

SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE Colossians 3:1-3
LOOKING AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN 2 Corinthians 4:18
EVIDENTLY THINGS ABOVE AND INVISIBLE, ARE SPIRITUAL CELESTIAL, ETERNAL AND INFINITE THINGS.
AND THE THINGS ON EARTH WHICH ARE SEEN ARE MATERIAL AND TEMPORAL.

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Purpose of this thesis: To revise our devotional life, our prayers, our requests, our attitude toward our needs and the balance between seeking the eternal things above and the transitory things on earth.

INTRODUCTION

These next Scriptures caused a revision in my spiritual devotional life. I had to recognize that most of my prayers had been asking for things and people on earth. I found out that our churches prayers and our small groups prayers are generally for the temporary things of this world. We pray for each other, for jobs, healing, prosperity, travel, etc. When somebody asks us to pray for him or her, we ask: what are your needs? The answer is generally for things on earth! But what about these recommendations by Paul?

Colossians 3:1-3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ (*to a new life, different life, a spiritual life*), **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.** ² Set your mind on **the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** ³ For you have died (*to the old materialistic life*) and your life is **hidden with Christ in God** (*this is a new, different, privileged and spiritual position*).

2 Corinthians 4:18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

While we **look not** at the things **which are seen**, but at the things **which are not seen**; for the things which are seen are **temporal**, but the things which are not seen are **eternal**.

Philippians 3:19-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁹ Whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, **who set their minds on earthly things.** ²⁰ For **our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior**, the Lord Jesus Christ.

My point is that our emphasis is on the wrong side. Our **first** concern should be the things above, the invisible spiritual things, **not** the things here on earth.

1 Corinthians 15:19 New International Version (NIV)

If only **for this life** we have hope in Christ, we are of all people **most to be pitied**.

A. PUTTING THE FIRST THINGS FIRST

1. Though, I do not believe that asking for things on this earth, visible things, and praying for each other is wrong, because the Apostle Paul asked the Romans to pray for him Romans 15:30-32, and James the Apostle says that we should pray for each other James 5:16, I do believe that **not looking first** to

the spiritual, invisible, celestial and eternal things above **surely is wrong**. There must be a balance with an inclination towards the spiritual and heavenly.

I believe that a Hebraism is used in these Scriptures, that is, using strong terms to indicate a **preference**. There are many Hebraisms like this in the Scriptures, Jesus even used them, but those who heard Him knew how to interpret them. Here is an example:

Luke 14:26 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Now, this is very heavy! Hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and our life? This looks crazy. If hermeneutics didn't tell us that it is an Hebraism, this would be unbelievable. Matthew puts the same affirmation in his version of what Luke registered:

Matthew 10:37 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

He who loves father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me.

Nobody reprimanded Mathew for changing the words because Matthew knew the Hebraism but didn't use it because the meaning was the same.

So, coming back to our Scriptures, it is very possible that Paul is not saying that we should **not ask at all** for things on earth, the visible things, but that we should put **first and over all the things above**, the **spiritual and invisible** kingdom of God. This is what our Lord meant when He said:

Matthew 6:31-33 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus didn't mean that we shouldn't cook or drink or clothe ourselves, He says that the spiritual life is more important. So, it is very possible that Paul doesn't mean that we should not pray at all for "things on earth", the "visible things" but that we should put first and **over all the things above, the invisible, celestial and eternal family of God of which we are part: The Holy Trinity, angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the myriads of angels, the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, the spirits of the righteous made perfect** Hebrews 12:22-24. Are we doing that? Most of us don't!

2. These Scriptures emphasize the spiritual, celestial, eternal and invisible, the Holy Trinity, angels, saints, etc.

Matthew 16:26

For what will it profit a man if he **gains the whole world** and forfeits his **soul**?

But not only these, we also must be skillful in facing the other side of the invisible spiritual powers: The kingdom of darkness, which is also continually present fighting against us:

Ephesians 6:10-18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm **against the schemes of the devil.** ¹² For our struggle **is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** ¹³ Therefore, take up the **full armor of God**, so that you will be able to resist in the **evil day**, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with **truth**, and having put on the **breastplate of righteousness**, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the **preparation of the gospel** of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the **shield of faith** with which you will be able to **extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.** ¹⁷ And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the **word of God.** ¹⁸ With **all prayer** and petition **pray at all times in the Spirit**, and with this in view, be on the **alert** with all **perseverance** and **petition for all the saints.**

2 Corinthians 10:3-7 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh,** ⁴ for the **weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.** ⁵ We are **destroying speculations** and ever lofty thing raised up **against the knowledge of God**, and we are taking every thought **captive to the obedience of Christ,** ⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. ⁷ You are looking at **things as they are outwardly.** If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him **consider this again within himself**, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

Evidently what makes us different than the unbeliever is that most of our activity is spiritual.

Colossians 3:1-3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ (*to a new life, different life, a spiritual life*), **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.** ² Set your mind on **the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** ³ For you have died (*to the old materialistic life*) and your life is **hidden with Christ in God** (*this is a new, different, privileged and spiritual position*).

2 Corinthians 4:18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

While we **look not** at the things **which are seen**, but at the things **which are not seen**; for the things which are seen are **temporal**, but the things which are not seen are **eternal.**

Philippians 3:19-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁹ Whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, **who set their minds on earthly things.** ²⁰ For **our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior,** the Lord Jesus Christ.

My point is that our emphasis is sometimes on the wrong side: in our earthly temporal needs, when our **first** activity should be the heavenly dimension, the things above, the invisible things, the things from where our citizenship is, **not** the things on earth; here we are peregrines. We are supposed to be the **spiritual power, the priests** on earth, both before God and His angels by intercession and against Satan, his angels and demons; the latter is generally called "**spiritual warfare**" by many Christians. We are supposed to be "**priests**". A priest is a person between people and God, but also defenders against the god of this world, Satan, his angels and demons. The responsibility for the spiritual activity on this planet is ours, the spiritual believers. This is the big difference between unbelievers and us.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ For though we walk in the **flesh**, we do **not war according to the flesh**, ⁴ for the **weapons** of our warfare **are not of the flesh**, but divinely powerful for the **destruction of fortresses.** ⁵ We are **destroying speculations** and every lofty thing raised up **against the knowledge of God**, and we are taking every thought captive **to the obedience of Christ.**

Matthew 16:18-19 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (*which means 'rock'*), and upon this rock I will build my church, and **all the powers of hell will not conquer it.** ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. **Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."**

Matthew 18:18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Truly I say to you, **whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.**

John 20:22-23 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" ²³ **If you forgive the sins of any, their sin have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."**

Did you know that we had this power... and responsibility?

1 Corinthians 15:19 New International Version (NIV)

If only **for this life** we have hope in Christ, we are of all people **most to be pitied.**

3. The type of prayer in the early church: When Apostles Peter and John were threatened with jail, punishment and were forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus, they made a prayer that could be a prototype of prayer, very different from the prayer we would have done. They were concerned more for God's interest than for theirs!

Acts 4:18-21, 23-31 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they **commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.** ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰ for **we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.**" ²¹ When they had **threatened them further,** they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; ²³ When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said...

Look and meditate that in their prayer the most used pronoun is "**YOU**" referring to God.

²⁵ O **Lord,** it is **You** who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David **Your** servant, said, "Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples devise futile things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together **against the Lord and against His Christ.**" ²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together against **Your** holy servant Jesus, whom **You** anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever **Your** hand and **Your** purpose predestined to occur. ²⁹ And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that **Your** bond-servants may speak **Your** word with all confidence, ³⁰ while **You** extend **Your** hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of **Your** holy servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, **the place where they had gathered together was shaken,** and they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak the **word of God with boldness.**

Now, suppose that this persecution would happen to us and our leaders today. How would we pray?

"O Lord, the kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against **Peter** and **John.** For truly in this city there were gathered together against **Peter** and **John** and **us...** and now, Lord take note of their threats, and grant that your bond servants **Peter** and **John find a good place to hide.**"

How different was the teaching of Our Lord!

Matthew 6:31-33 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek **first His kingdom and His righteousness,** and **all these things will be added to you.**

B. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE THINGS ON EARTH AND THINGS ABOVE

1. The Old Covenant **blessings and curses** were both material, things on earth and temporal Deuteronomy 28:1-68. As we read the Old Testament, we tend to be like them always asking for things on earth. In the New Covenant, there are no curses because Jesus redeemed us from the curses of the Law of Moses Galatians 3:13, and now, God gives us promises that **are not** material, earthly and temporal, but **celestial, angelical, eternal and infinite.**

Hear Paul defining the beginning of the **Old** Covenant of **FEAR**, and the beginning of the **New** Covenant of **PEACE AND JOY**:

FEAR IN THE INAUGURATION OF THE OLD COVENANT. All these things are visibly, touchable and hearable.

Hebrews 12:18-24 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ For you have not come to a **mountain that can be touched** and to a **blazing fire**, and to **darkness and gloom and whirlwind**, ¹⁹ and to the **blast of a trumpet** and the sound of words which sound was such **that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them**. ²⁰ For they **could not bear** the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST **TOUCHES** THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." ²¹ And so **terrible was the sight**, that Moses said, "**I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling**."

PEACE AND JOY IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH GRACE. All these things are heavenly, divine, spiritual, invisible, eternal and infinite.

²² But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to **the city of the living God**, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to **myriads of angels**, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are **enrolled in heaven**, and **to God**, the Judge of all, and to the **spirits of the righteous made perfect**, ²⁴ and **to Jesus**, the mediator of a **new covenant**, and to the **sprinkled blood**, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

The blessings in the Old Testament were: more children, more cows, better harvest, longer earthly life, etc. Deuteronomy 28:1-14, all things transitory, short-lived and perishable.

The blessings in the New Covenant were spiritual and eternal:

Ephesians 1:3-14 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be **holy and blameless before Him**. In love ⁵ He predestined us to **adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of **His grace**, which He **freely bestowed on us in the Beloved**. ⁷ In Him **we have redemption through His blood**, the **forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His **grace** ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all **wisdom and insight** ⁹ He made known to us the **mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the **fullness of the times**, that is, the summing up of **all things in Christ**, things in **the heavens and things on the earth**. In Him ¹¹ **also we have obtained an inheritance**, having been **predestined** according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would **be to the praise of His glory**. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were **sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**, ¹⁴ who is given as a **pledge of our inheritance**, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

2. In the New Covenant everything is better. We live under the **New** Covenant with **better promises**. The promises of the New Covenant are better because they are **eternal, celestial** and **infinite**:

Hebrews 8:6-7 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁶ **But now, He** (*Jesus*) has obtained a **more excellent ministry**, by as much as He is also the mediator of a **better covenant**, which has been enacted on **better promises**. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Notice the words "**more excellent ministry, better covenant, better promises.**" You can see this in the blessing given by the Apostle in the introduction of the great epistle to the Ephesians. Notice that all promises of the New Covenant are not temporal here, but eternal:

As I started to meditate on these Scriptures, I asked myself, how do we seek the things above, the spiritual and invisible ones? And it is Paul who tells us how to do it! In my search for starting to "**keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God** and **not on the things that are on earth** and look at **things which are not seen, which are eternal and not at transitory things which are seen,**" I decided to start trying to obey Paul's recommendations, and set my mind and direct my spiritual exercises into a **higher dimension**, which is also the kingdom of **my citizenship!** The things above are the things of the place I can call home. The things from above should be **first** in our lives.

We cannot ignore these Scriptures:

Colossians 3:1-2

¹ **Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.**

² Set your mind on **the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**

Colossians 4:18

We **look not at the things which are seen**, but at the **things which are not seen**; for the things which **are seen** are **temporal**, but the things which are **not seen** are **eternal**.

This is very clear in the Scriptures, but since we do not understand it all, these teachings are solid food for us. This is something stronger than the milk which we are used to.

C. THE NEED OF SOLID FOOD

1. When I was a child I always wanted candies and cookies with milk. I didn't like spinach, liver, soup, vitamins, minerals, proteins, etc., just candies and milk! My mother said to me: "You should not just eat what you like, but what is good and nourishes you." Paul is very clear that **milk** is for the immature. Whoever lives only on milk is in the kindergarten stage of his

spiritual life. Desiring solid food is evidence of our willingness to grow spiritually. Physical growth is natural, but spiritual growth is intentional and supernatural as we nourish our inner person and as we grow in stature, starting to have **solid food**.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since **you have become dull of hearing** (*sluggish in your spiritual hearing and disinclined to listen*). ¹² For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, (*because of the time you have had to learn these truths*) **you have need again for someone to teach you** (*from the beginning*) **the elementary principles of the oracles of God**, and you have come to need **milk and not solid food**. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk **is not accustomed** (*unskillful*) **to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant**. ¹⁴ But **solid food is for the mature**, who because of practice have their senses trained **to discern good and evil**. ^{6:1} Therefore **leaving the elementary teaching** about the Christ, let us **press on to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of **repentance** from dead works and of **faith** toward God, ² of instruction about **baptisms** (*or washings*), and **laying on of hands**, and the **resurrection of the dead** and **eternal judgment**. ³ And this we will do, if God permits.

2. Paul is saying that the following are the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” that we should teach right after a person is born again: **Repentance** from sins, **faith** to believe in God, **baptism**, **laying on of hands** to receive the Holy Spirit, **resurrection of the dead**, the second coming of Christ and **Judgment**; this is like the apostolic creed.

These, in that order, are the first things the early Apostles did with new believers. They had to first:

- 1. Repent**
- 2. Believe**
- 3. Baptized**
- 4. Lay hands on** to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire Acts 2:38-39
- 5. Expect Christ’s second coming and the resurrection of the dead**
- 6. Judgment**

All these things in the early church occurred the first day of their encounter with Christ: The first day they repented, believed, were baptized, were filled with the Holy Spirit, started waiting for the second coming. This is before the milk, this is the colostrum! Paul exhorts us to **leave these elementary teachings about Christ and “press on to maturity.”** These teachings are for new believers as they enter the Kingdom!

It is interesting, that Paul says to this group: “by this time **you ought to be teachers**.” After conversion and learning these elementary teachings, they should start teaching them to those who come after them, because it is by teaching that we learn more and faster. This is discipleship: to make

disciples who make disciples who make disciples, etc., so all teach and all learn. This creates leaders who become priests helping others. We **learn only when we teach** and become doers of the teachings we learned. Those who don't do what Jesus commanded and don't teach it to others, **don't learn** Hebrews 5:12.

3. **"Preaching" and "teaching"** is not the same thing. The Greek words do not have the same meaning, although many times preaching and teaching are quoted together because we have to do both.

Matthew 9:35 Good News Translation (GNT)

Jesus went around visiting all the towns and villages. He **taught** in the synagogues, **preached** the Good News about the Kingdom, and **healed** people with every kind of disease and sickness.

Acts 5:42 Good News Translation (GNT)

And every day in the Temple and in people's homes they continued to **teach** and **preach** the Good News about Jesus the Messiah.

Matthew 28:19-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁹ Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Preaching is **"kerygma"**: "to announce, "to proclaim", "to declare", "to decree" (*Theological dictionary of the New Testament, Geoffrey W. Bromiley*).

Teaching is **"Didasko"**: "practical knowledge", "with the highest possible development of the disciple as the goal", "has an authoritative bearing", "to demonstrate", "to perform" (*Theological dictionary of the New Testament*).

1 Corinthians 15:14 Good News Translation (GNT)

And if Christ has not been raised from death, **then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe.**

Most spiritual truth cannot be demonstrated because spirits are invisible or because it happened long ago. So it requires us to exercise faith. The "Kerygma" is when the anointed preacher proclaims something and the Holy Spirit causes people to believe it. Faith is a gift from God Ephesians 2:8.

Hebrews 11:6 Good News Translation (GNT)

No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God **must have faith that God exists** and rewards those who **seek him**.

The "Kerygma" is a miracle. A preacher shouts: "God is here and He loves you" and the Holy Spirit causes people to believe that it is so, because God gives them the faith to believe, and that saves them. "Kerygma" is an announcement, a notice, a proclamation, **not an explanation**. It is good

news and by just believing the proclamation, WE ARE SAVED! Isn't this great?

1 Corinthians 1:21 New Living Translation (NLT)

Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world **would never know him through human wisdom**, he has used our **foolish preaching to save those who believe**.

"Foolish preaching."

1 Corinthians 1:21 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

This is what God in his wisdom decided: Since the world did not find him through its own wisdom, he used the **message that sounds foolish to save those who believe it**.

"Message that sounds foolish."

It is foolishness that a person from the pulpit makes an affirmation that if you believe it is sufficient to receive eternal life. Why do so many believe it? It is because of the Holy Spirit is preparing that affirmation in the heart of the unbeliever and causes him to be a believer. It is true, it pleased God to save the sinners by the foolishness of the "Kerygma."

Read again.

1 Corinthians 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised from death, **then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe**.

It is foolish that God decided to deliver people from death into life eternal, just by hearing an anointed preacher affirm it and believing that what he said is true (*read again Hebrews 11:6*).

Matthew 28:19-20 Good News Translation (GNT)

¹⁹ Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and **make them my disciples**: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and **teach them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

Mark 16:15-16 Living Bible (TLB)

¹⁵ And then he told them, "You are to go into all the world and **preach** the Good News to everyone, everywhere. ¹⁶ Those who **believe and are baptized will be saved**. But those who **refuse to believe will be condemned**."

"Didasko" is different than **"Kerygma."** "Kerygma" means good news, that people only must believe. "Didasko" is an order or command that we must obey. The **"Kerygma"** must be **believed**; the **"Didasco"** must be **done**. Grace gives us the willingness and the capacity to do what Jesus commands US: Philippians 2:13, Ezekiel 36:26-27, Jeremiah 31:33-34. In our classes there should be testimonies about how the disciples practiced the teachings, obeying what Jesus commanded, and the changes that happened in their lives as a result. To give a testimony before a group means accountability. Not doing so

means there are no challenges in the life of the believers. This is not legalism, this is Grace functioning. So, the preaching must be believed, the teaching must be done. And the disciples will experience the willingness and the capacity to do it.

Paul definitely says:

Hebrews 6:1-3

¹ **Leaving the elementary teaching** about the Christ, let us **press on to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of **repentance** from dead works and of **faith** toward God, ² of instruction about **baptisms** (or washings), and **laying on of hands**, and the **resurrection of the dead** and **eternal judgment**. ³ And this we will do, if God permits.

c. Somebody may ask: should we stop teaching repentance, faith, baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, resurrection and judgment? Paul's idea is that those who were taught the elementary teachings should later teach them to the next new group of believers. Otherwise, the leaders will be always teaching the first principles to everybody and people will not grow spiritually, which is exactly what Paul complains about.

¹¹ **You have become dull of hearing** (sluggish in your spiritual hearing and disinclined to listen and obey). ¹² For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, (because of the time you have had to learn these truths) **you have need again for someone to teach you** (from the beginning) **the elementary principles of the oracles of God**, and you have come to need **milk and not solid food**.

In a Church that truly makes disciples, the first group of disciples should be trained to teach the **ABCs** to the next group of newcomers, while they are now learning the **DEFs**. Then the **DEF group** teaches the **DEFs** to the group behind and the leaders teach the first group the **GHI**s etc., etc. As people teach it to others, they will understand it even better and the teaching will become more a part of their lives. This is exactly what Jesus clearly said: "**make disciples** baptizing them" and "**teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**." All people should teach in order to really learn. This is very easy to do in small groups. Every member of the congregation should belong to a small group. The small group should be in their homes.

When the elementary teaching of lessons on milk is over, they can then enter into the teaching program of the church, the methodology of which is close to the school system. In our church, after the elementary teachings that we called "New Life" (milk), we taught Bible, then the Bethel course and then the Ministry Associate Training program. After this any student could go to seminary. Many of the new converted people in our congregation eventually became pastors. Some even started new congregations when they moved back to their country, others are assistant pastors now, and the church has an army of volunteers and is growing rapidly.

Something almost funny happened in those days. In the first days of starting our Hispanic congregation, we did our course "New Life" for the new believers at Rancho Capistrano. I told them that if they would repeat the same course two times, they could later teach it to another group. One third of them accepted the challenge. Among them was a Catholic man. Many of the Catholics who came to our church kept going to their Catholic church as well. One day this man went to his Catholic service and the invited preacher had a problem at the last moment and could not come. The local priest was not prepared to speak so he opened the sermon time to the public asking if some of them may have something to share. This Catholic man had taken the New Life Course three times and still had the first lesson in his pocket. So, he gave the lesson. The priest could not believe how this man could give such a speech. Well, he had taught it already in our church!

D. WHAT IS SOLID FOOD?

1. Solid food is a higher and deeper spiritual learning. A believer who is hungry for solid food always seeks fresh insight into Scripture that they previously didn't understand which takes them closer to God and the "**things above**". Paul described his solid food team as a group where he could talk about every spiritual theme and experience.

1 Corinthians 2:6

⁶ We **do speak wisdom** among **those who are mature**; a wisdom, however, **not of this age nor of the rulers of this age**, who are passing away; ⁷ but **we speak God's wisdom in a mystery**, the **hidden wisdom** which God predestined before the ages to **our** glory; ⁸ the wisdom which **none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**"

Solid food is wisdom. Wisdom enters the unknown. Wisdom is discovery. Wisdom is mystery. Wisdom will be difficult to understand at the beginning because it is something new, something that was previously hidden and sometimes different to what we are familiar with. People who do not like changes will not like solid food. We experience this problem continually because most members of the church do not want changes, since that forces them to think differently and they resist that. People feel more comfortable without changes. Others love wisdom, become wise and when they discover something new they rejoice in the discovery. We call those who discover something unknown wise, like Dr. Albert Einstein.

The difference between Wisdom and Knowledge (*or science*) is that knowledge is something already discovered. We acquire knowledge in school, universities, reading and asking questions of those who already know. But wise persons are the discoverers who feed science. They discover something that later becomes knowledge and is then taught in schools.

Spiritually, there are nine spiritual gifts in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸ for to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the **word of knowledge** through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The first two in the list of nine gifts, are: “**Word of wisdom**” and “**Word of knowledge**”, and I believe these are the two most important gifts for pastors and teachers. Paul emphasizes that the wisdom they speak is only for the “mature” believers. Maybe I am wrong, but I think that a group of retired ministers come the closest to mature Christians. My personal experience is that when I was an active pastor, I was so busy that I thought if I made time to read then I didn’t have time to meditate. So, most of my sermons were at the same level of spirituality. I didn’t have time to dig. Anyway, the members of my church did not require from me more than what I learned in seminary and during my life as a believer. There were many Scriptures that I never regarded as necessary to use. Guess which ones; those that said something different than what I already believed.

But spiritual wisdom is not just dissecting verses of the Bible, but a continual dialog with God. It’s as simple as this: “Lord, what does this Scripture mean?” “Are there other Scriptures about this theme?” “Why did I never know what it meant before?” “Why did I never hear or preach about this?” “What do commentaries say about this? (Actually, many times the commentaries did not convince me).

Now Paul is very clear about this. He said, it is a wisdom **not** of the “things on earth”, but “God’s wisdom in a **mystery**” a “**hidden** wisdom which God predestined **before the ages** to our glory.” “**None of the rulers of this age has understood it**”, and then he says something to make us think: “If they had understood it, they **would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**” Now, who crucified the Lord? The religious leaders John 18:14, 19:7. What was the hidden wisdom that, if the religious leaders had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory? I believe the mystery was GRACE. Those religious leaders were taught all their lives “**You shall not show pity** to a false witness. **Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot; this is your rule.**” Deuteronomy 19:21. Grace for them was unimaginable, the greatest heresy!

Now we have a challenge: Paul says that "**none of the rulers of this age has understood it**", that is grace, and then he says something to make us think: "If they had understood it, they **would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**" Paul means that if they would have understood GRACE, they would have converted and become disciples of Christ! If that had happened, then could there have been salvation without the cross? This is solid food and food for thinking.

2. An example of a solid food group could be the group of Acts 13:1-3. The group of mature believers that Paul is talking about could be the group of leaders of the Antioch Church:

Acts 13:1-3

¹ Now there were at **Antioch**, in the church that was there, **prophets and teachers**: Barnabas and **Simeon** who was called Niger, and **Lucius** of Cyrene, and **Manaen** who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and **Saul**. ² While **they were ministering to the Lord** and **fasting**, the **Holy Spirit said**, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, when they had **fasted and prayed** and **laid their hands on them**, they **sent them away**.

Prophets and Teachers: There was a clear line of authority. This authority was not by voting, but **by their spirituality and gifts**. What were they doing? They were **ministering to the Lord**, not to the people, not **asking** things for themselves or the church. Ministering to the Lord is **ministering to God's needs!** Their prayers were not "Lord **give us**", but Lord, what do you need **from us, what can we do for you?** In other words, "we are your servants!" How different this is from the church boards that I knew! God answered: "I need your two pastors, Paul and Barnabas, to evangelize Europe." This same attitude should be in our Elders' meetings. Usually our prayers are: "Lord do this, Lord do that..., Lord give us, help us." Lord or servant? Who is the Lord, who are the servants, and who gives the orders to whom? The following Scripture gives the idea of the line of authority:

1 Corinthians 4:19-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, **not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.** ²⁰ For the **kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.**

They had authority according to their spirituality, gifts and power. The following Scripture gives that order.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And **God has appointed** in the church, **first** apostles, **second** prophets, **third** teachers, **then** miracles, **then** gifts of **healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.** ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹ But earnestly **desire the greater gifts.**

The gifts:

1. APOSTLE
2. PROPHETS,
3. TEACHERS (*or pastors*)
4. MIRACLES (*evangelists*)
5. GIFTS OF HEALINGS,
6. HELPS (*elders*)
7. ADMINISTRATIONS (*deacons*)
8. VARIOUS KINDS OF TONGUES (*lowest gift, the first new believers received*)

This is an order of normal spiritual growth. It is evident that this list is the order of authority. The group of five in Antioch were "prophets and teachers", the second and third positions; they were close to the top. But after they laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and sent them to mission they entered the first position, which is: Apostles, as the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Acts 14:14-15 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁴ But when the **apostles Barnabas and Paul** heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵ and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you."

Apostle gr. "**apóstolos**" "person sent with full authority" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

3. The Babies and the Mature Believers.

1 Corinthians 2:1-8 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹ And when I came to **you**, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of **wisdom**, proclaiming to **you** the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among **you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** ³ I was with **you** in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive **words of wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that **your** faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. ⁶ **Yet we do speak wisdom** among **those who are mature**; a wisdom, however, **not of this age nor of the rulers of this age**, who are passing away; ⁷ but **we** speak **God's wisdom in a mystery**, the **hidden wisdom** which God predestined before the ages to **our** glory; ⁸ the wisdom which **none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

We can clearly see **two** different groups in this piece of Scripture, the **You Group** (*the Corinthians*) and the **We Group** (*Paul and his mature friends*). For the Corinthians: **JUST MILK**; for the mature believers: **SOLID FOOD**.

The **We** are groups of mature believers who had finished with the milk and speak of **SOLID FOOD** among themselves. The solid food is called here: "**Wisdom not of this age**", "**God's wisdom in a mystery**", "**Hidden wisdom**", **wisdom that the hierarchy of the religious system did not understand, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

Paul found the solid food when he was **CAUGHT UP TO PARADISE IN THE THIRD HEAVEN** and received a GREAT REVELATION: the Grace of God plus who knows how much more:

Galatians 1:11-12 Amplified Bible (AMP)

¹¹ For I want you to know, believers, that the gospel which was preached by me **is not man's gospel** (*it is not a human invention, patterned after any human concept*). ¹² For indeed **I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a** (*direct*) **revelation of Jesus Christ.**

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Amplified Bible (AMP)

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, only God knows — such a man was **caught up to the third heaven.** ³ And I know that such a man — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, only God knows — ⁴ was **caught up into Paradise** and **heard inexpressible words which man is not permitted to speak** (*words too sacred to tell*).

Paul gives us a glimpse of solid food, something very thought-provoking, that only people anxious to grow spiritually would face without fear. Evidently, the group to which Paul belonged had commented on Paul's assertion.

1 Corinthians 2:8

The wisdom which **none of the rulers of this age has understood;** for if they had understood it **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

A challenge for us today.

Let us revise our own thirst for God and enter into a higher dimension of our relationship with the things above, the invisible celestial kingdom. It is very different to see our earth and its needs from here than trying to see things as God sees them from His side. We should have **the mind of Christ,** we have to image us **seated in the heavens with Him.**

Ephesians 2:5-6 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁵ Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and **seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**

Colossians 3:3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

For you have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

This is one of the prayers of Paul for us:

Ephesians 1:16-18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁶ Do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation** in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the **eyes of your heart may be enlightened,** so that you will know what is the **hope of His calling,** what are the riches of the glory of **His inheritance in the saints.**

We should try to see things the way God sees them. It is very sad when a person has a baby who never grows. The joy of their birth turns into sadness. Paul is very clear about this:

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able.

Isn't this sad? "I **couldn't** speak to you as to **spiritual persons.**" What is a spiritual person? It is a person who "**seeks the things from above, solid food**" and has discernment to know what is from God and what is not. In a group like this, all pastors, we can talk about these things. But most members of the church, even Elders wouldn't understand or would be scandalized.

Hebrews 5:13-14 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹³ For everyone who partakes **only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he **is an infant.** ¹⁴ But **solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.****

Philippians 3:20 Good News Translation (GNT)

We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven.

We are citizens of Heaven! We need to integrate into the spiritual life of heaven. We need to think more heavenly and love the things from above! We are about to be the bride of the greatest spiritual Person.

I was very proud when I became an American citizen. Now, most of the time my mind is on America, its politics, its problems, etc., and not as much on Argentina, though I love her also. So it has happened to me now spiritually. I am meditating more and more on my higher citizenship, the things from above than on the things of earth. I have the privilege of belonging to the Spiritual realm, where my citizenship is now. I am starting to better understand the Scriptures like **living in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being guided by the Spirit, praying in the Spirit, singing in the Spirit, serving God in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter, etc. etc.** Maybe it is because I am not far from going there. We must "serve God in the new way of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

Romans 7:6 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, **so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.**

4. How do we move from milk to solid food?

Hebrews 5:14 New International Version (NIV)

But solid food is for the **mature**, who by **constant use** have **trained themselves** to **distinguish good from evil**.

“Constant use”, “trained themselves,” “distinguish good from evil” is to think and talk with liberty on spiritual experiences, spiritual Scriptures, spiritual matters, among spiritual people. Therefore, I love to speak of these things with pastors and listen to them, where are they in their spiritual journey, and exchange our experiences. I cannot speak of these things with spiritual children, unless they desire to grow spiritually by opening their minds to inquire and their hearts when they find a new truth.

Mature persons have much more discernment than children. We must continually give orders to children, “Don’t cross the street now,” “don’t touch the iron, it is hot.” They are still under the law. They do not yet have the capacity to understand what is dangerous: electrical appliances, animals, etc. It is very sad when believers are eternal children! Hearers and not doers. They don’t understand what God has called us into. And many times, our sermons are “don’t handle,” “don’t taste,” “don’t touch” Colossians 2:21. Our people are not trained in being taught by the Spirit from within their inner person.

1 John 2:27 Good News Translation (GNT)

But as for you, **Christ has poured out his Spirit on you**. As long as his Spirit remains in you, **you do not need anyone to teach you**. For **his Spirit teaches you about everything**, and **what he teaches is true**, not false. **Obey the Spirit’s teaching**, then, and **remain in union with Christ**.

How sad is it when people are **“dull of hearing”** and you cannot speak with them about anything out of the box. And my experience around the world is that only with pastors can I talk about things out of our denominational box. I was never able to speak about the other half of my material that I have in my computer under the file: “SOLID FOOD”.

“Dull of hearing” in other versions:

“You no longer try to understand” NIV

“Dull and sluggish in (*your spiritual*) hearing and disinclined to listen. AMP

E. USING OUR FAITH TO ASCEND IN OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. The secret **is** to learn to use our faith for higher things. Not only faith in the Bible, but faith in the living persons of **God, Son, the Holy Spirit, angelical beings, and especially how to communicate with them. Also, how things are where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

Hebrews 12:22-24

²² But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to **the city of the living God**, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to **myriads of angels**, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are **enrolled in heaven**, and **to God**, the Judge of all, and to the **spirits of the righteous made perfect**, ²⁴ and **to Jesus**, the mediator of a **new covenant**, and to the **sprinkled blood**, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

Our Lord Jesus Christ promised us: "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things" John 14:26. "The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth" John 16:13. **St. Paul exhorts us to "be guided by the Spirit" Galatians 5:16, "walk in the Spirit and live in the Spirit" Galatians 5:25, "be fervent in Spirit" Romans 12:1, to "be filled with the Spirit" Ephesians 5:18, and prayed that we may be "strengthened in the inner being by His Spirit" Ephesians 3:16, "serve God in the Spirit" Romans 1:9, and "pray without ceasing" 1 Thessalonians 5:17 non-stop.**

Also John tells us that:

1 John 2:27 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Jesus said: "God is spirit... and those who worship him must worship the Father in spirit and in truth" John 4:24. **We need to believe this and accept this challenge of living in the Spirit.**

2. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are **living, spiritual and dynamic personalities**. They are omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, sovereign, and invisible. Faith is to imagine them and visualize them if we know and believe they really exist. We talk to them, they hear us, and they speak to us. We need to believe that He is in us. He couldn't be closer. Where in us is the Holy Trinity? In our conscience. He talks to us making us know **not** making us feel.

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 11:6 New International Version (NIV)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him **must believe that he exists** and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Hebrews 11:1 New English Translation (NET Bible)

Now faith is **being sure** of what we hope for, being **convinced** of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1 Amplified Bible (AMP)

Now faith is the **assurance** (*title deed, confirmation*) of things **hoped** for (*divinely guaranteed*), and the **evidence** of things not seen (*the conviction of their reality — faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses*).

Sometimes it seems that we believe more in the **existence of the letter of the Bible** than in the existence of the living **Father, Son, Holy Spirit, angels and saints**.

John 5:39-40 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁹ You search the Scriptures because **you think that in them** you have eternal life; it is these that **testify about Me;** ⁴⁰ and **you are unwilling to come to Me** so that **you may have life**.

3. In other words, the Holy Scriptures guides us to God. The Scriptures are not an end in themselves, but the route to the living and dynamic Holy Trinity and the entire spiritual universe, **"the things above."** The Bible loses its purpose when we become "bibliolatrours." To have a continual awareness of the presence of the Holy Trinity in and with us we must use the wonderful gift of God, our faith.

Ephesians 2:8 New Living Translation (NLT)

God saved you by his grace when you **believed**. And **you can't take credit for this;** it is a **gift from God**.

Ephesians 2:8 New International Version (NIV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith** — and **this is not from yourselves**, it is the **gift of God**.

"Without faith it is **impossible to please God**" Hebrews 11:6. Faith is to first be sure that God is a real, living, dynamic person, who is in us, knows what we think and speak to us through our conscience. My conscience is the real me, my inner person. I am not what I appear, but what I am in my conscience. Faith is the conviction in our conscience that God, the Holy Trinity, angelical beings, etc., do exist despite their invisibility. The conviction is not a feeling but a knowing in our conscience. We do not feel that God is within us, we **know** He is in us; this is the language of faith. God's way of speech is making us **know**. The best way to practice our faith is to imagine the invisible and to visualize it, the three personalities of the Divinity, their angels, their liturgy, and the heavenly mansions. We are instructed by Paul, that we can imagine and visualize the following of the things above:

Hebrews 12:22-24 New Living Translation (NLT)

²² Have come to Mount Zion (*Revelation 14:1 God's Mountain*), to the city of the living God (*Hebrews 11:10, Revelation 21:2*), the heavenly Jerusalem (*where we are going to live with Christ Revelation 21:10-22, Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 3:20, Galatians 4:26*), and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering (*Revelation 5:11*) ²³ You have come to the **assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven** (*Luke 10:20*). You have come to **God himself**, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the **spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect**. (*Revelation 6:9, 11*) ²⁴ You have come to **Jesus, the one who mediates** the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

Romans 1:17 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

For the righteousness of God is **revealed from faith to faith**; as it is written, **the righteous man shall live by faith.**

2 Corinthians 5:7 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

For we walk by **faith**, not by **sight**.

And what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Now faith is the assurance of things **hoped for**, the convictions of things **not seen**.

Paul is very clear when he defines our relationship with God, the Divine and eternal dimension.

2 Corinthians 4:18 New International Version (NIV)

So we fix our eyes **not on what is seen, but on what is unseen**, since what is **seen** is **temporary**, but what is **unseen** is **eternal**.

Faith is the eyes of our inner person, the real me, the one who inhabits my body. Conviction of things not seen means things that we do not see but **believe they exist**, and because we believe they exist, we imagine how they are. In other words, faith is **being sure that what we hear from the preachers and read in the Scriptures really exists.**

4. An example of visualization: In my family, we are five brothers and sisters. I am the youngest and the only one still living, the rest are in heaven. All of us were preachers. The last one to leave had Alzheimer disease. One day his granddaughter decided to get him dressed up, shave him and take him to church. In a moment he slipped out of church, tried to cross a freeway and was killed by a car. Very sad. When I received the news I cried... but for only five minutes:

I immediately went to pray and visualize the whole history of his death. I visualize (imagined) him in church, imagined how he slipped away, imagined the freeway, the car, the police, the ambulance, the hospital where he was taken and being prepared to go into surgery. There, in the surgery room, he died. I visualize all this, because I knew the place. When he died (in my imagination), I thought which direction in the huge universe should we turn to when we leave our bodies? I said: Now what, the universe is so large, which way do we take towards heaven?

Then I saw in my imagination an angel who took the spirit of my brother by the hand, pulled it out from his body and went up, up, up. I imagined in my visualization the door of heaven, very wide, full of light, and contemplated the arrival of my brother in heaven. All my family, parents, other brothers,

sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, the pastor of our youth group were all waiting for him. They hugged him, there was laughter, joy, celebration, and my mother looked down and said, now the only one of the family left down there is Juan Carlos. That's me.

What I did was to visualize in my imagination what I believe really happens when we die. In a moment, as I saw that welcoming, my sadness turned into joy. I am looking forward to my trip there and the joyful welcome that I will receive. This is a little bit of the meaning of "**faith is the conviction of things not seen.**" I simply visualized what I believe really happens when we die. I visualize my faith. I **visualize the invisible!** Because I believe that death is going to be like this. This is what I mean by visualizing. This was the starting of a new approach to my devotion and relationship with God. It is like passing from high school to college. So, I decided to read the Scriptures again with a new mind: "**seeking things from above,**" and "**the things which are not visible**" that I know, I believe and have the conviction they exist. This caused a tremendous jump to a new level of devotion and relationship with the kingdom of which I am also a citizen. I now apply this to everything that is invisible but that I know truly exists. I would like to pass on to you this wonderful jump in my private devotion.

5. Since St. Paul and St. John had both been to heaven, they could give us a lot of information to support our visualization of things above. Paul is more reserved than John and therefore he said very little about his stay and experience in the third heaven. He gave more importance to what he learned there than describing what he saw. John, who also was there, gives us many descriptions of the things he saw. I think Paul kept the secrets because God gave him a thorn in his flesh to help him not to boast of such revelations, because he had a tendency to do so. It is a tremendous privilege to be in the third heaven, the central offices of the Kingdom of God, receiving the great revelation of God's Grace. But of course, though he does not give us pictures of the third heaven to help us imagine how it is, we realize that his aim in heaven was to receive and understand the hidden mysterious wisdom: **GRACE!** For which I thank God and Paul also: Paul said: I "**heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak**" 2 Corinthians 12:4. He also called those things **hidden** wisdom and **mysteries**.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁶ Yet we do speak **wisdom** among those who are mature; **a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age**, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak **God's wisdom in a mystery**, the **hidden wisdom** which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ the **wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**.

Paul says that if the religious authorities of that day had access to this mysterious wisdom, "**they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**" This is a real mystery, salvation without a crucifixion?

One reason the Pharisees and Sadducees could not believe that Christ was the **Messiah**, was his **grace, love** and **forgiveness** of sins. They had the Law written in their souls. It is a fact that they killed Jesus to keep their Law:

John 19:7 New Living Translation (NLT)

The Jewish leaders replied, "**By our law he ought to die** because he called himself the Son of God."

Listen to the Law:

Deuteronomy 19:21 New Living Translation (NLT)

You must **show no pity** for the guilty! Your rule should be **life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

Their Law was ingrained in their minds and souls, **grace was unthinkable, incomprehensible**, and according to them Jesus brought the greatest heresy to the religious authorities of that time! He said:

John 3:14-17 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that **everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.** ¹⁶ "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that **everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world **not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**

Acts 13:38-39 New Living Translation (NLT)

³⁸ Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is **forgiveness for your sins.** ³⁹ Everyone who believes in him **is made right in God's sight** — something **the Law of Moses could never do.**

For the Pharisees and the Sadducees, this was a foreign language!

F. BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE THINGS FROM ABOVE

After observing the liturgy of the book of Revelation, we should use our faith to imagine and visualize the Divine, as much as we can. To make it easy for you I copied the liturgical parts of the book of Revelation, purposely avoiding the terror parts, to help you to visualize the wonderful scenes of the celestial liturgy that John describes in his book.

John the theologian was invited into heaven and wrote about his experience in the book of Revelation. What a wealth of scenes of heaven we have in this book! I read it again and again, **this time not to learn about the seasons, the beasts, the judgments etc.,** but **as a devotional book,**

contemplating the liturgy of the heavenly citizens in the presence of God and the Lamb, the seven Spirits of God, the Elders and Apostles glorified. All these will teach us a little bit of how the things are above, the devotional liturgy of heaven and the ceremonies. He gives us many celestial pictures of heaven, The New Jerusalem and its activities, helping us to admire their behavior not as something foreign but as a place of which we are citizens, the **things above**.

I know that the book of Revelation is a very small part of what heaven and eternity is, so I will underline the most outstanding moments of John's visit to heaven to contemplate the details of the heavenly liturgy. I will just underline them and let you interpret it and meditate on them as I am doing in my search for the things above. There are other books that mention things in heaven, but this is more at hand. At the same time, we will also find out **how poor our liturgy** (*LITURGY: "litos ergos" or "public service"*) is. I found out that the historic churches are closer to the liturgy of heaven, especially the Anglican and Episcopal churches. I will go chapter by chapter in Revelation where there is something from above that we could image and make it part of our contemplative devotions. I will comment a little bit: Revelation 1:12-20, 4:2-6, then from Revelation 4:7 forward, I will let you imagine how to visualize it and do your own commentary.

Revelation 1:12-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw **seven golden lampstands;** ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, **clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.** ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held **seven stars,** and out of His mouth came a **sharp two-edged sword;** and His **face was like the sun** shining in its strength. ¹⁷ When I saw Him, **I fell at His feet like a dead man.** And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and **I have the keys of death and of Hades.** ¹⁹ Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. ²⁰ As for the mystery of **the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."**

The purpose of my humble comments on these passages is to help you to imagine and visualize the grandeur of the "things above", and to start thinking more of our heavenly home.

"Seven golden lampstands with Jesus amid them, and the seven stars in his hands." Seven golden lampstands are the seven churches to which this book of Revelation is written. The seven stars are the pastors of the seven churches. **"The clothes of Jesus,"** is a robe reaching to the feet, girded with a

golden sash. These are the magnificent vestments of the High Priest or Principal Pastor. The Anglicans and Episcopalians are the closest imitators of this robe. You can see it on YouTube, Anglican Church services, London. **"White hair, eyes like flame of fire, his feet like burnished bronze like a furnace. His voice like sound of many waters."** White hair speaks of his eternity, the Ancient of Days. Eyes like flame of fire see our inside. Has a potent voice, this high priest is energetic. Energy, proper dressing, strong voice and experience in the pulpit are very important for gaining the attention of people. **"Seven stars in His hand."** The stars are the pastors and the seven lampstands are the churches, which are the people. Jesus owns the churches not just individuals. **"A sharp two-edged sword."** This is not the Bible, but the living and dynamic word of Jesus; he speaks to us today in our consciences. **"His face like the shining sun."** John fell like dead at His feet. This happened also to Paul on the way to Damascus. He saw a great powerful light and fell to the ground and became blind. **"John also fell like dead."** He was slain in the Spirit. This happens in some Pentecostals circles when under intense prayers.

"Jesus had the keys of death and Hades." He rules the dimension of the dead. We should not fear death, Christ overcame the powers of death Hebrews 2:14-15. **"The seven stars are the pastors of the seven churches. The seven lampstands are the seven churches."** This calls my attention to the fact that we make salvation only on an individual, personal Savior basis, but it seems that it is not only personal but as a unit or family of people. He has the Church in his hand. I am very curious about the Catholic prayer after communion: **"Look not at our sins but on the faith of your church."** It seems that belonging to the Church of our Lord has some benefits such as "you and your household shall be saved" Acts 16:31, "the unbeliever husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbeliever wife is sanctified through her husband and so your children are holy" 1 Corinthians 7:14. The covenant with Abraham was not only for him as an individual but for all his descendants and his household, servants and workers. This is why we present our children to the Lord and other churches baptize newborn babies, because of our faith in Gods promise: "You and your household" Genesis 17:7-13. This is food for thinking.

Revelation 4:2-6 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

² Immediately **I was in the Spirit;** and behold, a **throne was standing in heaven,** and One sitting on the throne. ³ And He who was sitting was like a **jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.** ⁴ Around the throne were **twenty-four thrones;** and upon the thrones I saw **twenty-four elders sitting,** clothed in **white garments,** and **golden crowns** on their **heads.**

What's the meaning of "I was in the Spirit"? Could it mean that "being in the Spirit" makes us conscious of the spiritual, invisible kingdom around us here? It may mean that our body stays on earth but our inner person translates to

heaven or simply discerns the spirits who are always around us but we don't see them. Paul related his experience:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

I know a man in Christ who... **whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know,** God knows, such a man was **caught up to the third heaven.**

This sense of not knowing if he was there or here, tells us that we can sometimes "be there in the Spirit".

I had a member of our church, in Capilla del Monte, Cordoba, Argentina, whose name was Martha Conil. Almost every time we had a prayer meeting she fell to the floor like John in Revelation Chapter 1 and went into ecstasies; she was like dead. As it happened many, many times, we started to pinch her expecting a reaction, but there was none, she was like in another world. As she woke up she always talked of visions of angels, veil dancing, etc. These things happened 60 years ago when I was 23. In those days we, both the church and myself, were very anti-Catholics. Once, she fell into a trance and when she came back she said: "I saw our pastor surrounded by Catholic priests and nuns. He was laying hands on them and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit" As we believed then that Catholics were non-Christians who worshiped idols, I said to the group that surrounded her, "this is impossible, a Catholic can never be baptized in the Holy Spirit, much less the priests. This girl is demon possessed." So we exorcised her. Poor girl, when she could talk, she asked forgiveness for allowing Satan to enter into her mind. This was in 1957. Years later, during the charismatic revival, I was many times literally surrounded with Catholic priests and nuns, laying hands on them as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Her vision was fulfilled years later exactly as she said, not once but many times.

Can you visualize what John was seeing? A throne, God looking like jasper and sardius with a rainbow around the throne, like emerald in appearance? Jasper silica, usually red, yellow, brown or green in color; and rarely blue. Sardius: The color can vary greatly, ranging from pale orange to an intense almost-black coloration. Emerald is a gemstone and a variety of the mineral beryl colored green. 24 Elders on thrones, white garments, golden crowns, like the Episcopalian bishops.

Revelation 4:5-6

⁵ Out from the **throne** come **flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.** And there were **seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,** which are the **seven Spirits of God;** ⁶ and before the throne there was something **like a sea of glass, like crystal;** and in the center and around the throne, **four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.**

Flashes, lightning, thunders. This would be like fireworks. Many times in Disneyland, when the fireworks and the music filled the air, I started to praise the Lord and dedicating the fireworks to Him. Also, I thought many times of having a special worship service of all the churches in the city and singing Handel's Alleluia at the center of the fireworks. The four living creatures are the highest level of angelical beings, the Seraphim.

Now I will give you the chapter and verses without my comments, and let you imagine every heavenly scene and start to imagine those things in heaven, and think more of that as our country, because we are citizens there. Imagine yourself being John! Of course, imagining these scenes is not all that Paul means when he says "seek the things above." There is much more that we will discover as we become more spiritual.

Revelation 4:7-11 New Living Translation (NLT)

⁷ The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. ⁸ Each of these living beings had **six wings**, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night **they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty — the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."** ⁹ Whenever the living beings give **glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne** (*the one who lives forever and ever*), ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders **fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne** (the one who lives forever and ever). And **they lay their crowns before the throne and say,** ¹¹ **"You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased."**

Revelation 5:2-14 New Living Translation (NLT)

² And I **saw a strong angel**, who **shouted with a loud voice:** "Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it. ⁴ Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. ⁵ But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.**" ⁶ Then I saw a **Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered**, but it was now **standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders**. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the **sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth**. ⁷ He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. ⁸ And when he took the scroll, **the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb**. Each one had a **harp**, and they held **gold bowls filled with incense**, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they **sang a new song** with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For **you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.** ¹⁰ And you have caused them **to become a Kingdom of priests for our God.** And they will **reign on the earth.**" ¹¹ Then I looked again, and **I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders.** ¹² And they **sang in a mighty chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered — to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."** ¹³ And then **I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.**

They sang: **"Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever."** ¹⁴ And the **four living beings said, "Amen!"** And the twenty-four elders **fell down and worshiped the Lamb.**

Revelation 7:9-17 New Living Translation (NLT)

Praise from the Great Crowd

⁹ After this I saw a **vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.** They were **clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.** ¹⁰ And they were **shouting with a great roar,** "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" ¹¹ And **all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God.** ¹² They **sang,** "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³ Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, **"These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.** ¹⁵ **"That is why they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter.** ¹⁶ They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. ¹⁷ For the **Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd.** He will lead them to **springs of life-giving water.** And God will **wipe every tear from their eyes."**

Revelation 14:1-3, 6-7, 13 New Living Translation (NLT)

The Lamb and the 144,000

¹ Then I saw the Lamb **standing on Mount Zion,** and with him were **144,000** who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a **sound from heaven like the roar of mighty ocean waves** or the **rolling of loud thunder.** It was like the **sound of many harpists playing together.** ³ This great **choir sang a wonderful new song in front of the throne of God and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders.** No one could learn this song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁶ And I saw another **angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world — to every nation, tribe, language, and people.** ⁷ "Fear God," **he shouted.** "Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. **Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water."** ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: **Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!"**

Revelation 15:2-5, 8 New Living Translation (NLT)

² I saw before me what seemed to be a **glass sea mixed with fire.** And **on it stood all the people who had been victorious** over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name. They were **all holding harps that God had given them.** ³ And **they were singing the song of Moses,** the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: **"Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations.** ⁴ **Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed."** ⁵ Then I looked and **saw that the Temple in heaven, God's Tabernacle, was thrown wide open.** ⁸ The **Temple was filled with smoke from God's glory and power.** No one could enter the Temple until the seven angels had completed pouring out the seven plagues.

Revelation 19:1-6, 7-16 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹ After this, I heard what sounded like a **vast crowd in heaven shouting, "Praise the LORD! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. ² His judgments are true and just.** He has punished the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. **He has avenged the murder of his servants."** ³ And again their voices rang out: **"Praise the LORD! The smoke from that city ascends forever and ever!"** ⁴ Then the **twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshiped God, who was sitting on the throne.** They cried out, **"Amen! Praise the LORD!"** ⁵ And from the throne came a voice that said, **"Praise our God, all his servants, all who fear him, from the least to the greatest."** ⁶ Then I heard again what sounded like the **shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder: "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.** ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give **honor to him.** For the time has come for the **wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself.** ⁸ She has been given **the finest of pure white linen to wear."** For **the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people.** And the angel said to me, "Write this: **Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.**" And he added, "These are true words that come from God." ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said, "No, don't worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers and sisters who testify about their faith in Jesus. **Worship only God.** For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus." ¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and a **white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war.** ¹² **His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns.** A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. ¹³ He wore a **robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God.** ¹⁴ The **armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen,** followed him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth came a **sharp sword to strike down the nations.** He will **rule them with an iron rod.** He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. ¹⁶ **On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.**

Revelation 20:11-15 New Living Translation (NLT)

The Final Judgment

¹¹ And I saw a **great white throne** and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. ¹² I saw **the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne.** And the **books were opened,** including the **Book of Life.** And the dead **were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.** ¹³ The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were **judged according to their deeds.** ¹⁴ Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ And **anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.**

¹ Then I saw a **new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.** ² And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, **coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.** ³ I heard a **loud shout from the throne**, saying, “Look, **God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.** ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” ⁵ And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, **I am making everything new!**” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega — the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. ⁷ All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and **I will be their God, and they will be my children.** ⁸ “But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars — their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” ⁹ Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come with me! **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**” ¹⁰ So he took me **in the Spirit** to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the **glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone — like jasper as clear as crystal.** ¹² The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. ¹³ There were three gates on each side — east, north, south, and west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ When he measured it, he found **it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles.** ¹⁷ **Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 feet thick (according to the human standard used by the angel).** ¹⁸ The wall was made of **jasper**, and the city was **pure gold**, as clear as glass. ¹⁹ The wall of the city was built on foundation stones **inlaid with twelve precious stones:** the first was **jasper**, the second **sapphire**, the third **agate**, the fourth **emerald**, ²⁰ the fifth **onyx**, the sixth **carnelian**, the seventh **chrysolite**, the eighth **beryl**, the ninth **topaz**, the tenth **chrysoptase**, the eleventh **jacinth**, the twelfth **amethyst.** ²¹ The twelve gates were **made of pearls** — each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was **pure gold, as clear as glass.** ²² I saw **no temple** in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has **no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city**, and the **Lamb is its light.** ²⁴ The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. ²⁵ **Its gates will never be closed** at the end of day because there is **no night there.** ²⁶ And **all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city.** ²⁷ Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty — but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Your comments on this thesis will be very appreciated.

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