

## **5. GOSPEL OF WELL-BEING AND PROSPERITY**

### **FOOD SOLID 5**

15-Mar-14, 19-Mar-14, 22-Mar-14, 24-Mar-14, 25-Mar-14, 26-Mar-14, 29-Mar-14, 1-Abr-14, 2-April-14, 3-Abr-14, 4-Abr-14, 5-Abr-14, 6-Apr-14, 7-Abr-14, 11-Abr-14, 12-Abr-14, 13-Abr-14, 14-Abr-14, 15-Abr-14, 16-Abr-14, 17-Abr-14, 24-Abr-14, 26-Abr-14, 27-Abr-14, 28-Abr-14, 29-Abr-14, 30-Abr-14, 1-May-14, 2-May-14, 6-May-14, 9-May-14, 10-May-14, 11-May-14, 12-May-14, 16-May-14, 21-May-14, 22-May-14, 23-May-14, 24-May-14, 27-Jun-14, 28-Jun-14, 2-jul-14, 3-jul-14, 4-jul-14, 5-jul-14, 7-jul-14, 9 de jul. de 14. 11-jul-14, 12-jul-14, 16-jul-14, 17-jul-14, 20-jul-14, 21-jul-14. 23-jul-14, 21-ago-14, revised:1-sep-15, revised FCT 19-sep-15, 23-sep-15, revised FCT 27-sep-15.

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### **CHALLENGE:**

1. Some ask me **"What do you think of the popular Gospel of well-being and prosperity that is being taught today in many churches, including physical healing, earthly blessing as a result of tithing, financial prosperity by sowing dollars as seeds in the offerings in order to harvest and receive more dollars in return, etc...?"** I have very dear friends who teach this, all of them very sincere followers of Jesus Christ, all based on some Bible texts and all honest Christians, truly believing they are preaching the truth. From what I know, my friends who preach prosperity and success did not invent this theology but have copied it from other leaders who have had success when asking for the offerings. Also from TV preachers who motivate people to give by teaching that giving is like sowing seeds (dollars). The more we sow, the more we harvest for ourselves, because the seeds we sow will multiply into many more "dollar-seeds". In other words, if you give \$100 God could return you \$200. With this promise people respond much more to the request and put more money into the offering plate. I have friends who testify that this has really happened to them. Since they gave more, they have prospered more financially, but some others have not. All these friends are very honest and believe that it is so because this is based on some texts from the Scriptures.

2. What I understand is that we all have Bible verses for our different points of view. For example: for predestination by God and human responsibility by us, or for Pre-tribulation – Post-tribulation - Mid-tribulation Rapture. We have verses to prove that we can lose our salvation and verses that show we cannot lose it, verses for Dispensationalist and verses for Covenant theology, etc. All of these different ideas are based on Bible verses. So I prefer not to argue. I very much respect those servants of God, men and women, who are doing their best to bless people, though they do not see those verses as I do. Our theologians have discussed some of these biblical themes for centuries. The Bible is a very large and complex book and has verses for everything and everyone. This is why we should very carefully apply the rules of hermeneutics. My concern is that we sometimes choose only one side or kind of verses and we ignore the other side or kind of verses. I was taught that all Scripture is the Word of God and never contradicts itself. Verses complement each other when the appropriate rules of Hermeneutics are applied.

3. Another difficulty for superficial students of the Bible is that it is **two** books bound together into one book. Each book contains different ways in which we can relate to God. The Old Testament teaches the **Old** Covenant of Moses way to be justified by God by keeping the Law, doing **good works** and keeping all the commandments in the Law. If we don't the Law prescribes severe penalties, even death. If we do obey we are rewarded with **material** blessings. Paul says that no one can be justified in this way *Romans 3:20* because of our sinful nature and affirms that the Law had "*a Ministry of condemnation* *2 Corinthians 3:9* and death" *Romans 7:5,10*, because disobedience to the Law brings curses and death *Hebrews 10:28*, *2 Corinthians 3:79*, *Romans 7:5*, *Galatians 3:10*, etc.

The other book is the New Testament which reveals a **New** Covenant, according to which we are not justified **by our good deeds** nor by keeping the Letter of the Law of Moses, but **by God's Grace** by which He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ His Son *Ephesians 2:8-9*. By Grace He gave us a **new heart** *Ezekiel 36:26-27*, placing in us the **desire to please** Him also by Grace as was promised by the Father *Jeremiah 31:32-33*, providing us a **new life also by Grace** *2 Corinthians 5:17*, **forgiving** us or not counting our sins by Grace *Colossians 2:13-14*. He helped us by Grace both to **want to do His Will and the capacity to do it** *Philippians 2:13*, and giving us by Grace even the **faith** to believe His promise *Ephesians 2:8-10*.

4. When others ask me about this topic I do not want to debate with them but just share with them **my ideas** on this issue to broaden our minds and compare with the ideas of others. Of course I have ideas about many things, like any other pastor or theologian who dedicates time to meditate on the Scriptures. To share my ideas with others is a pleasure and a privilege. I don't want to contradict or argue because usually these discussions are endless and I don't have the final answer. When I discuss a Bible truth or experience with a friend it is usually to learn more and not to impose my idea, because I am just one more person who reads the Bible, one more idea, and as I grow spiritually my ideas take new forms. These lessons are only written to help those who love theology to reflect more on the issue from different angles, telling them what I believe and in this case, calling their attention to the different **use and kind of promises** of prosperity and **blessings** under the **Old** Covenant and under the **New** Covenant, since they are not only different but **opposite** *Romans 11:6*.

Paul tells us that the true **purpose of the Law** was not the salvation of humankind but to make us realize we are sinners and in our desperation understand the **necessity of the coming of a Savior, Jesus, with the only solution, which is Grace**. Believe Jesus and start to see God not as a severe judge as in the Old Testament but as our Creator and Father who loves us. Actually it was Jesus who introduced us to addressing God as **Father** *Matthew 6:9*, and introduced us to His Grace *John 1:17*. Paul says that the severity of the Law was to **thrust us into the arms of the true eternal character of God, the God of Grace**. Not only that, Paul says that now **thanks to the Grace that was given**

**to us in Christ Jesus** to become His bride, as His adopted children, we can call Him **"ABBA Father"** or Daddy Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6 rather than the Old Testament name He gave Moses, an unpronounceable name made up of four consonants, **YHWH**, "I Am Who I Am" for a God described in the Old Testament as jealous and severe who would condemn disobedient people to death. Paul also clarifies that the severity of the Law was to **help us recognize our unmanageable sinfulness**, incapacity and impossibility of being righteous ourselves by our natural behavior, in order that at the first opportunity we would **run into the arms of the true eternal character of God: His Grace** 1 Corinthians 1:4. In this way, the Law with its severity **constrains us to believe in the only option left**, to be justified of our sins and receive a new life: **God's Grace**.

**Romans 7:7-14** Living Bible (TLB)

**1** Well then, am I suggesting that these laws of God are evil? Of course not! No, the law is not sinful, but **it was the law that showed me my sin**. I would **never have known the sin in my heart—the evil desires that are hidden there—if the law had not said, "You must not have evil desires in your heart."** **8** But sin used this law against evil desires by **reminding me that such desires are wrong, and arousing all kinds of forbidden desires within me!** Only if **there were no laws to break would there be no sinning**. **9** That is why I felt fine so long as I did not understand what the law really demanded. But when I learned the truth, **I realized that I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die**. **10** So as far as I was concerned, the good law which was supposed to show me the way of life **resulted instead in my being given the death penalty**. **11** Sin fooled me by taking **the good laws of God and using them to make me guilty of death**. **12** But still, you see, **the law itself was wholly right and good**. **13** But how can that be? Didn't the law cause my doom? How then can it be good? No, it was sin, devilish stuff that it is, that **used what was good to bring about my condemnation**. So you can see how cunning and deadly and damnable it is. For it uses God's good laws for its own evil purposes. **14** The law is good, then, and **the trouble is not there but with me because I am sold into slavery with Sin as my owner**.

**Romans 5:20-21** Good News Translation (GNT)

**20** Law was introduced **in order to increase wrongdoing**; but where sin increased, God's **grace increased much more**. **21** So then, just as sin ruled by **means of death**, so also God's grace rules by **means of righteousness, leading us to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**.

So the Law was given to make us aware of the necessity of God's Grace, and to lead us to know the true character and nature of our Creator and Father. This is why it is important to understand the difference between the Law and Grace, and it seems that a great segment of the Church does not understand it and has a **mixture of Law and Grace** in the pulpits and pews.

**Galatians 3:21-29** Good News Translation (GNT)

**21** Does this mean that the Law is against God's promises? No, not at all! For if human beings had received a law that could bring life, then everyone could be put right with God by obeying it. **22** But the scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin; and so the **gift which is promised on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ is given to those who believe.**

**23** But before the time for faith came, **the Law kept us all locked up as prisoners until this coming faith should be revealed.** **24** And so **the Law was in charge of us until Christ came,** in order that we might **then be put right with God through faith.** **25** Now that **the time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us.**

**26** **It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus.** **27** You were baptized into **union with Christ,** and now **you are clothed,** so to speak, **with the life of Christ himself.** **28** So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; **you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.** **29** If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.

Promises and blessings are very different under the Old and New Covenants. Perhaps this will cause us on both sides to reflection:

<b>Old Covenant</b>	<b>New Covenant</b>
Meritorious works to be justified	Not taking into account our sins but imputing to us the righteousness of God by Grace
Material and temporal blessings	Spiritual and eternal blessings

The difference between Law and Grace is not that the Law is a list of very difficult commandments and Grace in the New Testament is an easier list of commandments. **NO! They are two completely different systems of Salvation.** Under the Law righteousness is by obedience to very difficult commandments impossible for us to obey and there is no Savior there. Under Grace there is a Savior who fell in love with us and to save us paid our debt to the Law and a ransom to Satan. With His sufferings and death on a cross, He forgave us of all our sins, gave us new life and made us members of His family, the Family of God, loving us to the point of proposing marriage to us Revelation 19:7.

5. I believe that the confusion that reigns in the Church on this issue is because both Testaments are bound together as one book in the Bible, so we mix both Covenants using them indistinctively as if the whole Bible would be the same having the same meaning for the Church. Under the New Covenant promises are eternal, celestial and spiritual, the **opposite** of those in the Old Covenant whose promises are material and for this life only. These covenants produce **different** results: eternal life versus a better life here, therefore they cannot be mixed. I believe that in the Church today, the majority of preachers are using the two Covenant systems of approaching God at the same time although they contradict each other, forgetting that we have died to the Law through the body of Christ

Romans 7:4. The purpose of the Old Covenant cursing and condemning humankind to death was to prepare the world to understand that **only by Grace** can we be saved and receive Jesus the Son of God the Messiah-Savior into our hearts. Jesus replaced the Law, not **requiring** righteousness to please God but **providing** it 1 Corinthians 1:30-31. The Law required us to be killed for our sins Hebrews 10:28. Jesus, who died for us because we could not keep the Law and satisfy the Law, becomes our Savior. Since Jesus crucified us with Him, He delivered us from the condemnation of the Law Romans 8:1 and opened for us a new and different way of relating with God, not by Law but **by Grace, being justified by faith and receiving God's justice** 2 Corinthians 5:21.

6. When we say that both the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, it does not mean that they are both relevant today and should be used in the same way. That is why these two Covenants are called "**Old**" and "**New**". The Old Covenant is like an old newspaper from the 1800's. The news was right **for the people of that age**. I do not say that the news of Moses is not truth, but I am saying that this news is **old**, and is the news of condemnation. Now we **have new News! Different News! Better News! Good News! God's News: The Gospel!**

John 1:17, where salvation is not by works but by God's Grace. We will not destroy the old newspapers, they are history and are filed in safe archives, but we are informed today by today's paper. The difference is that in the case of the newspapers, we do not have the old 1800 newspaper attached everyday to today's newspaper. The old newspapers are not at hand, they are archived somewhere, but in the Bible we have the Old Covenant bound in the same book with the New Testament, and we carry both in our hands continually. The writings of the Old Testament that are relevant for us are Genesis, Job, Psalms, Proverbs and the prophecies about the Messiah, **but not things related to the Law of Moses nor the way that the Law dealt with the poor Israelites enslaved by that Law**. The story of the Judges and Kings of Israel is interesting as history of how life under the Moses religion was, so we can compare it with the New Covenant of Grace. But **we should not mix it with the New and Eternal Covenant of Grace with the Law**, because **we are not under the Old one but under the New Covenant sealed by the body and the blood of Jesus** Luke 22:20.

Justification by good works was the **Old** Covenant system and proved itself **impossible**. In the **New** Covenant justification is by Grace, by faith, which is also a gift from God, who freely imputes to us and accredits us the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption of Christ 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, which **Jesus made possible**. It is impossible to merge these two Covenants, it is one or the other Galatians 5:4. I believe that the majority of us preachers in the Church today are using the two Covenants interchangeably and overlapping them, contradicting and losing sight that our Savior died precisely to **liberate** us of any responsibility from the Old Covenant of the Law Romans 7:4-6, John 1:17. We have been delivered from the

Old Covenant through the death of Christ because we have died in Him to that Covenant. The Old Covenant condemned us to death, but Christ paid that death, by dying for us <sup>2 Corinthians 3:6</sup>. That covenant was and is so damaging to humanity that we need to cast it out from the Church as Sara, a type of Grace, casted out Agar, a type of the Law, from her house <sup>Galatians 4:21-31</sup>. Christ came to save us from it. Having been crucified, dead and buried with Christ <sup>Colossians 2:11-17, Romans 6:3-11</sup> We are **not** under the Old Covenant <sup>Romans 6:14, 7:4</sup>. We will see that sowing and reaping have a different and much broader meaning in the New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, the good works we do here will be rewarded in heaven with eternal, spiritual and celestial blessings, not material ones.

## A. DIVINE PHYSICAL HEALING

1. I knew very well a powerful preacher of **divine healing**. He was totally sincere and preached and practiced what he truly believed. I knew him both in the pulpit and in his private life. He believed that believers should not get sick at all, and if someone got sick it was because they had no faith. He never went to the doctor and he confessed it openly, although he did not judge those who did. He was very ill and suffered constant pain for many years but never went to a doctor. He confessed that he had already been healed at the Cross of Christ and did not need a medical doctor and he had verses to prove it. Once in a work accident he fainted and was taken to the hospital. When he realized where he was, he acted as if it would be a sin to be touched by a doctor and so he escaped. For a long time he suffered from cancer and he knew it for the symptoms, but did not want to see a doctor. He could have overcome his cancer with routine surgery if done promptly. Despite the insistence of his family, friends and pastor friends who saw him suffering, begging him many times to see a doctor, he never went. When he was almost consumed his family and the Superintendent of our denomination managed to get him to a hospital after many years of suffering, at least for calming his horrible pain, but it was too late, the cancer was everywhere. A few days later he died. This honest preacher was my own brother in the flesh. Neither his wife, his children, I, nor anybody else could his change his mind.

I respected and admired him for his unwavering faith and example to the point of giving his life for what he believed. Was it a heresy? My brother might still be alive if he had gone to a doctor. The example of my brother is very sacred to me, but also scaring, because he was a person who practiced what he believed and taught it to others, but it did not work for him as he expected. He was not a hypocrite who preached and did not practice it. Some of us preach faith and **urge others** to believe for healing, but when **we get sick** we run to the doctor. So, with my beloved brother in mind, I'll try to ask my friends who read this lesson, to review their position on this matter and be more moderate on how to offer healing from the pulpit. Do it in a way that those who do not get healed do not get condemned

thinking that they don't have faith, or have a hidden sin, or become so disappointed that they lose their faith.

**2. We should not promise from the pulpit what we are not sure we can produce.** I believe that we do not see as many healings today in our ministry as occurred in the first century, not because people do not have faith, but because we do not have the gifts of healings they had. But we never say this. We generally put the responsibility back on the poor sick people. We say that it is because **they** did not have faith or maybe have a hidden sin, etc. So they come to the service sick and they leave the service still sick and now also condemned thinking that they don't have sufficient faith or have a sin. Every time we pray for a sick person that does not get healed it's a deterrent to his or her faith. We are ministering "*the Letter of Bible verses that kill*" instead of ministering "*Spirit that gives life*" 2 Corinthians 3:6. We always put the responsibility on the sick person. If they don't get healed it is because they don't have faith. Instead we should be honest and say: "*Dear friends I don't have the gift of healing as the apostles did, but let us ask God...*" When the apostles declared a person healed, they were healed, and it was very evident Acts 4:14.

3. It is said that heresies are not entirely wrong ideas, but rather the overemphasis of a portion of the truth, disregarding or ignoring other parts of that same truth. The Scriptures complement each other but you have to know all the verses on the same theme and **give them all equal weight** in order to achieve balance. What about those who do not know all the Scriptures well on a particular subject, or do not consult with others who know them well, and/or with those who believe differently in order to honestly compare their understanding of the verses with ours and perhaps see other perspectives of the same truth? Many of us also ignore the customs and culture of biblical times, the original languages of the Bible and the rules of hermeneutics, etc. This happens to many of us preachers and teachers of the Word. We are sometimes lonely people. At least we should be more humble in our opinions Romans 12:16.

4. When we read about the lives of the Apostles who taught us the Gospel, we see that it was not all health, prosperity and welfare for them, and they did not hide that reality. Observe the life of the Giant Apostle Paul. I call him a giant because he saw the glorified Lord on the road to Damascus in such a way that he became blind for several days. After that the Lord appeared to him many times and even invited and snatched him up to the "third heaven", giving him so many revelations that he was not able to pass them all to us 2 Corinthians 12:4. Paul defined the Christian theology for all ages, he expelled demons, healed the sick, did not die when bitten by a poisonous snake, angels appeared to him many times, but... listen what he says about himself:

**2 Corinthians 11:23-33** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**23** Are they servants of Christ? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more **labors**, in far more **imprisonments**, **beaten** times without number, often in **danger of death**. **24** Five times I received from the Jews **thirty-nine lashes**. **25** Three times I was **beaten with rods**, once I was **stoned**, three times I was **shipwrecked**, a night and a day I have **spent in the deep**. **26** *I have been* on frequent **journeys**, in **dangers** from rivers, **dangers** from robbers, **dangers** from *my* countrymen, **dangers** from the Gentiles, **dangers** in the city, **dangers** in the wilderness, **dangers** on the sea, **dangers** among false brethren; **27** *I have been* in **labor and hardship**, through many **sleepless nights**, in **hunger and thirst**, often **without food, in cold and exposure**. **28** Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily **pressure** on me *of* concern for all the churches. **29** Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? **30** If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. **31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. **32** In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to **seize me**, **33** and I was let down in a **basket** through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

Didn't Paul have faith? Had he not prayed enough? Did he have a hidden sin? And as if all these were not enough...

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**7** Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a **thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me**—to keep me from exalting myself! **8** Concerning this I implored the Lord **three times** that it might leave me. **9** And He has said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you**, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. **10** Therefore I am well **content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake**; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Poor Paul, he prayed to the Lord three times for his healing, but he was not healed. Could it be that he had no faith? Could it be that to pray three times was not enough, or that he should have decreed and declare himself healed?

What could Paul's thorn be? Those who defend to the end the doctrine of healing claim that it was not a disease because a man of faith like Paul could not be sick. What then was his "*thorn in the flesh*?" Was it an angel who hammered a nail into his body? Some people think that Paul was short-sighted because he did not write his letters, Romans 16:22, and when he signed them, did it with very large letters because he saw very little Galatians 6:11, so this thorn reminded him continually of his encounter with Jesus that left him blind on the way to Damascus. Others say that its sting was a physical defect or something that made him feel inferior, perhaps stuttering 2 Corinthians 11:5-6 or lame or humpbacked or deformed 2 Corinthians 10:10-12. But to compensate, Paul surpassed them all in wisdom and knowledge, both of the Old Testament and in the understanding of the New Covenant, its difference from the Old one, and the nature of the Kingdom of God, as expressed in the Gospel 2 Peter 3:15-16. When Paul learned that the purpose of the thorn was to remind him that he should not exalt himself, instead of complaining and keep praying for God

to remove it, he began to boast in this weakness because he understood it was to improve his character. It was suffering with a purpose.

## 5. See what happened to the other Apostles and leaders of the Church:

STEPHEN was stoned [Acts 5:54-60](#). He was one of the first seven deacons of the Church in Jerusalem. His death was a chase that killed about 2,000 Christians.

JAMES the Great (Son of Zebedee) was beheaded with a sword died AD 44 [Acts 12:1-2](#), the first of the apostles to die.

PETER and PAUL were both martyred in Rome about 66 AD during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified, upside down at his request, since he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

ANDREW went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what is now the Soviet Union. Christians there claim that he was the first to bring the Gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

"Doubting" THOMAS was probably most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as Far East as India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revered him as their founder. They claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

PHILIP possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

MATTHEW the tax collector and writer of a Gospel, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

BARTHOLOMEW had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the Gospel.

JAMES the son of Alpheus, is one of at least three James referred to in the New Testament. There is some confusion as to which is which, but this James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

SIMON THE ZEALOT, so the story goes, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

MATTHIAS was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.

JOHN is the only one of the company generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the Church in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary the mother of Jesus in his home. During Domitian's persecution in the middle 90's, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he is credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil at Rome.

Many were martyred in the Roman Coliseum: Some torn by lions, others burned at the stake while praising the name of God and singing praises.

Could it be that all these saints suffered so much because they had no faith? Do you think that they did not pray? Did they have some hidden sin? And why did most of them die praising the Lord's name instead of complaining? Have you ever

wondered why they enjoyed suffering for Jesus? Acts 5:40-41. What about the holy prophets of the Old Testament heroes of faith of Hebrews 11?

**Hebrews 11:36-39** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**36** and others experienced **mockings** and **scourgings**, yes, also **chains** and **imprisonment**. **37** They were **stoned**, they were **sawn in two**, they were **tempted**, they were **put to death with the sword**; they went about in **sheepskins**, in **goatskins**, being **destitute, afflicted, ill-treated** **38** (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), **wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground**. **39** And all these, having gained **approval through their faith**, did not receive what was promised, (the New Covenant or Gospel).

6. There are many Scriptures that tell us that in the world we will have tribulation John 16:33. James teaches us to *"Consider it all joy when we face various trials"* James 1:2, also 1 Peter 2:20, Romans 8:18-23, Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Philippians 1:29-30, 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, 1 Peter 2:19, 4:12-16, Revelation 21:4. With all these texts we can begin a new denomination called "The Church of the Afflicted." In fact, some ascetic monastic orders, as the monks of the pillars, and those who flogged themselves as Martin Luther did, etc., believed in causing self-suffering in order to share in the sufferings of Christ Colossians 1:24. This was an exaggeration of the truth about sharing in Christ's sufferings. But though we do not believe in promoting suffering in that way, we cannot deny what the Scriptures say about suffering and we cannot say that they suffered because they had no faith or were in sin.

About becoming rich and material prosperity there is also another side in the Holy Scriptures:

**1 Timothy 6:6-11** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**6** But **godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment**. **7** For **we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either**. **8** If we have food and covering, **with these we shall be content**. **9** But those who want to get rich **fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction**. **10** For **the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil**, and some by **longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs**. **11** But **flee from these things, you man of God**, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness.

We believers also experience trials and difficulties in life today. Some of my friends, older ministers, ended their life with cancer or Parkinson's or Alzheimer or paralysis or even dementia. It can border on heresy to take a doctrine to such an extreme as the monks took the doctrine of the suffering, or setting a date for the rapture of the Church, or the doctrine of sowing seeds or dollars to get more dollars, and using some Bible verses to prove it without complementing them with other Bible verses that are also true but indicate very different things. We must find the balance. It is said that truth is not in the middle but in both extremes. Maybe that is the case of the Bible. The verses on prosperity, healing, etc. and those of suffering are both extremes and both are in the Scriptures and they are very clear. They look paradoxical but **both are true!** God heals some and doesn't heal others. Both are true. God delivers some from prison or from persecution or

demons but does not deliver others. Both are true! In other words, God is sovereign and a living dynamic person with intelligence and free to make decisions. He is not static letter like a book.

God heals some and does not heal others. God prospers whom He wants to prosper and does not prosper others, both are true. In other words, God is sovereign. When we ask God to heal us and He does we should rejoice and be thankful. When we ask for liberation and he does not, it is best to say what Jesus said in Gethsemane after he asked three times: "*not my will but yours*". This will give us peace to take up our cross. And when we are going through some afflictions let us say what Paul said when he asked God three times for liberation and He didn't deliver him, "*I will boast in my weaknesses*" and acknowledge that "*His grace is sufficient for me, for His power is perfected in weakness*" 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

St. Paul had many spiritual gifts. Through him God healed and liberated many, so it is evident that he strongly believed in healing and faith, yet he was not healed because his thorn had a purpose and we know it because God told him so. I also firmly believe in divine healing, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, but it is clear that many, like Paul, are not going to be healed. I also wish that we all prosper both spiritually and materially and we also have health as John in his greeting wishes to his friend Gaius <sup>3</sup> John 1:2. But I also believe that the Lord sometimes allows us to go through tribulations and difficulties because He has a purpose for that, as he did with Job, Paul, etc. Because for those of us who love God, who are called according to His purpose "*all things that happen to us, work together for good*". Our tribulations help to fashion our Christian character Romans 8:28. To believe only in prosperity and health or believe only in suffering are the two extremes and both border on heresy. But both are in the Scripture therefore both are true. It is true that God heals some and it is also true that He does not heal others. In Scripture there are many paradoxes like this and we must accept them as they are. We must give equal weight to the healing verses and to the suffering ones. We should respect those who believe in one way or another or even better those who find a balance believing **both**. Let us observe other saints who were not healed.

7. Timothy, Paul's spiritual son, suffered "frequent diseases". Frequent means often and diseases mean several. He was in poor health.

**1 Timothy 5:23** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**23** No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your **frequent ailments**.

Epaphroditus, Paul's friend, was sick almost to death:

**Philippians 2:25-27** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**25** But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; **26** because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that **he was sick**. **27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death**, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Could it be they did not pray for him?

**2 Timothy 4:20** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**20** Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.

8. Actually, Christ, the apostles and we in our everyday experience see that this world is a place where people suffer afflictions, and Christians suffer persecution and even martyrdom. Jesus said: *"I send you as lambs among wolves"* Luke 10:3. When wolves bite us it is to remind us that we are on the right path because our kingdom is not of this world, and it is expected that wolves will attack us. When the primitive Christians were persecuted they went *"rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name."* Acts 5:41. The healings and miracles were and **are signs** that Jesus is alive Mark 16:17-20, but **obviously not to heal everybody and always**. Healings are circumstantial **signs** according to God's will, to confirm His Word and with a purpose John 9:1-3. Not only do some get healed and some do not, but also sometimes there are many healings Lucas 5:17, 6:19 and sometimes there are few or none Mark 6:5. In Argentina during the times of the beloved Evangelists Tommy Hicks and Carlos Anacondia, there were many healings, in other times there are just a few. In the times of the Charismatic Movement, we would lay hands on pastors, priests, nuns, monks and believers of all denominations and all would experience the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In other seasons, even in Pentecostal Churches, there are periods when few or none receive that experience.

What happens is that even though we say we believe in the Sovereignty of God, in practice we do not believe it or just ignore what it means. Most Christians believe that God must act in this or that way and not as He wants or decides. We have a series of buttons and we believe that if we press this one, God heals, if we press the other, God gets angry, if we press another, God rejoices, etc. No way. He acts as He wants to act. He is a free Person and Sovereign.

Let's look at a few verses of Scripture that are almost never preached.

## **B. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

1. The next biblical passages in both Old and New Testament show that God is sovereign. God's sovereignty is rarely emphasized in our sermons, maybe because we do not understand what it means, but it is a Biblical truth nonetheless. God

sovereignty means that **He has unlimited authority. He does not have to be accountable to anyone. There is no one above Him. He cannot be judged by anyone, much less by us, simple worms of this earth** Romans 9:20, 11:33-36. When Moses asked God what His name was, God answered, "I am who I am" Exodus 3:14. "I am who I am" is not a name. God is saying "there is no other God", "I am the only God so I do not need a name" "I am sovereign, there is no other like me". We prefer to preach a God that is as we believe He should be and not a God **that is as He really is, someone who is not accountable to anyone**. Meditate on the following Scriptures that rarely are preached.

**Amos 3:6** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? **If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?**

There are many references in the Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments of the calamities that God has produced among His chosen people and others, sometimes making them die by the thousands. Does the Lord cause calamities? Yes, there are many references in the Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments of the calamities that God has caused or allowed to occur among His chosen people by making them die by the thousands, such as when He punished His people for worshiping the golden calf. He commanded the Levites each to take a sword and each one kill his brother, friend and neighbor Exodus 32:27-28. 3,000 were killed. God commands David to count the people or at least allowed Satan to incite David to do it and then punishes the people for having been counted, sending a plague that killed 70,000 persons 2 Samuel 24:1,15, 1 Chronicles 21:1,14. There are many similar cases in the Old Testament that seem unfair and incomprehensible to us. If one does not understand the sovereignty of God, one's faith might be in jeopardy. God **is as He is** and **not as we would like Him to be**. There are many instances like these:

In the New Testament the King Herod's killing of innocent children in and around Bethlehem was a great tragedy, and more than this, it was predestined to happen! Matthew 2:16-18. God saved the Holy Family, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus from Herod instructing them to flee to Egypt, but did not warn the other parents to save their children from the same wicked king... and this massacre was predestined to happen! Matthew 2:13. Also, God freed Peter from jail, but did not free Jacob Acts 12: 1-11, nor Esteban Acts 7:59-60. Why? Only God knows.

Even today there are so many injustices according to us: It's heartbreaking every time we read about the abduction and disappearance of women who then become sex slaves, abduction and missing of children in order to sell their organs or to sexually abuse them. What about those who die in earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, accidents, etc. and Christians slaughtered by radical Muslims?

What about the manner in which the apostles and thousands of Christians were martyred in the Roman Coliseum, eaten alive by lions or killed by gladiators?

Brethren, if we do not accept the sovereignty of God our faith is at stake! Therefore it is also necessary to examine all these verses that are almost never cited in order to discover that God is sovereign. Never say God cannot do this, or God cannot allow that. No one knows the thoughts of God because those thoughts are much higher than ours Isaiah 55:8-9. We must imitate the faith of the saints from both the Old Testament and New Testament. When you do not understand why bad things happen to good people, to believers, and your faith is weakened, if you abandon the only God that exists, where shall you go? John 6:66-69. You better stay in contact with the God you know because there is no other, so accept Him as He is, not as some preachers try to paint Him.

Let us learn fro Habakkuk:

**Habakkuk 3:16-19** Living Bible (TLB)

**16** I tremble when I hear all this; my lips quiver with fear. My legs give way beneath me, and I shake in terror. I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon the people who invade us. **17** Even though the fig trees are all destroyed, and there is neither blossom left nor fruit; though the olive crops all fail, and the fields lie barren; even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, **18 yet I will rejoice** in the Lord; **I will be happy** in the God of my salvation. **19** The Lord God is my strength; he will give me the speed of a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.

Habakkuk's attitude was: God is Sovereign, therefore I will praise Him whatever happens. This was also Paul's attitude Acts 21:13.

Let us see other Scriptures that show the Sovereignty of God:

**Deuteronomy 32:39** Good News Translation (GNT)

I, and I alone, am God; no other god is real. **I kill and I give life, I wound and I heal, and no one can oppose what I do.**

2. Isn't it that God always heals if we have faith? No. He heals when He wants to 1 John 5:14.

**Exodus 7:3** The Message (MSG)

3 And I will **harden Pharaoh's heart** to multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

It was **not** Pharaoh who hardened his heart but God who did it. Obviously God hardens the hearts of some with a purpose and also softens the hearts of others with a purpose Nehemiah 2:1-8. Paul was neither crazy nor retarded. He understood that God's sovereignty cannot be explained, because **God is as He is**. Paul understands that the ways of God in our eyes and human understanding **seem to be unfair**, but he remains confident. This is true faith. I have an agnostic neighbor who whenever there is a disaster, such as fires, sinking of a ship, crash of an airplane loaded with people, she tells me: 'where is that Almighty God full of love of which you talk about...?'

That is why Paul clarifies and warns:

**Romans 9:10-24** New Living Translation (NLT)

**10** When he (*Isaac*) married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. **11** But **before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad**, she received a message from God. (This message shows that **God chooses people according to his own purposes; 12 he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.**) She was told, "Your older son will serve your younger son." **13** In the words of the Scriptures, "**I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.**" **14** Are we saying, then, that **God was unfair? Of course not!** **15** For God said to Moses, "**I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.**" **16** So it is **God who decides to show mercy.** We can **neither choose it nor work for it.** **17** For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, "I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth." **18** So you see, **God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others** so they refuse to listen. **19** Well then, you might say, "**Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven't they simply done what he makes them do?**" **20** No, don't say that. **Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God?** Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, "**Why have you made me like this?**" **21** When a potter makes jars out of clay, **doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?** **22** In the same way, even though **God has the right to show his anger and his power,** he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are **destined for destruction.** **23** He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on **those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory.** **24** And **we are among those whom he selected,** both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

3. God loved his descendants Jacob and Israel and hated his descendants Esau and Edom since before they were borne. Isn't that unjust? Paul's answer to the question: "**Is God unfair?**" is **NO.** Why? Paul answer is because He is sovereign, He is accountable to nobody. If you understand at least a little bit of His nature, greatness, eternity and infinity and that He sustains and maintains the whole Universe functioning and His manifold wisdom (gr. Wisdom of many colors) then **who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God?** Paul's answer, however, does not really answer our question. So the only choice left to us is to rejoice that we are part of "**those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory** and **we are among those whom he selected,** both from the Jews and from the Gentiles", though we do not know why we were selected. About Esau, God not only hated him, but also hated all of his descendants, the Edomites. See what God said about Esau and Edomites, his tribe:

**Malachi 1:1-5** New Life Version (NLV)

**1** This is the Word of the Lord spoken to Israel through Malachi. **2** "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "**Yet I have loved Jacob, 3 but I have hated Esau. I have laid waste his mountains and have given his riches to the wild dogs of the desert.**" **4** Edom may say, "**We have been destroyed, but we will return and build our cities again.**" But the Lord of All says, "**They may build, but I will tear down.** They will be called the sinful land, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever." **5** You will see this with your own eyes and say, "The Lord is great even outside the land of Israel!"

Paul's answer to "is God unfair?" is **He is NOT**. Why? Because He does not have to give account to us of what He does or doesn't do. He is sovereign and is not accountable to anyone. If we would understand just a little bit of His nature, greatness, eternity, infinity and how it is that He created and maintains His universe, we would understand these words: *"who are your to hold Him accountable?"*

Paul says it all in this scripture:

**Romans 11:33-36** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**33** Oh, the **depth** of the **riches** both of the **wisdom and knowledge** of God! How **unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!** **34** For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? **35** Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? **36** For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

4. Let us continue with the "difficult" verses:

**Isaiah 45:7** New Living Translation (NLT)

**I create the light and make the darkness. I send good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things.**

**Isaiah 54:16** New Living Translation (NLT)

I have **created the blacksmith who fans the coals beneath the forge and makes the weapons of destruction.** And I have **created the armies that destroy.**

**Job 2:10** GOD'S WORD Translation (GW)

**10** He said to her, "You're talking like a godless fool. We **accept the good that God gives us. Shouldn't we also accept the bad?**" Through all this Job's lips did not utter one sinful word.

**Exodus 4:11** Good News Translation (GNT)

**11** The Lord said to him, "**Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? It is I, the Lord.**

5. Not only in Scripture do we notice His sovereignty but also in our own experience. Many times God does not punish people who according to us deserve it and sometimes does not help those we think deserve it. We know people who are very, very bad, but have good health and are rich, like most drug traffickers and the mafia. We know pastors who are saints but somebody has divided his church, others suffer horrible deaths from cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, etc. Of course there are some drug dealers who have been assassinated and some pastors who live very well. I know people who do not tithe and yet have thriving businesses and others who tithe and do not thrive. Some saints were transported alive to heaven like Enoch and Elijah; others were decapitated, as St. Paul or crucified, like Peter, or stoned like Stephen. Eleven of the twelve apostles were martyred. Do you think they did not pray? Or had no faith? Or had some hidden sin that God did not forgive? The only explanation in Scripture is that God is Sovereign Romans 9:10-29 and some day, if He wants to, He will explain to us everything and if He does not want to, He won't. Please take God's answer to Paul

as His answer to you: **"My grace is enough for you"** 2 Corinthians 12:8-9. Let us rejoice and be thankful for being the lucky ones who belong to the number of the elected, and not judge God for what He does or He doesn't do.

What is God like? "God **is like this**" says this person; another says, "No, God **is like that**". God is neither like this nor like that, **He is as He is**. He is **sovereign**. He acts as He pleases and is not accountable or tied to any law. A Sovereign makes the rules for us, or changes them, but He is not obliged to them or to anyone above Him. He saves whom He wants and condemns whom he wants. *"Those he foreknew He predestined, those He predestined he also called..."* Rejoice that you happened to be one of the group He called. If God called you it is because you are predestined. To us, this seems unfair Romans 9:14. But Paul answers: **"Who are you to talk back to God? Does the clay pot tell the potter why did you do that? The potter has the right to do whatever he wants with the clay and from the same clay make a pot for special use and another for common use"** Romans 9:20-21.

Look at poor Job. He was a *"perfect and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil"* Job 1:1. But God allowed all ten of his children to die in an accident, then he lost all his wealth, his home and his wife and eventually became ill with sore boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head and was left lying in the dust scratching with a tile, all allowed by God. But look how he reacted; he accepted that God is Sovereign and does as He wants. He said, *"Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."* Job 1:21. This is true faith in **God as He is**.

His religious friends judged him very badly because they had a uniform wisdom. They believed as many of us today that God is like this or like that. If one suffers it is because he behaved badly and if one is blessed it is because he behaved properly. Guided by this philosophy his friends told Job: *"You're a hypocrite, you affected holiness, but now the truth is revealed; you must have behave very badly to have such a punishment."* But at the end of the drama, God rebuked his friends, healed Job, and gave him double of what Job had lost. Of course, the fact that God again gave him many children would not removed his sorrow for those who died.

During his test, Job complained a lot and asked many questions of God, the same questions we may have asked. **Why** being such a believer and generous person did he have to suffer so much? He was confused because he also believed that God was like what his friends and everybody else believed. That God blesses the good people and curses the bad ones. What happened to Job confused him. But he never lost his faith in the existence of God. Finally God appeared to Him, but did not answer any of his questions. God only explained His sovereignty by asking Job questions. Read Job chapters 38 to 41. After that Job said:

**Job 42:1-6** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**1** Then Job answered the Lord and said, **2** "I know that **You can do all things**, And that **no purpose of Yours can be thwarted**. **3** 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared **that which I did not understand**, Things too wonderful for me, which **I did not know**." **4** 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' **5** "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; **6** Therefore **I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes**.

6. God is like He is and not as we would like Him to be or as we believe He should be. Whoever does not accept the sovereignty of God is always in danger of losing their faith when going through a tragedy in their life. Why? Because preachers constantly tell them that if they behave well and have faith, God will bless them and if something bad happens and they become poor or sick it is because they must have some hidden sin or don't have faith. If we, Bible readers, think like this, we are very shortsighted! Learn from Job! How many have left the Church because they were told that if they would tithe God would prosper them, and they did tithe but did not prosper? Or because they were told that their loved one is going to be healed and yet he died? Do not try to explain the failure, saying they did not have faith, or were in some sin. In that case if the person confesses his sin, he will be forgiven. And by the way the anointing with oil includes forgiveness of sins

James 5:14:16.

Many were healed while being unbelievers. Others seemed to have had a lot of faith, like my brother, and they weren't healed. Did the saints who died by being tortured and martyred not have faith? Did they not pray? Did they have some hidden sin? If you do not believe that God is sovereign and acts with a multiform wisdom Ephesians 3:10, you do not have a true faith in the true God, a faith like Job. You have faith in a wrong image of God and worship that image, the image of a God who is as you think He should be and not as He really is. For this reason when God does not act as you expect your faith wavers. Job said, "*Though the Lord slay me, I trust in him; though he slay me, I hope in him*" Job 13:15. This is faith in God. The true God that is like He is and not as we wish Him to be.

7. When those who followed Jesus were offended by His words, because what He said was too strong for them and very far from what they believed, Jesus did not change His words or softened them. On the contrary, He repeated them in the same way again and again:

**John 6:51-58** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven;** if anyone **eats of this bread**, he will live forever; and **the bread** also which I will give for the life of the world **is My flesh.**" **52** Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, "**How can this man give us His flesh to eat?**" **53** So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood**, you have no life in yourselves. **54** He who **eats My flesh and drinks My blood** has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. **55** For **My flesh is true food**, and **My blood is true drink.** **56** He who **eats My flesh and drinks My blood** abides in Me, and I in him. **57** As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so **he who eats Me**, he also will live because of Me. **58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven;** not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

Note that when Jesus said: "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven*", "*he who eats this bread will live forever*" and "*The bread is my flesh*" the Jews were shocked saying "*How can this man give us to eat his flesh?*" Jesus did not soften it by saying: "*well, I don't really mean that...*" On the contrary, he repeated it **six times** that **yes**, he was talking about His body, His flesh and His blood, which they had to eat. They had to eat Him and drink His blood! That's why most of His disciples turned away from Him when they heard such statements. They did not understand the words "*I came down from heaven*" much less that they should "*eat his flesh and drink his blood...*"

**John 6:60-69** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**60** Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" **61** But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? **62** *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? **63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. **64** But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. **65** And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." **66** As a result of this **many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.** **67** So Jesus said to the twelve, "**You do not want to go away also, do you?**" **68** Simon Peter answered Him, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.** **69** We have believed and have come to know that **You are the Holy One of God.**"

These disciples turned away because they were shocked by the words of Jesus. Many believers today, when things happen they don't understand, get confused because they have not been taught the SOVEREIGNTY of God. Dear friends, but if we abandon the Lord when we do not understand who He is and what He does, **where shall we go?** God is the only one who gives eternal life! If you are a believer then rejoice that you are one of the chosen for salvation!

An acquaintance of mine had a great misfortune when his young son was killed. He was sad and what happened to his family was unthinkable. When asked how he felt he said he was confused. When asked how much this has affected his faith, he replied, "I thought about it for a while and said to myself, **if I abandon Jesus, who do I go to? He alone has promised eternal life and that is the only way I will see my son again!**" And it's true. This brother accepted the

sovereignty of God. He did not understand why it happened, but yielded to the sovereignty of God. This is true faith. *"More blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"* John 20:29.

8. God's Sovereignty: I think I know what it is, though I don't understand it, but I accept it because there is no alternative. I finish this theme with the words of Paul:

**Romans 11:33-36** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**33** Oh, the **depth** of the **riches** both of the **wisdom and knowledge** of God! How **unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!** **34** For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? **35** Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? **36** For **from Him** and **through Him** and **to Him** are **all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

And the words of Job:

**Job 42:1-6** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**42** Then Job answered the Lord and said, **2** "I know that You can do all things, And that **no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.** **3** 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared **that which I did not understand**, Things too wonderful for me, which **I did not know.**" **4** 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' **5** "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; **6** Therefore **I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.**

9. *"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* 2 Corinthians 3:6. Beloved preachers, beware how we use the Letter of the Holy Scriptures because we can emotionally kill many people. Many people go out of our services condemned, mistreated and sometimes deceived with promises of blessing and curses that sound more like Moses than Jesus. We should respect the Holy Spirit, executer of the New Covenant, giving Him the rightful place in our ministry, allowing Him to guide us, and doing nothing that He does not guide us to in our preaching and teachings, because we should not minister Letter but Spirit and life 2 Corinthians 3:6, Romans 7:6. To minister Spirit is to minister a person, Jesus, who has feelings and emotions and knows the mind and conscience of people. The Letter is static, has no emotions or feelings and is not a person. It does not forgive and is without personality and intelligence. Jesus is a living person with feelings and emotions. We can talk to Him and He answers in our conscience. Jesus is life and guides us from our inside. See what He did with the adulterous woman. Instead of following the Letter He ministered life to her. The same thing He did with the Samaritan woman at the well. In an instant He changed her from an adulterous into a preacher! Jesus is a person *"The letter kills but the Spirit Gives life"* 2 Corinthians 3:6. Jesus Christ is alive today. He is in us and with us. He promised to guide us and teach as all things John 14:17, 26, and guides us from our inside. Do not replace the Living Jesus Christ with the Bible. He said: *"I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you"* John 14:18. The Bible is good if we don't make a god of it. The Bible introduces us to Jesus John 5:39-40. If this is not happening in our lives then we are just like the Jews, led by a book that we read with a veil over our face

2 Corinthians 3:13-18. If the Holy Scriptures does not guide you to Jesus, you are still under the Old Covenant, that is, salvation by keeping the Letter and not salvation by the living Christ!

When the early apostles declared a person healed it was because the Holy Spirit guided them to do so, not because of a Bible verse. That's why they never failed because they were not guessing. They were doing what the Spirit guided them to do. We pray for healing for many people and yet very few are healed. In the case of the Apostles they never failed. I believe they never failed because it was not them who asked God to heal the sick but it was God who asked them to do it, so it never failed. If God did not guide them to heal, they did not heal, but when they did because the Lord guided them, it surely happened. Jesus himself did nothing before His time would come, or before receiving permission or the mandate from the Father 1 John 5:14, John 5:17, 30, 36, 6:38, 8:28-29.

That's why we do not see any apostle or Jesus "praying" for the sick. They simply ordered them to walk because they knew that it would happen, because they knew that it was God's will for that person to be healed. Neither Jesus nor the apostles "prayed" for the sick as we usually do. They did not say: "Heavenly Father, we come into your presence to ask you to heal this person..." No, they did not ask, they simply obeyed. Peter said: *"In the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk"* Acts 3:6-10, *"Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, get up and make your bed"* Acts 3:33-35. Notice that Peter did not say, "Heavenly Father, we come to you now, to bring Aeneas into your presence, please heal him..." No, he did not appeal to anyone else with perhaps more authority. Knowing that God sent him Peter just commanded Aeneas to get up and was sure that it would happen. I think they didn't ask God to heal but God told them to do it. I sometimes have to pray for the sick because they ask me, but I would never take the initiative to do so without the Holy Spirit guiding me. If He commands, it will not fail. We should not **guess**, but **know**. Do not promise what you cannot produce, and don't forget that God is not our servant who has to do whatever we ask. We are His servants and it is we who have to do whatever He asks.

When I see in my backyard the different colors, shapes and sizes of birds, the insects and snails in my garden, the mountains, deer, coyotes, rabbits, squirrels, pelicans, and the Pacific Ocean, all very close to my home, I cannot imagine the greatness of the Creator, not to mention the planets, galaxies, universes and the worlds of invisible billions of angels of different ranks and who knows how much more! When I think that God made all these **from nothing, but only by speaking**: "let there be light", and it was. "Let the earth produce" and it produced. How careful God must be when He speaks because what he says happens. This is why I am afraid if He gets angry because with one Word He can make all of what exists, including us, disappear. Imagine, how can we understand a Supreme Being like Him?

**Romans 11:33-36** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**33** Oh, the **depth** of the **riches** both of the **wisdom and knowledge** of God! How **unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!** **34** For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? **35** Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? **36** For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

And don't forget that God is as He is and not as we would like Him to be.

### C. "WHATEVER YOU ASK..."

1. Meditate a moment on what Jesus said as written by St. John in his Gospel, and then compare it with what the same John says in his first epistle on the same theme:

**John 14:13-14**

13 And **whatever** you ask in my name, **that will I do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.  
14 If ye shall ask **anything** in my name, **I will do it.**

This is a wonderful text that says "*whatever*" and "*anything*" we ask in the Name of Jesus, He will do it for us. Also the text "*Ask and you shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you*" Matthew 7:7-8 seems to indicate the same. Sure, we emphasize the word "**whatever** you ask" which is absurd in itself because if it were so, we would not need to go to work. We would just ask Him for a monthly salary and that's it, because he said, "**whatever** you ask". We could ask, "Send an angel to make our beds and clean our house, because he said, "**Whatever** you ask." We could ask, "Send another angel to make us a good stew..." But obviously without anyone having to explain it, we know that it does not work this way. If we want to eat then we need to go to work. If we want somebody else to make our beds and clean the house, we must pay a maid. If we want a stew, we have to cook it ourselves or pay a cook. He said: "**Whatever** you ask I will give to you...", but we have to ask ourselves, how much and what is "whatever"? When Jesus said this **what did the disciples understand?**

When a visitor comes to my house, we Hispanics say: "Brother this is your home" which means "make yourself at home." That does not mean he can invite his friends and host a party at my house or move his entire family into my house. He could say, "but you said: 'this is **your** home'." Of course what we mean in our language and our culture is "*you can take a seat and if you need the bathroom it is there... and ... nothing else.*" So if the visitor needs to use the phone he will ask permission and he shouldn't even to open the refrigerator without permission, because that is not included in our culture when we say, "feel at home". Visitors understand that it is not their house. Then what did the disciples understand when Jesus said, "Whatever you ask?"

John himself explains it:

**1 John 5:14** New International Version (NIV)

14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that **if we ask anything according to his will**, he hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have made.

2. So **before** asking healing for us or to declare a person healed **we must know God's will** for that person. And how can we know God's will? Believing that He is alive and is close to us and knows our heart, if He wants to heal that person He will make it clear to us. If He doesn't then we will leave it up to Him. According to this passage God does not even listen when we ask something that is not His will. Of course, when the disciples heard these words "*whatever you ask*" they used their common sense and took into account all His teachings during the time they were together as well as His example. They saw that Jesus never did anything without checking with His Father first, so they knew where the limitations of "whatever you ask" were. Using their common sense they understood that God would not give them what He does not want to give them. Jesus himself never did anything unless His Father allowed Him to do it <sup>John 5:19, 30</sup>. Let us be careful with literalism because the Letter can kill. We can make mistakes and promise things that God does not want to give on that occasion and therefore hurt or even emotionally kill many people! Though we did not walk with the incarnate Jesus for three years to understand His thinking in order to put His words in context, we do have **all** the Scriptures to compare and complement each other. We must look at all other texts on the subject and not just some. It is very different to be **with** the person than to have a book. The present Christ in our lives reminds us of everything. But who knows all the verses of the Bible by heart? This is why Letter is Old Covenant. In order to remember some verses they used phylacteries (*a small leather box containing Hebrew texts on vellum, worn by Jewish men at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the Law*). But the New Covenant is Spirit and Life. It is Christ in us and He wants to guide!

We all believe that God is able to heal but the Scriptures and our experience tell us that He also has the authority to not heal. He has power to do what He wants. We should not say "God can not allow that..." How do you know? Or "God should punished that person" Who told you so? Or "God is not so!" How do you know?  
**GOD IS AS HE IS.**

#### **D. IN THE OLD COVENANT PROMISES & BLESSING ARE MATERIAL AND TEMPORARY**

1. I have a friend, very sincere, honest and generous, who is a pastor of a small church. When he invites me to preach, I get a significantly higher honorarium than much larger churches usually give. I asked him why they do this and he replied: "*that it is because our Church believes in prosperity, we have to give in order to get more*". One day he perplexed me. He came to visit me in a Rolls Royce car...of

his own! He actually practiced and experienced prosperity. Later he sold it because it did not fit for a Hispanic pastor. But it would be difficult for me to say something negative about a person who is a friend, whom I love and respect dearly, who loves me and who sincerely believes and practices what he preaches. He is not a hypocrite, but honest with what he believes. But the fact that one is honest does not mean that one is right.

2. Under the Old Covenant financial and material prosperity was achieved by obedience to the Law, that is works; blessings or curses were according to behavior, they have to earn them. They were offered prosperity if they kept the Law and punishment if they disobeyed it. All the promises of prosperity were conditioned by their works. "If you pay tithes, you shall prosper" was the promise, but if you don't *"You will be cursed with a curse"* Malachi 3:9. Living under the Law was like the carrot and the stick used to make the donkey walk; reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience. In other words it was a life of works. One had to earn God's blessings with the sweat of his brow. But in the New Covenant it is not so. As we will see it is not by works. So, if we preach material blessings and multiplication for the act of giving, and poverty and decrease for not giving, we are teaching Old Covenant, because the material blessings or curses were according to their works. This implies that we still do not understand the difference between the Old and New Covenants and we neutralize Paul's teaching that Jesus Christ made us ministers **not** of the Old Covenant **but** of a New Covenant 2 Corinthians 3:6. The Letter tells us that we are sinners and punishes us. But the Spirit gives the solution, forgiving us and giving us new life. The Old Covenant asked us to do what we couldn't do because of our sinful nature Romans 8:3-5. It was like asking grapes from a fig tree. In the New Covenant it is God Himself who gives us both the will and the capacity to do God's will Philippians 2:13. This is Grace, this is life, and this is the solution, not a punishment. Also our ministry is a work of Grace. It is He who gives us the capacity to do it 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

We should examine ourselves to make sure that we are preaching and teaching in the new dimension of the Spirit of life and **capacity**, rather than in the old dimension of the Letter where God's blessings depended on our works and brought **curse and death** if we didn't do them Romans 7:6.

3. Paul says that the oldness of the Letter brings death 2 Corinthians 3:7, *"For there is none righteous not even one, no one who does good and never sins"* and that *"by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified before God."* Malachi was a faithful minister of the **Old** Covenant, so it was a right saying at that time, *"If you tithe you will prosper, but if you don't you will be accursed"* because the blessing or curse was according to their works. But to us, God has made us *"able ministers of a new covenant, not of Letter but of the Spirit, for the Letter kills but walking in the Spirit gives life"* Hebrews 10:28, 2 Corinthians 3:6. The Letter of the Law pointed to our sins and punished us. The Spirit gives the solution of forgiveness and new life. The Old Covenant asked what we were not able to give

because of our sinful and rebellious nature. It was like asking grapes from an orange tree. In the New Covenant, however, it is God himself who justifies us and gives us both **the will and the ability to do** His purpose Philippians 2:13. This is Grace, it is life, and it is the solution, not the punishment. Also, our ministry is a work of Grace. It is He who enables us.

**2 Corinthians 3:6-18** New International Version (NIV)

**6 He has made us competent** as ministers of a **new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit**; for the letter kills, but **the Spirit gives life**. **7** Now if the ministry that **brought death**, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, **8** will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? **9** If the ministry that brought **condemnation** was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that **brings righteousness!** **10** For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. **11** And if what was **transitory** came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that **which lasts!** **12** Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. **13** We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of **what was passing away**. **14** But their minds were **made dull**, for to this day the same veil **remains when the old covenant is read**. It has not been removed, because **only in Christ is it taken away**. **15** Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. **16** But whenever anyone **turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**. **17** Now the **Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18** And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory**, which comes from the **Lord, who is the Spirit**.

4. Examine yourself! Are you a minister of the New Covenant, where the Grace of Christ and the Spirit gives us new life, where the works needed to be justified were done by Christ, not by us, and where He guides us and helps us to live in holiness? Or are you a minister of the Old Covenant where everything depends on your works and keeping the Letter of the Law? The Law declared the death penalty for us who disobeyed Hebrews 10:28, but Christ died on the cross to pay our penalty dying **for us** and making us **die with Him** to deliver us from the death penalty of the Law Romans 7:4 and resurrecting us giving us a new birth to live for Him and by Him Romans 14:7-9.

If we read the Scriptures in the Old Covenant way, with the veil of obedience to the Letter set in our brain, it will obstruct our mind from seeing Jesus resurrected and alive in us. It will continue to make us believe that the blessings of God depend on our obedience to the commandments written in the New Testament and not in the guide, impulse and capacity to obey given to us by the Spirit of Christ who now dwells in us Galatians 5:25, Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:3-6, Philippians 2:13. If we live under the New Covenant it is God who created us in Christ Jesus for good works, the works that He prepared beforehand for us to walk in, and He fills us with His Spirit to help us please Him Galatians 5:16-25, Ezekiel 36: 26-27, Jeremiah 31:33.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** New King James Version (NKJV)

**8** For **by grace** you have been saved through **faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God**; **9 Not of works**, lest anyone should boast. **10** For **we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which **God prepared beforehand** that **we should walk** in them.

5. Note that we are saved **by Grace** v 8. Note that the faith to be saved is also a gift of God, **by Grace** v 8. Note that it is not by our works, lest anyone should boast v 9, but **by Grace**, so in heaven there will be no boasters saying, "I'm here because I earned it". In glory, for eternity the praises for our salvation will be to the Lamb of God Revelation 4:9-14. Note that we are His workmanship vs 10, that is, God has begotten us again **by Grace** to do good works that **God** also **prepared** beforehand for us to walk in them. We do not have to even think about creating them or looking for them, because He will put them on the road of life in advance and the Spirit of Christ from our conscience will help and guide us to walk in them, **all by His Grace**. God himself from our awareness will guide and help us walk in His ways and obey His wishes Ezekiel 36:26-27, Jeremiah 31:33. We do not have to do good works to be saved and be blessed, but the opposite. God saves us and blesses us **so** we can do the good works, which He prepared for us beforehand.

## **E. THE NEW COVENANT: PROMISES AND BLESSINGS ARE SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL**

1. I would appreciate it if you would compare the Old Covenant promises of blessings for those who obeyed the letter of the Law, where all promises were material and transitory things Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and the curses of the Law for those who disobeyed, also were material and transitory Deuteronomy 28:15-68; and compare them with the blessings of the following text, which is an example of all the promises of blessings under the New Covenant of Grace. Notice that they are all promises of things spiritual and eternal.

**Ephesians 1:3-6** King James Version (NKJV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ**, 4 He **chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, to be holy and blameless before Him. 5 In love **he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ**, according to the **purpose of his will**, 6 to the **praise of the glory of his grace**, which he **freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved.

Do not put the horses behind the cart because it will not work. **We cannot be good in order to be blessed; we need to be blessed in order to be good!** If our good works could win salvation and blessings then we would not need a Savior. Each person could then be his own savior. Please meditate on each word of the text above.

2. Meditate on what the New Covenant of Grace is: Who "*has blessed us with every **spiritual** blessing*"? **God**. Who "*chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless*"? **God**. Who "*predestined us to adoption as sons... according to the **purpose of his will***"? **God**. Who did it "*to the praise of his **grace***"? **God**. Who "*freely bestowed on us in the Beloved*"? **God**. And all this we received, not by our works but by the Grace **of God through Christ** Titus 3:5. God placed us in Christ, "the beloved" and imputed to us His merits. If we focus our spiritual life on the person of Jesus Christ, who is in

us, **the Old Covenant veil over our conscience when we read the Scriptures as if they were an end in themselves will fall off!** <sup>2 Corinthians 3:14-17.</sup> The Old Covenant veil says to us: "*God treats you according to your works*". This is the old system registered in the Old Testament where human relationships with God were according to a person's behavior. Remember the New Covenant **IS NOT LIKE THE OLD** <sup>Jeremiah 31:31-32.</sup> That was to read the Letter and keep it without any help. **Now, under the New Covenant, God places His desires in our hearts and guides us from within by His Spirit to do His will.** <sup>Jeremiah 31:31-32, Ezekiel 36:26-27.</sup> When we read the Scriptures that veil does not allow us to see Christ clearly, uniquely and matchlessly because our focus is on the Letter and not in the Spirit of the Living Christ. We need to understand the significance of the boundless change that Christ brought into this world. With the veil on our spiritual eyes we only see the Letter, the book in our hands, not the living Christ within us. He did not come to add something to the Letter but to change the whole system; not to reform but to create something totally unknown: **GRACE**. When the veil falls, we will understand that the work of Christ was made for us, and we will read the New Testament **not as an end in itself but as a catalog of all the spiritual resources we have today in the living Christ** that we may live and walk in Him, who happens to be **in us** <sup>Galatians 5:25, Romans 8:4-14.</sup> Let me repeat: the **New Testament is not an end in itself as the Law was, but a catalog of everything we have in the living Christ.** The New Testament is the catalog where we can find the promises which when we believe them cause us to become like Him <sup>2 Peter 1:4.</sup> All the resources we have in Christ who is the Spirit <sup>2 Corinthians 3:15-18</sup> are part of this new agreement or Covenant with God. The eternal solution for a race whose nature is sinful is Christ in us <sup>Colossians 1:27-28.</sup> The ministry of the New Testament is not the same as the Old Testament where the Letter was an end in itself. The New Testament points us not to our works or merit but to the work of the risen, living Christ <sup>John 5:39-40,</sup> so that His Holy Spirit in us will guide us to do the will of God <sup>John 14:15-19</sup> and transform our lives <sup>2 Corinthians 3:18.</sup> Old Covenant is "*our delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His Law we meditate day and night*" <sup>Psalms 1:2.</sup> Under the New Covenant "*our delight is in Jesus and in Him we meditate day and night*".

**2 Corinthians 3:14-18** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**14** But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. **15** But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; **16** but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. **17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. **18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

**Corinthians 3:14-18** Living Bible (TLB)

**14** Not only Moses' face was veiled, but his people's minds and understanding were veiled and blinded too. Even now when the Scripture is read it seems as though Jewish hearts and minds are covered by a thick veil, because they cannot see and understand the real meaning of the Scriptures. **For this veil of misunderstanding can be removed only by believing in Christ.** **15** Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings their hearts are blind and they think that obeying the Ten Commandments is the way to be saved. **16** But **whenever anyone turns to the Lord from his sins, then the veil is taken away.** **17** The Lord is the Spirit who gives them life, and where he is **there is freedom from trying to be saved by keeping the laws of God.** **18** But we **Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.**

3. This happens to us today when we read the New Testament with the Old Covenant veil mentality. If we read the New Testament with the same attitude that Jews read the Law of Moses, that is, believing that salvation is by obedience to written commandments posted in the Letter, instead of the action of Christ in us, the veil of the Law of Moses on our eyes says, *"All depends on your works"*. It will make us believe that we earn God's blessings with our works, *"if you tithe as the Law says, God will prosper you, if you don't God will curse you"*, *"you must pray much and repeat your requests until God gets tired of hearing you and seeing our sacrifice of repeating prayers for hours, or months, or years, then when He is tired of listening, He may answer your call"*.

Please, do not confuse the New Covenant with the Old one. Now we have everything in Christ not in a list of orders and rules Colossians 2:9-10. These two Covenants are two very different ways of relating to God. In the New Covenant, God, knowing that we cannot completely please Him in spite of how much we strive, decided to help us by sending His Son to end our relationship with the Law Romans 7:4-6, 8:3-4. This is part of the meaning of "It is finished", and then at Pentecost, sending Him in the form of the Spirit to dwell in us, so that we could achieve it with His help from inside of us. I believe, though, by listening to some preachers on TV and radio, they have a mixture of Old and New Covenant. The veil is still on our minds.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 3:18**

All of us, then, **reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces**; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, **transforms us into his likeness** in an ever-greater degree of glory.

4. As we see, it is not the legal Letter from outside that makes us change but the Spirit of life and grace of our loving Lord that transforms us from the inside into His image. This is why we are supposed to be *"Ministers of a New Covenant, **not of the Letter but of the Spirit**"* 2 Corinthians 3:6. This is Grace. That's why we say to people:

“open your hearts to Jesus”, because Jesus is commissioned by God to do the work of transforming us into His image from our inside out. This was His eternal purpose. For this He predestined us <sup>Romans 8:29</sup>, solving thus our impossible challenge of pleasing the Letter. The solution is not to have the Letter written on stone, but the living Christ in us helping us to be what was impossible for us to be <sup>Colossians 1:27</sup>. We do not follow a set of regulations; we follow a person who happens to be in us.

**Romans 8:29-35, 37-39** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**29** For those whom He foreknew, He also **predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; **30** and these whom He predestined, He also **called**; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He justified, He also **glorified**. **31** What then shall we say to these things? If **God is for us**, who *is* against us? **32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him **freely give us all things**? **33** Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? **God is the one who justifies**; **34** who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who **died**, yes, rather who was **raised**, who **is at the right hand of God**, who also **intercedes for us**. **35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **37** But in all these things **we overwhelmingly conquer through Him** who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that **neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

- vs. 29 Who predestined us to be made conformed to the image of His Son? **God the father.**
- Vs. 30 Who called us? **God.** Who justified us? **God.** Who glorified us? **God.**
- Vs. 31 Who is for us? **God.**
- Vs. 32 Who gives us all things and with who? **God with Christ.**
- Vs. 33 Who is it that justifies us? **God himself.**
- Vs. 34 Who is He who died, rose and intercedes for us? **Christ Jesus.**
- Vs. 35 Can anything happen that would separate us from the Love of Christ? **No, nothing, not one.**
- Vs. 37 Through whom can we be more than conquerors? **Through Christ.**
- Vs. 38-39 What from this list can separate us from the love of God? **Not one.** What does it mean “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus”? It means **that God shows us His love through Christ Jesus.**

5. If one reads these verses with the mind veiled with the Old Covenant system, automatically he will see Old Covenant and inadvertently this is what Paul's writing will mean to him:

*"Well, surely all the promises and everything that Paul says are true:*

- *If 'I' believe,*
- *If 'I' am faithful to the last day of my life,*
- *If 'I' don't backslide,*
- *If 'I' do not fall into sin,*
- *If 'I' do not give in to the temptations of Satan,*
- *If 'I' pray every day,*
- *If 'I' ask do not ask others to pray for me so 'I' don't fall,*
- *If 'I' tithe,*
- *If 'I' read the Bible every day,*
- *If 'I' do not miss the services,*
- *If 'I' fast, etc. etc.*

**Works, works, works**, as if everything depended on **us**. Then where is Grace? This is equal to saying: We are our own Savior, the glory then is for us, as if keeping the Letter would save us rather than living in Christ and Christ in us. Then we should change our name to Jesus, because the Angel instructed Joseph to call the son of Mary, **Jesus**, which means "**one who saves**", "**Because he will save his people from their sins**" Matthew 1:21.

In heaven the following song will resonate for eternity:

**Revelation 1: 5-6** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**5** To **Him who loves** us and **released us from our sins by His blood** **6** and **He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.** Amen.

**Revelation 5:13** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "**To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**"

6. The Old Covenant is salvation by man; The New Covenant is salvation by Jesus who saves us and keeps us saved by Grace Philippians 1:6. Do not read the New Testament with the veil of the Old Covenant on your mind. In the New Covenant it is God who takes the initiative and makes us what He created us to be. What He wants to do with us is that we become the Bride of His Son, which is the manner of adopting us as His children. New Covenant is salvation by our Savior Jesus.

According to Paul, God did the following:

**Romans 8:29-31** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**29** For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* **conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the **firstborn among many brethren**; **30** and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. **31** What then shall we say to these things? **If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?**

7. God knew us beforehand, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us. Everything is made from earlier times. You cannot lose this eternal salvation. Eternal means without beginning or end. He had you already written in the Book of Life since before the foundation of the world and "*anything or anyone can't separate you from His love*". Salvation means that the Holy Spirit has convicted you of sin and that you will be faithful until your last breath Philippians 1:6. If you are predestined, He will help you in your life of Holiness and will give you the desire to obey Him and please Him. He will help you not to fall and forgive you when you fail, just as we do with our children. If Jesus is the first born among many brethren, it means that by being His bride we become adopted as God's children.

8. If we read the New Testament with the same attitude that the Jews read the Old Testament, as "regulations", we are living as if Christ has not yet come Luke 16:16. In the Old Covenant blessings had to be earned with our works rather than believing that in Christ we are complete Colossians 2:8-10. Christ made the perfect sacrifice for us and said: "*It is finished*". What is finished is our eternal redemption. What's valuable to God are not our works but the work that Jesus Christ did for us. Christ bought us to be His bride. This is why we come to God "*in the name of Jesus*". We call on His merits and not ours. Once we answer the call of the Lord, **we start to do the works that God prepared beforehand for us**. But these works do not save us. We are saved **to** do good works. Jesus Christ the Lamb of God is the unique, perfect and forever sacrifice that God Himself prepared in advance on our behalf Hebrews 10:11-14, Revelation 13:8. We are not our own saviors; Christ is our Savior. Note what Paul says: God "*has made Christ to be our wisdom, justice, holiness and liberation and redemption*" 1 Corinthians 1:30-31.

**1 Corinthians 1:30-31** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**30** But **by His doing** you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, **31** so that, just as it is written, "**Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.**"

**Hebrews 10:12-14** Good News Translation (GNT)

**12** Christ, however, offered **one sacrifice for sins**, an offering that is **effective forever**, and then he **sat down** at the right side of God. **13** There he now waits until God puts his enemies as a footstool under his feet. **14** With **one sacrifice, then, he has made perfect forever those who are purified from sin.**

**Romans 8:3-4** Good News Translation (GNT)

**3** What **the Law could not do**, because human nature was weak, **God did**. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, to do away with sin. **4 God did this** so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature.

**Hebrews 10:8-10** Good News Translation (GNT)

**8** First he said, "You neither want nor are you pleased with sacrifices and offerings or with animals burned on the altar and the sacrifices to take away sins." He said this even though all these sacrifices are offered according to the Law. **9** Then he said, "Here I am, O God, to do your will." So God **does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place**. **10** Because **Jesus Christ did what God wanted** him to do, **we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all**.

To be saved we no longer need to offer either animal sacrifices or ours but come before God with Christ the Lamb and His meritorious work as our sacrifice.

9. This is what we mean when we say "*We come to you in the name of Jesus Christ*". He is the one who has value, it is He who counts, it is on His merits, not ours, that we are accepted. If we had sufficient merits we could come to God in our own name. That was the intention of the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican Luke 18:10-14. But we don't have any merit of our own. We deserved condemnation, the death penalty, for not obeying the Law of Moses. But we are now baptized into Christ Romans 6:3 not in ourselves or in Moses 1 Corinthians 10:2, and do not come to God on our own merits but because of the merits of Christ our Savior! We are saved and blessed, not by our merits but by those of Christ. This is why He is called Savior.

He commanded us to always celebrate the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of His death for us, so we have His sacrifice always present. In the bread and wine we are thanking God for the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and as we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are confessing that we have made Christ our own John 6:51-57. We must therefore do communion with much reverence and confession of our sins which acknowledges in itself our continual need of Grace 1 Corinthians 11:28. So the communion experience keeps us clean while it causes us to always remember that it is Christ and His work, not ours that has saved us eternally. For this reason the Eucharist will be held also in heaven Matthew 26:29, to never forget that "*it was not by our works*" that we are there but because of Him and **His** work.

**1 Corinthians 1:30-31** Good News Translation (GNT)

**30** But God has brought you into **union with Christ Jesus**, and God has **made Christ to be our wisdom**. He puts us **right with God**; we become **God's holy people** and are set free. **31** So then, as the scripture says, "Whoever wants to boast must **boast of what the Lord has done**."

10. To believe that we must do something for God to bless us is Old Covenant. By becoming born again by His doing John 1:12-13 we are made His children. We have eternal life, we are one with His Son John 17:21 and we will be the bride at the wedding of the Lamb Jesus Christ Revelation 19.7-9. We will reign with Him forever. "He

has blessed us with every spiritual blessing" so we can do good works. What else could He give us? We are complete in Christ Colossians 2:10. We must not ask Him to give us what He has said He has already given us but believe as Abraham did and act accordingly. For example: if we ask for love, He has already given it to us Romans 5:5. We simply need to use our faith to release it from our inside out. Do we want also joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control? The fruit of the Holy Spirit that we already have has it all Galatians 5:22-13. Are we going to live by faith and believe His promises or not? "*The righteous shall live by faith*". Faith is to believe that in Christ we have everything we need to live this life on earth and to live the spiritual life with God 2 Peter 1:3. Our good works as a result of exercising our faith in His promises are the evidence that we have in us the author of our salvation, because we are doing the good works that He prepared for us beforehand. So the glory will be for Him forever.

Did you notice that the New Covenant blessings are all spiritual and eternal? In the Old Covenant, the blessings were longer life, good harvests, etc. — all material and transitory blessings. Under the Old Covenant there was no revelation of eternal life, life in the Spirit, going to heaven when you die, celestial and eternal blessings. All blessings were for here and now.

## F. TITHES AND OFFERINGS

1. Tithing is well known because we are constantly reminded by our pastors at every meeting when we announce: "*and now let us receive the tithes and offerings*". The way in which tithing is taught in the so-called prosperity Gospel is an example of how the Old Covenant of works has been installed in the Church also. We quote Malachi 3:9-2 and tell believers that if we tithe God will prosper us and we will have more and more material abundance. If we do not tithe we will be cursed and fall into poverty.

**Malachi 3:9-12** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**9** You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! **10** Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "**if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.** **11** Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast *its grapes,*" says the Lord of hosts. **12** "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts.

2. Both curses for not tithing and blessings for tithing under the Law are earthly, material and temporary blessings, never spiritual or eternal. Many of us preachers when we talk about the tithe and read this text of Malachi from our pulpits do not realize we are teaching tithing with the mentality of the Old Covenant, which is a Covenant of works and material benefits. I did it for a while until I examined the Scriptures better and discovered that what I said in my youth needed to be revised. Malachi taught like that because he was a Minister of the Old Covenant so

in his time he was right, every blessing was by works and for material things. He proclaimed that if one tithes then God will prosper him materially and if he does not tithe then God will "*curse them with a curse*" and that person would not prosper materially at all.

3. In the New Covenant blessings are not for tithing but by the Grace of Jesus Christ. Blessings are not tied to our works but are part of the package of salvation, love, grace and God's eternal purpose. He gives to whom He wants to and does not give to whom He doesn't want to give Romans 9:10-24. **God does not sell himself for money**. There is no curse for not tithing today Galatians 3:13, because our blessings are given to us **by Grace, not by works** Ephesians 1:3, 11. **Our blessings come "in Christ"** and we are **no longer governed by the Law of Moses**. Under Grace the tithe is an example of the minimum of what one should give. How should we give under Grace? To begin with we will say that under Grace **we should not fear any curse as brother Malachi, Minister of the Old Covenant preached** because:

**Galatians 3:13** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree".

**Galatians 3:13** Good News Translation (GNT)

**13 But by becoming a curse for us Christ has redeemed us from the curse that the Law brings**; for the scripture says, "Anyone who is hanged on a tree is under God's curse".

4. Tithes and offerings are not an invention of the Law of Moses. They existed since the very beginnings as a thanksgiving to God for giving us such a wonderful and plentiful planet to enjoy.

**Genesis 1:27-30** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**27** God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **28** God **blessed them**; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and **fill the earth, and subdue it**; and **rule over the fish** of the sea and **over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**" **29** Then God said, "Behold, **I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food**"; and it was so.

Offerings are a portion of what he gives us in creation and has been done from the very beginnings of our history. It is like if a friend comes to your house, brings a nice cake for the teatime and you invite him to stay for the tea and give him a piece of his cake. It does not require any effort, it is not a sacrifice, it is a pleasure to share with your friend a piece of the cake he brought, and anyway the largest piece will remain with you! That is the tithe. We treat Him with the 10% but still we remain with the 90%! This is why we say that under Grace the tithe is very little, because we could still send a piece of cake to a poor neighbor and still have

some left for our family. Giving to God a portion of the cake was practiced since the very beginning by Adam, Eve and their family.

**Genesis 4:3-5** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**3** So it came about **in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.** **4** Abel, on his part also **brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.**

Cain and Abel surely learned this gratefulness from Adam and Eve. Later we see Abraham tithing, who lived 430 years before Moses Galatians 3:17 and therefore knew nothing of the Law of Moses. He lived under Grace but he was already tithing. He tithed spontaneously to the priest of the Most High and did it naturally as a matter of course.

**Genesis 14:18-20** Good News Translation (GNT)

**18** And Melchizedek, who was king of Salem and also a priest of the Most High God, brought bread and wine to Abram, **19** blessed him, and said, "May the Most High God, who made heaven and earth, bless Abram! **20** May the Most High God, who gave you victory over your enemies, be praised!" And Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the loot he had recovered.

Evidently, offerings and tithes were used from the beginning of the history of the human race to express gratitude to God for the beautiful land and its produce. Because there was no law that prescribed it, it was done voluntarily as a gift of thanksgiving to God. I believe that **the tithe should not be taught in the context or the Law of Moses but in the context of the beautiful and bountiful creation, because neither offerings nor tithing started as a law under the Law of Moses. It started in Genesis 1, with creation.** From Eternity, God's purpose for humankind was Grace. The Law was **added temporarily** by Moses because of the misbehavior of Israel until the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ Galatians 3:19 who revealed the eternal Mystery of Grace John 1:17.

5. Citing today the physical, material and temporal curses and threats or promising the physical, material and temporal blessings of the Law of Moses about tithing or not is a theological error because we are not under Moses' Covenant, "*we are not now under the law but under Grace*". Cain, Abel, and Abraham were not under the Law Romans 4:9-10, 13, Romans 6:14, 7:4, 6. Under Grace **tithing should be taught in the context of Creation where it belongs.** Tithing is a sign of thankfulness to God for giving us the whole creation! It was not Moses who invented tithes and offerings. Tithes and offerings were already practiced before the Law appeared and was a demonstration of thanksgiving to God for generously giving us His creation.

Evidently the offering that Adam's family was giving to the Lord in that early time was in thanksgiving to God's generosity for creating them and giving them this beautiful and bountiful planet. Since there was no Law yet those offerings were offerings of grateful hearts. The Law of Moses that came later, making it compulsory and promising prosperity to tithers and threatening with curses the

non-tithers, **ruined, spoiled and corrupted the motivation for giving, now making it just in the interest of receiving rewards.** Before the offerings were a sign of grateful hearts done cheerfully and surely was part of a party or celebration, because there was no law requiring it. Under the Law it became an obligation with threats of punishment and an **interest** of gaining prosperity and blessings, not as thanksgiving and love. As we will see, under Grace the giving is in another dimension. Using the Law, the Church has lowered the value of the Christian tithe because it transforms it into a dead work. It is like bringing a bribe to God in order to receive prosperity from Him, because we give it the interest of getting more prosperity or out of fear of receiving a curse, and not out of gratitude and love. On the other hand, if we give expecting to receive from God **more than what we gave** it really isn't giving. Under Grace "God loves the cheerful giver"

2 Corinthians 9:7.

6. The atmosphere of grace is bi-directional love. Our justification, sanctification, redemption and every blessing in the New Covenant **is not by our works** but is a gift from God of much more value than what He gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He confers His justice to whom He wants Romans 9:11, 15-16, as a free gift from God just like the **first creation.** Now what the Maker of Grace came to do was **to start a New Creation with us** Galatians 6:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17. Tithing in the New Creation is a gift of love and grace both ways. It is also a matter of gratefulness, love and gratitude to God for His goodness to allow us to use everything on this earth, all of which belongs to Him... wood, metals, animals, oil, water, solar energy, in short, all His property Genesis 1:28-30. We industrialize His materials, make money with them and use it for our comfort. But now we have much more to be thankful for in addition to all these material blessings. We are thankful for our **eternal salvation!** Not only is the land God's, but we are also His. Do you think the tithe is enough to repay God for everything He gives us by pure love? This is why I say that the tithe is insignificant under Grace. It is a tiny demonstration of our gratitude for everything He has given us and continues to give to us. The Lord rescued us, He bought us with His blood to make us entirely His. Not just the tithe but also everything including ourselves belong to Him. Just as the poet said in the last stanza of this wonderful Hymn "**When I survey the wondrous cross**"

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."*

Salvation is by the Grace of Jesus Christ, not by tithing. Tithing is the response of a thankful heart. It is like sending a thank-you note to someone who does us a favor. The favor is done and if you don't send a thank-you card God will not curse you, but it is an obligation of love or at least of courtesy. Love is more than courtesy, Paul says, "be grateful" Colossians 3:15. It is not essential that our children give us thanks for their birth, food, etc., although they should. Sometimes we gave gifts to our children and they did not say thank you! But we did not curse them for

that and they did not cease to be our children. But when they grow up most of them become thankful because they understand the value of parenthood.

7. In the book of Acts the word "tithe" does not exist, not because the apostles did not believe in tithing but because the early believers gave "**all** they had". This is not a rare thing, love is integral to giving. When we got married, we gave all that we are and have to each other for the rest of our lives. Jesus is our "groom", our spouse of the Church. He gave us everything, even His life, and when we said yes to His proposal, we also gave Him all we are and have. Thus were the conversions in the early Church.

Now we understand why the Apostles did not emphasize tithing in the New Testament. It is not because it is wrong, but because they understood that what they received in Jesus Christ demands all of ourselves and all we have. Jesus gives us eternal life, makes us His bride, we become part of the family of God and we will reign with Christ, and all that for eternity! Whoever is truly born again surrenders everything of what he is and what he has to the Lord. When we give our heart to Jesus, we are also giving all we are and we have. The tithe under grace is nothing compared to what God gives us and compared with what the primitive believers gave in return. Therefore, we should take the tithe as a minimum, as just something. The New Covenant way is to live in the Spirit. We should always allow the Spirit to guide us to whom, to what and how much we give.

Let us see how it was in the early Church:

**Acts 2:44-45** Good News Translation (GNT)

**44** All the believers continued together in close fellowship and **shared their belongings** with one another. **45** They would **sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all**, according to what each one needed.

**Acts 4:32-35** Good News Translation (GNT)

**32** The group of believers was one in mind and heart. **None of them said that any of their belongings were their own**, but they all shared with one another **everything they had**. **33** With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God poured rich blessings on them all. **34** There was no one in the group who was in need. **Those who owned fields or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale, 35** and turn it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed according to the needs of the people.

Evidently there was no need for the Apostles to beg for the tithes. This is why I say it should be a minimum. People under grace naturally give more.

8. And a tithe is much less if compared with what awaits us in eternity being "*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*" Romans 8:16-17. Everything belongs to Him, even ourselves... Romans 14:7-9. Uniting ourselves to Jesus makes His business our business also. The extension of His Kingdom also becomes our responsibility because we are His bride. If we don't do it, He loves us anyway because he will

always keep His promises <sup>2 Timothy 2:13</sup> and if we do it, it is because it is normal in marriage. How much would you pay God for His Grace? Grace is priceless; this is why it has to be free. *"Come and buy, without money and without cost"* Isaiah 55:1. For us to offer to pay for something so immense when we are completely bankrupt is not only absurd, it is an insult. We are not going to lose our salvation if we don't tithe, but if we love Him, we will consecrate all we have just as we did at our wedding. Remember that from eternity we were predestined to become the Son of God's bride <sup>Ephesians 1:4-6</sup>, and that He went to heaven to prepare a place for us <sup>John 14:2-3</sup>, the "New Jerusalem" <sup>Revelation 21:10-27</sup>. The climax of our salvation is the "marriage of the Lamb" <sup>Revelation 19:7:10</sup>. In this wonderful relationship with God's Son, all of His becomes ours and all of ours becomes His. Because of our love, tithing will be a pleasurable experience, as when we buy a gift for our parents, wife or children.

9. Grace is like what parents do for their children. Our children didn't have to do anything to be born; we caused them to be born. They didn't have to pay us to help them develop and grow, give them food, dress them, send them to school, etc. We did all these for free, with joy and even sacrifice, without even thinking about it. We did it because we love them, and by grace, and we don't expect them to pay us for what we did for them. They did not ask us to come into this world, so it is considered normal to maintain them free of charge. Of course we expect them to help themselves when they grow up, but even then, if they need help, we will be there to help them. So it is with God. Most children love their parents and out of love try to behave well. Even if they disobey we always forgive them and they remain our children forever. We love them because they are our children and not for what they do or don't do. Of course there are children who are thankful. My children continually give us many gifts, though we strongly urge them not to because we already have everything. However, they don't stop and their gifts are quite valuable, so much so that we sometimes get concerned they are spending too much. Of course, the greatest gift they give us is themselves when they come periodically to see what we need and help us.

We were not born again because of something we did. We have been begotten by God <sup>John 1:13</sup>. Without first being begotten by God, we could not be alive, see the Kingdom of God <sup>John 3:3</sup>, have faith, see Jesus, etc. When we saw the Kingdom of God and believed it was because God the Father had already given us life and spiritual sight. We don't have to believe in Jesus **to** be begotten by God, we need to be begotten by God to be able to believe in Jesus <sup>Ephesians 2:1, 5-6</sup>. We did not decide to be born again, it happened to us by grace. Only when God caused us to be born again and gave us sight, could we see His Kingdom <sup>Colossians 2:13</sup>. When we were dead in our sins we could not decide to believe in order to be born again, because a dead man cannot decide anything. We see His Kingdom and want to enter it when God touches us and gives us life and convicts us of our sin. Our response to the Grace of God which gives us everything and makes us heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, is to give Him ALL that we are and have <sup>Matthew 13:44-46</sup>.

The behavior of parents to their children and the children to their parents depends on the love of the parents and the gratitude of the children. The father's love to his children does not depend on what they do or don't do. The love parents have for their children and what they do for them is by grace, it is priceless,. Our children buy us "*without money and without cost*" Isaiah 55:1 but when they thank and give us a gift we get very excited. Our children do not give us gifts as a payment for what we did for them; on the other hand, what parents do for their children is priceless. We gave to them all in love. Martha and I know that what we give to our children is out of love and we do not expect to receive any payback for what we did for them. That is grace.

10. If you tithe and give it hoping that God will return it to you multiplied then you are giving nothing. You are an Old Covenant person. If you are giving for interest, to receive something better in return, then your tithe is a dead work and has no value because you give it only to get a reward or because you are afraid of a curse. You are not giving it out of love and that depreciates the value of the tithe. This kind of tithing is like a bribe to God in order to get more prosperity. It is as if my wife kisses me expecting me to buy her an expensive dress. That kiss has no value, it is a dead kiss. In the early Church, the first thing that Jews who became Christians did was to repent of their dead works Hebrews 6:1, 9:14. A dead work is what we do for interest or fear, and not for love. And those who preach and teach tithing, in the same way that Moses and Malachi did, under the threat of curses and promises of prosperity, are Old Covenant Ministers of the Letter and not of the Spirit. Under the New Covenant we do not give out of fear of a punishment or interest in getting a reward. God loves the cheerful giver, the one who gives out of love, not expecting anything in return.

11. As we see, the tithe is not an invention of the Law of Moses. No! Offerings and tithes were created in Genesis as an expression of human gratitude to God for His bountiful creation He gave us to enjoy and use. When there was no organized religion the tithes and offerings were burnt at an altar and sent symbolically in smoke to God. But when a Priest of God would appear the tithes were given to Him because he represented God Genesis 14:18-20. When the religious life was organized under the Law, God gave His tithes to the *priesthood tribe of Levi*. God said: "*I have given all the tithes in Israel to the Levites*". God says, "*I have given*" because the tithes are His. We gave them to Him. The tithes were a minimal amount and used **before and under the Law of Moses to pay the salaries of the servants of God** Genesis 14:17-20, Numbers 18:21. Tithes were compulsory under the Law of Moses but were not compulsory **either before the Law of Moses or today after the Law of Moses**. When there was no law there were no sins Romans 5:13. It is interesting to notice that tithes were never used to build either the Tabernacle or Solomon's Temple. All that was done with extra offerings beyond the tithes for the Levites.

11. The Israelites actually had to give three tithes under the Law. The principal tithe was for the support of the **Levites**, the priesthood tribe Numbers 18:21. The Levites received 12 tithes from the other 12 tribes. Therefore **their salary, if every one tithed, would be 20% more than the average citizen's salary.** The Israelites also had separate tithes for the yearly **religious pilgrimage** to Jerusalem Deuteronomy 14:22-26 and every three years for the **poor**.

Tobit, a saint of the Old Testament, tells us his experience of giving the three tithes:

**Tobit 1:6-8 (Deuterocanonical book).**

6 I was the only one in my family who regularly went to Jerusalem to celebrate the religious festivals, as the Law of Moses commands everyone to do. I would hurry off to Jerusalem with the **first part of my harvest, the firstborn of my animals, a tenth of my cattle, and the freshly clipped wool from my sheep. Then I would stand before the altar in the Temple, and give these offerings to the priests, the descendants of Aaron.** 7 I would give a tenth of my grain, wine, olive oil, pomegranates, figs and other fruits to the Levites who served God in Jerusalem. Every year, except the seventh year when the land was at rest, I would sell a **second tenth of my possessions and spend the money in Jerusalem on the festival meal.** 8 But **every third year, I would give a third tithe to widows and orphans and to foreigners living among my people,** and we would eat the festival meal together. I did this in keeping with the Law of Moses, which Deborah, the mother of my grandfather Ananiel, had taught me to obey. (I had been left an orphan when my father died.)

12. So a Jew who kept with the obligations of the Law had to separate 20% of his income for his religious obligations and 10% every three years for the poor. It seems that Paul believes, following the example of Abraham before the Law and the Levites under the Law, that the Church should use the tithes for salaries for the full time leaders (pastors).

This is what Paul suggests:

**1 Corinthians 9:13-14** Good News Translation (GNT)

13 Surely you know that the **men who work in the Temple (the Levites) get their food from the Temple** and that **those who offer the sacrifices (the Levites) on the altar get a share of the sacrifices.** 14 **In the same way,** the Lord has ordered that those who preach the gospel should get their living from it.

**"In the same way"** means that as the tithes were for the priests **before** the Law Genesis 14:18-20 and also for the priests **under** the Law Numbers 18:21 Paul says that **"in the same way"** this should be done in the Church. This being the case, the tithes should be used to pay the salaries of the pastors **not for buildings or other projects.** They should earn about 12 times the average tithe, that is 20% higher than the average income of the believers of his congregation, that is, no less than the poorest and not more than the wealthiest of the church. The altars before the Law, and the tabernacle and the Temple during the Law, were made with extra offerings, not with the tithe. The tithes were exclusively for the Levites:

**Numbers 18:21** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given **all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting.**

**Numbers 18:21** Good News Translation

The Lord said, "**I have given to the Levites every tithe that the people of Israel** present to me. This is in **payment for their service in taking care of the Tent (Tabernáculo) of my presence**".

**1 Corinthians 9:13-14** Good News Translation

**13** Surely you know that the **men who work in the Temple (the Levites)** get their food from the Temple and that **those who offer the sacrifices (the Levites)** on the altar get a share of the sacrifices. **14** ***In the same way,*** the Lord has ordered that those who preach the gospel should get their living from it.

I should say that we commit another violation! We use **Malachi 3:10** from the Old Testament to **ask the tithes** from the people, but then we do not use **Numbers 18:21** from the same Old Testament to **use the tithes** as God ordained. The money of the tithes should be used only for the salaries to the Pastors, Missionaries, Evangelists and every person that is spiritually and professionally equipped to be Ministers. I believe that if all the money from the tithes would have been used for missionaries the world would have been already fully evangelized. I even believe that the Church would be better served if local pastors would earn their own living as professional workers Acts 20:34, 1 Corinthians 9:13-18 so they would not burden their members with so many programs and meetings, because they would know how difficult it is to work eight or more hours a day and then also attend the multiple programs of the church. Also for about 300 years the early Church did not have buildings. Since they were persecuted they met anywhere they could — beach, parks but mostly in homes. Consequently, there were no building expenses. Most of the money collected was use to eradicate poverty from among their members. In the very beginning they would meet at the Jewish temple gates and in their homes Acts 2:44-47, 4:32-35.

In the New Covenant we should give what the Holy Spirit guides us to give. I would take the Old Testament as guidance for the basic family budget: For a family that makes \$60,000 a year, its **yearly** budget under the Law would be \$6,000 (10%) to **sustain the ministers**, \$6,000 (10%) for **family vacations**, and \$2,000 (1/3 of a tithe per year) for **the poor**. Hebrews 10:1 says, "*The law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things*" which means that the actual form of things, the New Covenant, is better than the shadow. The economical system of the Church should also be better than the one under the Law of Moses. We should start to eradicate poverty at least among the members of our congregation.

## G. SOWING AND HARVESTING

1. An analogy used to motivate people to send money to radio and television speakers and to put more money in the offering plate on Sundays is the sowing and the reaping.

**Galatians 6:7-10** New American Standard Bible

**7** Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for **whatever a man sows**, this he will also reap. **8** For the one who **sows to his own flesh** will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap **eternal life**. **9** Let us not lose heart in **doing good**, for in **due time we will reap** if we do not grow weary. **10** So then, **while we have opportunity**, let us **do good to all people**, and **especially to those who are of the household of the faith**.

Many preachers explain that the seeds are dollars. To put dollars in the offering plate is sowing seeds. God will multiply it and we will harvest even more dollars than those we sowed. However, if we do not sow by putting more dollars in the offering there will not be a return of dollars. The way of sowing is to put it in the offering plate or send it to the radio and TV preacher. The more dollars we sow the more dollars we will harvest. If one sows \$100 the return could be 100% or more and give us back \$200 for the investment! Which is not that bad of a return! This is essentially the motivation of the message of prosperity: that people **give more money to the Church** and in doing so they experience **material prosperity**. But when one reads the text that speaks of sowing and harvesting in the New Testament, seeding money means mostly to help the poor and needy, which will give us **eternal spiritual rewards, not more money**. To send money to the preachers and placing more money in the offering plate, **not knowing** what they are going to do with it, does not assure us that God will prosper us economically and materially because this is Old Covenant. The New Covenant has **new and better promises** than mere material prosperity. Its rewards for our donations **are not earthly** as in the Old Covenant **but heavenly and eternal**. The promises of the New Covenant are higher and they are spiritual, heavenly and eternal (see Lesson 4 "Rewards For The Believers' Good Works"). Having this in mind, I like to know in what manner the money I give is spent to see if I am really **sowing to the Spirit or to the flesh**.

**Galatians 6:7-10** The Message

**7-8** Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others — ignoring God! — harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life. **9-10** So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

2. To sow to the flesh is to invest in our physical body: food, clothes, amusement, entertainment, sports, gym, holidays, parties, dances, theatre, travel, jewelry, homes, automobiles, motorcycles, yachts, restaurants, etc. None of these things

are a sin in itself, but it is investing in things that wear out with the use Colossians 2:22, 1 Corinthians 6:13. They have no eternal value and will not enter into eternity but will remain here on earth when we die. Those of us who invest our money, time and talents in our flesh do not lose our salvation if we belong to the elected and have trusted in Jesus, but the things that we spend our money on will not be credited in the Kingdom of heaven. All will remain here, as well as our physical body 1 Corinthians 15:50. We won't receive rewards in eternity because we invested in "wood, hay and straw", all things that will degrade and rust. We should instead invest in "gold, silver and precious stones" materials that do not rust 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (again see Lesson 4 "Rewards For The Believers' Good Works"). Although our interior being, our spirit, will go to heaven, because it is eternal and we trusted in Jesus, if we have only invested in our own flesh, in material things, our spiritual treasure in the Bank of Heaven will be 0.00. The Sacred Scriptures makes it very clear: "the one who sows to his own flesh of the flesh will reap corruption". The body will rot and be eaten by worms, and the "things": house, cars, etc., will not get into eternity. They are corruptible bodies, and corruptible material cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven 1 Corinthians 15:50. What we invest in our flesh will not be credited to us in heaven, whether they are houses, automobiles, etc. They will all stay here and corrode.

3. On the other hand to "sow to the Spirit" is to invest in our spirituality of our interior being following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in things that do not die, things eternal value. Everything we invest in **our inner person and in the inner person of others** is to invest in eternal things and will accompany us into eternity, "their works follow them" Revelation 14:13. What we invest in the improvement of our inner eternal spiritual personality will accompany us for eternity. This is very clear in Scripture when it says, "do for yourselves treasures in heaven" Matthew 6:19-21, 10:42, Luke 14:12-14, etc. This will "reap eternal life". How do we sow to the Spirit? "Doing good to all and especially to those of the household of faith". In other words, helping the poor, widows, orphans, the handicapped, sick, etc., beginning with the poor members of the Church. I seldom hear preachers, though some do, who say that sowing to the Spirit is to help a neighbor in need, a poor brother of the Church, a widow or an orphan. Generally, the emphasis is always put on the offering plate or sending a check to the preacher. If you offer a dinner for the poor you're sending treasure to heaven. The reward is that you increase your spiritual and eternal riches.

**Luke 14:12-14** New Living Translation (NLT)

**12** Then he turned to his host. "When you put on a luncheon or a banquet," he said, "don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and **that will be your only reward.** **13** Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. **14** Then **at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."**

4. If you invite your poor neighbors to your house for dinner, or to try to reconcile them with God, you are depositing the money you spend on the dinner in the Bank of Heaven, because you are investing in immortal people who may well be with you in heaven for eternity. Also what we spend to send missionaries to evangelize is sowing to the Spirit because that is invested in eternal lives and produces eternal results Matthew 25:35-40.

**Matthew 19:21** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**21** Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and **give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me."

"**You will have treasure in heaven**". He did not say that he would get a better paid job, though he could, but as we see, the rewards under the New Covenant are **not material and temporal** as in the old system such as living longer, a better harvest, more sheep, etc. No. Instead they will be spiritual and eternal rewards that we will find waiting for us in glory and will be our treasure in heaven forever. Yes, everything is superior in the New Covenant even our money, time and talents can be immortalized. But most preachers when they say that if you put money in the offering you will prosper mean materially and in this life. That **is an Old Covenant promise**. We are ministers of a **New Covenant** 2 Corinthians 3:6.

5. Let's look at another case where Paul uses the analogy of seeding and harvesting when he asked the gentile churches to help the poor Jewish brothers and sisters of Jerusalem. It is a very interesting example and clear explanation of how to give under grace and how much. Also observe the Christian politeness of Paul when he asks the offerings and the amazing response of the believers, teaching us the difference of giving when we have the New Life in Christ vs. being under the Old Covenant of the Letter of the Law of Moses.

**1 Corinthians 16:1-4** Good News Translation (GNT)

**16** Now, concerning what you wrote about the money to be raised to help God's people in Judea. You must do what I told the churches in Galatia to do. **2 Every Sunday** each of you must **put aside some** money, **in proportion to what you have earned**, and save it up, so that there will be **no need to collect money when I come**. **3** After I come, I shall give letters of introduction to **those you have approved**, and send them to take your gift to Jerusalem. **4** If it seems worthwhile for me to go, then they can go along with me.

Note that Paul asks them to give wisely, not under the pressure of a well-prepared sermon to make people feel condemned if they don't give. He says **think about how much and prepare it with time**. He is not planning to come in person and give them a talk **to touch their emotions** and **promise prosperity** in order to get more money, telling them that if they give \$1,000 God will return to them \$2,000, but he says: "each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come". This means to "think with time", think "how much is possible for you", "give in proportion to what you have earned".

Then Paul, the champion of grace, also praises the churches of Macedonia who gave more than what Paul expected, and the quality of their gifts for the same cause, to help the poor Jewish brethren of Jerusalem and Judea.

**2 Corinthians 8:1-7** Good News Translation (GNT)

**8** Our friends, we want you to know what **God's grace has accomplished** in the churches in Macedonia. **2** They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but **their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving**, even though they are very poor. **3** I can assure you that they gave as much as they could, and even **more than they could. Of their own free will** **4** they **begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping** God's people in Judea. **5** It was **more than we could have hoped for!** First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they **gave themselves to us as well.** **6** So we urged Titus, who began this work, to continue it and help you complete this special service of love. **7** You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in your love for us. And so we want you to be generous also in this **service of love.**

These Scriptures show what this lesson seeks to demonstrate; the giving under Grace is very different. There are no threats or material promises because Grace means giving with love <sup>1 Corinthians 13:3</sup>, not receiving. God prepares good works beforehand for us to walk in them, making it a privilege to do them. Far from being a sacrifice or a pain or giving under pressure; giving under grace is a joy and it is considered a privilege <sup>2 Corinthians 9:7</sup>. Paul said the Macedonians "**begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judea**".

In this case, **it wasn't the preacher who asked the people to give, but the people who begged the preacher to allow them to give!**

Do you get it? Do you see the difference between Law and Grace? The Law forces you to give an offering under the threat of punishment and offering a material reward if you give. Under grace, these Christians did not have to be motivated with... "*If you put \$100 into the offering, God will return you \$200!*" No, these people who were obviously poor pleaded to give and considered it a privilege to do it! And they offered not only their money but also offered themselves! Paul says: "*we want you to know what **God's grace has accomplished** in the churches of Macedonia*". My beloved brother, do you understand how different it is to live under Grace than under the Law? The Apostles did not emphasize the Letter of the Old Covenant as Malachi did because under the Grace of God we give everything and even ourselves to God and our neighbor. We give what the Spirit compels us to give, which is often more than a tithe. Paul says that **this is to sow seed to help the poor**. Paul says more about giving "*each as he proposed in his heart, not grudgingly and by obligation, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed...*" <sup>2 Corinthians 9:1-15.</sup>

**Ephesians 2:10** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

6. During the first centuries the offerings of the Church were usually for the poor. This was one of the reasons they grew in number Acts 2:45-47. In the early Church the Deacons did not receive money from the believers to put it in the bank account of the Church, but people brought their offerings to the Apostles who gave it to the Deacons for distribution among the needy Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35, 6:1-7.

Of course, if we want to make sure that much of our donations are to help the poor, Missions and Evangelism, which is sowing to the Spirit, we must know in what we are investing. I don't know how my church or the TV preachers use my tithes and offerings that I give to the Lord unless they are accountable to the donors. Usually we know the amount of income and of the expenses, but not how and in what it is spent. I've never heard a treasure report that said: **We expended X dollars in spiritual and eternal things and X dollars in things for our comfort that will remain here on earth.** Preachers and churches should explain to donors how they spend the money so donors know how much we are investing in the Spirit and how much for the flesh. Which investments are made in eternal things that will accompany us for eternity as our treasures in heaven and what is spent on superfluous things that produce no eternal value. Of course, we must invest something in our flesh to be able to exist, but how much and how? This text of Scripture (Galatians 6:7-10) is very important to consider because it teaches us how to invest our dollars. Do we know how television and radio preachers who ask us for money while promising us blessings and prosperity actually use that money? Is it to sow to the Spirit? **I do not think that it is wrong to ask for money**, but I do believe that if as donors we want to invest as Paul instructs, in spiritual and eternal things, we need to know how that money is used in order to continue donating wisely.

7. This is a sensitive issue, but we must examine it. It is very well known that in some cases a large part of the money we give is used for luxuries and superfluous things and not for things of eternal value. The early Church had no buildings and the pastor's salaries were modest. In the Scriptures it was around 20% more than the average income of the members of the Church. Those who ask for seed, or donations, should report to the donors how every dollar they receive is invested, so donors know if they are sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit with their donations. Are we investing in carnal things, which perish with use, or in spiritual and eternal things as Paul urges us to? ***"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life"***. I think that the best use of money is what is used to help the poor and needy and what is used to evangelize and save eternal souls. I know many evangelists, close friends of mine, who are very careful about this and give an account of every penny and are accountable to the donors.

If you want to know which American ministries are transparent and which are not, it is very clear on the Internet:

<http://www.MinistryWatch.com>.

Ministries are graded from **A** to **F**. An **A** is given to ministries that are the most transparent and **F** the least transparent. In some **A** cases, all the accounts of the Ministry are published, so that people know to whom they donate money and how it is used.

## **I. SUMMARY**

1. Heresy is not necessarily a wrong doctrine but instead too much emphasis on just part of the truth.
2. Material prosperity is desirable but the way to get it is by studying for a good career and working hard.
3. All God's blessings are by grace. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are signs. God heals some and does not heal others. Jesus in Gethsemane and Paul for his thorn prayed three times and God did not give them what they asked.
4. God is sovereign. He saves some and sends some to hell. Life is full of very nice things and very bad ones for everybody, both non-believers and believers. We must accept what God allows just as Job, Habakkuk, Paul and the primitive martyrs did.
5. In the Old Testament all the promises and blessings were material and for this life alone.
6. In the New Testament all the promises and blessings are spiritual and eternal.
7. Tithing in the Church should be considered in the context of the wonderful and plentiful creation that God has given us to enjoy. This is where tithing belongs, as our response to God's love for humankind, and not in the context of the Law, where the motivation to tithe is dirty. People would tithe for interest of better harvests and for fear of God's curses instead of out of gratefulness and love.
8. To sow to the Spirit is to invest our tithes and part of our earnings in spiritual and eternal things by helping the poor and to propagate the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is to build over the foundation of Christ: gold, silver and precious stones, which are imperishable things and have eternal value. To sow to the flesh is to invest in perishable things, building over the foundation of Christ: wood, hay, and straw, things of no eternal value.