



Come out of Babylon

WINE OUT OF BOTTLES

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FOREWORD

We have written this book because the church is in crisis. We meet so many people who do not want to go anymore. Many churches are stuck in the traditions passed down from generation to generation, as if God has no fresh revelation and strategies to reach the people in these times. People are not ashamed to kiss and hug in the streets and to shout and cheer at sporting events but are ashamed to declare their love (if indeed it is in their hearts at all) of Jesus openly and proudly. Yet Jesus says, "Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven". (Matthew 10:32&33)

We believe it is time to declare our love and allegiance to and for Jesus as loudly as we can. This is not "religion" we are propagating, but a relationship which is life-changing and life-giving. Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", and we, the writers, believe this is the simple truth. Some people might say to us because of our commitment to His cause, "Get a life", meaning have some fun, enjoy food and wine, travel cruises and luxury items, spend what you have because otherwise your kids will, but to us this all represents Babylon. The pursuit of these things, we believe, is idolatry. Life in fellowship with Jesus is fun, is fulfilling and brings great joy.

We made this choice willingly and gladly and we are hearing some preaching that encourages us greatly but we do not witness many churchgoers who realise that it is the Lord's will that all of His family should be equally committed to His great commission in the power and anointing of His Holy Spirit. It seems to us that because they pay their clergy, many consider that it is those who are paid that should do the work of ministry. This is really sad because Paul wrote, "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13) The writer to the Hebrews states that "solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil". (Hebrews 5:14) Worldly Christians, according to Paul, are not ready for solid food. (1 Corinthians 3:2) So this book is a challenge to grow up to maturity in Christ.

1. WHAT DOES BABYLON REPRESENT?

The city of Babylon was founded by Nimrod, called a mighty hunter. (Genesis 10:9&10) It was dedicated to the god, Marduk or Merodach, who was regarded as the supreme god of the Babylonians. This god was also called Bel. It was also the site of the tower called Babel which was regarded by God as a dangerous symbol of the pride of man, which had to be curbed. This god's name was adopted as part of the names of subsequent rulers of the city. Babylonia included other cities and in the south was Ur on the Euphrates River. This area was called Chaldea and this place became synonymous with educated people, astrologers, philosophers and priests of Marduk. It was a place of humanly acquired knowledge from unreliable sources, speculations from people who had exalted their intellects (and their imaginations) in the same way as the devil was recorded as doing. (Ezekiel 28:12-18)

We believe it is the knowledge that God referred to when He forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden. Babylon therefore came to represent the worldly way of doing things; and the city the centre of the whole region of Babylonia. John writes particularly, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – come not from the Father but from the world". (1 John 2:15&16)

There are many prophecies against Babylon. In Isaiah God has summoned His warrior angels to "carry out His wrath...to destroy the whole country". (Isaiah 13:3&5) The king of Babylon is Satan himself who

was cast down from heaven because he wanted to be worshipped as God is. (Isaiah 14:4&12-15) This is why any form of idolatry is repugnant – it is conceived in the heart of Satan.

It is hard for us to understand why the Israelites adopted the gods of the lands in which they lived, but we know they did not know how to relate to God because they refused to learn at Sinai. (Exodus 20:19) God gave the Israelites a choice. "I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess". (Deuteronomy 30:16) Later Joshua reminded them, "Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods...you must not serve them or bow down to them". (Joshua 23:7) "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve". (Joshua 24:15)

Babylon therefore came to represent the antithesis of God's standards and His ways. Everything reminded Him of the damage the devil did in Eden and the curse on the whole of mankind and particularly His chosen people. "Babylon" was the original temptation to Eve multiplied a thousand times. God had wiped out the wickedness in the flood and then promised He would not do that again, starting fresh with Noah, but the iniquity and rebellion born in the hearts of Adam's descendants kept rearing its ugly head. The book of Genesis is "beginnings" or the precedents and precepts of relationship with Holy God, and the Old Testament is the story of God's desire to retrain His people. This depended on their looking to Him for guidance all the time and learning from Him by revelation, to convict of sin and convince their hearts of the righteous way. God

has never changed His original plan and "His eyes range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him". (2 Chronicles 16:9)

Babylon in John's vision (Revelation 18:2-24) is portrayed as a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a place of excesses and self-indulgences, dishonest trade leading to selfish gain and acquisitiveness, followed up with violence. This "place" or state will be utterly destroyed.

2. ABRAM WAS CALLED OUT OF BABYLON

Abram's father, Terah, took his son, his grandson, Lot, who was Abram's nephew, and his daughter-in-law, Sarai, from Ur of the Chaldeans, and they set out for Canaan, but they never reached Canaan because when they arrived in Haran they settled there. (Genesis 11:31&32) This is the first recorded "coming out" or being separated to YHWH. But Haran was in Assyria on the main route east from Nineveh, and the people worshipped the gods of Babylonia, with a few more added. We have a saying "out of the frying pan and into the fire". So God again called Abram to leave his home and finish the journey to Canaan.

When Abram left Assyria in obedience and trust, God made him mighty promises to bless and prosper him, his descendants and even all peoples of the earth. (Genesis 12:2-3) God intended to teach Abram as He had not been able to teach Adam and Eve, and develop the personal relationship and family that He had wanted from the

beginning. This was dependent on loyalty and honour to Him and to each other. Most of the book of Genesis is about Abram and his family learning how to do things God's way and under God's rule. Lot's wife was a fatality because she disobeyed the instructions for her salvation when God asked them to come out of Sodom. (Genesis 19:26)

Abraham made many mistakes but because his heart was right towards God he was very trainable and pleased God. He became a friend of God because of his close relationship with God and his faithfulness. (2 Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23) He must have felt the honour and privilege and enjoyed it as much as God Himself. If God was looking for this relationship as He had first had with Adam and Eve, Abraham's willingness to learn and his cooperative obedience must have given God joy too. In this matter God has never changed right down to this day. He is still calling people into this personal relationship with Himself.

After Abraham died, although Isaac and Jacob followed some of their training, the descendants neglected the relationship that they had, and ended up in Egypt as slaves. They did not hang on to the prosperity and blessings that God had promised because they had begun compromising God's instructions with their own ideas. Moses became the man to lead God's people out and they were given very specific instructions. (Exodus 12) They had begun to worship the gods of the Egyptians and the thrust of Moses' message to Pharaoh was that he must let God's people go out of Egypt so that they can worship Him. The plagues were warnings to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians that God blessed obedience to His ways, and punished

those who continue to come against Him and His chosen ones. Paul writes, "the Scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up...that I might display My power in you and that My Name might be proclaimed in all the earth". (Romans 9:17) The Scripture goes on..."Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden". God's mercy is infinite but it is received by those who respond to His bidding.

Although Joshua followed God's ways it is recorded that "after that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel. They forsook the Lord and served the Baals". (Judges 2:10-12) Every region had its own god and the regional god's name was prefixed by the title "Baal". This title means "master", "possessor", "husband". It was only by coming out of the area that one could avoid being caught up in the demonic atmosphere. The book of Judges finishes with the words, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit (did what was right in his own eyes)". (Judges 21:25)

God had made a promise to Noah that He would "never again curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood". (Genesis 8:21) Yet He could not find many who wanted to honour and obey Him. How His heart must have longed for His children to worship and adore Him as they had done in Eden before the devil came and tempted Eve. How could He teach them about the idyllic conditions He had originally created?

3. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO LEARN ABOUT HEAVEN

YHWH, who made the world and everything in it, is our Master and Possessor and calls Himself "husband". (Isaiah 54:5) This is why worship of made-up gods, whether statues or even in the imagination, is so grieving to Him. He calls it adultery because He regards Himself as our "husband". The Garden of Eden was a beautiful place – fellowship with God, pleasant work, peace and joy, perfect weather, animals and plant growth, good health, and love and trust. God decided it was very good. But disobedience brought it to an end.

There were prophets that were given a vision of Heaven. They describe their visions in great detail.

ISAIAH – "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.'... and the temple was filled with smoke". (Isaiah 6:1-4) This vision stayed with him all his life. He writes later, "Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious". (Isaiah 63:15)

EZEKIEL – "I looked, and I saw...an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures...Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle...The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like

torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it...Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome...Then there came a voice from above the expanse...over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be His waist up He looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down He looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded Him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." (Ezekiel 1:4-28) Later, after many trials, he has a similar vision. "I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with His glory". (Ezekiel 43:2)

DANIEL – "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." (Daniel 7:9&10)

"I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold round His waist. His body was like chrysolite, His face shining like lightning, His eyes like flaming torches, His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and His voice like the sound of a multitude." (Daniel 10:5&6)

JOHN – "I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a Son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash round His chest. His head and hair were white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:12-16)

Because Paul also had a vision of Heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) it is not surprising that he writes to Timothy, "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness...keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...God the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light". (1 Timothy 6:11 and 14-16)

Yet Abraham had an extraordinary vision when the Lord came to his prepared offering as a smoking brazier with blazing torch – the demonstrated covenant between God the Father and Jesus. (Genesis 15:12-21) This is why the writer to the Hebrews could say, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". (Hebrews 11:10)

While each of these had a personal relationship and friendship with God in the way that He had always longed for, all those who related to Him through the Law had only "outward" signs – for Jacob a stairway to Heaven (Genesis 28:12-17); for Moses flames of fire from within a bush (Exodus 3:2-6); for Gideon fire flared from the rock on which

Gideon had placed the meat and bread as an offering (Judges 6:20-24); for Manoah flame blazed up from the altar of offering that he had prepared. (Judges 13:19&20) Yet for each of these who had an experience of the fire of God their lives were changed by Him, because each realised that God wanted them in His family, heard their prayers and watched over them.

Later, when Moses went up the mountain to fellowship with God, the Israelites who watched him go saw the glory of the Lord as a consuming fire. (Exodus 24:17) Each of these prophets want to tell how wonderful God is, how majestic and glorious is His presence and how awesome, yet how humble and compassionate is our God who wants to have fellowship with His children.

Heaven as described in Revelation (21:22-27) says that the glory of God will be its light, the Lamb is its lamp, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. These facts are supposed to stimulate us to desire His offer above all things.

So when Jesus came to the earth to bring God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness, (Romans 5:17) John writes that He came as the Light of the world. (John 1:4&9) He truly represented the Heavenly Father's presence and power – to make Him known. (John 1:18) Jude believed and wrote that God is able to keep us from falling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy...through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Himself said there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:7)

There is a lot written about Heaven because, as Jesus promised, "in My Father's house there are many rooms...I am going there to

prepare a place for you". (John 14:2) This place is our reward when our life on earth is over. Jesus is "the firstborn from among the dead". (Colossians 1:18) This means that all His "brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11) will follow Him. This is His desire for His family, and a promise to encourage us and not to fear death. Yet what is promised to us at the end of our lives is not all that Heaven is. It is recorded that Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (Genesis 5:24) The writer to the Hebrews records that he did not experience death, and was commended as one who pleased God, by his faith. (Hebrews 11:5)

Even more interesting is that Moses, after he died, was buried by the Lord somewhere in Moab, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. (Deuteronomy 34:6) However he appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, in "glorious splendour" to talk with Jesus. Elijah, who had been translated to Heaven in the midst of a whirlwind accompanied by a chariot and horses of fire, appeared more than 800 years later, also recorded as talking to Jesus at this time. Heaven is where God dwells.

But Jesus also proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven is near. (Matthew 4:17) He came as Immanuel, God with us. (Matthew 1:23) If man would not meet the requirements of Heaven, God brought Heaven to man. Such is His grace and mercy!

4. ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN (Representative of restored Eden)

When we look at the Scriptures we can read God's plans and some of the stories of the effectiveness of the early church, but the continuance of this demonstrated power of the gospel began to wane as the devil influenced men to become false prophets, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. Paul writes, "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve". (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) Paul also writes to Timothy, "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them". (2 Timothy 3:1-5) These words are obviously the antithesis of Heaven.

Jesus told His disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". (Matthew 6:10) The glory of God is supposed to be obvious. Jesus said, "I have given them the glory that You gave me, so that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me". (John 17:22&23) Jesus' followers are to be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which we shine like stars in the universe". (Philippians 2:15)

Isaiah prophesied, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you". (Isaiah 60:1) Jesus demonstrated this glory at His transfiguration on the mountain. (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:3, Luke 9:29)

When Moses came down from the mountain after being with YHWH, his face shone with the reflected glory. (Exodus 34:29-35) But Paul writes, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit". (2 Corinthians 3:18) From these Scriptures it seems that God expects us to gaze on Him, to spend time in His presence, to look to Him and reflect His radiance, (Psalm 34:5) to invite Him to shine His face on us. (Psalm 31:16)

Jesus taught much on the kingdom of heaven – storing our treasure (Matthew 6:20); entering by doing the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21); the kingdom of heaven is near (Matthew 10:7); the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing (Matthew 11:12); knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven is given to those who hear, and then they will be given more (revelation) (Matthew 13:11); there are many who are weeds growing with those in the kingdom, who will be identified by angels at the harvest (Matthew 13:24-30); even a small witness in the kingdom of heaven has a powerful and effective influence (Matthew 13:31-33); finding the kingdom of heaven is worth more than any earthly riches (Matthew 13:44&45); though many are caught up into the kingdom of heaven angels will sort the good and the bad. (Matthew 13:47-49)

Each of these Scriptures explains the culture of heaven on earth, and God's own character. Because He is so generous He wants us to be generous with what is valuable to us, our time, our money and

possessions; not to amass these for selfish reasons but to steward them wisely. God equips us with gifts and talents so that as we exercise these we bring Him glory and honour, demonstrating that we are His children, which we are because we have received His Spirit when we are born again. Jesus has given us a great Commission and the authority to do it in His power and His presence, (Matthew 28:18-20) therefore we need the awareness wherever we go that we are His ambassadors – God making His appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20) He says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last". This is a proclamation so He will guarantee it if we are willing and obedient. This is why the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing. It seems crazy that God would trust all this to His children, but growing into His likeness and nature is not by ordinary learning but by revelation. He shares His secrets, His own knowledge, a little at a time as we practise what He asks us to do. Sometimes what He asks us to do is very small, maybe just a smile or a kind and thoughtful act, but each of these acts in obedience bring Him pleasure and put us in the way of more understanding of His ways. And God's "well done" into our hearts is the best reward; that sense of having done what God put on our hearts to do. Even when we are mocked by those "weeds" for our childlike submission to our heavenly Father we know that God sees our faithfulness because He is always faithful. Forgiving one another is also important because we know that God's angels will sort it all out eventually.

Interestingly though, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are not mentioned like that until Jesus taught this in the New

Testament. One of His teachings on the mountain was that He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 5:17) Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant of obeying God's Law and paying the penalty for sin and separation from God so that He could introduce a better Covenant. (Hebrews 8:7-13) Our new heart towards God would enable us to know Him, love Him and hear His voice so that we can do His will each day. But we cannot see this kingdom on earth unless we are born again. (John 3:3) We become holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4) because He looks at Jesus Christ in us. It is then up to us to make this status He has given us a reality in our lives. Our relationship with the Heavenly Father depends on **our choices, His way or our own**, and our countenance and our witness will convey what our choices have been.

5. EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

Before our eyes daily are the current standards of the world. The Apostle, John, felt a great responsibility to help people avoid the traps of worldliness and wrote his first letter to explain how the power of the gospel works. We are supposed to walk in the light. (1 John 1:7) He has already written much about this in his gospel account. Jesus, the Word of God, came into the world to be the Light of the world. (John 1:1-9) Walking in the light or truth is compared to walking in darkness or evil. (John 3:19) "Men loved darkness...because their deeds were evil...and will not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed".

What then are evil deeds according to God's Word? James writes of harbouring bitter envy and selfish ambition and then boasting about it or denying the truth that it is evil. These traits, which James describes as earthly wisdom, unspiritual and from the devil, lead to disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:14&15) He also advises "brothers" to get rid of all moral filth and the evil which is so prevalent.

(James 1:21)

John writes, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world". (1 John 2:15&16)

What do the cravings of sinful man include? Paul also writes about the cravings of our sinful nature; following its desires and thoughts. (Ephesians 2:3) Falsehood, anger leading to unforgiveness, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, brawling, slander and every form of malice, sexual immorality or any kind of impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking. (Ephesians 4:25 - 5:4) Many of these traits give rise to idolatry – the worship or demonstration of the worth-ship of anything other than that decreed by God. Jesus' first temptation was to turn stones into bread, but He knew that God's Word was much more wholesome food. He knew that testing God's faithfulness to save by doing stupid acts and by trying to achieve the control and admiration of the world by obeying the devil was not only against God's ways but would also ruin His calling. (Matthew 4:3-10)

What about the lust of the eyes and the pride of life or the boasting of what one has and does? Jesus said that anyone who looks at a

woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28) Covetousness, selfish ambition and vain conceit (thinking that I am better than another), jealousy and greed fall into these categories too. Even in the Bible narrative there are many examples of those who are considered followers of Jesus who fell into the devil's trap in these matters, including Jesus' disciples. This is probably why they are at great pains to warn us as we read God's Word.

Unforgiveness will prevent our sins being forgiven and our prayers being answered. (Matthew 6:15 and Psalm 66:18) Worst of all – without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they were worldly because they were jealous, quarrelling with each other like children do. They were also factional, boasting about who they followed. (1 Corinthians 1:12 and 3:1-4)

To the Galatians Paul defined the acts of the sinful nature – sexual immorality, impurity and excessive sensuality, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies. According to our own values we might think that some of these are less sinful but Paul says that all who continue to practise any of these will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

To the Ephesians Paul wrote similarly – among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking. (Ephesians 5:3&4) In Colossians Paul advises his readers to put to death our earthly nature – sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

These traits are so common in our world that people excuse themselves with the fact that everybody does it and even publicly. These things are filmed for our amusement (?) and particularly sexual immorality seems to be supported, and evil men and women are celebrated in the media much more than there are stories of good deeds. Because these stories seem to be exciting, stirring our human passions, we are seduced into watching and listening. The message to the church at Thyatira says that God has something against them – they tolerate the Jezebel who misleads even God's servants into sexual immorality and idolatry. This word, tolerate, means allow, condone, sanction and even submit to. It is participation in at a voyeuristic level, but it can lead to participation at an active level too.

The Old Testament is a sorry story of the mistakes of the people of God. But the deliberate worship of these idols is the worst insult and offence to our Holy God. These acts are wholly inspired by our deadly enemy, the devil, because it takes our focus off God and reflects the devil and his works. John writes that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one". (1 John 5:19) Although Jesus has disarmed the "powers" and "authorities" in the world, triumphing over them on the Cross, (Colossians 2:15) until the devil is consigned to the lake of fire, (Revelation 20:10) these powers and authorities will continue to come against us. We, as believers, need to see how God sees these things and resolve to decide that our focus will be as Paul advises. "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

6. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAN AND WOMAN OF GOD

We have all begun as sinners who have met Jesus, by faith, and been born again by the Spirit of God who has exchanged our hearts of stone to one of softness. God has sprinkled us with clean water and filled us with His Spirit. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

We are then persuaded that God's way is always best. His voice is soft whereas the flesh and the devil speak loudly and strongly. But Jesus says, "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me". (John 10:27) He also says, "If you love Me you will obey what I command", (John 14:15) and "Love one another". (John 13:34 & John 15:12)

We are so blessed because we have a written manual to read His words as well as the Holy Spirit to interpret these to us. Nevertheless the Apostles who learnt day by day from Jesus have written much advice.

Paul learnt from Jesus by revelation. (Galatians 1:11&12) He writes to the Romans, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position and be willing to do menial work. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it

depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge".

(Romans 12:9-19) GASP! Who is equal to such a task?

But this instruction begins – "I urge you...to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". (Romans 12:1&2) Paul could say this because he understood **it is God's energy which powerfully works within him**. (Colossians 1:29) The writer to the Hebrews prays for his readers that God will equip them with everything good for doing His will, and that He would work in us what is pleasing to Him. (Hebrews 13:21) The Word of God is at work in us who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13) "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. (Hebrews 12:10) These are some of the Scriptures that reassure us that it is God, by His Holy Spirit, who enables and strengthens us to do His will.

Paul encourages us to set our minds on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5) In Galatians he writes, "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature". (Galatians 5:16) The fruit of living by the Spirit is love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These virtues enable us to fulfil those difficult instructions.

Peter writes, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them we may participate in the divine nature..." (2 Peter 1:3&4) He asks us to make every effort to add to our faith, goodness; and to goodness,

knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. Peter assures us that if we possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive. (2 Peter 1:5-8) We are God's temple and as we build ourselves in our most holy faith, with Jesus Christ as our foundation, we choose the building bricks. Paul writes of gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw. Our reward is dependent on what survives when it is tested by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-14)

Jesus promises that our reward will be great when we love one another, demonstrating that we are sons and daughters of the Most High. (Luke 6:35) God also rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6) This is not seeking for the first time, but continuously seeking Him, His guidance, His power in our lives, to do His will. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9) But He loves to reveal His secrets to His family as they will put them into practice. (eg, Matthew 13:11&12) This is how Abraham developed and became a friend of God as an example for us all. This practice will draw us closer and closer to God so that we abide in Him, and He in us. Jesus speaks a beautiful picture about this. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of / from Me". (Matthew 11:29) Solomon wrote about Wisdom, "Let Love and Faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck". (Proverbs 3:3) These pictures convey being connected to One who carries the large part of the load. But the greatest advantage of this connection is that we are safe from the strategies of the enemy of our souls.

7. BABYLON WILL BE DESTROYED

There is a hell and there is a place of eternal torment which is reserved for the devil and all who choose to follow him. (Revelation 20:10) Sometimes we meet people who think they will go to hell to be with their friends. What a lie! Perish does not mean that there is nothing after we leave this earth. "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sin of many people". (Hebrews 9:27) "God so loved the world that he gave His One and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life". (John 3:16) Peter writes, "God...is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (change their worldly ways and turn to Him)". (2 Peter 3:9) He explains further, "In the last days scoffers will come... (asking) where is this coming He promised? ...everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's Word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of the water and by water. By these very waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same Word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men". (2 Peter 3:3-7)

Christ died to take away the sin of many people. (Hebrews 9:28) We have the choice of whether this is for us or not. Long ago God offered His chosen people a choice. "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you will have to ask, who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it? Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to

us so that we may obey it? No, the Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. Now choose LIFE...that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life". (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

God equates life with prosperity but death with destruction or perishing. Therefore if we choose the way of the world, in the end we will perish just because God has determined to destroy everything that has been affected by the touch of the devil. The awful truth is that if we do not come to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, chosen from the beginning, to receive the gift of eternal life, we are by default in the kingdom of the devil.

Revelation has much to say about Babylon, the signature of the devil's handiwork. "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit...the kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries". (Revelation 18:2&3) "She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her". (Revelation 18:8)

Yet long before, God had determined the fate of Babylon. Their gods seduced first Samaria and then Jerusalem to the worship of idols, which God regarded as prostitution. (Ezekiel 23) Thus Babylon became the enemy of the Israelites. God decided to use Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to discipline His people. Nevertheless anyone who came against His people was liable for punishment since He protected His chosen people in spite of their rebellion. Habakkuk was horrified when God revealed to him that He

was going to use evil people to carry out His judgment. (Habakkuk 1:5-13) However God reassures Habakkuk – "the righteous will live by his faith (or His faithfulness)". God punishes the wicked but preserves the life of those who hold faithful to Him.

Jesus talks about the signs of the end of the age. It was in the context of His warning His disciples about the destruction of the Temple. This happened in 70AD but this prophecy has further implications, right down to the end of history, and the coming of the Son of Man. There have been many destructive acts by natural forces but particularly by "man" as an agent of the devil. So He says that many will come claiming they are the Christ. There will be wars, famines and earthquakes. There will be martyrs and apostasies because of offence, there will be an increase of wickedness, and the love of most will grow cold. (Matthew 24:5-13) Paul also warns, "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (2 Timothy 3:2-4) as we have already written in chapter 4. But God is good and He does good. As a "consuming fire" He will burn up all this ugliness. (Hebrews 12:29) Who can endure the day of His coming? (Malachi 3:2)

The Bible says that the message heard by the Israelites was of no value to them because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (Hebrews 4:2) This is defined as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see". (Hebrews 11:1) "Without faith it is

impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists". (Hebrews 11:6)

8. FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Jesus tells us to have the faith of God. (Mark 11:22) He commends those who have great faith, (Matthew 8:10 and Matthew 9:28) and rebukes His disciples for their lack. (Matthew 8:26) He asks whether He will find faith on the earth when He returns. (Luke 18:8)

James writes about faith which is always joined with deeds. He writes that we demonstrate our faith by our deeds; faith and actions work together. (James 2:14-26) Even with our salvation, although God initiates by the wooing of His Holy Spirit, nothing happens until we respond. So when God puts something to do into our hearts He waits for and expects us to respond. Sometimes He waits a long time for us to obey His command and we can feel His love has grown cold to us. But this is not actually true because God disciplines His children that He loves very much. (Hebrews 12:5-9) Like any good father He teaches us to live our lives in righteousness.

Jesus has a lot to say about obedience to His commands. First it demonstrates that we love Him. (John 14:15) "If anyone loves Me he will obey My teaching". (John 14:23) "You are My friends if you do what I command". (John 15:14) "Whoever has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father". (John 14:12) WHAT? Greater things than Jesus, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, and went around

doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil!
(Acts 10:38) Our God is a God of increase so He expects that the wonderful acts of Jesus will increase too, and this is what Jesus prophesied. This kind of faith in God, for Whom nothing is impossible, is expected of us, His children, in the same power of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples asked Jesus, "Increase our faith". (Luke 17:5) Jesus replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can... (order something impossible in the natural to happen)". This faith is an expression of who we think God is; a demonstration of our trust in His calling of us into His family and in His written and spoken promises. We can start small and as we practise this faith will grow, because we develop more confidence in God's love and faithfulness. Everything that Jesus demonstrated to us has set precedents of God's intentions. Isaiah prophesied what the anointing of the Holy Spirit would do: (Isaiah 61:1-3)

- preach the good news to the poor
- bind up the broken-hearted
- proclaim freedom for the captives
- release from darkness for the prisoners
- proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of
vengeance of our God
- comfort all who mourn
- provide for those who grieve
- bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes
- oil of gladness instead of mourning
- a garment of praise instead of despair.

Jesus said He fulfilled these words. (Luke 4:21) He did every one of these actions when He was here on the earth. This was first to show the love and compassion of the Father, and also to show what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is supposed to do. Paul writes that God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter of the law but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:6) He also writes that we are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20) This is the greatest privilege that God can give us; His power at work in and through us. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...His incomparably great power for us who believe". (Ephesians 1:17-19)

9. COME OUT AND GO INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We meet many people in the street who wave us away or who say they are not interested in hearing about Jesus when we approach them. However we also meet Christians who go to church sometimes but are not really seeking God with their whole heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-14) These verses indicate that God knows the plans He has for their lives, but unless they call out to Him (pray) He will not be found by them, and they will not be free from the temptations that the devil whispers into their hearts every day. We tell them that God is Love so He

honours our choices and does not intervene in our lives unless we invite Him. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me". (Revelation 3:20) Sitting on the fence or dallying with the devil is a very dangerous place. The Bible warns that without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14) Our right standing with God (righteousness) is given to us as a gift which we receive when we trust in Jesus. We cannot come into God's presence without this robe of righteousness. In the story of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:12&13) the king threw out the man who did not have his wedding garment. He could have been a "good" man but he thought he did not need to be "dressed", even though the wedding garment was a gift from the king. Isaiah wrote, "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness". (Isaiah 61:10)

Israel was commanded to "leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians". (Isaiah 48:20) This was written as a triumphant announcement. "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob". Isaiah wrote, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace". (Isaiah 55:12) Freedom from captivity should feel like this, because the world's standard, the world's thinking, has a hold on us to pull us towards our selfish flesh all the time. Paul describes it. "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out...now if I do what I do not want to do...it is sin living in me that does it". (Romans 7:18-20) But in chapter 8 of Romans Paul goes on to describe what it is to live by the Spirit of God, where there is no condemnation and our minds are controlled

instead by Life and Peace. (Romans 8:1&6) This is described as a Spirit of sonship, because the Spirit living within testifies that we are God's children. (Romans 8:15&16)

We are saying this all the time...it is so easy to enter the kingdom of God...just invite the Holy Spirit to come into our life. 2000 years ago Jesus died on a cross for every sin ever committed. He died this painful and ignominious death to pay the price that God's holiness and judgment demanded of man. But one sinless Man took the responsibility on Himself.

But having accepted the gospel message does not mean an automatic sanctification because to be holy is a work in progress. Every time we dally with the devil we lose ground which we have to regain. And every time we are tempted and succumb we get discouraged. The Holy Spirit is speaking within, but He is not angry but warning us. Paul puts it very well. He is not yet perfected in reflecting his relationship with Jesus, but he forgets what is behind (after confessing a mistake) and presses on to his goal – "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death". (Philippians 3:10-14) And what is sharing in the sufferings of Jesus? Jesus reverently submitted to His Father in all things, including His death. (Hebrews 5:8) He only did what He sees His Father doing. (John 5:19) He was persecuted and misunderstood, mocked and eventually killed by many He really cared about. He warned us that these things could happen to us as well. But His love in our hearts never fails because He is faithful.

10. THE BEAUTY OF THE KINGDOM

We are presenting two kingdoms. Eden was the most beautiful place that God could make for His family, but **the atmosphere was beautiful because of love**. As soon as disobedience and blame came into that atmosphere there was also discord and guilt, followed by fear. John explains, "There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love". (1 John 4:18)

The kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17) Jesus taught that He **must** preach the good news of the kingdom of God...because that is why He was sent. (Luke 4:43) Everyone is by default in the power or kingdom of the devil unless they are born anew into God's kingdom. "I tell you the truth, No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water (naturally into this world) and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit". (John 3:3-6) "You must be born again". (John 3:7) God's seed is planted into our hearts to grow into **His** likeness, otherwise we will continue to grow into the likeness of "fallen man" who is under the power of the devil and subject to his whims, temptations and ultimately his control. Ezekiel describes the process. The Lord declares, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws". (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Because Jesus is King in God's kingdom He has the right to dictate the culture of God's kingdom. Jesus' church, as His representative on the earth, should therefore reflect His likeness. The fruits of the Holy Spirit which He displayed should be evident in each member, as His body. Paul lists these fruit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 6:22&23) Love is what binds all these characteristics together. The present "established" church of the 21st century seems to care very little for God's ideal. But Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power, and went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him. (Acts 10:38) John writes that we (God's children) have an anointing from the Holy One. (1 John 2:20)

We (the church) pray frequently (in the Lord's Prayer) "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". But the work is up to God's people. His command is "be holy, because I am holy". (1 Peter 1:18) We must renounce worldly ways and seek to follow Jesus' example in all things. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world". To Pilate He also said, "You are right in saying I am a King. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth". (John 18:36&37)

We began that Babylon and all that it represents will be destroyed... but we finish...the kingdom of God will last for ever. God has decreed how this "City" is entered into and how it will be. He will have His holy people, His precious children who reflect His likeness. (Revelation 21:3&4) The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it...those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:26&27)

The Spirit and the bride say, "**Come!**" **Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of Life.** (Revelation 22:17)

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