wickedness and corruption in the world should only serve to remind us that the prophecies of the Bible are surely being fulfilled. This world is not our home. Our Lord is going to return as a flash of the lightning to punish the wicked and take us home.

03.02. The Divine Call (4-15)

THE DIVINE CALL (Psalms 50:4-15)

TEXT He shall call to the heavens above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.

I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. The Call To The Heavens And The Earth (Psalms 50:4-6)

"He shall call to the heavens...that he may judge his people." The purpose of His Appearance as being for Judgement is now shown. Fire and the Call to the heaven and the earth (as in Psalms 50:3-4) are also juxtaposed in Deuteronomy 4:24-26, where Moses is warning the Israelites against the consequences of forgetting the covenant of the Lord. The Call there is a call by Moses to witness concerning the factuality of the warning. Craigie considers this call (Ps.50) also as a summons to the heavens and the earth to be the silent witnesses to the Judgement event. The Call must not be read apart from the Call to gather the saints (Psalms 50:5) and the appointment of the heavens to declare His righteousness (Psalms 50:6). Assuredly, the covenant relationship is, here, brought to view. The saints, who have been true to the covenant, need not fear any longer: the God of the covenant has come and the promise of the covenant will be kept. The people are His. The relationship between Him and His people is well portrayed through the words "my saints" (Psalms 50:5), "my people" (Psalms 50:7), "thy God" (Psalms 50:7), and "those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psalms 50:5). The addressive words of the Call are reminiscent of the words the Lord spoke at the making of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:4-6). The Theophany, there, was for the establishment of the Covenant. The Theophany, here, is for the explanation of what that covenant really meant: its meaning, its gravity, and its significance.

"Gather my saints...those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." Craigie opts the word "devotee" for "saints" and considers it as designating specifically those who were committed to God in the relationship of covenant. They are, of course, His saints -- His holy ones. This points

out to at least three characteristics of this people group:

1. Distinction. They were separated from all other peoples of the world by His Sovereign choice. They were now distinct (1 Kings 8:51). The word *hagios*, Greek for "saints" and "holy", has also been translated as "distinct", "different", and "separate" by scholars.
2. Possession. They were His, His peculiar treasure above all people (Exodus 19:5). The word "peculiar" is important as it distinguishes them from all other of His possessions -- "for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5), but the Israelites are His peculiar treasure.
3. Consecration. They were His saints. In Exodus 19:6, He calls them "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (emphasis mine) unto Him. They were His "holy people", His "special people", and His chosen people not because of their own quality or quantity, but because of His own love and faithfulness (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).

Craigie prefers the version "those about to make a covenant with me..." to "those that have made a covenant with me..." and considers it to be critical to the understanding of the text as a whole. He thinks that treatment of the verb in the text as belonging to the past tense by the RSV, NIV, NEB, et al., is but a failure to recognize the force of the k-d-t-y. He comments:

'In this context, the participle functions as the "the participle of the immediate future," as is commonly the case in covenant contexts.... Thus the covenant members are summoned by God; later in the day, they will be making, or renewing, the covenant, but first they must go through the searching preparatory ritual of divine scrutiny, to ensure that they are ready for the ceremony itself, in which the covenant "sacrifice" (Psalms 50:5-6) would be offered.' The call to an introspection of self-motives is, of course, a motif throughout the Psalm. Yet, if the translation preferred by Craigie is agreed with, then the timing of the Theophany may even be supposed to be that of the Sinai-event now reproduced in a festive drama (the like genre of the Book of The Songs Of Solomon). This interpretation, however, doesn't align with the situation presupposed by the Psalm itself. The context of the Psalm presupposes that the covenant had already been made in the past; now, there are some who are loyal to it while the others are not. In addition, it seems inappropriate to interpret "those about to make a covenant with me" (italics mine) as "those about to renew their covenant with me." The mention of the Covenant by sacrifice is surely a reference to the sacrifices and the sprinkling of the blood at the initiation of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24:3-11). The Covenant was, without doubts, a Covenant of blood. And the people had, then, agreed with one accord: "All the words which the LORD hath said will we do." It was time now to investigate whether they had been faithful to the Covenant. Sten Nilson illustrates that the act of covenant-making, among the Hebrews, demonstrated two things:

1. Death to self and renunciation of right to self, and
2. That the two (between whom the covenant was made) have begun a walk together that will last until they are separated by death. They are friends forever. The hazard of breaking the covenant was death itself. Nilson writes:

'...the two point to the bloody animal cut in two and say, "May God strike me thus if I should ever break this covenant. May I be cut in two and be eaten by vultures if I break this holy covenant."

There is every reason to suppose that Psalms 50:22, where God speaks of tearing into pieces the forgetters of God or, more specifically, the forgetters of the covenant, is in reference to this basic ingredient of the Covenant-stipulations. The Covenant by blood repudiates half-hearted service. It is a Covenant of life and demands total affection and total sacrificial service by each of the members of the covenant. Hadn't God loved them with His whole heart (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)? His love is called an "everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3), that is, it is infinite and unlimited by either time or space. He also served them with His whole heart (Jer. 63:9; Exodus 19:4). He rejoices to act for the good of His people and does that with His whole heart (Jeremiah 32:41). He is a faithful God and desires His worshippers also to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). He, therefore, calls His saints to gather together at His presence for the exposition of their hearts -- their thoughts, desires, and intentions -- and to instruct them concerning the kind of service that He expects from them. The reference to the heavens as the witnesses of His righteousness, in the next verse, seems to indicate that the direct speech in Psalms 50:5 is addressed to the earth itself. He has called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof to gather His saints together unto Him. The interpretation in that manner, however, is not necessitated if a comma is supposed before and after the expression "my saints". The addressee, then, would be the saints themselves. Craigie supposes that the people themselves are summoned to gather together in God's presence, in the words of an oracular pronouncement. But the syntax, as the NIV, the RSV, and the Amplified Version also indicate, doesn't support the supposition proving that the addressee is the earth itself. The earth, the habitat of men, is summoned, poetically speaking, to assemble the saints together; and the heavens, as in Psalms 19:1, are summoned to declare His righteousness. Both are His witnesses.

"And the heavens shall declare his righteousness...." The sudden shift from a direct speech to an informatory statement almost suggests a choral arrangement. The words "shall declare" is an Hiphil Imperfect conjugation, which is an active causative of the Qal. The implication is that the declaration of His righteousness is caused by the heavens themselves. Any act of God is of universal significance. The imperfect tense of it implies that the action is still in effect. The Amplified Version interprets it: "And the heavens declare His righteousness -- rightness and justice...." The Poetic nature of the expression can also suggest a principle of investigation: when observed from a planer(terrestrial) point of view, the works of men are righteous to their own selves which, inevitably, gives rise to rationalizations and self-justificatory arguments. But when viewed from the heavenly perspective with a comprehensive legal outlook, the vileness of man is revealed proving the righteousness of God (cf. Psalms 51:4). The earthly perspective is surely a biased perspective; the heavenly, as an external witness, a biasless one. Atleast four characteristics of this witness can easily be observed:

1. Externality. The heavens are an external witness. The heavens are neither the Judge nor the judged.
2. Eternality. In the sense that they were present from the very beginning of the creation and that their expanse is uncomprehended by man. This suggests universality, both in time and space, of its witness.
3. Unity. The heavens are one.

4. Immutability. Their being immutable since the creation of the universe (not immutable in the sense that we move in space-time, but by its very nature of being a continuum) strengthens the quality of their witness. The witness is an unquestionable witness of His righteousness and justice. "...for God is judge himself. Selah." The italicised "is" is not in the original. The Amplified Version interprets the clause: "...for God, He is judge. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]!" That God is Judge means that there is no escape. This is not an earthy judge, limited in resources, ability, extent, and power. He is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Lord of the universe and the heavens themselves bear witness of His righteousness: For God is Judge Himself. Selah. It is a matter not just to be thought about, but one that demands a proper and immediate response. The Call To The People Of His Covenant To Realisation (Psalms 50:7-13) The section opens with the words: "Hear, O my people...O Israel...I am God, even thy God." This is reminiscent of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4 : "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD...." The call is followed by a call to love the LORD with the whole being (Psalms 50:5). Worship cannot begin without the realisation of who our God is. He is God, the God of Israel. He is one. Thus, worship cannot be pluralistical -- i.e., the object of our worship is our God alone ("with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"). Craigie considers the summons to "hear" as implying also "obey". He goes on to add that "I am God thy God" (Psalms 5:7 c) is the equivalent, in the Elohistc Psalter, to the more familiar "I am the Lord (Yahweh), your God." "I will speak...." The verb is a Piel conjugative imperfect and implies that the speech will be very intense, thorough, and complete. When the Lord of the hosts speaks who can but listen? "...and I will testify against thee...." Delitzsch shows that "the forms strengthened by ah, in Psalms 50:7, describe God's earnest desire to have Israel for willing hearers as being quite as strong as His desire to speak and to bear witness." The Mighty God YHWH has called, has shone, has come, and now He commands to pay Him attention: who can dare but listen to this weightiest and the gravest of all speeches ever heard or ever to be heard by human ears?

"I will not reprove thee...." This section is neither meant to be an accusation nor a chiding as is the section that deals with the warning to the wicked (i.e., Psalms 50:16-22; cf. Psalms 50:22 : "I will reprove thee"). The word for "reprove" (Psalms 50:7), in the Hebrew, is the word Ya Khach which means "to dispute with someone, argue; to be convicted, reprov'd; to decide, judge; to prove; to rebuke, correct; to meditate, arbitrate; to punish; to chide." It is the same word used in Isaiah 1:18, where the KJV interprets it as "reason". "...for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me." The Hindi version joins "for thy sacrifices" with "I will not reprove thee" and without interposings of "or" before and the comma after "thy burnt offerings" joins it to "continually before me" with an "are". The English version of the Hindi would read: "I do not condemn you for your peace offerings, your burnt offerings are continually offered to me." God is not disregarding the sacrifices of His people; He only desires to show them something more significant than these -- the true meaning of worship, of sacrifices. Craigie observes:

"The essence of the divine speech concerns the meaning and purpose of sacrifices, and it was vital that the people have the meaning clear in their minds before the actual sacrifices were offered later in the day."

He means that since the occasion of the recital of the Psalm would be at sunrise during the feast of tabernacles and the people would be offering sacrifices and burnt offerings later in the day, it was necessary that they understand what those sacrifices really meant.

"I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds." The reference seems to be for the purpose of burnt offerings; since that was the offering in which either a bull or an he goat/ male sheep or turtledoves/ young pigeons were required for offering. The peace offering, on the other hand, being a freewill offering did not require that the offering be a male alone. A female goat in the sin offering was admitted if the offerer was poor while in the trespass offering a ram was required along with a restitution fee. The purpose of the burnt offering was for the propitiation of sin in general (Leviticus 1:4) and the signifying of one's total commitment, dedication, and consecration to God. The bullock or he goat (excepting its skin) was entirely burnt on the altar of offering. Here, God says that He wouldn't take either of them: the reason He gives in the next verse.

"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." The Amplified Version suggests that the phrase "the cattle upon a thousand hills" can also be translated as "upon the mountains where thousands are." The idea is that God is the sole Owner of all living creatures. The implication seems to be that He doesn't need to strive with them to get them to submit to His will; but with man He strives (cf. Genesis 6:3) and is provoked by their rebellious nature (Exodus 23:21; Numbers 14:11; Psalms 78:40; Jeremiah 4:8). God is Sovereign but He doesn't deny the freewill of man. Sin is a freewilled rebellion against the Will of God. That is the reason why when two or three kinds of offerings were to be offered the sin offering usually was the first of the sequence. Then came the burnt and the peace offerings. Reconciliation and propitiation, without which any positive relationship is made void, must precede dedication. "I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine." The knowledge is unlike that of man: it is deeper, complete, full, and perfect {"I know and am acquainted with...," (Amplified)}. God is Omniscient. "...are mine" can also be translated as "are with me." God is Omnipresent. Thus it is shown that the idea that God requires a material gift from us is absurd and preposterous. He is the Ruler, Possessor, Knower, and Sustainer of all things. Is He in need then of anything?

"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof." Obviously, God doesn't get hungry: He is Infinite, non-contingent, Absolute, and a Spirit -- that is, He transcends the limitations of this finite space-time continuum. But the Psalm is not a philosophical treatise. It doesn't, however, shun to display the fallacy of their reasonings. The implication seems to be that even if the people reasoned that the offering was to satiate the hunger of God, they would still be committing a fallacy. For to call Him God, The Almighty YHWH and to posit that He needed to be sustained by their offerings at the same time would be erroneous. What makes Him Almighty then, if He couldn't make provision for Himself or if there is something over which He cannot exercise His might and so must depend on others to satiate His needs? But the question is: Is He really in want of the flesh and blood of these animals?

"Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" The question is a rhetoric one. The answer, obviously, is "No." God is Self-Sufficient in Himself. Daniel Cresswall rightly observes that the pagan sacrifices were considered as feasts of the gods. The pagan religions surrounding the Israelites often tempted them to regard their own religion as something similar to them. But the purpose of sacrifice in Judaism was completely different from the purposes of them in the pagan religions. Hinson writes about these fallacious thinkers of Judaism as follows:

"Continually they were tempted to follow the pattern of other religions, and to suppose that what the LORD chiefly required from his people was worship and sacrifice. They found it difficult to understand that even though they took part in the sacrifices and feast days, the LORD was not necessarily satisfied with their service." The purpose of the sacrifices which God instituted was not for the fulfilment of God's needs but for the fulfilment of the people's needs. The significance of the sacrifices was tied to relationship these people had with God through the Covenant ("by sacrifice"). The effect of the sacrifices was nullified without the existence of the covenant. Hinson writes:

"The first thing we must remember is that Salvation depends on God, and not on man, so it is achieved through His Covenants, rather than through sacrifices. The ritual of sacrifice may be a way for the covenant people to approach God. But their relationship with God is established in the first place by a covenant, not by an act of sacrifice." The sacrifices were meant for three purposes:

1. The Atonement of sins -- e.g. the sin offering, the guilt offering, and the annual Day of Atonement. These were unacceptable without an accompaniment of confession and restitution (Numbers 5:7).
2. Thanksgivings for His goodness -- especially, the thank-offerings (Leviticus 7:12) and the burnt offerings (Leviticus 1:10-13).
3. Fellowship with God -- e.g. the peace offering (Leviticus 3:1-5), which expressed peace (fellowship) with God and so culminated in a community meal.

These external sacrifices were meant to be significations of internal givings to and relationship with God. They were not meant to be mere one-time events but were meant to signify a whole life relationship with God. What the offerer did at that one moment of sacrifice was meant to signify what he was going to do for the rest of his life. They were reflections of the decision that one was really going to love the LORD his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might. Which meant that he was going to do only that which would please his God, without which all his sacrifices were meaningless. For obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). The Psalm indicates that the hypocrites (dealt with in the next main division) had none of the motives listed above. The Call To True Worship (Psalms 50:14-15) This section is a Call to the saints to action, to do that which their God really desired from them: this is a Call to true worship. Four actions are called for, here, as imperative:

1. Thanksgiving. "Offer unto God thanksgiving...." Thanksgiving is the offering which God desires. For, factually speaking, man can offer nothing else: all belongs to Him. Gratitude towards God is also an expression of a total and joyful acceptance of whatever He gives us and the humility to accept the fact that it is His doing and it is marvellous in our sight. The religion of pride refuses to accept any gift of God's grace. The Israelites, however, ought never to forget the fact that the Covenant relationship into which they have entered is but a relationship through grace. The Covenant was a Covenant of grace.

2. Cheerful Giving. "And pay thy vows unto the most High." The language and the command of this Shema is very reminiscent of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:1-25. Deuteronomy 6:13 says:

"Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." The Call was to total reverence and total allegiance to Him alone. The word "pay" is a Piel imperative conjugation,

which implies that the act is to be thorough and complete. The payment of the vow is to be cheerfully done because what has been received was thankfully received out of His bounty.

3. Prayer. "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee...." The Israelites must not remember the fact that their existence was solely because God chose them to be His own peculiar people and so had delivered them and sustained them through the years. A pride in their own ability and strength would only later confuse them. The assurance of the answer to prayer is made evident by the use of "will" instead of "may". God will surely answer the call of those who trust and wait patiently on Him.

4. Praise. "and thou shalt glorify me." The word "glorify" is a Piel imperfect conjugation. The idea is that the act of glorifying God wasn't meant to be momentary but was meant to be continuing throughout life. In other words, the delivered one becomes a living testimony of God.

True worship is not possible other than these. A person who is neither thankful, nor owes his allegiance to God, nor prays to God, nor glorifies God in his life cannot serve Him. He cannot worship him in spirit and in truth.

CONCLUSION The instruction of this section is marvellous. The heathen could not comprehend this. And the saints of God should not forget it. The Covenant was what made this relationship with the Almighty possible. God desired an intensification of this relationship which could only be made possible by, first, a realisation of who this God of the Covenant was. He is Sovereign., Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Self-Sufficient; therefore, He was never in need of their sacrifices. What was it that made Him institute the laws of the sacrifices? Wasn't it not the will to maintain and deepen the Covenant relationship? The sacrifices were only meant to signify how this relationship was maintained. The Call is to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. The motives must be right and must accord with the revelation of God. A life of thankfulness, cheerful giving, prayer, and glorifying of His Name is what God calls forth for. Thus the relationship is deepened. God, it must be noted, is concerned with the individual and not just the masses. He is a God of care. He is a God of relationship. And true worship is what builds this relationship up. A thankless, grumbling, murmuring, and prayerless life cannot glorify God. Worship and service to God becomes impossible for such kind of a person. And his relationship with God before long comes to an end. The bullocks and the goats were not what God required from His holy ones: it was their heart that He desired to be offered up to him. Wasn't that what the burnt offering signified? Note, God doesn't reprove them for their sacrifices. He is not rejecting them. He only wants to tell His people that the person was more significant than his gifts. In fact, God had no use of those offerings except that they expressed a heart of thankfulness, dedication, trust, and adoration towards Him. He is forever ready to accept to these gifts of theirs and answer their prayers to Him. So that His saints would glorify Him and continue to be a living testimony of His love in this world of pain and hopelessness.

03.03. The Divine Warning (16-22)

THE DIVINE WARNING (Psalms 50:16-22)

TEXT But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?

Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and thou hast been partaker with adulterers.

Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.

Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.

These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

While the addressee of the former division were the saints the addressee of this division are referred to as "the wicked". The word "but" distinguishes this division from the former. Thus it can be seen that "my people" was set in contrast to "the wicked". These people, then, were not considered the people of God; reminiscent of the prophetic illustration in Hosea 1:9. God commanded Hosea to call his second daughter's name Lo-ammi, which meant "not my people". This daughter symbolised "God's rejection of his people Israel."

"The infidelity of Gomer, Hosea's wife, portrays the apostasy of Israel in her covenant relationship with God. Instead of responding in gratitude and love to God's grace extended to them in material blessings, the Israelites used their crops in making offerings to idols. The injustice, bribery, mistreatment of others -- all of these reflect their laxity of love toward God as well as their fellow citizens." The prophetic words of this Psalm of Asaph had already warned these people to be cautious and sober almost 250 years before the word came to Hosea. An underestimation and neglect of God and His Covenant is what ultimately alienates man from His Creator. The neglect of the covenant is, of course, displayed through a lifestyle which is in total rebellion to the stipulations of the Covenant itself. Therefore, God says to the wicked: "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" A profession of an allegiance which is not in possession is what constitutes hypocritical religiosity. Craigie understands "the wicked" as "those who know the law but did not keep it." Delitzsch understands these to be the "manifest sinners". He writes:

"...the divine discourse is now turned to another class, viz. to the evil-doers, who, in connection with open and manifest sins and vices, take the word of God upon their lips, a distinct class from those who base their sanctity upon outward works of piety, who outwardly fulfil the commands of God, but satisfy and deceive themselves with this outward observance."

Kidner calls them "the hardened and hypocritical" and Leupold labels them "despisers of the Word of the Lord." Surely, their actions spoke louder than their words. And because of this they had nothing to do with God's Covenant. For once they had broken the Covenant by a transgression of its stipulations, they could no longer claim inheritance of any of its promises. The transgressor was ridded of all rights pertaining to the Covenant and was doomed to death (for the Covenant was a blood covenant). This, however, did not alter God's commitment to do His Will.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right...hath walked in my statutes, and kept my judgements, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD."

Psalms 50:23 describes the visitation of this salvation on the just while Psalms 50:22 deals with a description of how the death penalty will be visited upon these Covenant-breakers. But before the penalty would be effected God exposes their wickedness and issues a warning to them. The Exposure of Their Works (Psalms 50:17-21 a)

Psalms 50:17-21 a deal with God's exposure of these people's Godless actions. The section begins with the words "Seeing" which speaks of the conspicuousness of these works of theirs as being a very manifest evidence of and witness against them in the Divine Court of Justice. Delitzsch did rightly call them "manifest sinners". The description of their transgressions against the Covenant is given as follows:

1. Rejection of His teachings. "Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee". As Leupold labelled them, these were surely despisers of the Word of God. The hatred and contempt of the stipulations of the Covenant was undoubtedly fuelled by their own lusts, pride, and the desire to be autonomous and have everything their own way. These were chronic rebellers as is implied by the tense of the word "castest". The word is an Hiphil imperfect conjugation and implies that the discarding of His Law was willingly done on a regular basis. Any attempt to correct them proved only futile since they hated correction. These were those incorrigible and stubborn fools mentioned in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 1:28-29; Proverbs 5:12-13; Proverbs 26:11; Proverbs 27:22). A student doesn't submit to the teaching of his teacher has no right to call him his teacher -- obviously, because he has chosen to learn nothing from that teacher. Therefore, these ungodly men had no right to declare the statutes of God nor to take His Covenant in their mouth. Furthermore, one who despises a law has no authority to teach others to follow that same law (cf. Romans 2:21).

2. Accomplice with the lawless. "When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers." The accomplice is an accomplice by either of the ways: a. Consent. The verb is set in the imperfect tense implying that the consent was given whenever a thief was spotted. The wicked agreed with the moral code of the thief and thus broke the eighth commandment of the Covenant (Exodus 20:15). b. Involvement. The Hebrew literally reads "thy portion was with adulterers." It might be that these hypocrites were really adulterers in the literal sense of the word. The sons of Eli were examples of such hypocrites. It was said concerning them that they were sons of Belial and that they knew not the LORD (1 Samuel 2:12). It could even be a reference to spiritual adultery as pictured in the book of Hosea. These people, by rejecting the God of their covenant by a rejection of His commands (cf. 2 Samuel 12:9-10), and by intercouring with the companions of wickedness, were committing spiritual adultery.

3. Godless Speech. "Thou givest thy mouth to....slanderest thy mother's son." The Godless chatter is a consequence of submitting the mouth to the dictates of evil itself, or of a commitment to speak evil alone. This is implied by the perfect tense in which the word "givest" is set in. The Hebrew word for "givest", used in the Text, literally means "sendest". The picture seems to be that of someone sending an other with a commission to accomplish a given task. Thus, the purpose of their tongue seems to be just one: evil. Two things flow out of such an abandonment to evil: a. Creative deception. The speech is deceitful. The hypocrite's speech is incredulous and not worth any belief. If he has been unfaithful to God what is the surety that he will be faithful to men. "...thy tongue frameth deceit." The verb is in the imperfect tense suggesting, perhaps, that this continual behaviour is only a result of what had already been done earlier: the commitment to evil-talk. The tongue is said to be the one that is framing deceit. Such an identification seems to indicate the intensity with which the tongue was being implemented for wicked purposes. It must also be noted that the Hebrew language often pictured the body parts as initiating a function when to specify how the person was doing a thing. For example: "...no eye shall see me." (Job 24:15); "...mine eye shall weep sore..." (Jeremiah 13:17); "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me..." (Psalms 119:73). Thus is the Godless person's deliberate and active act of deceptive speech exposed. b. Coldblood, constant slander. "Thou sittest" indicates the cold-bloodedness of the action. The imperfect tense in which the words "sittest" and "speakest" are cast imply that the accusative behaviour was constantly displayed. The word "speakest" is a Piel conjugation indicating the intensity of the slander. It also shows that the slander was continued until its purpose be accomplished. The gravity of this breaking of God's ninth commandment is, further, intensified with the modification of "thy brother" by "thine own mother's son". The sin was grievous. If the fellowship of the Covenant was not maintained how could the Covenant be maintained? The contempt of the fellowship of His Covenant was a contempt of His Covenant itself. In addition, if one couldn't love his own brother whom he encounters daily, how can he love God whom he cannot see (1 John 4:20).

Thus, it has been made obvious the fact that the wicked one has no inheritance in the promises of His Covenant. In addition, it is also implied that the transgressor of the Covenant is worth to suffer its penalty. "These things hast thou done...." The works of the wicked have been exposed. The guilt of the transgressor has been proven in the court of His Justice. The Exposure of Their Thoughts (Psalms 50:21 b)

"...and I kept silence...." Earlier, we noted that the silence of God had only served to enflame the idleness, carefreeness, and lustfulness of the wicked. The fact was that God was patiently waiting to see if they would repent and change their way of living.

"And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgement: blessed are all they that wait for him." The word "kept silence" is a Hiphil perfect conjugation. The meaning conveyed is that the keeping of silence, of being patient, had been very persistent, perseverant, and resolved so as to give a chance for them to bear the fruits of repentance. But the wicked had interpreted this silence of God very differently. "thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself...." The wicked were, now, questioning the very Justice of God. The perfection of Heaven's rule was questioned. In effect, it was a direct mockery of His Justice, His Authority, and His Power. The intensity and seriousness of their way of thinking is shown by the tense of the

word "thoughtest" itself, which is a Piel perfect conjugation. They were sincerely deceived by themselves. Sin had blinded them. Their conception of YHWH was identical to the pagan conceptions of their gods and goddesses. They thought that He was also like them -- lenient and unjust. God is not going to keep them in this misapprehension for too long. The Exposition of The Fact (Psalms 50:21 c, Psalms 50:22)

"...but I will reprove thee...." The Lord had been patient, gracious, and long-suffering: but it was time now to remind these men that the Covenant is also a Covenant of Judgement. And Judgement belongs to the Lord. He would reprove them, perhaps meaning that He would convict them of their sins. The Hindi version interprets "will reprove" as "will make [you] understand". "...and set them in order before thine eyes." The Amplified Version reads: "...and put[the charge] in order before your eyes." The idea seems to be that till now they had been deceived concerning the Justice of God, but now God Himself will show them the order of His judgement after rebuking them for their foolishness. The RSV puts it as "But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you." The wicked are rebuked for their false way of thinking and are convicted for their very acts of wickedness.

"Now consider this...." This is a command that must be followed. To consider is imperative. "this" might refer to either what has been said this so far or what is going to be told now or both. "ye that forget God...." The wicked are now referred to as the forgetters of God. These are those who live their lives as if God is not there, or if He is He is bothered about them. The word God, in the Hebrew Text, is Eloah which 'comes from "Ahlah"(to worship, to adore), and thus presents God as the one supreme object of worship; the Adorable One.' These people had forgotten the only Adorable One. They were being irreverent and disobedient towards Him. The consequences of such insolence can only be very terrible. He continues, "...lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Surely, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." If the God of the Covenant Himself turns against them then who can deliver? Years later, lamenting on the desolation that had fallen on Jerusalem because of her unfaithfulness to the God of the Covenant, the writer of the book of Lamentations expresses the grief of Jerusalem as follows:

"For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed."

Jerusalem would not have had to lament so if the Divine warning, in Psalm 50, had been heeded to earlier. They didn't, and they suffered the consequences thereof. The description of the Judgement as through tearing in pieces has allusions to the event of the making of the Covenant. The penalty of breaking any blood covenant, it has been pointed out, would be the tearing apart of the defaulter in the same manner in which the animal, through which the blood covenant was made, was torn apart for the shedding of the blood. Craigie considers the language as metaphorically referring to God as the fierce lion who would tear apart evil doers (cf. Hosea 5:14).

CONCLUSION

Honesty is vital and indispensable to the maintenance of any relationship. God did not make a covenant with the Israelites because of their quality, but because of His own great love. They did not choose Him; it was He who had chosen them to be a people unto Himself. The stipulations of the Covenant were only for the good of the people (Deuteronomy 10:13). God is loving but He is

also Just. He is forever truthful to His promise of the Covenant. It was the transgressor of the Covenant who would suffer the penalty. Those who forsake the Lord by the breaking of His Covenant will be forsaken by Him (Deuteronomy 31:16-17). And when God turns against someone in the fiery wrath of His Justice, who can deliver that one? The despiser of Moses' Law, the Covenant, suffered the penalty of death, how much more the one who despised the very blood of the Covenant of Jesus Christ? The writer of Hebrews says:

'A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' The grace of God has only been made available to us because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. One can forfeit the blessings of this grace by simply proving by his lifestyle that he owes no allegiance to Christ any longer. The Covenant of Grace is also the Covenant of Judgement. The Divine warning must not be left unheeded. Covetousness, deception, fornication, and slander of a brother-in-Christ is nothing but an expression of a heart which has no reverence for either God or the relationship which one could have with Him through the blood of His Covenant. That is the reason why the writer of Hebrews says:

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." May this Divine Warning only serve us to the intensification and deepening of a love, worship, reverence, and awe which is acceptable and pleasing in His sight!

03.04. The Divine Postscript (23)

THE DIVINE POSTSCRIPT

(Psalms 50:23)

TEXT Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.

"Whoso offereth praise...." The Speaker, of course, is God. The latter part of the sentence, "I will show the salvation of God," almost suggests Asaph or the singer of the Psalm as being the one who offers to show the salvation of God. But the context doesn't support such an interpretation. Nowhere in the Psalm is the psalmist speaking with a first person personal pronoun. In addition, the sudden intrusion of an other speaker in the scene, while God himself is speaking, doesn't seem appropriate. Furthermore, such usage of His own Name while addressing is not novel to God. For example, in Exodus 31 He uses the phrases "spirit of God"(Exodus 31:3), "holy to the LORD" (Exodus 31:15), and "the LORD made"(Exodus 31:17) while Himself addressing Moses. It is concluded, therefore, that Psalms 50:23 is a Divine Postscript to all that has been said heretofore. The Divine Postscript enumerates and calls for two things as pleasing Him. They are:

1. A God-Honouring and God-Glorifying Sacrifice 2. A Righteous and Preparatory Walk

1. A God-Honouring and God-Glorifying Sacrifice. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me...." The word "offereth" is a Qal active participle and indicates continued action the call is for an habitual and constant sacrifice of praise. The word for "praise" is also translated as "thanksgiving" (RSV & The Amplified Version) and "thank-offerings" (NIV); the word for "glorifieth", as "honours" (The Amplified Version, RSV, & NIV). A constant, instant, persistent, and abundant offering of praise is what constitutes a real God-honouring and God-glorifying sacrifice.

2. A Righteous and Preparatory Walk. "...And to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." The italicised words, as can be noticed, are not found in the original Text. The phrase "that ordereth...conversation", in the Hebrew, literally means "that disposeth way." The RSV translates it: "...to him who orders his way aright...." while the Amplified Version puts it : "...and he who orders his way aright -- who prepares the way that I may show him...." The NIV knits it with the former text to mean that the offerer of thank-offerings prepares the way for God to show him His salvation. The call is, evidently, for a perfect and upright walk before the God of Covenant. This walk mingled with a heart of thankfulness and praise to God is what opens the door for God to demonstrate His salvation. The preparation of the way for God to show His salvation has also got a prophetic significance. 1 Samuel 7:3 indicates two things as requisites for returning with all the heart to the Lord: a. Abandonment and destruction of all false gods. b. Preparation of the heart or direction of the heart to the Lord. c. Service to Him alone.

Then and after doing that only could they experience the deliverance of the Lord. The call to prepare the way of the LORD in Isaiah 40:3 also gives insight into the prophetic significance of the

text. Matthew saw it as a prophetic fulfilment in John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3): John preached repentance. The word "to repent", in the Greek, meant "to change the way of thinking." The Interpreter's Bible comments:

'The word "repent" implies a radical change of mind. It looks to the past in honesty and remorse, and then in a rightabout-face it looks to the future in resolve on a new way of life.' The call to prepare one's way through repentance and seeking of the face of the Lord, thus ordering one's way aright, is an opportunity to renew one's fellowship with the Lord. The hypocrite is still given a chance. The call is also a signification of the salvation by grace which was about to come through the incarnation and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was He who chose us and not we by ourselves. And He did that "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace; wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." He who offers thanksgivings, therefore, with a grateful acceptance of His gift and will in his life, glorifies and honours God. And he who thus walks in accordance to his confession prepares the way for the demonstration of the salvation of God.

CONCLUSION The Divine Postscript was truly, as Craigie also notes, a re-emphasising of the Call to true worship in Psalms 50:14 and Psalms 50:15. The offerings and feasts would lose their significance once the people forgot the place and meaning of these in the Covenant relationship. They were only momentary rituals and celebrations to commemorate, emphasise, and signify the life-long relationship. The relationship was more important than the ritual. Wasn't that the reason why Abraham was commanded by the Lord to walk before Him, and be perfect (Genesis 17:1)? Then would the promise of the Covenant materialise. The Israelites had to remember that honesty, sincerity, and faithfulness were crucial to the maintenance of the covenant relationship. Of course, they were chosen to be His peculiar treasure not because of their own ability and quality, but because of His own great love and grace. But they were chosen to be His people, to be subjects of His rule. They were not chosen because of their good works; but were chosen to good works: to be distinct in life, thought, conduct, and speech. They were his saints. The observance of the Law would only show how much they honoured, loved, and revered Him. Their offerings of thanksgivings would tell the Lord that all they were and had, in this Covenant relationship, was His and because of Him alone. Their walk of integrity would show that now they were not their own, and that it was no longer going to be their own way: His will was paramount in their lives. Such a maintenance of the Covenant relationship would prepare the way for the promise of the Covenant to be fulfilled in their lives. They could now stand still and see the Salvation of God. As Christians, we too need to understand and recognise the supremacy of His Good-Will in our lives. We were saved not by our own works but by His grace, unto good works (Ephesians 2:10). We must be thankful to God for His "unspeakable gift"(2 Corinthians 9:15), and "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith" we are called (Ephesians 4:1).

03.05. Conclusion

CONCLUSION The significance of Psalm 50 has been very well summed up by Peter C. Craigie as follows: "Just as the covenant was the very heart of the religion of Israel, so too Psalm 50 lies at the heart of the meaning of the covenant." The reality of the access of sinful men to the presence of God is not a thing that must be lightly estimated. Often man forgets the gravity of this truth. Man is forever doomed by his own sinfulness to eternal separation from God. It was His grace and provision that has brought us closer to Him. A price was paid. In the Old Testament, it was the sacrifice of the animal, which was but a portrayal of the great sacrifice that was going to occur in the fullness of time. Most often, we as Christians lose the sense of sublimity, gravity, and significance associated with this sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ that bridged the gap for us to gain access into the presence of the Father. It often happened so with the Israelites. It happened with Moses. He got so familiar with God that, perhaps, he thought that God need not need to be obeyed verbatim. He struck the rock twice when, in actuality, he was commanded just to speak to it (Numbers 20:2-12). He had to learn that obedience has no substitute. Saul had to learn this lesson: "...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The sacrifices and offerings were meaningless to God without the heart-attitude of gratitude towards what all He had done to them in His gracious disposition. They were even more worthless if they were not attended by an act of remorse and repentance of all unworthy acts and thoughts, and a decision to live according to His will. The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo* (its counterpart in the Hebrew being *shachah*). And it means "to fall down, prostrate oneself, adore on one's knees...do obeisance." It denotes reverence to, submission to, and adoration of the one worshipped. And where these qualities are not included in the act of 'worship', 'worship' becomes only an empty-shell-word. The other word for worship, in the Greek, is *latreia*, and "relates to the worship by priestly service that every believer can now offer to God through prayer and personal adoration." It is when His will and service become our happiness that worship actually takes place.

Psalm 50 explicitly declares that a confession of our gratitude to Him for all that He had done in our lives, a cheerful giving out of all that He had given to us, a prayer of faith and trust in Him alone is what God desires as the true service to Him. This dynamic relationship shows that we are the people of a living God and positions us as living witnesses of His marvellous deliverance in this dark and dying world. The essence of worship lies in the recognition of God's character and an understanding of our relationship with Him. We were not worth it at all. It was only by His grace that we are brought nigh into His presence. An honest adoration of Him through an expression of praise and gratitude in speech, and an expression of love through the observance of His commands is what constitutes real worship. This is how Archbishop William Temple summed up the meaning of worship:

"Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God, it is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, nourishment of mind by His truth, purifying of imagination by His beauty, opening of the heart to His love, submission of will to His purpose, all this gathered up in adoration; it is the greatest of expressions of which we human beings are capable. Let me take that all and put it in

one statement: worship is the sense and the service of God." The knowledge of God and His will with a sense of responsibility are vital to our relationship with Him. The wicked, in Psalm 50, underestimated this. They limited God in their thinking and became lax and frivolous in their actions, speech, and thoughts. God reproves them for that and warns them of the impending Judgement. They had taken the Covenant of Grace lightly and needed to be taught that this Covenant was also a Covenant of Judgement. He who breaks the Covenant will bear its consequences but he who offers praise and thanksgivings to God honours and glorifies Him; and he who walks according to His will prepares the way for the manifestation of the salvation of God.

Psalm 50 is, surely, a very instructive Psalm. It displays the factuality of the truth that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," the gravity of the command "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," and the imperativeness of the call "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." God desires His people to worship Him -- to love, adore, praise, thank, and serve Him with a total submission of themselves to His will. The twenty-four elders, in the book of Revelation, are shown as falling down before God and worshipping Him and casting down their crowns before His throne, saying,

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." For every beast of the forest is His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. He knows all the fowls of the mountains. The world is his, and the fullness thereof. He alone is worthy of all praise, honour, and glory. He alone is worthy of all worship. Man can give nothing to Him except worship. God is not desirous of vain-glory. He is worthy of all glory.

'God did not need thanksgiving to bolster his own self-esteem, as if (in the words of C. S. Lewis) he were "like a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who had never met him or heard of him"[Reflections on the Psalms,79]. God wanted thanksgiving, for that in turn emerged from human lives full of joy; it was the joyful lives of the covenant members, expressed so vividly in the sacrifices and the words of the ceremony, which fulfilled in God the richness of relationship which he had given to his people.' The significance of worship is well summed up by Jack Hayford in the following words:

'God requires no more of us in our doubts than He did of those early apostles. He only calls us to worship; to offer up all glory, honor, and praise...

'For it is there, as we exalt and lift up on high the Name of Jesus, that doubts like shadows will fade away.

'For it is there that His power will be poured out like new wine; and that Kingdom Authority will freshly flow through us.

'For it is there that Jesus Who died, now glorified, will be revealed among us in all His Majesty.

'So, MAGNIFY, come GLORIFY Christ Jesus the King -- WORSHIP HIS MAJESTY!'

Let us , therefore, offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name. May we not forget to do good and to communicate: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. And may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through

Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:15-16, Hebrews 13:20-21).

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04.00. Three Major Religions

THREE MAJOR RELIGIONS An Introduction to Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam
Domenic Marbaniang

04.01. Origin of Religions

ORIGIN OF RELIGIONS The subject of the origin of religions is not free from debate. Perspectives differ along presuppositions. Even the scientific versions are not beyond dispute. Novel discoveries are forcing us to re-examine these scientific theories of religion that were considered to be axiomatic.

Much of the problem involved in the study of pre-literary religions arises because of the lack of sufficient historical information dating back to the time when religion began. What all we have that can give actual information dates from the literary period (c. 3000 BC) — the time when the great civilizations were rising and priesthood was being developed with the building of temples, idols, altars, and scriptures.

Archaeological findings dating to the time before the literary period do give some idea, but the interpretations cannot be considered conclusive, since they lack absolute evidence — i.e., evidence that proves the interpretations as being beyond doubt. A stone 'altar' might not have really been an altar after all. Though the various religious scriptures give some idea of the kind of religion practiced by their respective adherents, each of them differ in at least some way from each other in their descriptions of the origin of religion.

Robert Brow cannot be considered wrong when he answers the question "What was the first religion of man?" with the statement: "Answers to this question differ widely and depend very much on what view is taken of man's origin." A polytheistic view, for instance, would opt for a polytheistic approach to religious history. An evolutionist would view religion as an evolved or evolving system. The disagreement among the accounts intensifies the problem even more. Formerly, most would have chosen to cling fundamentally to their own religious tradition; but with the advent of Darwinism and the new ideological shift it provided, the intellectual climate was challenged. Darwin's naturalistic evolutionism provided a newer perspective and way of approach. Herbert Spencer applied the idea of evolution not just to biology but also to psychology, sociology, religion, and ethics. Thus the evolutionary process of religion was charted as from animism to polytheism to monotheism, pantheism, and monism. The evolutionist viewpoint begins with the view that man evolved from a pre-simian ancestor. And so, since animals have no religion, a long period of apish chatter and fear of the unknown marked the trail towards the first religion "animatism". "Animatism," a "belief in a vague, potent, terrifying inscrutable force" preceded "animism," the spirit-fearing religion of tribals. Out of animism arose polytheism, when the nature-spirits began to be attributed with personality—intellect, emotions, and volition. Evolutionists believe that a certain form of polytheism divided the many gods hierarchically: one god was exalted above all the other gods in some way. Then each tribe began giving allegiance to a particular tribal god until monotheism was formed. Some philosophers (especially in India) began so deep an inward search that they ended up in abstractions concluding that Truth was beyond the domain of senses and could only be realized through self-abnegation. Pantheism and monism arose as a result. The scientific garb worn by evolutionism greatly attracted and influenced scholars of most disciplines. It

appeared to be proved, factual, and correct. In the west, the struggle to resolve the conflict between science and religion was tentatively solved by Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis, which attempted to interpret the Pentateuch to fit in with the evolutionary theory of history. Wellhausen's theory has now, however, been discredited and discarded by most scholars. The archaeological findings and writings of early historical period give evidence of a monotheistic religion with priestly practices. Wilhelm Schmidt of Vienna and anthropologists led by him have shown that hundreds of tribes around the world do not follow animism as their original religion. But most of them have a faint picture of a 'high-god,' a benign father-creator-god, who seems to be almost forgotten, so transcendent and so alienated that he is no longer feared. In place of him have come spirits that are dreaded and sought to appease. In other words, animism was not preceded by animatism, but it was preceded by monotheism. Religion has not evolved; it had degraded. The hypothesis of evolution is also not beyond controversy. It has scientific and rational as well as historical problems involved in it. That is one of the reasons why we can contend that the biblical answer is not to be so easily dismissed as outdated. It has already been shown how anthropological researches have indicated that monotheism may be more naturally primitive as a world-view than animism. Thus, it is arbitrary to just state that religion has evolved, without considerations for other viewpoints and evidences. The multiplication of evidence against the theory that religion originated in the fear of the dark unknown, feeling of dependence, and apish chatter and evolved into animism, polytheism, and consequentially, monotheism and monism; and the growing evidence in support of religion as having first started as monotheism and later degraded to polytheism, animism, and pantheism forces us to reconsider the biblical vantage point.

Turning to the biblical viewpoint, we see that God created the first man in His own image and likeness – i.e., as a rational, moral, volitional, and spiritual being – and began to have fellowship with him. Thus began the first religion as a relationship between God and man. The fall of man in disobedience to God's commandment brought in the element of sacrifice. Later, descendents of Adam began to depart from the original concept of God, and the more they departed away the more distorted their conception of God, of human life, and human responsibility became. After the confusion of languages at Babel, people became divided rapidly into nations by languages and families (Genesis 10:5). Paul's theological interpretation of this historical event was that God "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and determined the times before appointed, and bounds of their habitations; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." (Acts 17:26-27). This division of clans and communities prevented faster spread of religious degeneration as it had, earlier to the flood. Religious degeneration was also checked by the destruction of the tribe or ethnic group that degenerated in its morality. This is a well-witnessed fact of history. Immorality weakens a tribe to such an extent that it falls prey to invading tribes, thus bringing disaster on itself.

Signs of a system of sacrifice in pre-literary religion seem to be almost every where. But a clear interpretation of their purpose is not very easy. Only data dating from the literary period is of substantial help. Prehistory gives proof for none of the theories. That is to say, what may be considered as proof for one theory of religious history can also be interpreted as proof for another. In addition, how do we even know that the objects had religious significance in the first place? And so whatever evidence we have dates from the time when religion had come a long way from its

first and original state. By the time religion began, it had already developed a system of priesthood, place of worship, etc. therefore, since we can obtain no absolute proof for even our hypothesis of the origin of religion, we may, on recourse to reason opt for the biblical account as our starting point. Monotheism explains several historical facts that are intractable on the evolution of religion hypothesis.

Traces of the sacrificial system can be found in ancient religion. Sacrifice was a means of approaching God or gods. The nomadic Aryan tribes who invaded the Indus and Ganges plains brought along with them to India the practice of sacrifice. After their settlement in India they developed a regular priesthood, and the Vedas were born during this period. The Vedas are hymns chanted during the sacrifice. The hymns address God as 'the sun,' 'the heavenly one,' 'the storm.' And no matter whatever name was given to God, He was worshipped as the supreme ruler of the universe. This practice is referred to as henotheism. Later, henotheism changed into polytheism when the various names were personified to form various gods. And so, by 1000 BC, it is understood that the Vedic religion had become polytheistic; whereas, in its earliest forms it has an appearance of being monotheistic.

Attention may be focussed at the origin of the various names of God while discussing the origin of religions. The Creator-God has been called by various names in different nations. At first he was referred to as Dyaus Pitar ('divine father') which is the same as the Greek Zeus Pater, the Latin Jupiter or Deus, the early German Tiu or Ziu, and Norse Tyr. He was also known as 'the heavenly one' (Sanskrit Varuna, Greek Ouranos), or 'the friend' (Sanskrit mitra, Persian mithra). He was also, later, referred to as 'the fire' (Sanskrit agni, Latin ignis, Greek hagnos) which was crucial to the sacrificial event. As time went by, stories and myths increased in these religions. Polytheism went rampant and deities were identified in the forms of terrestrial creatures. Sex was added to worship in the fertility cult with a host of superstitious beliefs. Monotheism having degenerated into polytheism, the religious situation got worse and worse until, finally, monotheism became almost untraceable. However, monotheism didn't totally vanish from the face of the earth. Some groups still worshipped the one true God.

Priests had become significant to religion because of the mediatory role they played between God and man. Ancient India, China, Egypt, classical Greece, Rome, and many other civilizations found priesthood emerging in their religions. The priests performed the religious rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices. Later, this priesthood degenerated into priestcraft with all its malicious and rapacious depravedness. Rituals increased with time and apparent need. Writings, hymns, collections, etc., came into being. Thus originated religion, which still keeps going on.

We can summarize the account of the origin of religion by stating that it began, as far as it seems reasonable to assume, with the creation of man and his first understanding of God as the Almighty Creator God. This form of pure monotheism, however, began degenerating by the impact of sin into polytheism and other forms that expressed separation from God. The Concept of God, Nature, Fear, and Salvation in Pre-Literary Religions As to what the pre-literary-era man conceived of God is also open to discussion as has already been seen. The evolutionist would say that God was once conceived of as the dark unknown, then as forces of nature, then as spirits, gods, and lately – towards the beginning of literature-- as the transcendent God. But the biblical perspective suggests something very different. Anyway, resorting to archaeological findings becomes

necessary once information regarding pre-literary religion is sought. The interpretation of archaeological findings is not so easy. Pre-literary and pre-history are synonymous since pre-historic period refers to the period before recorded history. The period of interpretation of pre-historic materials is the difficulty one faces when ascertaining whether an object was used for religious purposes or for something else. Pre-historic source materials include the following:

Burial places and burial finds,

Deposition of offerings,

Representation of deities, spirits, and cultic figures (carved idols, reliefs, rock paintings, etc.),

Remains of constructions with religious associations, such as altars, temples, or foundations of world pillars.

The pre-historic period has been divided into

The Paleolithic – Old Stone Age. Historians consider the people of this period to be hunters, food-gatherers, and fishers.

The Neolithic – New Stone Age (c. 10,000 BC). During this period the hunters began turning into farmers.

Viewing from the monotheistic viewpoint, we may infer that the people of the Paleolithic period regarded God as the one who protected them and helped them in their hunting episodes. Following the monotheistic theory (that religion degenerated from monotheism to all of its other forms), we may assume that this God of the hunters became very significant only to the utilitarianistic purposes of later generations. That is to say, He was worshipped not for relationship but for benefit. For example, bear skulls found in Drachenloch cave in Switzerland seem to indicate that the dead bears' skulls were so buried in stone coffins because it was believed that the dead animal will return to life, or persuade its relatives to make themselves available to the hunter. If this plausible 'cultic interpretation' is true then it indicates not only how much the concept of God had fallen down but also how low the need of worship and its quality had come down. From 30,000 – 10,000 BC spans the Upper Paleolithic Age. The way the bodies were buried during this period gives evidence of a clear belief in life after death. Also during this time the cult of the mother-goddess appeared. The idols have very distorted features with the breasts, hips, and sexual parts excessively enlarged. This emphasis on the private parts is a sure evidence of religion degenerating into a kind of naturalism – fertility cults. The concept of hunting magic might also have appeared during this period as is indicated by the cave paintings. If it was so the concept of a Transcendent, All-powerful, Sovereign God was delimited now to a power that could be tapped in by formulas.

It is certain that man was very fearful of natural forces that could be hazardous to his survival. And so he was turning more and more to the mercy of nature, which he personified in many forms. The Neolithic Period (from 10,000 BC) is the period during which objects of stones are not found as chipped but as grounded and polished. During this period, producing replaced hunting. Warm weather and fast melting ice characterize the climate. Farming and village life are established. Pottery, weaving, and agriculture come to scene. Dogs and goats are domesticated. Death and burial beliefs appear. Graves have been found with gifts in them; probably, indicating a certain kind

of belief in life after death. Fertility rites also abound. Temples appear with altars, vases, etc., inside. The megalithic monuments, dolmens, and menhirs indicate that the priesthood had also indulged in astrology and magic. Superstitions and religious rituals might as well have begun to abound with further leanings towards magic, taboos, totems, and witchcraft. The interpretations are, however, only probabilities. The temples became the places of sacrifice. Salvation-beliefs may be divided into salvation-present and salvation-future. Salvation-present was survival-oriented and was sought by appeasing gods and goddesses and also by nature worship. Salvation-future was for the peace of the soul after death. The family members buried their dead one with gifts that would give him/her comfort. There are a varied possibilities of interpretations, however. In short, pre-historic religion with its concept of God, fear, nature, salvation might be considered to be much superstitious and utilitarianistic arising from a fear of the natural forces and the instinct for survival. Anyway, we should not presume that our hypothesis is the final.

Finally, the Bible believing Christian can find many anthropological proofs for the fact that the first religion was monotheistic, which later degraded to polytheism, pantheism, and such isms that bear marks of departure from the true revelation of God (Romans 1:18 ff).

04.02. Christian View of Other Religions

CHRISTIAN VIEW OF OTHER RELIGIONS What Should Be Our Attitude to People of Other Faiths The Bible demands us to respect every human as one created in the image of God. Each life is precious. Each person is significant. And Christ died for all humanity. This, however, does not mean accepting their ways of worship. It is acceptance of the person, not of his beliefs. But people who are dangerous to society must be handed over to law. And Christians should contribute towards the Judicial, Executive, and Legislative administration of their nations. This, in order that all humans might live peacefully.

There are chiefly three theological perspectives regarding world religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivism maintains that the truth is only found in the Biblical revelation of faith; inclusivism holds that people of different faiths can also be saved because of Jesus Christ, though they do not know Jesus Christ; pluralism regards all religions as equally valid ways to God.

Many Evangelical Christians look at the people of other faiths as those who are lost and are in need of the Savior. This calls for a heart of compassion, love, and sympathy. This also calls for action. Extremities of traditionalism, not endorsed by the Bible, which might be very offensive to non-Christians must be avoided. All that is a stumbling block and hindrance to people from coming to Christ must be abandoned. This is an obvious exclusivist position. But, this must not be equated with fundamentalism. The pluralists and the inclusivists, by stating their positions as right, also posit another exclusivist position. In fact, on matters pertaining to truth, exclusivism is inescapable. Truth is unique, divisive, and paramount. The truthfulness of the Christian Gospel is not only evident but also consequentially very beneficial to all humans in the present. Therefore, it must be preached. Thus the exclusivist attitude is totally contrary to the fundamentalist extremism that is often characterized by intolerance, hatred, and gives rise to terroristic activities. The Christian exclusivist attitude is open to the truth. Therefore, no man must preach the Gospel unless he is sure of the power of the Holy Spirit working in his own life and making him God's witness. Jesus Himself commanded His disciples to wait till they received power from above after the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The actual working of the Spirit in a believer's life and evangelistic pursuits provides reasonable ground for him to proclaim Christ as the exclusive source of salvation. The fruit of the Spirit is anti-terroristic (Galatians 4:22-23). Divine wisdom is open to reason (James 3:17). This means that to have a really Christian attitude towards people of other religions is to appreciate the goodness in them, be ready to work along with them for beneficiary purposes and at the same time have a heart of compassion to win them to Christ by love. No man can be a Christian by fear or by greed. Self-desiring is anti-Christian. Therefore, the attitude of a Christian towards people of other religions must be an attitude which Christ had for them: of love, compassion, respect, and passion to rescue them from the bondage of Satan, sickness, and sin. A Christian is different from a non-Christian as far as beliefs are concerned. But this doesn't argue for discriminations on the basis of religion. Even Christians are divided among themselves on matters of doctrine. The Christian who is confident that he has the truth must strive to preach that truth in love. Superiority complexes and colonial spirit must be avoided since they

are anti-christian. Pride leads to tensions and intolerance. A Christian should understand that if he knows the truth it is only by grace, and this should make him more humble. If it were not for the grace of God then the Christian himself would have been in the position of the one he judges. Man is man whether he is a Christian or a Hindu. The same temptations that a non-christian faces are the temptations that a Christian faces. And there is possibility of the Christian himself falling from faith. So, let us look at men as those created in God's image and those for whom Christ died.

How God Blesses People of Other Religions Biblically speaking, God's blessings on the people of the earth can be divided into two general categories:

General Blessings on everyone.

Specific Blessings on His Covenant people.

It is an understood fact that no man deserves any of the blessings of God. All blessings that man gets from God is only by grace, and arises out of some kind of a covenant act initiated by God Himself. Thus, even the former general blessings also are not apart from some kind of a God initiated covenant. The covenant people are those who have bound themselves to God by a covenant God Himself has initiated. According to the Bible, the Jews and the Christians fall under this category. The Mosaic and the Palestinian Covenants with the Jews had different ramifications than the New Covenant by Jesus Christ with His followers. The Davidic Covenant directly referring to the reign of Jesus Christ has implications for both. We can't explore each of them right here. But the point to be made is that both the Jews and the Christians are entitled to the privileges that the people of other religions are not entitled to. History testifies to the fact that the Israelites have experienced many miracles as a nation. This is nothing but the blessing of God in their lives, which comes not just as protection but also as fruitfulness, success, development, and victory over enemies. Christians experience the blessings of the New Covenant here on earth and expect to experience greater blessings in the coming Kingdom. Christians have the forgiveness of sins, the rights of sonship, the authority over demons, over sickness, and over adversities. They have the promise of answered prayers and host of other blessings as a result of Christ's Covenant with them. The General blessings result out of the covenants made with Adam and Noah. These covenants are unconditional and are relevant to all humans. The Edenic Covenant with Adam in Genesis 1:28-30, gives humans authority over all creation and authorizes them to eat of every herb and tree. God reiterates the covenant in the covenant with Noah and his descendants in Genesis 9:1-29. An additional item of this reiteration is that all the creatures will fear humans and every living thing was made available as food for humans, in addition to vegetation. God blesses man to be fruitful, multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth, and multiply therein (Genesis 9:7). I believe that the recent population explosion is a blessing. Mankind can never be totally wiped out of existence, even by themselves, apart from God's will. But then God goes on to state that that He would never again destroy mankind as a whole again by flood (Genesis 9:11). The token of this covenant is the rainbow (Genesis 9:13). The covenant also institutionalizes Human Government. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). This, in a way, was not left to man alone to be carried out, but was originally backed by God Himself. This blessing of Justice is a clearly observable fact. What one sows is what one reaps. When a viper wound around Paul's wrist at Malta, the people said among themselves "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance (dike – God of Justice) suffereth not to

live" (Acts 28:4, parenthesis mine). Thus, God's Justice as a blessing is seen as an experience of all humans.

God's blessings include all that work towards and facilitate human well being and prosperity on earth. The blessings of Justice is given for the preservation and well being of human life. Without which man would have destroyed his own species.

Jesus Himself said that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Thus, we see God as blessing the people of the earth with everything necessary for the continuation of life. It is only the social, economic, and political boundaries that man has built up, in addition to his own sinful and selfish pursuits, that lead to the state of distress and poverty in the world. Other curses of sin like sickness and death also prevail and hinder God's blessings on the people. However, justice through various means is also dealt on the transgressors as emphasized in the Bible. God punishes the evil doers by withdrawing His blessings of goodness, thus allowing famine; by withdrawing His protection, thus allowing the enemies to prevail; by punishing by pestilence (1 Chronicles 21:12). History is a witness to the fact that all those races that had reached a level of moral degeneration that was intolerable and dangerous were in a way or the other, often by one of the ways listed above, exterminated.

Thus, God's blessings on the people of other religions are for their well being while on earth. He also protects them in order to give them a chance to accept His Son, Jesus Christ, and thus become partakers of the heavenly blessings of the New Covenant. The Significance of The Study of Major Religions The study of major religions of the world does help me to become both a better human being and a better follower of my own faith.

After studying briefly the various major religions of the world, I could realize the universality of this quest for meaning and the eternal, despite of the many scientific developments. The further development of religions is an indication that even though we have developed materially we still are in need to develop spiritually. The dissatisfaction inside and search for fulfillment is well reflected in the way the various religions are followed. The realization of this human condition spurs me even more on the search for the truth. Even as a Christian I realize that there are still many questions that are left unanswered. This, probably, helps me to be more spiritually oriented and thus be a better human being. It is amazing to find how great a role worship and belief play in a religion. Faith in a God is indispensable to life. Tolstoy said that it was faith that gave him meaning in life. Perhaps, this understanding of the significance of faith could only be realized after studying the pathos of people of other religions.

I believe that if every individual man and woman studied the major religions with an open mind they would grow to learn to respect each other and relate to each other in ways that are more efficient. This would surely help them to be better humans. I think that instead of remaining in my own well and desiring to limit everything to and bringing everything in to it, one must get out of that well, survey the whole expanse of human spiritual experience. This would surely help him to be more sympathetic to his fellow humans. I am not encouraging here compromise. I only am emphasizing the need of a knowledge of other religions for an understanding of the human quest for spirituality, the human quest for salvation, and what that means to me as a human myself. A study of the major religions also helps me to become a better follower of my own faith. By studying

the major religions, I sense the need of studying my own religion more deeply. This, in order that I may find myself in a sure ground when proclaiming to other people that my faith is the truth. To say that I know the truth does seem to be ambitious and to say that I do not know the truth seems to be humble enough to many in this post-modern world, which follows the rule that absolute truth cannot be known. But one who has tasted and proved the truth must equip himself must also be ready to prove and confirm the truthfulness of his testimony. That is what makes a witness a witness. This forces me to study my faith more deeply.

After observing the plurality of religions, I am also forced to be committed to the truth that I know follow it more diligently. I understand that if I didn't do so I would not be able to proclaim to these searchers of truth the truth that I know. Unless I believe and practice my faith how can I preach it? The study of religions does challenge me to be more careful in my conversations with, behavior before, and relations with the people of other religions.

Therefore, study of major religions is very significant, especially to one undergoing ministerial training.

04.03. Hinduism

HINDUISM The word "Hindu" comes from the word "Sindhu" (name for the Indus river in Hindi – the word "India" comes from the name Indus). It originally referred to the people who lived beyond the Sindhu (or Indus) river. Later, it came to describe the religions that they practiced. Thus, Hinduism is not one single religion but a group of many religions. Popularly, it is the religion that came to be established through the invasion of Aryans who entered India in about 2000 BC. The other people groups, the major being Dravidians, embraced the Aryan culture and this intermixture produced various forms of Hindu religious ways. Other people groups who didn't assimilate came to be known as the tribals – they were separated from contact with the main world. Some other groups were declared as untouchables and didn't find liberation until the dawn of the modern age, when humanism started becoming popular.

Hinduism doesn't have a founder; still Manu, the author of Manusmriti, the Hindu law code, is considered to be the law giver of Hinduism. It was he who propounded the division of Hindu society into four castes (Brahmins - priests, Kshatriyas- warriors and rulers, Vaishyas – Business class people, and Shudras – Lower caste workers), and established many laws for the people. In the 5th century BC, two protest groups, Jainism and Buddhism, arose as reaction against the oppressive theologies and practices of the upper caste people, known as the priestly class of Brahmins. Both Vardhamana Mahavira (founder of Jainism) and Siddhartha Gautama (founder of Buddhism) were Kshatriyas. Following this, there was a highly philosophical era that involved scholars of different schools debating on many issues such as epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and liberation. There came to be 6 theistic schools (Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Uttara Mimamsa, and Purva Mimamsa or Vedanta) and 6 atheistic schools (Charvaka, Jaina, and four schools of Buddhism). Later, during the period of Islamic invasion in the 14th and 15th centuries, Bhakti or devotional trends arose that emphasized on pluralism and devotion. Important Bhakti saints were Tulsidas, Meerabai, Tyagaraj, and Surdas. Another major Indian religion, Sikhism, also arose during the same period. In modern times, people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, S. Radhakrishnan, and Mahatma Gandhi gave a new outlook to Hindu thought and practice. Hinduism also has a number of guru cults, in which a sect conforms to the teaching of their patron guru or teacher. The chief scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva) and the Puranas (the epics chiefly, Ramayana and Mahabharata). The Vedas contain hymns and regulations regarding the sacrifices, while the epics recount stories regarding the dealings of the gods with men. The doctrine of Avatara (Incarnation of Lord Vishnu) is a main theme of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The doctrine states that Vishnu incarnates whenever evil increases in order to destroy the wicked and re-establish righteousness. The Hero of Ramayana is Lord Rama, and the Hero of Mahabharata is Lord Krishna. The Bhagavad Gita (Song of God) is a part of the Mahabharata which has gained immense popularity in modern times.

Two important teachings in Hinduism that are also found in Buddhism and Jainism, though variantly, are the doctrines of Karma (the doctrine that we reap what we sow) and Punarjanma (the

doctrine that a soul is reborn to suffer the sins of its past birth). Liberation is a process by which sins are cleansed at each stage of rebirth. If one's sins multiply, he is reborn into a degraded life-form. However, there are a great number of Hindus who don't believe in the doctrine of Punarjanma and a number of those in the age of Hindu Reformation who no longer hold to idolatry and polytheism.

Main Teachings: The Four Goals of Life The four goals of life according to Hinduism are dharma (righteousness), artha (worldly prosperity or material well being), kama (enjoyment or pleasure), and moksha (liberation).

1. **Dharma:** Dharma is translated as righteousness, duty, law, and religion in English. In Hindu mythology, Rama, Yudhishtra, and Harishchandra are all symbols of dharma – ones who symbolized the dignity and power of dharma through their lives.

Dharma is a relative term – relative in the sense that it has sense only in its practical relation to each of the varnas and the ashramas. The edifice of law dealing with the varnas (i.e., caste divisions) is called the varnasarama dharma. The varnasarama dharma, however, must be distinguished from the practice of the modern caste system. The Hindus came about with the varnasarama dharma theory for the purpose of benefit to the society. Dharma is social and relational. A cooperative division of labor in society is imperative for its progress. Each individual must perform his duty (dharma) as prescribed by the law related to his varna. He must be faithful to his dharma for the benefit of society and his own self. The mythological basis for the varnasarama dharma theory is that Brahma, the Creator God, is the originator of the castes. According to this mythical account, the Brahmin or the priestly caste came from the mouth of Brahma and so were the sole authority on deciphering and proclaiming the scriptures; the Kshatriya or the warrior group came from the arms of Brahma; the Vaisyas or merchants, from his thigh; and the Sudras or the workmen, from his foot. It is the dharma of the Brahmin not to eat non-vegetarian food. It is the dharma of the Kshatriya to protect his people from the enemies. That is the reason why when Arjun desired to back off from killing his cousins out of love and compassion, Krishna explained to him the meaning of life and dharma and encouraged him not to give in to his feelings but fulfill his dharma of being a Kshatriya by killing the enemies of righteousness, presently his brothers. The modern world looks at the caste-system as the greatest evil, because of the inequality it presupposes and the evil it produces. It is a hindrance to the self-actualization a Sudra. Most scholars, however, agree that the caste system originated out of pure motives – aiming towards a well-organized and cooperative society. Caste system, according to them, becomes an evil when it is implemented as a means by the upper castes to dominate and suppress the lower castes. The ashrama dharma divides a human life term into four stages. At each of the stages, an individual is expected to fulfil his particular ashrama dharma -- related to that particular stage – in order to attain moksha (salvation). This too is a responsibility-duty-oriented division, which we will later explore a little more.

2. **Artha:** Hinduism is not a not-this-worldly religion altogether. It also emphasizes the importance of earthly prosperity. Progress by development occurs through the pursuit of worldly and material well being, and that in accordance to the rule of dharma. This is the material aspect of life. A man not only ought to pursue righteousness (dharma) but also pursue material prosperity (artha). Almost every Hindu aspiring to be rich worships the goddess Laxmi, the goddess of wealth.

Various religious ways are sought by the Hindus to ward off an evil eye, to destroy a dangerous spell, and to tap the flow of riches.

3. Kama: Life's goal is also to satisfy the demands of the flesh. The enjoyment of kama, physical desire is not evil when it is pursued in accordance to the dharma in Hinduism. The erotic sculptures over the temples at Khajuraho and other places, the once prevalent practice of the devadasi system, and a host of other things bear witness to the religious encouragement of kama. It doesn't, however, mean that Hinduism promoted licentiousness, though some of its gods favored that. Hinduism does uphold the virtues of Pativrata (a wife's faithfulness and total allegiance to her husband) and Tyaga (renunciation of worldly desires). The pluralistic nature of Hinduism also allows a plurality of ethical ways, only they must be somehow disguised as a form of dharma.

4. Moksha: Moksha can be translated as 'liberation' or 'release.' It is the release, exit of the self from this world of existence and liberation from the series of birth and rebirths. Release can be obtained at different levels. A householder who, for example, conducts well his household affairs gets into Swarga-loka where gods live. A brahmacharya who performs well his dharma enters Maharloka. A vanaprasthi enters Jnanaloka and Tapaloka to enjoy higher pleasures. A righteous sanyasin enters Satyaloka. But the final part of salvation can only be obtained when an individual merges with the Over-Soul Brahman in the final stage of realization. A person can achieve moksha by following three ways. We will examine each of them later. The ideas behind the doctrine of moksha are Samsara, Karma, and Punarjanma. There is also the concept of Maya (illusion – subjective and objective) which is posited to explain each of these. Samsara is the universal manifestation, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The law of Karma states that each man receives the fruit of his actions in the next birth (Punarjanma). The cycle of rebirth goes on and on until moksha is attained. Moksha is the release from rebirth by union with the absolute. By breaking loose from these chains of Maya and avidya (ignorance) and merging with Brahman in absolute identity moksha is attained. The Four Stages of Life Hinduism divides the life of man into four stages. They are as follows:

Brahmacharya. The bachelor-student life.

Grihastya. The householder life.

Vanaprasthi. The life of retirement to forest, i.e., the hermit life.

Sanyasin. The holy sage, ascetic life.

The above four stages are known as the ashram dharmas. These were dharmas or duties assigned to each period of a man's life. While the first three stages are said to be obligatory, i.e., all men experience them, the last is only optional, and not all men reach it. Each period or stage may be divided into 25 years each. The first stage of Brahmacharya is of student life. This is the period of life when man lives in the house or ashram of the guru, his teacher and guide, and under his supervision studies the sacred texts. He also acquires expertise in various fields of learning at this stage. The student must be obedient and submissive to his teacher, without which he can learn nothing. The guru to him is like God since he helps him to meet and know God. The respect for the guru and for the parents is to be continued to the end of one's life. The Grihastya is the period when a man gets married and settles down to ordinary family life. It is known as the

householder life. Living with his family and looking after them, the householder also contributes much to the society in which he lives. Continuation of the family line by reproduction is a significant part of this stage. All the dharmas pertaining to this stage contribute much to the wellbeing of the society, family, and lineage. Virtues like honesty, responsibility, industry, and hospitality are obligatory during this period. The householder is not just a provider of his family needs but also a guide to his family. Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha are highly pursued during this stage. The Vanaprastha period, i.e., of hermit life, is the stage when a man retires to the forest with his wife and meditates on the value of life. Away from all pursuit of worldly materials, he can now concentrate on spending his time in meditating on the values of life and strive to know God. The observance of such a life is, it may be noted, highly impossible in the modern era. The ashram dharmas were solely enacted in accordance to the feasibility of circumstances during the Vedic and puranic era and could not have been envisaged for our times. The final stage of life, which only some can reach, is that of the holy sage, the ascetic life called the Sanyasa. During this stage a man renounces all worldly attachments, immerses himself in his struggle to know the truth and experience union with it. The Sanyasin practices hard asceticism to overpower his flesh and his senses. The goal is to become so liberated from the domain of the senses and carnal passions so as to transcend them, realize God and attain moksha.

All that are faithful in the observance of the various varana and ashram dharmas enter the various respective gradations of heaven. The Three Ways to Become One with God

Freedom from Samsara, the cycle of birth and death, is moksha. It implies union with Brahman – the only Absolute Reality. By this experience of Brahman, avidya (ignorance) is destroyed. By the power of Maya one is deceived into believing that the plurality of phenomenon is true. In his avidya he is chained to samara, the manifest world filled with the cycle of events, of birth, death, rebirth, etc. Moksha is the eternal, intrinsic nature of the Atman and is the chief goal of life. It can neither be produced, modified, attained, nor refined since it is an accomplished fact, the intrinsic nature of the Atman that needs to be discovered by intuition. Self-realization or realization of the Atman (Self) as the reality of the universe is moksha. The key is detachment from the phenomenal world and union with Absolute Reality.

Three ways have been prescribed by which one may attain perfection, or be liberated from the bondage of Samsara. They are as follows:

The Karma Yoga, i.e., the path of work

The Jnana Yoga, i.e., the path of knowledge

The Bhakti Yoga, i.e., the path of devotion

The Karma Yoga is the practical method, the Jnana Yoga is the theoretical method, and the Bhakti Yoga is the emotional method.

1. The Karma Yoga. This is the path of action. It essentially involves the working out of right principles in ones life so as to be liberated from the chains of Samsara. The bad Karma has its roots in selfishness and the desire for the fruit of action. The Bhagvad Gita states that action should be motivated by detachment from the desire of its fruit. Action is, indubitably, superior to inaction. Only action that is selfless is liberating.

"If one performs all actions including daily duties dispassionately, without anger, without attachment, in the spirit of selflessness, in dedication to God, without desire for the fruit, such action will free the individual soul and will lead him to perfection."

Such action alone constitutes sacrifice. Every single act must be a sacrifice (Yagna). Sanyasa is the renunciation of the desire and not the renunciation of action. Tyaga is the renunciation of the fruit of all works. Karma includes acts of sacrifices, gifts, austerity, dharma, etc. but true, liberating Karma is desireless.

2. The Jnana Yoga. It is the way of knowledge, not the kind of scientific or physical knowledge that the world pursues but a metaphysical, a mystical one. It is the knowledge of reality as it is by union with it. While the plurality of the universe as it appears to us does constitute our experience of self and the world, the Gita calls for consideration of the Jnana Yoga. It calls for union with the absolute non-dual Reality – the realization of self as Self. For this the mind must be disciplined and tuned in with Reality. The individual self is the hindrance when it phenomenalises as a separate entity from other entities. Jnana or knowledge happens when this self realizes that it is Brahman – Being – Reality; and that all the other phenomena is itself in manifestation. It is held that Jnana Yoga is difficult without Karma Yoga. Study of the Vedas and other scriptures is the action followed by long periods of reflection and meditation.

3. The Bhakti Yoga. This is the way of devotion, the way of trust and love. Devotion is interpreted as the bond of trust and love to a personal God. Unlike Jnana Yoga, which focuses on the Impersonal Brahman, Bhakti Yoga focuses on a loving attachment to God, a longing for God for its own sake. To be noted is the concept of this God as being transcendent and yet totally immanent. All icons of this God are to be considered as symbolical. Absolute meditation and undivided devotion to Ishwara is essential to Bhakti. God must become his/her sole refuge. For those who have found Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga extremely difficult, the Bhakti marga comes in as solace. A true devotee has three distinctive qualities: evenmindedness, undivided devotion, and skill in action. These three qualities woven together in perfect harmony within the devotee knit him/her to his/her Lord. By absolute devotion, one is united to his/her Lord in love. Stories abound of how Vishnu finds the marks of the beating inflicted on his devotee's body on his own. The Lord is so tied to his devotee that in one story he forgets to bring his chakra along with him when he hurries to rescue his devotee from peril.

Thus, by following any of the above three ways a person can find his/her way to God.

Parallels in Christianity The Four Goals: Christianity also talks of righteousness, material prosperity, enjoyment of life, and salvation (Matthew 6:23; Psalms 1:1-6; Ephesians 6:3; Psalms 104:14; John 3:16), but it has no division of class or caste within it. It neither does set rules for ashrama dharmas. The moksha of Christianity is moksha from sin, its condemnation, and its misery. Hinduism talks of liberation from the misery of the world. But then it delimits that misery as being an illusion of the self and reduces it to a picture of recurring birth. The difference centers on the diagnosis of the human problem. It also consists on how the solution is formulated. "Why is a man here" (the goal of human existence) is tied to "Where did man come from" and "Where is he going?" What a person believes about his origin and his destiny (past and future) affects his decision (present) greatly. Christianity does differ greatly from Hinduism in the explanation of all these three questions, although it resembles superficially to it in its acknowledgement of the belief

on creation and judgement. The Four Stages of Life: Although Christianity doesn't subscribe to the theory of ashram dharma, it does uphold the virtues of social responsibility, duty, protection of family, respect of parents and elders, detachment from carnal lusts, sacrificial giving, etc. One is required to fulfill his duty according to his position. There is a time for everything. The Three Ways: Christianity, especially in its Protestant form, emphasizes the fact and is built on the assumption that man can never be reconciled to his God by his own works. Man is intrinsically sin-proned, lustful, and proud. That is why, we have the concepts of Grace, Sacrifice, and Atonement on which Christianity stands. But a Christian is saved unto good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Christianity does talk about spiritual knowledge, but it is the practical knowledge of knowing God as ones Lord and accepting Jesus as ones Lord and Savior (John 3:16). The world is not an illusion. It is real – created by God. The self is not God. But man is created in the image of God and the Christian is expected to grow up in the image of Christ the Son of God. In this way, the Karma marga doesn't is a failure according to Christianity. Jnana can be reinterpreted as knowledge of God, not intellectual but personal and relational. It is not Jnana of one being God himself but Jnana of God as ones God.

Christianity finds great parallels in Bhakti Yoga. Devotion is sublime to Christianity. "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," is said to be the greatest of the commandments. Loving God and obeying his commandments (Bhakti and Karma) go together. Christian Bhakti, however, is anti-idolatry. Idolatry is considered an affront on the dignity of God. The devotional hymns of popular Hinduism are much parallel to Christian worship. The only basic differentiating element is the cross of Jesus Christ, which also segregates Christianity from any other religion of the world.

04.04. Buddhism

BUDDHISM The Life of Gautama Buddha

Gautama Buddha was born as Siddhartha Gautama in c. 560 BC in a grove called Lumbini near the city of Kapilavastu (modern Bhinla), Nepal. His father's name was Suddhodhana and mother's name was Mahamaya. Suddhodhana was an aristocratic Hindu chieftain who made all effort to keep his son in all comfort. It is said that at Siddhartha's birth some astrologers had predicted that this child would either become a very great emperor and rule the world or renounce everything and bring emancipation to the world.

Till the early twenties of his life, Siddhartha lived all the time in the palace not venturing far from the comforts, luxuries, and delights provided to him by his father. There were three palaces, each of which were built to suit the three seasons of summer, rainy, and winter. Siddhartha resorted to each of them as convenient. Female minstrels were appointed to entertain him and he enjoyed all comforts and pleasures of life. He was also trained, during this period, in all the skills that a prince needed. His skill in archery helped him to win him his beautiful wife Yasodhara, while he was only sixteen years old. For the next thirteen years after his marriage, Siddhartha lived a very luxurious and complacent life until, one day, he encountered a very shocking scene, which was followed by three others.

It came to pass that, one day, the prince climbed his chariot and drove through the streets of his city. Suddenly, an old man with gray hair staggered out of his house clad in ragged clothing. On inquiry, he was horrorstruck by the fact that all men must encounter this inevitable pain of aging. On another day as the prince drove in his chariot, he heard a curdling cry for help. Turning to where the sound came from, Siddhartha was shocked to see a sick man rolling on the ground with excruciating pain and agony. On an other occasion, the prince came face to face a corpse of a man being carried to its funeral by bewailing men and women. Siddhartha was overpowered by the reality of the scope of human suffering. He was dumbfounded, shocked, disillusioned, and dismayed. Then, he saw a hermit, calm and dignified, clothed in flowing orange colored robes. Siddhartha understood this to be the way to finding emancipation from suffering for all humans. And so, one night, at the age of twenty-nine, the very day his son Rahul was born, Siddhartha left his family in the sleeping night hours and departed into the forest in search of truth, peace, and deliverance. Deep in the forest, he shaved his head and put on the yellow robes of a hermit. For six years, after that, he kept searching for truth. He went through severe forms of asceticism to the extent that he was close to death. According to traditional accounts, once Gautama fasted so much that his belly was glued to his backbone. After having found this way to be fruitless, he renounced asceticism; then arriving at Gaya, sat down under a Peepal-tree with a resolve not to get up until he found a solution. The story goes on that Mara, the tempter, tried to dissuade Gautama from his meditation by sending horrifying storms, rains, and fiery weapons. But Gautama was adamant and firm. Then, after forty-nine days of meditation, on a full-moon night of May, Siddhartha achieved enlightenment. Henceforth, he would be known as "the Buddha," which

means "the Enlightened One." The tree, under which he sat and achieved enlightenment, came to be known as Bodhi-tree or Bo-tree, and the spot came to be known as Buddhagaya (it is in modern Bihar). This was the thirty-fifth year of his life.

Beginning right here, for the next forty-five years of his life the Buddha toured through north India teaching and preaching his message of truth and deliverance. He made many convert, despite the many opposition and pains he had to face. After all this, finally, on a full moon day at Kusinara the Buddha passed away at the age of eighty.

Buddhist Scriptures The Theravada scriptures are known as the Tripitaka (the three baskets) and consists of the Vinaya Pitaka (Discipline), Sutta Pitaka (Discourses), and the Abhidhamma Pitaka (Metaphysics). The Mahayana scriptures are named as Vinaya, Sutras, and, Shastras. The Teachings of Buddha

Immediately after his enlightenment, the Buddha set out for Banares. At Sarnath, he preached to his five ascetic friends his first sermon called the 'Dharmachakra Pravartana,' i.e., the setting in motion of the wheel of dharma. The sermon set forth the four Noble Truths concerning life and the Eight-fold path to deliverance. Dhamma is paramount for Buddhists. That is the word by which they designate their religion. It means 'doctrine,' 'law,' 'norm,' 'religion,' 'truth,' or 'world order.' 'Dharmachakra Pravartana' is generally called the speech of the foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness and is considered the foundation of the whole doctrine. Buddha's doctrine is based upon two axioms:

All life is sorrow,

Always keep the path of the mean.

These two axioms are summed up in the Four Noble truths, which may be called the Gospel of Buddhism. The first two of these Truths diagnoses the problem, the third one declares the remedy, and the fourth one declares how this remedy is to be attained.

1. The Four Noble Truths a. The first Noble Truth is that suffering is a universal fact. All of earthly existence can be summed up in one word: suffering. The word for suffering in the Pali language (the language which the Buddha spoke) is dukkha. This word has a deep philosophical meaning and is very difficult to define. It covers the whole avenue of concepts related to suffering such as, misery, distress, despair, agony, suffering of body and mind, change, emptiness, imperfection, conflict. This dukkha is what describes the condition of all existence.

"This is the noble Truth of pain: birth is suffering, old age is suffering, disease is suffering; death is suffering; sorrows, lamentation, dejection and despair are suffering. Contact with unpleasant thing is suffering; not getting what one craves is suffering. In brief the five groups of clinging are suffering."

This, however, was not a pessimistic analysis leading to existential despair and nihilism. Life is not totally meaningless and hopeless. The Buddha was Buddha he knew the solution to this problem; he had awakened; he was enlightened. He has already diagnosed the sickness of the world. Now he goes on to explicate the second Noble Truth related to the cause of this problem of suffering.

2. The second Noble Truth states that suffering results from desire. Desire is the cause of all suffering. In this sense, suffering is purely subjectivised. The problem is internal not external. It is the thirst, the desire, the craving (Tanha) for sensual enjoyment, indulgence, and self-satisfaction that leads to renewed rebirths. The false self being submerged in desire, desire seeks satisfaction and falls down to another birth. And so the cycle is set in motion. The illusion of self is the fruit of ignorance, which gives birth to desire, which in turn causes sorrow.

3. The third Noble Truth deals with the cessation of suffering. Suffering ceases to be when desiring ceases to be. This state of complete deliverance, of unceasing and unspeakable bliss is called nirvana.

4. The fourth Noble Truth declares the path to nirvana. It is called the Noble Eight-fold Path. Also referred to as the Middle Way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-torture, the Noble Eight-fold Path lays down the moral principles of Right living:

Right Views – understanding the Four Truths.

Right Aspirations – good will, lustlessness, kindness, etc.

Right Speech – abstaining from lying, slander, vain talk, and harsh language.

Right Conduct – abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual immorality.

Right Livelihood – earning in way that doesn't harm to any living being.

Right Effort – rejecting evil thoughts and cultivating good thoughts.

Right Mindfulness – watchfulness and vigilance to every state of body, feeling, and mind.

Right Concentration – deep meditation to control the mind and body.

The Eight-fold path leads to insight and wisdom, which dispel ignorance and bring about serenity, knowledge, and enlightenment; which is nirvana.

2. The Doctrine of Anatta

Buddha revolted against the Vedas by proclaiming the doctrine of anatta, which essentially states that there is nothing called an eternal, unchanging soul, a fundamental diversion from Hinduism. This would even mean that the concept of an eternal Paramatma, the Supreme Self, the Brahman, is not only preposterous but also false. Every existing entity is subject to the law of change and decay. The apparent self (atman) is only an illusion, originating from and manifesting itself in a clinging to things. The "I" arises out of sense-experience which also are the cause of suffering; since they add fresh fuel to the flame of life. An individual is made up of the Skandhas, which by combination produce the delusion of the self, the "I." The five Skandhas are:

Material attributes (Rupa),

Feeling (Vedha),

Perception (Samjana),

Mental dispositions and will (Samskaras),

Reason (Vijnana).

All of the above forces or factors are changing; therefore, the self that they combine to produce is also changing, although it assumes that it is an unchanging unity. The false idea of the self must be done away with to attain nirvana.

3. Karma and Rebirth

Buddhism retained the Hindu doctrine of Karma and Samsara, although with some modifications: Buddhism doesn't talk about the transmigration of soul. As we have already seen, it denies the existence of the self. According to Buddhism, after death the desire that a being entertained in his life (instead of destroying it) gathers fresh life and forms a new mind-body complex, a new 'being.' As long as there is desire, the law of Karma will hold sway and rebirth will occur.

One's Karma (action) determines one's kind of rebirth, as an animal, a ghost, or a god. By 'one's rebirth' is meant neither the rebirth of the same individual nor the rebirth of another. The Buddhists attempt to solve this paradox by the means of parables used to illustrate the doctrine. They say that rebirth is like lighting a new candle by an old one. The two lights have the same properties but are not identical.

4. Nirvana The goal of Buddhism is not eternal life. It is extinction and annihilation of the illusion of the self and freedom from the cycle of rebirth, the end of all birth and individual existence. It is freedom from suffering. The word nirvana literally means 'dying out,' or 'extinction' as of fire. The world is enveloped with the fire of suffering kindled by desire. All the panorama of suffering that we observe is only a depiction of how evil desire is. This desire needs to be extinguished. The extinguishing of this desire is nirvana. Once desire for existence is annihilated, individual existence is annihilated, and with that all suffering. The way to nirvana is the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, and the pursuit of the Noble Eight-fold Path. Sadly, Buddhists can hardly point to at least one who has experienced nirvana, in the present time.

Main Buddhist Groups and their Ways of Worship The four main groups within Buddhism are: Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and Mantrayana Buddhism.

1. Theravada Buddhism. This form of Buddhism is the orthodox group that rigorously sticks to the Buddha's original teachings. It follows the doctrine of anatta, rebirth, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-fold Path strictly. Buddha is considered as the emancipated one and his refuge is sought. This form of Buddhism is also called Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) Buddhism because of its straitness and conservativeness.

Theravada Buddhism is practiced in Sri Lanka and Thailand where it has also been mixed with local beliefs and practices.

2. Mahayana Buddhism. The high demands of Buddhist ethics were very severe for ordinary men and women. Two hundred years after Buddha, a group of his disciples came up with a more liberal interpretation of Buddha's teachings that would suit the needs of ordinary people. This movement came to be known as Mahayana Buddhism or the 'Greater Vehicle.' This form of Buddhism is practiced in the northern countries of Asia, China, Korea, and Japan.

While the Hinayanas stressed salvation by works, Mahayanis taught that faith and devotion were sufficient for salvation. Nirvana was not the only goal. One could aim to become a Bodhisattva, a compassionate person who vows to reach supreme illumination in order to help all other humans to gain the same. The Bodhisattva postpones entering nirvana for the same. The Mahayanis consider the Buddha to be their savior. There are other Buddhas besides Gautama that the Mahayanis venerate. In Japan, Vairocana is the great Buddha; in China, Amitabha. The Mahayanis also worship a goddess known as Kuan Yin, who is given equal status with Amitabha and worshipped as the goddess of mercy, love, and compassion.

3. Mantraya Buddhism. This form of Buddhism is prevalent in Tibet, Mongolia, and Japan. A mixture of magic, mysticism, and occultism, it was brought to Tibet by an Indian Buddhist monk named Padma Sambhava in about AD 750. Also known as Tantrism, it includes prayers, ritual dances, demon exorcism, and magic spells.

4. Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism derives its name from the Japanese 'Zen' meaning 'contemplation.' It originated in China and from there spread to Japan. The west knows Zen Buddhism better than any other form of Buddhism.

According to the Zen doctrine, enlightenment can be obtained through contemplation. It is not study, neither is it reason that leads to enlightenment; only a mystical intuitive insight does. This form of Buddhism understands logic and the mind as being a hindrance to enlightenment. The art of right meditating is to be learnt by meditating and transcending the mind.

Ways of Worship As has already been seen both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists resort to Buddha for help in attaining salvation. In Theravada countries, the Buddha is regarded as Devatideva – the God above gods – who lives, knows, and loves, and is worthy of all adoration. Strict orthodox Buddhists, however, regard Buddha as only the greatest man and the most enlightened teacher who ever lived.

1. The Refuges and the Precept. Buddhist worship begins with a recital of the formula of homage to the Buddha which is followed by the recital of the worshipper's resort to the three Refuges, viz., the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the brotherhood of monks.

Immediately after this the five Precepts are taken, which are:

To abstain from destroying life,

To abstain from taking things not given,

To abstain from sexual misconduct,

To abstain from false speech,

To abstain from intoxicating drinks.

2. Offerings. Offerings offered by the worshippers are of various kinds, such as flowers, oil lamps, candles, incense, food, drinks, and requisites for the monks. Each offering is accompanied by a recital of the relative formula.

3. Prayers and Invocations. Prayers and invocations are offered for human needs and material blessings, for rain, food, and for pardon.

4. Transference of Merit. Worshippers offer offerings in the name of their deceased relatives in the form of robes, utensils, medicines, and food for monks. The purpose is to transfer the merit thus gained to the account of the dead. A formula invoking happiness for and transference of merit to the dead relative follow this.

5. Pilgrimages. The Buddhists consider a pilgrimage to a sacred place very meritorious. The birthplace of Buddha, the place of his enlightenment, the place of his first sermon, and the place where he passed into nirvana are considered sacred. In addition to these places are the Sri Pada in Sri Lanka and Phrabad in Thailand. It is considered very meritorious to journey to these sacred places all the way on foot.

6. Ceremonies and Festivals. The chief ceremony is known as Pirit. It is believed that this ceremony wards off the malice of demons and gives blessing. In this ceremony, one end of a long thread, twisted around the neck of a new clay pot filled with water, is held by the Buddhist monks while the other end is held by the congregation. The monks chant selected texts from the Buddhist scriptures called Parittas. After this, the thread is broken in pieces and tied round the wrist and neck of those assembled. The sanctified water is sprinkled on all to ward off evil and bring blessings.

Another festival, the festival of Vesak, is celebrated by Buddhists all over the world. It falls on the full moon day of the month of May. This day has three significances. It is said that it is the day of the Buddha's birth, his enlightenment, and his death. The Buddhists decorate and illuminate their houses, streets, and temples on this day. Clad in white, the devotees perform religious rites at the Stupa, the Bodhi-tree, and the Buddha image. They also assemble in the temples and halls to observe precepts, meditate, and listen to religious discourse.

04.05. Islam

ISLAM The word "Islam" means "to surrender to the will of Allah." A Muslim, thus, is considered to be one who surrenders to the will of Allah, the name of God in Islam. The founder of Islam was Mohammed, regarded as the apostle of God by the Muslims, to whom the angel Gabriel, it is said, was sent to reveal the Holy Koran (or Quran) while he was meditating in a cave near Mecca in Arabia.

Mohammed was born in Mecca in AD 570 into the Quraysh tribe that was in charge of the holy shrine, Ka'aba in that city. The religion of Arabs, then, was polytheism and idolatry. His father died before he was born and his mother died when Mohammed was six years old; so, he was brought up by his grandfather 'Abdu l-Muttalib, and later by his uncle Abu Talib. At the age of 25, he married a rich widow named Khadija, 15 years older than him, for whom he earlier served as manager of business. Of his six children born from Khadija, only the youngest daughter Fatima survived. When Mohammed first obtained the call to be Allah's messenger, a few people believed in him. However, when persecution started to rise against these, they fled to another city called Medina. In AD 622, Mohammed with few companions fled to Medina as well. This flight is known as the Hijra and marks the origin of the Muslim calendar. The Teachings of Islam The teachings of Islam resemble much the teachings of Judaism and Christianity. Authoritatively originating from Mohammed's acclaimed revelations, they stood in stark contrast to the prevailing beliefs of the people of his own time. The people of Arabia were superstitious, polytheistic, and idolaters. Their lives were steeped in blind beliefs, immorality, blood-drenched wars, and purposeless living. In the midst of such chaos, Mohammed arose as a prophet of the One God to lead his people back to their God. The word "Islam" means "to surrender or to submit oneself for obedience to God." A Muslim is one "who surrenders himself to obey God." The name Islam is received from the Koran itself:

"This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM."

Mohammed tried to return his people back to God in accordance to and by the revelation, he received; they are recorded in the Holy Koran. All who chose to receive and abide by these teachings of Islam became a Muslim. Following are the teachings of Islam on God, universe, human beings, angels, Koran, and the Law:

1. God: - The Muslims refer to God as Allah. Allah means 'the one and only God.' David Brown points out three things about Allah (Guide to Religions, Delhi: ISPCK, 1998, pp.207-208): a. The Uniqueness of Allah: The uniqueness of God is fundamental to the faith of Islam. Any variance from this standing is considered infidelity. This also reflects in Islam's rejection of the Christian doctrine of Trinity. God can't be three; He is One. This is not non-dualism. While non-dualism holds that all existences are only one existence appearing to be plural but essentially non-dual, Islamic monotheism holds that the world is surely pluralistic, God being transcendent and beyond the universe. There is nothing in this universe to match or compare with Him. Allah is the one God,

the Creator of the universe. There is not and cannot be anyone equal to Him. b. The Attributes of Allah: To know what God is like would have been very impossible if the Koran had not revealed it. This is so because there is none like Allah in the whole world. Following are some things about Allah that we can know from the Koran:

Allah is eternal. He is beyond time.

Allah is omniscient. Nothing, past, present, and future is hidden from Him.

Allah is omnipotent.

Allah's will is supreme. Nothing can happen without His will.

Allah hears all sounds; yet, He doesn't have an ear like men.

Allah sees all things; yet, He doesn't have an eye like men.

Allah communicates with men.

c. Names that Reveal His Nature: The Koran mentions various names of Allah. Following are few of them:

The One, the Real, the Living, the Secure, the First, the Last.

The Wise, the Knower, the One who comprehends (everything).

The Great, the Powerful, the Strong, the Mighty.

The Agent, the Beginner, the Creator, the King, the Sovereign, the Governor.

The Hearer, the Answerer (of prayer).

The Watcher, the See-er.

The Giver, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Forgiver, the Generous, the Loving.

2. The Universe: - Islam teaches that the universe is made up of both visible and invisible entities. Heaven and hell are also part of God's universe, His creation. Angels and jinn are all part of the creature world. So is Iblis the devil and his angels. Heaven is a place of cool gardens, rivers, and fruit trees. It is the place where the believers will rest forever. Hell is the place where the wicked and the unbelievers will go to suffer forever. It has been divided into various compartments, each reserved for its kind of the condemned.

3. Human beings: - The Koran states that Allah created humans out of dust, then from a little fluid.

"Allah created you from dust, then from a little fluid, then He made you pairs (the male and female)." The life of a human is conditioned by God's sovereign will. Nothing happens to him without Allah's approval.

"No female beareth or bringeth forth save with His knowledge. and no one groweth old who groweth old, nor is aught lessened of his life, but it is recorded in a Book."

God appointed humans as His agents to rule on earth. And so humans are servants of Allah. The greatest honor a man can have on this earth is to be called 'a servant of God.' The fall of humans

resulted from the disobedience of Adam who chose to listen to Satan instead of listening to Allah. Allah guides whom He wills unto a straight path.

4. Angels: - Angels one of the means by which Allah communicates with and guides men. These unseen companions of men work as envoys of God. One of the most important of them is Gabriel who brought the Koran to Mohammed.

5. Koran: - The Muslims believe that the whole Koran is a copy of the Heavenly Book written before the world began. It is in the Arabic language; an exact translation of it is considered impossible. The Koran was revealed to Mohammed in portions over a time span of over twenty years. The Koran has been divided into 114 Surahs, all of which had been recorded before the Prophet's death. In the Caliphate of Othman, all existing copies of the Holy Koran were called in and an authoritative version, based on Abu Bakr's collection and the testimony of those who had committed the whole Koran to memory, was compiled. This version preserved in its original form till now is considered the true copy of the Heavenly Book. The Muslims treat the Koran with much veneration. They cannot tolerate any dishonor of it. They will not touch it with dirty hands and will neither hold it in hand below the loins. The Sikhs got their way of venerating the Guru Granth Sahib from the Muslims.

6. The Law: - The Law of Islam is referred to as the shari'a. This Arabic term means 'the road to the watering-place'. The Shari'a is the road of right conduct following which a person can keep himself in submission to Allah. However, every Muslim understands that conformation to this Law, especially in this age, is not totally possible. Even interpretations of it differ. Seeing the difficulties associated with it, Islamic rulers and people resorted to various means of diluting and substituting the Shari'a with local customs and other feasible norms. Following are the two forms of law, in addition to the Shari'a, that guide the lives of Muslims:

Customary Laws: Local customs and the Shari'a are intermixed to form customary laws. The African Muslims, for example, have retained their African customs along with the Shari'a.

The Civil and Criminal Laws of Government: The Shari'a was meant to regulate the lives of people of a very different time and place. Therefore, it cannot be wholly applied to a different time and situation. Muslim rulers, having sensed this difficulty, have come up with their own laws of trade and civil administration. Most Islamic countries have adopted a law code that is often based on European law. Nevertheless, the Shari'a is the law that is a reflection ideal living to every Muslim, being endorsed by the Koran itself.

The Five Pillars of Islam and Their Practice by Muslims The five Pillars of Islam are:

Declaration of the Islamic Creed: the Shahada.

The Prayer-act: the Salat.

Almsgiving: the Zakat.

The Fast during the month of Ramadan: the Sawm.

Pilgrimage to Mecca: the Hajj.

The above are mandated by the Shari'a to every Muslim. They are what makes up Islamic service, or worship, 'ibadat.

Declaration of the Islamic Creed, the Shahada. The creed is a declaration in the form, "I testify that thee is no god except Allah, and that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah." The sincere confession of this creed makes a person a Muslim. The creed affirms the central belief of Islam that God is one, Mohammed is the final and supreme prophet of God, and he has established the brotherhood of all believers.

2. The Prayer-act, the Salat: Muslims are required to perform the Salat five times a day: at dawn, before sunrise; soon after mid-day; during the afternoon; soon after sunset; before retiring to bed. In addition to the time, a Muslim must also observe the regulation regarding the posture: stand facing towards Mecca in a fixed position, prostration with forehead on the ground. This should be done only after having undergone the required ablutions. Various prayer verses are uttered during the prayer act. The prayer is not a mere personal prayer but a requirement of the law. The prayer-act must conform to the form prescribed by the law. The prayer-act in the Mosque is done under the leadership of the leader called the imam. Friday noon is the prescribed time for congregational prayers.

3. Alms giving, the Zakat: The Zakat refers to the giving of contributions to the poor and the payment of tribute of the crops, products, income, etc. generosity and charity are encouraged by Islam. The Zakat money usually goes for the aid of the poor, the needy, and the travelers.

4. Fasting, the Sawm: The Koran's command regarding the observance of the fast is as follows:

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil). (Fast) a certain number of days; and (for) him who is sick among, you, or on a journey, (the same) number of other days; and for those of who can afford it there is a ransom; the feeding of a man in need – But whoso doeth good of his own accord, it is better for him: and that ye fast is better for you if ye did but know – The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of days. Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth nor hardship for you; and (He desireth) that ye should complete the period, and that ye should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that peradventure ye may be thankful." This fast is observed very strictly during the day, to the extent that a Muslim is not meant to even swallow his spit during the day. Feasting, however, goes on till late in the night. During the day a Muslim is required to keep away from all food and drink, from tobacco, use of perfume, sexual intercourse, and evil speaking.

5. The Pilgrimage, the Hajj: The fifth obligation or Pillar of Islam is pilgrimage to the holy places. The prescribed time for the Hajj is the month of dhu-al-Hijrah. The primary place of pilgrimage is Mecca. Pilgrims, having gone through the required ablutions, put on a special garment, and proceed towards the sacred area in Mecca under the guidance of specially appointed mullahs (priests). They then circle the Kaaba seven times kissing it once on each round. This Black Stone (i.e. the Kaaba) is said to have descended from the paradise of God, and will, on the last day, witness in favor of all those who had kissed it. Other spots of pilgrimage include the valley of Mina

and Mount Arafat. The person who returns having completed his Hajj receives the title Haji, and obtains a very honored position in Muslim society. The festival of 'Id al-Adha, which begins on the tenth day of the Month of Pilgrimage, is an opportunity of the whole Muslim community to share a little in the pilgrimage. 'Id al-Adha means 'The Festival of Sacrifice.' In addition to the above five obligations, a Muslim is also required to fulfill one other duty known as the Jihad. In recent times, this term has often been quoted as a controversial element of Islam, often in association with the terroristic activities carried on by Islamic fundamentalists and militants. The term originally means 'holy war' and refers to the duty obligatory on every Muslim 'to strive to bring the whole world under the banner of Islam, if necessary, by war against the non-Muslim world.' It is the duty of spreading Islam and thus, get the whole world to surrender to Allah, which is the only way to world peace. Though not one of the five Pillars, Jihad seems to have been given the same importance as the five of them. Jihad originally was Islam's bold confrontation coming forward to support the cause of Islam against the persecution raised against it by local rulers. However, in modern times it has, sadly, come to symbolise terrorism as extremist and fundamentalist group use it to wage war against non-Islamic nations.

04.06. Recommended Guides

Recommended Guides David A. Brown, A Guide to Religions, Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

Glimpses of World Religions, Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 1957. A Lion Handbook, The World's Religions, Oxford, 1992.

S. Practical Christian Ethics

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR A GODLY CONDUCT IN FAMILY & SOCIETY DOMENIC MARBANIANG TO PARENTS A.Encourage your child (Colossians 3:21) Don't let them feel discouraged, sullen, inferior, or frustrated.

Give gifts (Luke 11:11-13), Forgive, don't dig the past (Luke 15:22) B.Discipline him/her while he is young (Proverbs 19:18; Hebrews 12:10) C.Nurture him/her in the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) 1.In the training (Proverbs 22:6, Catechize, 2 Timothy 3:15)

2.Discipline (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 19:18; Proverbs 23:13-14; Proverbs 29:15, Proverbs 29:17; 1 Timothy 3:4-5) 3.Counsel 4.Admonition D.Do not Irritate your child (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4) 1.Do not provoke to anger 2.Do not exasperate him/her to resentment 3.Do not fret 4.Do not be hard on them or harass them 5.Do not break their spirit E.Provide for one's home (1 Timothy 5:8; Proverbs 31:21-27). TO CHILDREN

A. Obey your parents in all things. Make it a lifestyle to obey. For this is well pleasing unto the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

B. Obey your parents in the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1). For this is right.

C. Honor them (Ephesians 6:2-3). That it may be well with you, and that you may live long.

D.Serve them (1 Timothy 5:4). The wrath of God descends on the disobedient (Romans 1:30, Romans 1:32) TO MARRIED COUPLES A.In Union (Together) (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:5, 1 Corinthians 7:10) 1.Mutual Love (1 Corinthians 7:3, Conjugal rights, goodwill, kindness, etc) 2.Mutual Self-Giving/Submit to Authority of Other (1 Corinthians 7:4)

3.Mutual Consent (1 Corinthians 7:5. In submission to the Lord. Not like Ananias and Sapphira as in Acts 5:1-42, but like the Shunammite couple in 2 Kings 4:9) B.Duties of Husbands 1.Be the Head of your wife (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:3. Leadership, decision-making) 2.Make Christ your Head (1 Corinthians 11:3) 3.Follow Christ's Example (Christ's love for the Church) a.Love (Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 5:28, Ephesians 5:33; Colossians 3:19) b.Nourish, protect, and cherish her (Ephesians 5:29) c.Honor her with great respect (1 Peter 3:7) C.Duties of Wives 1.Be Body/helpmeet for him (Genesis 2:18) Accept his headship/rulership (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:22) Be bound to him till he dies (Romans 7:2) 2.Desire for him alone (Genesis 3:16) 3.Learn from husband (1 Corinthians 14:35) 4.Be subject to husband as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22, Ephesians 5:24) a.Submission in obedience (Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1) b.Adaptation 5.Revere husband (Ephesians 5:33) a.Notice him (pay attention, have concern) b.Regard him c.Honor him d.Prefer him e.Venerate, esteem him (think highly of, value greatly) f.Defer to him (submission) g.Praise him h.Love and admire him exceedingly 6.Be sober, wise (Titus 2:4; Proverbs 31:26, Proverbs 31:30) 7.Be trustworthy (Proverbs 31:10) 8.Be self-controlled (Titus 2:5) 9.Be chaste (Titus 2:5; Proverbs 31:10-11, Proverbs 31:25; 1 Peter 3:2) 10.Be homemakers (Proverbs 31:28-29, Proverbs 31:15-16, Proverbs 31:18, Proverbs 31:21) 11.Be good natured, kindhearted

(Proverbs 31:12) 12.Be hardworking (Proverbs 31:12-30). Not be idle (1 Timothy 5:13)

13.Be meek and quiet (1 Peter 3:4-6). Not nagging (Proverbs 21:19, Proverbs 21:9; Proverbs 19:13; Proverbs 27:15) TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS 1.Prayer (Colossians 4:12; Acts 12:5; James 5:15) 2.Love (Romans 12:10) 3.Honor (Romans 12:10) 4.Help, Assistance, Aid (Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 6:6) 5.Hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2) 6.Sympathy (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2; Romans 15:1-7) 7.Humility (Romans 12:16) 8.Goodness (Romans 12:17) 9.Honest (Romans 12:17; Truthfulness, Ephesians 4:25, Ephesians 4:15) 10.Edifying words (Ephesians 4:29) 11.Restoration (Galatians 6:1-2) 12.Exhortation (2 Timothy 4:2) 13.Mutual Subjection (1 Peter 5:5) 14.Forbearing (Colossians 3:13) 15.Forgiving (Colossians 3:13) TO SERVANTS 1.Honor master, boss. (1 Timothy 6:1-2) 2.Obey (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:23-25) a.With fear b.Single-heartedly c.As unto Christ d.Not as men-pleasers e.But as Christ's servants f.Doing God's will 3.Don't answer back (Titus 2:9) 4.Faithful (Titus 2:10) 5.Subjection (1 Peter 2:18-20) TO MASTERS (BOSESSES) 1.Do not threaten (Ephesians 6:9) Don't be violent. Don't use abusive words 2.Be just and fair (Colossians 4:1) Do not exploit. Give the right wages. Be merciful. Treat them with respect. (Leviticus 19:13) TOWARDS THE WORLD IN GENERAL 1.Intercede for them (1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Samuel 12:23) 2.Honor (1 Peter 2:17) 3.Be honest (Romans 12:17) 4.Speak edifying words (Ephesians 4:29) 5.Witness (1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Peter 3:1-5; Php 1:13; Matthew 5:14; Php 2:15) 6.Follow the Golden rule (Matthew 7:12) 7.Keep no debts but love (Romans 13:7-8) TOWARDS AUTHORITIES 1.Honor them (Romans 13:7) 2.Be subject to them (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13-16) 3.Pray/Intercede for them (1 Timothy 2:2-4)

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