

The Christian
Underground Journal

Where Do You Stand
An Issue of Belief

Who do you say Jesus is?

Volume 1 Issue 1
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Michael A. Kovach
The Christian Underground Journal

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Introduction:

This journal deals with a very difficult passage of Scripture and it was not my intent to create such a large issue. However, as I dug into the Scriptures and various works I found that treating this passage requires more background information than I imagined. Then with all the help I received from many friends the treatment took on a different direction. Now instead of exposing problems that I have personally seen within the Christian camp I now have to expand by covering many other aspects. My problem is trying to tie all of the varying treatments to make some sort of sense to the original thought. I believe I have come close to that objective while not answering all the possibilities in this journal. I hope what has been done will be useful to your personal growth and understanding, and I hope this journal can also be a resource for your Sunday school lessons or sermon outline.

What this is all about:

Simply put, this journal is about the difference between truth and fallacy, steadfastness and compromise. It is about trying to show the difference between being a religious believer and a faithful believer. In a more theological term it is about showing the difference between carnality¹ and spirituality, and about maturing in our understanding of the gospel or not maturing. It is about a very subtle deception that pits the intellectual believer against the spiritual follower. It is about the difference between light and dark, understanding and misunderstanding. It is about a possible 'why' to the missing power of God in many areas of our Christian ministry today.

Disclaimer:

Readers need to understand that this Journal is written with the understanding of its author and in no way constitutes an absolute truth. Scriptural interpretation is quite personal, and revelations gained are usually for its reader. However, there are times when what is understood needs to be made public for those who are having similar experiences, but are missing bits and pieces that are preventing a fuller understanding. There are many approaches to understanding what we are reading, and what it means individually. However, each one has the same foundation--which was laid by the apostles and the prophets and its chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ. That will never change for any of us. Everything else is knowledge gained through experience and taught by the Holy Spirit and this is for each individual as well as the corporate body. After all, if you put 100 people together to study a verse of Scripture, you will invariably have 100 different meanings.

¹ Carnal - Carnality: pertaining to the body as the seat of desires and appetites; opposed to spiritual.



So, let me say this final word; this is not for everyone, and what I say here could upset some; be a blessing to others, or be totally discarded. Whatever the case, neither event invalidates what is written nor validates it. It is through the eyes of the authors' journey that this document is given, and it is hoped that this will be a revelation and an experience for those who read and study its contents.

Thanks:

I wish to personally thank those who contributed their thoughts and ideas in the writing of this journal. It is never easy to complete such a document alone, and I deeply appreciate those friends for their objectivity and honesty, even when we differed theologically.

Scripture Source:

All Scripture used in this journal are from the Authorized King James unless otherwise noted.

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IVP Background Bible Commentary, New Testament

By Craig S. Keener,
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here do you stand?

An Issue of Faith

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By
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Building monuments to man and calling them a place of worship is open rebellion toward a Holy God. If we are going to build dwellings where we can gather as a united fellowship we need to teach that God does not dwell in them; that He is present in every follower of Jesus Christ. If this is done, compromise will not be so rapid and departure not so commonplace.

Opening:

In many denominations and congregations today people are being bombarded with the winds of doctrinal compromise and hints of divisions or splits. Not only do doctrinal differences cause division but also the acceptance of abhorrent lifestyles is driving us toward widening animosity that threatens even more splits. Men and women of the church who accept these changes in doctrine, and accept alternate life styles as valid and not to be part of the body of believers, are those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. By accepting matters contrary to Scripture as acceptable, people are quick to reject and acknowledge God's word in accordance with Scriptural teachings. They are not believers in the God of Israel, but rather blemishes and false teachers. They profane His Holy name by allowing the very evil that they were delivered from to become part of their lives once again. Now an attempt to interpret the Scriptures to support any doctrine without question, and not to hold accountable those who profane it by living outside its guidelines is common, and they seek teachers and leaders who support their brand of Christianity. This must come to an end; for those who continue to do this

have no way back to repentance as they continue to subvert the gospel of Jesus the only begotten Son of God. Let each one of us examine ourselves to see if we have adopted practices and traditions, which are contrary to our Holy Father who will judge the living and the dead. We are told that we are not to judge a person: this is true, just not true in they way we are taught, we judge the behavior and conduct and in doing this we can be assured that deceivers will not enter our fellowship so easy. We are to examine² (test) each who calls themselves followers of Jesus of Nazareth and who claim to love³ Him. Their actions, lifestyle, attitude, behavior and conduct should reflect the intent of God's word. Any less would be a compromise and unacceptable by God and by

² Examine: "to prove, test, approve," is rendered "examine" in 1Cor. 11:28

³ Love: I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to **prove** the sincerity of your love.

His followers. We are not to seek to do harm, only to have nothing to do with those who practice such things as these.

A look at the imposters:

What do some of these look like and how can we know for sure who they are? I think 2 Timothy 3 and Galatians 5 tells us plenty of what to look out for and how to recognize them.

2 Timothy 3

- 1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
- 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
- 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,
- 4 Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;
- 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.
- 6 For of this sort are they, which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,
- 7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Gal 5:19-21

- 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
- 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
- 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they, which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

What about false rulers:

How can we tell the difference between those who claim to believe and those who actually do? Does Scripture provide us an answer?

2 Peter 2:1-3

- 1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.
- 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
- 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

As for Hebrews chapter six, we are warned about returning to the former ways and if we heed it's warning, we will see that its implication speaks of all former things as well because those spoken of here have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit and that is why they have only tasted and are capable of returning to any former practices. Often people find themselves returning to what feels comfortable even if it is wrong and out of line with God's Word. I must say, that since I received the Holy Spirit as a testimony to Jesus Christ, I have never gone back to my former self. I have tried on occasion without success. Oh, I am not without sin and have some lingering things yet to be surrendered, only when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit did my whole life change; and well outside

acceptable religious practices. I no longer relied on the institution for forgiveness and acceptance. Only Jesus Christ could talk for me with God the Father; I recognized that if men were to mediate for man, both would be destroyed because God will not listen to anything not originating from His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

If we believe our forgiveness is the result of some ones intervention on our behalf and that because of their position and favor with God we are forgiven; we are deceived, and publicly stating that this person has taken Jesus' place. That Jesus is only a historical figure and that He no is longer our mediator as Scripture states. We have become religious in the practice of tradition and self-sacrifice. We have substituted the work of the cross with practices of penance and self-abuse that have an appearance of holiness when in fact they are nothing, but are dead works lacking any spiritual foundation at all.

Jesus is our only advocate between God and us; man cannot substitute for Jesus, and the sooner we recognize this, the sooner we will heal from the wounds of our pride and desires to be the boss. It is because of Him that all blessings flow, not because of anything we can do or say. It is not the righteousness of man that causes God to look upon us without judgment; it is because of Jesus Christ.

Christians are warned against backsliding:

We can surely make a mess of things in a very quick manner. It doesn't take but a few moments away from God before we start scheming and planning how to make our faith more religious. What is wrong with us? Are we so ignorant of the Gospel that we need to constantly re-produce the very things that Jesus delivered us from? Are we so high-minded that tradition and religious stunts and routines replace the work of the cross, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit? I believe that as long as we pretend⁴ to believe, we risk losing the very freedoms Jesus the Christ our Passover Lamb secured for the entire world some 2000 years ago. Let us not be so bold as to ignore the great gift of our Lord, by rejecting Him because of religious intolerance and doctrines of men and mere speculations. If nothing else, understand that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not, and are not intended for a select few, these gifts are for all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:1-8 refusing to mature:

¹ Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfections⁵; not laying again the foundation of repentance⁶ from dead works, and of faith toward God,

² Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands⁷, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

³ And this will we do, if God permit.

⁴ For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened⁸, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were

⁴ Pretend: make believe, imagine, act as if, make up, play, sham, false, feign, put on, simulate, profess

⁵ Perfection: sanctification the carrying on to perfection the work begun in regeneration. Maturity.

⁶ Repentance: comprehends not only such a sense of sin, but also an apprehension of mercy, without which there can be no true repentance

⁷ Laying on of Hands: Some ancient authorities read, *even the teaching of Or washings*.

⁸ Enlightened: received revelation, Or *having both tasted of...and being made...and having tasted etc*

made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

8 But that which beareth thorns and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned."

Isn't it ironic to read this portion of Hebrews chapter six and ignore its implications because it might fit your situation? I hope that if it does, that you will search your heart for forgiveness and pray that Jesus the only begotten Son of God will send to you the Holy Spirit to fill you with power and love.

You know, I have not heard a single sermon that adequately addresses what is being talked about in this chapter. I have read numerous commentaries concerning this section and have found two that I believe come close to the author's intent, and why he chose the hypothetical. So this newsletter takes a brief look at Hebrews chapter 6, verses 1 - 8 collectively.

On the matter of a religious spirit I feel that the following is an example of how man can take Scripture and make it fit whatever they wish. Even if it states openly contrary thought to what some wish it to say. My partner Jeff Dull places his finger on one aspect of this religious doctrine that tends to hold down instead of lifting up. Here are his words on a subject that is very familiar to all of us:

Toxic Religion:

As a personal testimony to the power of God in my own life, I can state that I have been cured of addiction to alcohol, sex, smoking, working, television, and finally to life. I know and believe that dysfunctional emotional and psychological manifestations of thought, word, and deed through addiction are not to be construed as disease, but as a broken relationship with God—Better known as sin. What baffles and just about bugs God's Grace out of me is the denial and the addictive or should I say the toxic faith attitude the church takes in dealing with this issue. I define denial as having three components, rationalization, justification, and shift of blame. Three major components of addiction are, increased tolerance, decreased time between use, and obsessive thoughts about the item used. Toxic faith issues, like addiction issues have many attributes. There was even a book written called "Toxic Faith." Some of the toxic faith issues are exclusiveness, personal absolute rightness, and isolation from other or outside ideas. I cannot count how many times I have heard ministers of Christianity say that alcohol and drugs are sinful, and that the Bible clearly teaches not to use alcohol. Wrong, Wrong, and more Wrongs! I understand that well meaning people try to prevent the use of alcohol because they have witnessed and or experienced the ravages of substance abuse. This is like saying that guns kill people, and money is the root of all evil. The substance is not good or bad, it just is. People use guns to kill other people; the gun does not use people to kill people. The Bible is pretty clear when read in context that it is the LOVE of the money, or the substance that is evil and sinful. It is when the substance becomes an idol, and comes between our obedience to God and His Will that it is sinful. I cannot count how many people I have met that in my professional opinion as a God cured addict and substance abuse counselor, that have switched addictions to the 12 Steps and or the church for the relief of emotional and or psychological disorders. The church has consistently been in denial and practicing toxic faith when it lifts up the Bible and preaches what the Bible does not say. As I read the Bible is does condone the use of alcohol. What about Paul telling Timothy to use a little wine for stomach problems? (1Tim. 5:23) What about God stating in His Law that people were to convert their tithe items into money and go to a city appointed by God and buy drink and strong drink when they could not make it to Jerusalem? (Deut. 14:23-26) What about Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding feast? (John 2:9) What about the end of the Nazirite vow? (Num. 6:20)

What the Bible and God never condone is the abuse and idolatry of a substance, nor the wrong expressions of thought, word, and deed that often result out of that abuse and idolatry.

So what is the point!

Again it is found in God's Word in James 1:13-15. The church by saying that the substance is the cause and at fault absolves the person from their responsibilities for their actions. This is denial and addictive behavior. Another example of addictive behavior in the church is the seeking of gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit because it is the "in thing", and you want it to show it off and prove to yourself and others your acceptance before God. When a person has this attitude it is worshipping the gift not the giver. Church and religion is used to get hyped and have a feeling of high that the person wants to last forever. This is the goal of crack and ice users. Normal life is a series of ups and downs. The presence and power of God is not dependent on feelings, but on the reality of His Word. It is time for the church to get real. It is time for the church to stop acting like addicts and come to really know the Word and their Father, the ONE and only TRUE GOD.

—*Jeff Dull*

Attitudes and Beliefs:

Now I know that you may be thinking why is this in an article about Hebrews chapter six? Well, it displays what I call the religious spirit; a spirit that tells people that God does not accept them unless they fit a certain societies beliefs, attitudes, desires and demands. If we are Christian, then what a society thinks is of little concern to how we live out our lives because all people are seen as equal—saved or not. There are no rituals in the Christian faith and if you find this hard to accept, I urge you to find one in Scripture and send it to me. There are observances that Christians participate in such as: the Last Supper or Passover, Feast of Tabernacles that according to Scripture will be practiced for eternity. Easter and Christmas are not Christian observances, they are pagan feast days that the church compromised on to bring more people into its fold without regard of their beliefs and then called them Christian. If you can remember Solomon's' story, you will understand the significance of this practice as well as other events in the history of the Hebrew nation. They allowed pagan practices to infiltrate their worship and the result was devastating. I'm not going to elaborate on this here: you can read those events yourself in Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah.

This is my point! Religion without spirit is dead and continually looks for ways to make itself attractive to people who are religious with tradition and attitudes—spiritually dead. It is like what is taking place around the world in the name of religion. Ethnic cleansing, religious intolerance, wars, factions and the segregation of societies based on religious indifference.

The God of Israel did not intend this to be!

John 3: 16-19

"¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.¹⁸He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

So what is our excuse: Religion, Fear, Fanaticism, Intolerance, Bigotry, Hatred, or Prejudice. What ever it is, it is not of God! What is of God is that we learn to live together and try to create a world based on peace and eternal love. For all Christians this can only be done if we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Simply being religious does nothing—you must believe. Now here is where it all begins! There are three types of people: those who do not believe; those who can go either way; and those who believe. And as the Scripture states God would rather you fully not believe, or fully believe.⁹ He does not accept those of you who are in the middle because you cannot serve two masters; you will serve one and hate the other. So the decision is whether you are a carnal believer (in the middle), or a believer based on religion, or an atheist based on that same premise.

⁹ Revelations 3:14-16

In Christianity we believe and this word has a far-reaching implication because the Greek root for this means: firm, faithful, true, conviction, assurance. In other words, to cling to, trust in and rely on. And this is just the beginning because belief is the first step in following Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. It does not rest on its laurels, it is active and forward moving; and its power is not of its own—it is of God.

Plain Talk:

I'm not going to get into a lengthy theological discussion here! I'm simply going to speak as plainly as I humanly can. There is far too much analysis of the Word already without my addition. So, let's agree that I don't have all the answers, only an opinion that may lead to one.

These verses in Hebrews chapter six are about defining who are not spiritual believers; they are about those who believe themselves to be believers; and in some cases those who appear to be empowered believers with various gifts! After all, Satan acknowledges Jesus and knows who He is, and Satan can also mimic religion with words that sound holy and right, we have an example to compare (judge) with; simply look at the story in Acts 16 about the girl that was released of an evil spirit that was saying "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Now what is wrong with that? Simple, it wasn't them who were showing the way to salvation, it was the Holy Spirit, and Paul was not about to take credit for being the messenger. And I think the most important aspect is that this proclaimer's source of knowledge was a demon, and we should take notice of this because we have many around us today acting the same way that this person did.

Lip Service:

Many people practice the principles of the Christian faith by simply doing what Scripture alludes to as 'pure religion' as talked about in the letter of James. I suppose you are thinking: this guy is being a bigot, or an intolerant and perhaps someone who cannot stand to have others believe differently than himself. Well, none of that is true! This guy is simply telling the truth according to Scripture and is concerned enough for you to write such a lengthy article on belief: and this is not for your benefit alone; it is for the writer's as well. In contrast to what I just said, it is for all who wish to know the difference between those who are on solid ground and in every way comfort those who are searching for truth until they receive the invitation to come.

On the other hand, there are those who couldn't care less about you. Your money and the surrender of your rights as an individual is what they seek. They do not seek to help you grow in Christ Jesus, only to see you grow in your allegiance toward them and their organization.

This is also about breaking through the lies and the deceit that has been around us for many centuries. It is about timing and the times in which we live; and the bottom line is, this article is about your very life.

Deception in the Open:

Many people today attempt to perform every kind of good work to show how religious they are, how spiritual they are, how favored by the Lord they are and how liked and respected they are in church and the community. These things are simply human nature (sinful) in and of themselves. All of it is something that you would not necessarily think a non-believer would practice. However, man has been doing such services long before the Jewish religion was born; none of it requires divine assistance because it brings glory to man not to God. On the other hand, there are those who do these things without the slightest desire to be known, commended or rewarded, for their only mission in life is to bring glory to God, and to assist the body of Christ in every way possible; and

none of it is sought out, rather people are called as the result of the great commission to be of this nature, they simply cannot help themselves. For others this service always requires an unspoken conditional intent of some form, mostly monetary or political; some sort of re-payment for services rendered is required for them to feel good and feel needed. There may even be the thought that doing all this will reward them with insurance against judgment and hell.

Not all are called?

Now the other side to this may be those who have this notion that all are called to spread the gospel, or to be an apostle, evangelist, pastor or teacher.

This notion simply is not true because Scripture plainly states in Matthew 22:14: "For many are called¹⁰, but few chosen¹¹." I understand that this calling in Matthew is an invitation to the wedding; however, greater implications are addressed when someone states (not many are chosen). So what is, "not many are chosen" all about? Is it talking about being the Christ? Is it talking about being a god? If it is about one person then why are "many called?" I believe this illustrates the point that many are invited ("called") to a feast, but few are in the end among the chosen. It simply does not say '*all are called and chosen.*' Don't confuse the issue here by thinking that the great commission falls into a calling, it does not; and it does not fall into the Matthew 22 story at all; our (duty), or commission, is a command not an invitation. One other point to make is that it would be well if translators put this into proper wording because it should read: "*As you are going make disciples¹² of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you all the way, even to the end of the age.*" this eliminates the excuse of 'It's not my duty to make disciples, to tell others of the gospel, or to baptize anyone by water and by the Holy Spirit,' because this is a direct order. So instead of saying that 'It's not my duty to make disciples,' perhaps one should say, 'I will simply disobey¹³ God's command to "go therefore into all the nations..." and testify about Christ Jesus.' Also, the word 'called' as used in Matthew is not a calling to preach; it is an invitation to be saved, the Divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption.

¹⁰ Called: Is used particularly of the Divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption

¹¹ Chosen: One who is the object of choice or of divine favor: an elect person

¹² Disciple: Follower, believer, supporter, devotee, student, adherent

¹³ Disobey: Defy, refuse to comply, break the rules, violate, go against, challenge

An exhortation to obedience:

Prov 3:1-6

- 1 My son forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:
- 2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.
- 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:
- 4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.
- 5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
- 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Referring to [The IVP Background Commentary](#) by Craig S. Keener:

Jesus' Final Orders

Matthew 28:16-20

"God had often revealed himself on mountains in biblical tradition, especially in the narrative about Moses. Some who see Jesus' appearance as doubtful, perhaps because it does not fit current expectations of the end time: all the dead were to be raised together, not the Messiah first. "Making disciples" was the sort of thing rabbis would do, but Jesus' followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves. Disciples are made here in a twofold way: (1) baptizing them. Because baptism was an act of conversion (used for Gentiles converting to Judaism), it means initiating people to the faith. (2) By teaching them Jesus' commandments recorded in Matthew. Rabbis made disciples by teaching them. Many Jews outside Palestine sought converts among "nations" (which can also be translated as "Gentiles" or "Pagans"). But only a few converts ever studied under rabbis, so the idea of making Gentiles full disciples—followers of Jesus who would learn from and serve him—goes beyond the Jewish tradition. Isaiah predicted that Israel would be a witness to (or against) the nations in the end time.

Jewish literature only called God omnipresent; Jesus' claim that he would always be with them, coupled with his being named alongside the Father in baptism (Jewish people did not baptize in the names of people), constituted a proclamation of his deity."

In addition to this, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not part of the calling, they are a gift to those who believe and are used for the equipping of the saints for good works, and to assist the body of believers until Jesus returns. Those who hold the office of, "Prophet, Apostle, Evangelist, Preacher, and Teacher," are not part of the calling, they are those chosen because they are few in number." Why do I say this? Because it states "**SOME** are given as apostles, prophets, evangelist, preachers and teachers, **NOT ALL** are given to be apostles, prophets, evangelist, preachers and teachers."

So, where do you stand and Who do you say Jesus is?

Hidden Dangers:

There is a danger for those who are ignorant of God's Word and who take this verse out of context. People can lead many others into a false faith and a false calling. There is a calling so let's take a very brief look at what it is:

1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thess 2:12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Heb 9:15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

1 Cor 1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother.

1 Cor 7:20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

(This is the calling to a profession or as we say it (a vocation))

Eph. 4:4 "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (The Hope of your calling refers to the hope of your calling into the kingdom of God, this is not a vocation)

Each of the above suggests either vocation or destination and in Romans 1.1 it is demonstrated as "an appointment to apostleship," and the word 'chosen' used in Matthew signifies "chosen out, selected," an obvious distance between what 'called' represents. Nonetheless, there is a distinct call where 'chosen' overlaps and that is where we merge the two as in Romans 1.1 where Paul states he is called to be an apostle of Christ and the "to be," is inserted to bring flow to reading. It would read Paul called an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is what I mean about where we merge called and chosen. Paul was chosen when Christ met him of the road, and after that, he was called an apostle. That is the correct understanding of that verse and others like it.

Concerning the Wedding Feast:

Concerning the wedding described in Matthew 22, perhaps clarity here is needed because the wedding garment was not on—the bride was not ready for the kingdom, not clothed and hid in Jesus. In other words, an imposter: someone who was not covered in the anointing (chosen) of the Lord, rather a person or persons who was called but not chosen. I realize this is stretching it a bit, but I think what Jesus was revealing was how an imposter looks and acts; they look very much like the real thing only they do not have the power of the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did later. In 2 Cor: 10, 11, and 12, Paul argues against false apostles and I believe that his defense is a parallel with what Jesus states here in Matthew. Both groups I highlight are very religious and practice a religion not emphasized in the Gospels or the letters of the Apostles. It is made up because man lost their faith in Christ's return, and with persecution all about, compromise was made and a new faith and a new religion and a new gospel were created. Both groups look at faith as their evidence and both prove themselves in error simply because their faith lacks power and is confused with conviction and overshadowed with zealousness.

Going Hungry:

Nevertheless, they are close, so close that they can taste the heavenly gifts, and while tasting, they never fully eat the whole meal before them. Salvation eludes them because they are religiously convinced that they are already saved. The narrative in Hebrews chapter six supports the opposite in my opinion because they have not matured. In fact, the organizations they attend have matured as well, and some of them are 1900 years old. Sad as it may seem it gets much worse because they don't realize it and for many others who have faith but lack conviction it becomes very confusing. Like some of you, I have seen these groups enter the doors of churches, teach Sunday school, preach sermons, run youth groups, direct the choir and every other sort of function. A side effect is that the church looks, feels and operates just like any other secular business. An unfortunate circumstance of compromise has allowed many people to believe the lie, and to perpetuate a secular belief system calling it salvation. They are constantly backing away from the salvation message, replacing it with social speeches and activities that do not point to their sin or their shortcomings so they can repent and be saved.

So what can you compare all of this to?

The angel of the church in Laodicea is rebuked for indifference:

Rev 3:14-22

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne?

22 He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

If you feel that you have arrived at the doorstep of God's kingdom and are full with all He has to offer, I urge you to stop and read the Scripture again and find out where you truly are. Because if you are like those in Hebrews 6:1-8 and like the Laodicean church and have no need to learn any more, or have it all together, you are truly lost.

A Pastor writes:

"Taking this as a hypothesis, I began to recall the words of Christ Himself from the Gospels, mostly the parables, in which Jesus spent a lot of time describing the Kingdom of God as something that contained sheep as well as goats; wheat as well as tares; good fish as well as bad fish; profitable servants as well as unprofitable servants. The punishment for those on the "wrong side" was being cast into outer darkness, with weeping and gnashing of teeth; being burned up in the fire; being told, "depart from me YE CURSED."

And then to go back to the very basic Sermon on the Mount and hear Christ warn, "Not everyone who says LORD, LORD will enter the kingdom of heaven, but they who do the will of my Father." Could it be that being a Christian is more involved than "repeating the sinner's prayer" and going to church every Sunday?

Then Jesus says, "Broad is the way and wide is the gate to destruction, and many find it. But the way to life is narrow, and the gate is straight, and FEW there be that find it." That blows all the theories about a worldwide revival in which 97.5% accept Christ. FEW, FEW, FEW, FEW, FEW find it.

Before our eyes we are watching the kingdom of God growing up around us as a mixture of wheat and tares, AND GOD ALLOWS IT, until the Day of Judgment. Then, again from the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says, "MANY will come in that day and say LORD, LORD, we did many things in your Name, etc. etc." And His response is, "I NEVER KNEW YOU. Away from Me, you workers of iniquity."

Who is he talking to? Not sinners! Sinners can't say they've been doing mighty works in Jesus' Name! Who then? Those goats pastoring churches, preaching on television, running ministries, attending services, doing all the "right" things. Jesus never once pronounced any "woes" on non-religious people, but on the scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the religious Law.

I began to see that there is no place for a hypocrite in the Kingdom of God. They are not just "immature" or "carnal", they are LOST. Of course, they are all over the place now. But there is a day of judgment in which God will distinguish between sheep and goats, wheat and tares, good fish and bad fish, profitable servants and unprofitable servants. Can you imagine the WEEPING and GNASHING OF TEETH, when these people who have been saying, "Lord, Lord, Hallelujah" all their lives stand before Christ and find out He doesn't know who they are?

Every wimpy little "repeat this after me" altar call will be revealed as worthless. God help us who have led people into thinking that your salvation is secure just because you held hands with the preacher and repeated a prayer. We say, "It's by grace we're saved, not works" but then we proceed to work our butt off to keep what supposedly we have been given for free. "Now that you're saved you gotta go to church, pay your tithes, read your Bible every day, blah, blah, blah" and people who do those things are "spiritual". PHOOEY! No they aren't! That is not what the Kingdom of God is all about!

Read what Jesus said! It's all right there! We will have no excuse!

And who are the ones who will stand up and tell people what it REALLY means to be a Christian? Who is there who really knows, and really lives it?

—Pastor Chip Brodgen

Commenting on the Pastor:

Boy those are some words to consider as we wrestle with trying to understand how the church has lost its power. And as Chip says, "Who will stand up and tell people what it means to be a Christian," because the church doesn't, it only tells you how you should act and respond. Life giving tools that are to be taught through maturing the body of believers just isn't happening, and I suspect deliberately. You see, the church today has become fat with wealth, and happy in their prosperity. It's leaders have become as the Pharisees were during Jesus time, they do not want you to mature beyond your current status. They do not want you to do as the Lord did and perform great signs and wonders so people will believe on Him, but they will perform so called signs and have great visions and call it a miracle and an anointing. While all of this smoke is obscuring your vision they are taking your money to the bank—and living it up in luxury.

Oh, my friends, we have been duped into believing in secret that God is dead, and that all these signs and wonders that do take place have to have mans approval before they are considered worthy of being a miracle. Even the church has to approve sainthood while the Bible tells us that **ALL ARE SAINTS** who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. How obstinate and antichrist.

Additionally, I believe that Hebrews chapter six reveals that these are those who talk the talk but can't walk the talk—those who have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Constantly doing this and that, involving themselves in taking care of the community while all along partaking of the heavenly things void of the life giving Spirit and because of pride, they do not repent. They not only bring this sentence of (no way back to repentance), but also are forbidding any thought of marriage with Jesus, or any relationship that replaces them as the center of people's thoughts and attention, or threatens to take the self-approval, and strong allegiance to their religion away from them.

So who were these Jews:

These were probably rehabilitated Jews who saw something different in following Christ. Perhaps they saw Him, heard Him, spoke with Him or even ate with Him. Nonetheless, I do not believe that they were saved in the context of the gospels' explanation of salvation because there is no evidence of being born anew. We are given the results of that "new birth" in the letter to the Galatians in chapter five where it talks about the fruit of the spirit. Today, these are most likely converted¹⁴ attendees from various denominations and congregations, those who appear to be saved because of their social involvement within and without the church. Perhaps they were converted from a particular faith while the salvation of the Lord was only acknowledged; a physical baptism, believing that alone would save them, and never receiving the gospel whole-heartedly. In other words, they falsely believe they are saved while being unwilling to repent of their sins and receive the Holy Spirit as evidence of their repentance. Their conversion is ineffectual because a repentant attitude¹⁵ is not present and their worship and service is simply outward and powerless.

¹⁴ Converted: Rehabilitated, transformed, changed, renewed, new, improved

¹⁵ This does not imply that all within these organizations are not saved; it simply implies that not all who claim to be mature spiritual believers are and that by not accepting the baptism of the Holy Spirit rejects the gift of God by crucifying again the Son of Man to the flesh.

So what do those filled with the Holy Spirit act like:

There are signs, which tell us who we are talking with and socializing with. It is important for us to know our Father's nature that we have in us through the Holy Spirit.

Gal 5:22-26

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Simply put, Hebrews chapter six tells us that these people had to get beyond the basics to biblical maturity, or they stood the risk of falling away. Keep in mind that a believer who has truly repented and has accepted Jesus Christ as messiah, there is no way they could fall away. If that were not the case, Jesus' work on the cross would be of no avail. In my opinion, the only way for a person to fall away from faith in Jesus is not to have believed in the first place. Now, this word believe¹⁶ has more connotations to it than simply saying, "Oh yes I know God is real; or I believe in a higher power." It means to put all your trust in that belief and to cling to, trust in and rely on the one you believe in; **not a simple acknowledgement.**

¹⁶ Believe: "to be firm, endure, be faithful, be true, stand fast, trust, have belief, believe." Outside of Hebrew, this word appears in Aramaic (infrequently), Arabic, and Syriac. It appears in all periods of biblical Hebrew (about 96 times) and only in the causative and passive stems.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

By Craig S Keener:

"The writer probably chooses these items as the 'basics' because they were the basic sorts of instruction about Jewish belief given to converts to Judaism, which the readers would have understood before becoming followers of Jesus. In this statement lies the paradox: "before becoming followers of Jesus," indicates that they were practicing religion based on their culture. Judaism stressed repentance as a regular antidote for sin, and a once-for-all kind of repentance for the turning of pagans to Judaism; Judaism naturally stressed faith as well. Although "dead" works could echo the common Jewish denunciation of idols as dead, that specific an allusion is unlikely in this context. He further states that early Judaism severely limited possession of the Spirit. The Dead Sea Scrolls limit the activity of the Holy Spirit to the congregation of the children of light, that is, those who agree with them; but besides these Christian texts; others viewed the Spirit as even more rare. The rabbis do so the most; they generally report that the Spirit was so rare that even when someone was worthy to receive it, the unworthiness of his generation prevented him from doing so."

A Question of Faith:

There is an issue of faith that needs to be addressed here: Just what type of faith persuades us to be a Christian, is it yours? Is it faith in someone else? Is it faith in an organization? Just what kind of faith is it that seduces us into being a Christian? Well, I have an answer for you and it isn't what you think it is; it isn't your faith alone! You may make a choice to believe, and you may have a contrite heart, but your faith cannot sustain you, or persuade you. It is the grace of God that increases our faith with a measure of His own, so we can teach, preach and prophesy. It is the full acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords and King of Kings that persuades us to follow Him.

A Living Sacrifice:

Romans 12:3-17

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

2 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, and perfect, will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, *let us wait* on *our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 *Let* love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 *Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

As indicated in verse six above, you can see it is not our faith alone that empowers, sustains or assists us in being Christian. It is the faith that God has proportioned out to each and every one of us. Man of course, has to overlay this with his finite understanding and make a religion with conditions calling it faith. That is why many cannot accept the workings of the Holy Spirit, or the miracles God performs every day through the hands of those He chooses to work through. It is not our choice to decide for God the proportion of faith we have or need; we have no idea!

Commentary by Spiros Zodhiates, Th. D.:

"The great difficulty in this whole question is that we interpret our own 'decision to follow Christ' as salvation per se. It is the second step toward salvation, the first having been the offer of that salvation by God through Christ in the convicting energy of the Holy Spirit. But our acceptance of God's offer of grace is not salvation. We are truly saved when God sees that our repentance of our sin is genuine and accepts us and makes us part of His body. Salvation presupposes truly genuine repentance on our part such being accepted by God (Eph. 1:6). Therefore we should never speak of salvation as a decision of ours only, but rather as God's acceptance of a truly repentant sinner. If He accepts someone whom He is not able to keep to the very end, then Christ has failed. Only that decision, which is man-initiated and constitutes merely man's emotion, and not God's acceptance of that decision, can be ineffective (II Thess. 2:13)."

Detour:

Now this short detour offers much to the background of what is being stated in Hebrews chapter six, and I believe that today, like then, we have many in our congregations that are carnal believers; unaware that they are in danger because their salvation is based on the works of the flesh. They tire easily because there is no life or power outside of their own, they are empty vessels practicing religion without the Holy Spirit; their form of conversion¹⁷ is fruitless and rigid. They simply practice the principles of religion while omitting the spiritual principles of the Christian faith. In fact, many are spiritually discerned and this means they are noticeable by those who are Spirit filled and more than that, they cannot understand the Scriptures. Actions and practices that are of this nature have a tendency to reject those who practice both principles, that of religion and faith. In other words, they are transformed from religion-to-religion, tradition-to-tradition, and law-to-law, not from death unto life. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is foreign to those who only practice law, and they look down on those who hold claim to both: the public acknowledgement of their acceptance of Jesus the only begotten Son of God by identifying with Him in physical baptism by immersion, and as Paul states in Acts, the baptism of the Holy Spirit which gives power, guidance and life.

"To put it bluntly they are converted to the church, not to Christ because they usually have their security, faith and trust in the church instead of in Christ, and that is idolatry. Especially where a false gospel is preached (e.g., Come to Jesus, all your problems will be solved)."

—Lynette Woods

¹⁷ Conversion: Change, exchange, adaptation, alteration, translation, renovation

Paul preaches Christ to Cornelius and his company:

Scripture has much to say about commands and the Holy Spirit. Let's take a look at a few Scriptures to see what they have to offer us. Here we see the word 'believe' and we need to fully understand what this word implies. It is not a simple acknowledgement as "sure I believe in Jesus," or "yes I'm a Christian." This word means to **cling to, trust in and rely upon**; a far cry from a simple tip of the hat or a flattering gesture of approval.

Acts 10:34-43

34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he, which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

The Holy Spirit is given by Paul's hands:

Concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit we are given a look into how Paul was shocked when he ran into believers such as those in Hebrews chapter six. Notice how he handles the difference between baptism by water and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:1-7

1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

3 And he said unto them, unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him, which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5 When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

7 And all the men were about twelve."

In addition to this the following words are even harsher. Your service to the unsaved does not show that you love the Lord. It shows that you love people. It does not show that you even belong to God, only that you may belong to the god of this world. In 1st John we are told how to recognize those who belong to God. This love should not be confused with the love we show to those who are not of the family of God. After all, do you love the stranger more than those of your own household?

Those who love God love His children and keep His commandments:

What does Scripture offer in the way of a test to see if we are God's children? I think 1 John 5 tells us plenty. I know for myself this has been a standard for me to use not only for others but also as a check for myself.

1 John 5:1-5

"1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Now God is a God of love and we need to divide this as well. Those who are empowered by the Holy Spirit can love all people with a love that is beyond comprehension. Now here lies the kicker: If that love is not for the brethren first then that love is not the love of God, it is rather the kind of love we have for friends. It is not the love for God's children; it is a love of self and self-sacrifice, one that appears to be holy and righteous. There is much confusion in our world as to what, how and who God loves. Scripture is plain as can be; it is the love we have one for another, those who are born again, bought with a price, a price too expensive for any on earth to pay. This price is what was done on the cross by Jesus Christ, and if we are to carry the wounds of His sacrifice by carrying our cross daily, and if we are to be Gods ambassadors of love on earth then we must understand once for all that those who are called to serve in any capacity can sustain, while those who chose to serve instead of being called to will starve.

So where do you stand?

A Life of Faith:

Now I'm not saying that you should doubt your belief! What I am saying is that you should examine yourself to see where you are in your walk. To check that you are not being deceived to believing in a faith of dead religious practices and traditions:

Paul's love and concern for the Corinthians forces him to tell of his own accomplishments:

How easy it is for us to swallow what others say without questions. We often go to church Bibles in hand, sit and listen to the sermon and very seldom question what was said. We are filled daily with messages that are both Scriptural and not, and the majority of people attending could not tell the difference. We have people performing magic with Scripture just like the devil did in the desert when he tried to tempt Jesus by turning words around. Our Lord caught him and told him "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." So, what do we know about falling for things so easily, especially when we think we know it all without the Holy Spirit's guidance, we are often forced to boast of our self.

2 Cor 11:1-4

"1 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my* folly: and indeed bear with me.

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*."

Paul threatens to exercise his authority as an apostle in dealing with the obstinate:

And what about those who think they don't need to know any more and refuse to learn or be taught. These are those who seek proof of the Holy Spirit speaking through you or living within you.

2 Cor 13:1-6

"1 This *is* the third *time* I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established,

2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God, for we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how

that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates."

A Question of Faith (Peter):

I realize that there are many different ways to view these fragments of Scripture, and I'm keenly aware that how I say things or organize my thoughts for others to read may not convey clearly what is on my mind or in my heart. This is also a dilemma for all of us because we not only take critical aim at others understanding, we also take that same aim at our own understanding, and often with more dire consequences than simply not reading or listening.

I am also aware that this entire treatment could easily be turned into a book just to bring more understanding to the verses in Hebrews chapter six. I did not intend to do that, nor did I intend to answer every question, circumstance or variable that could possibly arise. So if you can bear with me for a few moments longer I would like to wrap this journal up with an illustration that I pray will shed light on much of what has been articulated to this point.

Jesus Doesn't Require a Degree:

Jesus doesn't require a person to have a degree to minister and mature, only the willingness to love Him more than anything or anyone else. Remember John 21 after Jesus rose from the dead he met the apostles while they tried to return to their former life style (fishing)? You know, even though this is not part of that story, how about using your imagination for a moment by accepting that you cannot return to your former life style. Envision these men losing their master and all the confusion that brought with it. Can you hear all the questions: what will we do now? Where should we go? How are we going to tell others about Jesus when He is dead? After Jesus rose from the dead he spent time with them but he did not stay with them for he had other things to do and that was probably just as unsettling as when Jesus died. Well, Peter being his reactive self probably says something like this; well I'm going back to my former trade, fishing, at least I know how to do that and I can be comfortable like before, and off he goes. So there he is, in his boat on the lake fishing, and he is having a real poor day, he has caught nothing. All of a sudden they see a man on shore who is talking to them; the man tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat, they do, and their catch is so large that they were afraid that they would not be able to haul it in. Finally, they realize that that man is Jesus, who else could do such things. It is incredible how we lose our way; try to return to where we are comfortable even though we will not be successful without Jesus helping us out. Once you taste the heavenly gift there is no turning back, unless you are not true to your convictions.

Well, to keep this short, when they were around the charcoal fire, a similar fire to Peter's, Jesus asks Peter the same questions three times: "Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" Peter swiftly replied, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you," He said to him, "Tend My lambs." Jesus re-created for Peter the night he denied Him around the charcoal fire warming himself, you know the time, just after Jesus was arrested. This time, Peter affirmed his love for the Lord three times, and Jesus made sure he understood what was required of him. Tend my lambs; Shepherd my sheep; tend my sheep. Shortly after this exchange, Jesus told Peter how he would glorify God, and His concluding words were, "follow me." Peter understood, in fact there was no returning to the former ways again. Peter finally paid the ultimate for his Lord as he died on the cross.

A Love - More than your own:

Two words, agapao and phileo are used here but they are both translated as "love." The word agapao is to love unselfishly to the point that you would be willing to sacrifice. This is the word that we find in John 3:16. The word phileo or philio actually means to be a friend or to have the same interests with another person. So here Jesus asks if Peter Loves Him more than his friends and if so Peter is charged with tending Jesus' lambs. This is the only pre-requisite for ministry, there is nothing to support the notion of a degree for service because everything we have been equipped with is a gift from God, and simply requires their use with a repentant heart. There is no turning back unless you were never right with the Lord to begin with. He will meet you when you need Him most and least. He will never depart from you, if you truly love Him.

You see, to say we love God means we keep His commandments and that no one else is loved more. The difference between philio and agape love is that the first is the love of parents, wife, and children or self, which subordinates our love for God. It is a love that often fails because it becomes envious, angry, emotional, and takes great pains to vindicate itself.

On the other hand, agape is when that philio love takes second place because God is number one and this love never fails. Why? Because we love Jesus above everything else, His love covers us and so our relationships are more genuine and fulfilling. In doing this, our reactions or behaviors are no longer fueled by envy, selfishness, protectionism and status. Our love becomes His because it is kind, patient, longsuffering, endures all things, hopes all things, is not rude or unbecoming, it does not rejoice in a wrong, it does not brag and is not arrogant, it is not provoked and does not take into account a wrong, it rejoices with the truth, bears all things, it never fails.¹⁸

Standing on the Word:

Some time ago, a friend of mine shared something that he was shown by the Holy Spirit which also deals with Peter; only this time, the story is when the apostles were in the boat and Jesus was coming to them walking on the water. My friend told me that the Holy Spirit told him: "you realize that the boat is man made?" My friend responded what do you mean? The Holy Spirit responded: "Well when Jesus called to Peter he was actually telling Peter to step out of what was made by man and to trust on Him." My friend asked: "Ok, so the boat is man made, and Peter was asked to trust the Lord, so this means that we are simply to step out in faith. The Holy Spirit responded: "No, not just trust in Jesus, but to believe on Him, and to take a stand with Him, and by acting on this faith by following Him. You see, Peter did not step out until the Lord spoke, and when Peter stepped out of the boat he was not standing on the water because the water could not hold him; he was standing on the Word that was spoken by Jesus. As Peter walked a short distance, he began to sink; the Word began to diminish beneath him because he began to see what was around him, and that became overwhelming. When we take our eyes off the Lord and begin to focus on what man has created, and what the devil bombards us with every day, the Word we stand on is often forgotten because of all the noise and the constant pulling at our natural desires and tendencies to survive. We know then if we stand on His word, or simply our own.

¹⁸First Corinthians 13.

Many of us today are just like Peter! Jesus calls many, and many respond by beginning to stand on the word, then the world surrounds us and we begin to lose faith and sink because the Word that called is fading from beneath our feet. We have the desire at first, and then as problems enter our lives, and as we become entangled with the affairs of this life we lose our focus, and our foundation begins to weaken. Perhaps this is how so many splinter groups are formed--running from foundation to foundation and never really maturing in the Word. This foundation I'm speaking about can be found in Hebrews chapter six, and it is here we must be dealt with--right at our doubt and unbelief.

In Closing - No Easy Answers:

There are no easy answers to all the questioning, and the road of truth is littered with the bones of countless millions who, losing their way, gave up, and died. Don't let their unwillingness to receive life eternal become your headstone as well. Rise to the message of the gospel and seek the truth in its message, you will not be alone, disappointed, or bored. There are countless treasures to be found within the gospel, one being your life eternal, and most importantly, Jesus the only begotten Son of God. It is never too late! If you have been trapped with a religious and intellectual spirit you can be freed and forgiven once for all. Simply acknowledge your situation to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness and to send the Holy Spirit to fill you, comfort you and empower you to love Jesus more than anything and anyone else. After all, isn't it a question of love and faith and not simply love or faith?

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