

Spirit-Aided Activities

Series Article 3 – ‘Tradition Hinders Spiritual Growth’

At age 16, I was an emotional wreck drifting with no direction and questioning the meaning of life. I struggled to stay afloat in this baffling state when God threw me a lifeline and saved me. Since then, my primary questions have been: **‘What does God want me to think?’** and **‘How does He want me to act?’** I believe these two queries are fundamental to the Christian pursuit, for we need godly motives, attitudes, and deeds to properly serve the Lord.

Consequently, it’s vital for every child of God to understand what Scripture teaches about behaviors facilitated by the Holy Spirit. At the onset, it’s important to pinpoint the *divine intentions* needed to navigate our sin-tainted existence. Also, we must develop *godly attitudes* that can dominate the mindset we’re instructed to have. Lastly, it’s essential to become familiar with the *parameter of actions* worthy of our calling with a view to perform them. In this article, I hope to accomplish these objectives by identifying the types of Spirit-directed activity found in the Church Epistles.¹

These Scriptures are central since each word is “**God-breathed**” and written directly to Body members so we “**might be equipped, fully equipped toward every good work**” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Earlier in this same Letter, Paul specifies the exact revelation God wants us to implement when he orders Timothy to “**hold what you heard from me as a pattern** (υποτυπωσιν, or “**type**”) **of sound words in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Tim. 1:13 – emphasis mine, cf. Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:1-10; 1 Tim. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

In addition, three different times he labels this message “**the deposit**” (παραθηκην) which Timothy is to “**guard**” and “**commit to** (παραθου, or “**deposit with**”) **faithful men**” so they’ll be qualified “**to also teach others**” (1 Tim. 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 2:1-3).

Around the time Second Timothy was written, Peter affirmed this same principle, “**as all things toward life and godliness exist for us . . . through the full knowledge of the one having called us to His own glory and virtue**” (2 Pet. 1:3). Only Peter and Paul use the term “**full knowledge**” (επιγνωσεως) in reference to a *body of revelation currently able to generate spiritual growth*. Furthermore, several times Paul equates this noun with “**mystery**” truth he received from God – the now revealed “**administration**” (οικονομιαν) which *explains all aspects of Church management, belief and practice* (Eph. 1:9 & 17; 3:2-9 & 4:13; Col. 1:9-10 & 1:24 – 2:3; 3:10, cf. Phil. 1:9; Tit. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:2-3, 8).

Summarizing, Christians possess everything needed to carry out our spiritual walk. To progress, we're required to learn the contents of this divine record, seek to adhere to each part of it, and be careful not to go beyond or fall short of its scope (Acts 20:20, 27; 1 Cor. 4:6). When we realize this revelation “fully” equips us “toward every good work”, provides “all things” necessary “toward life and godliness”, and serves as our “pattern of sound words”, we should be confident that we can isolate all pertinent beliefs and practices God wants us to put into effect. Essentially, **The Church Epistles Present a Clear-Cut Parameter for All Conduct the Spirit Empowers.**¹

Next, it's important to grasp the principle: **If non-Christians can perform an act, that deed should never be classified as 'spiritual'**, for it's done within the confines of human flesh since they lack the indwelling Spirit. Regrettably, I sometimes hear believers assert actions done by the Lost can be Spirit-driven. Although we participate in many similar events as unbelievers, the primary factor which determines whether or not a deed is spiritual is the underlying purpose for which it's done. Because every effort of mankind is naturally and unequivocally controlled by our sin nature inherited from Adam, **Godly Activity is Only Possible for The Saved** since we can access power from the Spirit (Rom. 8:13-14; Gal. 5:16-18).

Therefore, my goal is to define explicit Spirit-aided behaviors we're to adopt and apply. The initial section focuses on the overall nature of our spiritual journey. The next identifies character traits God wants us to develop for our testimony to the world. A third portion touches on the “new man” makeover we need for life and ministry among believers. The fourth evaluates whether some Spirit-empowered activities seen during the Acts period are still in effect, namely those occurring between Israel's rejection of their Christ until “mystery” truth was fully revealed. And as conclusions are reached about the Spirit's role, these deductions will be compared with present-day viewpoints.

So, I invite you to hop aboard this expository roller coaster and ride the rails of relevant Scripture that divulge what a Spirit-led “walk” entails (Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). For, each believer needs to figure out what God wants us to do if we're to develop the capacity to detect and avert divergent philosophies as well as thrive toward robust spiritual health.

Section 1: Our Christian Conflict

In my early 20's when I thought I knew more than most adults, fortunately I had a wise mentor. I distinctly remember visiting Ruel Glover on three or four occasions

when he brought up a certain passage. His discernment led him to realize I wouldn't receive what he wished to convey if he lectured me so, instead, he shared his own reflections about what he was learning from these verses. After arriving home, each time I revisited the passage and tried to grasp why he was so enamored by it. And each time I garnered a bit more of what this portion taught. However, little did I know how much *the truths embedded in this Scripture present the core of how spiritual growth takes place* nor how its guidance would **Transform my Outlook of Our Purpose in The Christian Life.**

Second Corinthians 10:1-6

As Paul approached the Corinthians, he knew a contingent of detractors existed among them who didn't accept his entire message. So, the Spirit inspired him to begin chapter 10 in the following manner: **“Also, I Paul myself encourage you through the gentleness and fairness of Christ, who indeed is humble among you in presence, but when absent I am bold with you; also I pray while being present not to be bold with the confidence with which I'm considered to be daring by certain ones who consider us as walking according to the flesh”** (vv. 1-2).

With these critics in mind, Paul leads off by stating his name with two personal pronouns to draw attention to his person, **“I Paul myself”** (αυτος . . . εγω Παυλος). This construction is unique and only similar to a couple others in his thirteen Epistles. Ephesians 3:1 addresses gentile believers in reference to how the game-changing theology of **“mystery”** revelation justifies their entrance into the Body, **“For this reason, I Paul the prisoner** (εγω Παυλος ο δεσμιος) **of Christ Jesus . . .”**

The second occurs in an impassioned appeal to his friend, Philemon, while encouraging him to give up ownership of his slave, Onesimus, so he could minister with Paul: **“Rather, on account of love I encourage, while being such a one** (τοιουτος) **as Paul** (Παυλος) **an elder** (πρεσβυτης), **and also now a prisoner** (δεσμιος) **of Christ Jesus”** (v. 9). Just like these two contexts, the Spirit prompted him to use this type of rare self-aggrandizing grammar *for the purpose of adding gravity* to what he's about to share.

Yet, he immediately tempers this introduction by inserting two attributes associated with (genitive case) our Lord to exemplify the kind of bond he wanted to form with them. The first is **“gentleness”** (πραυτητος) which carries the idea of a *soothing calmness*. Then, **“fairness”** (επιεικειας) emphasizes his wish for *equity* in their relationship. These traits combined with his bold opening are generally considered incompatible, but their appearance together shows how Christians

can communicate with a *high level of confidence* when this approach is balanced with *Spirit-empowered restraint* (Gal. 5:22-23).

For, Paul knew some at Corinth were saying he had acted “**humble**” (ταπεινός), or *lowly* like a wimp, when he was among them. At the same time, he’s charged with being “**daring**” and “**bold**” after leaving town since he no longer had to face them. Ultimately, he’s being framed as one who is *continuously* (present tense) “**walking according to the flesh**” which amounts to *behaving in a devious manner*. Really, they’re saying Paul’s conduct isn’t controlled by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18).

Now he begins to answer these allegations, “**For, while walking in the flesh, we aren’t choosing to be caused to wage war according to the flesh**” (2 Cor. 10:3). Instead of solely defending himself, the Spirit had Paul add co-workers to the conversation. First, he uses the noun “**flesh**” (σάρκι) to refer to their *flesh and blood bodies*. Then, he repeats this noun with a preposition to deny they’re “**walking**” (περιπατούντας) or *behaving “according to”* (κατα) or *in keeping with* their “**flesh**” (σάρκα), that is, waging warfare *in a fleshly or sinful manner* (Rom. 7:5; 8:5-8; Gal. 5:13, 17, 19).

On the contrary, his contingent is *continuously* (present tense) *making concerted choices* (middle voice) “**to be caused**” (passive), *by accessing power from the Spirit*, to “**wage war**” (στρατευομεθα) or *employ a fighting strategy*.² And this, as they grapple with their own “**old man**” plus assist others to do likewise (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5, 9).

Next, the conjunction “**for**” (γαρ) occurs to explain how they handled themselves while living among the Corinthians and after departing. “**For the implements of our warfare aren’t fleshly but powerful in relation to God toward the destruction of strongholds, while continuously destroying reasonings and every high thing which rises up against the knowledge of God, and while continuously taking captive every thought in the direction of obedience associated with Christ, and while continuously holding in a prepared state to avenge every disobedient act, whenever your obedience might be fulfilled**” (2 Cor. 10:4-6).

The English word ‘strategy’ is derived from the term “**warfare**” (στρατειας), and its stem also appears in the verb “**to wage war**” (στρατευομεθα – v. 3, cf. 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3). In this *combat*, Paul and his fellow ministers used “**implements**” (οπλα) or *instruments* to conduct their agenda, the nature of which is disclosed in the next few verses. In this context, most Translations render “**οπλα**” as ‘**weapons**’ but translate it ‘**armor**’ elsewhere in reference to the Christian battle (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 6:11-13 – πας + οπλα).

However, in Romans 6:13, it's generally translated “**instruments**” (οπλα) to describe the *spiritual* “**implements**” used to put on “**righteousness**” as well as *fleshly* “**instruments**” used for “**unrighteousness**” (cf. 2 Cor. 6:7). In this passage, I chose to highlight this noun’s basic meaning to direct attention away from swords and shields to **The Actual Tools Used for Spiritual Conflict**.

Two adjectives which follow describe how Paul and his companions used these tools. He first claims their methods weren’t “**fleshly**” (σαρκικα), or *represent behavior in the flesh*, since this is exactly how his detractors wanted others to perceive them (2 Cor. 10:4). In contrast, he describes the “**instruments**” they use for battle as “**powerful**” (δυνατα), *strong* or *potent* “**in relation to God**”.

This term is central to his defense because it equates the power behind their ministry with *God’s capacity*, which is *expressed by enablement from the Spirit* (Rom. 9:22; 11:23; 12:18; 15:1; 2 Cor. 12:10; 2 Tim. 1:12; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 11:19). Also, its noun form “δυναμις” commonly conveys *the Holy Spirit’s power which believers can draw upon* (Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:4; Eph. 1:19; 3:16, 20; 1 Thess. 1:5). So, in no uncertain terms, Paul asserts the correct evaluation of their conduct; **They’re Governed by Divine Guidance**, not their sin-prone “**flesh**”.

After declaring their actions were godly, Paul clarifies this war is targeted “**toward the destruction of strongholds**” (2 Cor. 10:4). The preposition “**toward**” (προς) means *to proceed in the direction of* the first end goal of our conflict which is “**destruction**” (καθαιρεσιν). This noun is composed of the preposition “κατα”, signifying *a downward motion*, and the noun “αιρεσις”, which means *a taking or seizing* and comes across as our word ‘heresy’. It’s used for ‘sects’ of Judaism like the Pharisees or Sadducees in addition to the new ‘sect’ linked with Paul (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5; 28:22).

This term labels any system of belief considered contrary to a group’s normally accepted teachings and can be defined as *the practice of holding to and promoting errant doctrine* (1 Cor 11:19; 2 Pet. 2:1, cf. Titus 3:10). The text around these references indicates heresies in Corinth included allowing immorality or disunifying actions to persist, and in the Book of Titus the adjective “**heretical**” refers to someone trying to get Christians back under Jewish tenets of the Law (Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11).

Returning to the compound noun “**destruction**” (καθαιρεσιν), it means *a taking down or ruin*. And the other two contexts where this term is used emphasize Paul’s purpose wasn’t to *tear down the Corinthians* but rather *build them up* through “**edification**” (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). Still, these three usages imply any positive renewal requires simultaneous *demolition of ungodly* “**strongholds**”

(οχυρωματων) or *fortresses* since these confine believers to psychological and moral detention, plus obstruct real knowledge and growth available through the gospel.

Consequently, **True Spiritual Progress Only Comes about in Combination with Being Liberated from Heretical Thought**. This concept parallels what Paul teaches elsewhere; putting on qualities of the “**new man**” happens in conjunction with putting off traits of the “**old man**” (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10).

At this point, three participial phrases describe the techniques Paul used to tear down deviant fortifications so godliness could come about. The first is, “**while continuously destroying** (καθαιρουντες) **reasonings and every high thing which rises up against the knowledge of God**” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). This participle is built with the same root words as its noun “**destruction**” (καθαίρεισιν). So, together these terms doubly emphasize the need to “**continuously**” (present tense) and *vigorously* (active voice) *take down or free believers from heretical ideas*.

This participle along with two others (“**taking captive**” – αιχμαλωτιζοντες and “**holding**” – εχοντες, vv. 5-6) are nominative plural in form which stipulate *Paul and his associates are their common subject*. This indicates they weren’t just focusing on the Corinthians’ spiritual battle, but they were paying close attention to their own minds and hearts as well.

In fact, one’s ability to effectively minister to others as a model of Christian behavior first requires extensive experience in being transformed from the control of sin. The proof Paul’s group had done this over many years is observed in their capacity to care for these brethren (2 Cor. 1:3-7, 12; 2:17; 4:1-2, 7-15). This testimony provides the best counter to the accusation they were “**walking according to the flesh**”.

Now to the crux of the matter, Paul states the first obstacle hindering Christians, which also needs *constant* (present tense) annihilation, is “**reasonings**” (λογισμους) or *rationale* (2 Cor. 10:4). This noun is from its familiar root “λογος”, which is generally translated “**word**” though it basically conveys the idea of a *message*. The English words ‘logistics’ and ‘logic’ are derived from it. And the *Logic* or *thought processes* behind every secular philosophy include tenets fundamentally opposed to the gospel Paul preached (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 11:4, 12-15; 12:19-21).

Therefore, whether a point of view contains precepts from the Law of Moses which no longer apply or concepts from human-sourced thinking, God wants every unorthodox belief lining up “**against**” His “**knowledge**” to be severed from

afflicting His children. For, all of us need to be reorientated and reprogrammed by divine truth to escape heresy's alliance with sin and emerge with new conduct (Rom. 6:11-14; 12:1-2, 16-21; 14:1, 13, 22-23).

In the phrase, “continuously destroying . . . every high thing (υψωμα) which rises up against the knowledge of God”, this noun speaks of *elevation*, and its religious relevance implies the sense of *exaltation* (2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 8:39, its other occurrence). This term's effect is expressed by the phrase “which rises up” (επαυρομενον) as these *high ideas* stand “against” (κατα) or *in opposition to* “the knowledge of God”.

This participle combines the preposition “επι”, meaning *upon*, and the verb “αιρω”, *to take* or *seize*, which contains the same root as the noun “αιρεσις” (heresy) just covered. Also, its perfect tense signifies *after acts of uprising start, they maintain an ongoing effect*. Together, these points of grammar indicate *after high things gain a foothold, they continue to enforce their negative impact of opposing God's revelation*.

This use of “υψωμα” is consistent with the evil intent implied by “high places” in the O.T. which Jews were to stay away from since religious practices *exalting false gods* occurred at those locations (Lev. 26:30; Deut. 33:29; 1 Kings 3:2-3; 2 Kings 17:11; Isa. 16:12; Micah 1:3). In contrast, other passages show *God wanted His people to encounter exaltation* in their own “high places” to experience divine victory (Deut. 32:13; Psalm 18:33; Hab. 3:19). This same principle is portrayed in the N.T. by the verb “υψωω” which states Jesus and believers are or should be “exalted” (Acts 2:33; 5:31; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Pet. 5:6; and Phil. 2:9 adds “υπερ”).

The second participial phrase describing how we can destroy “strongholds” is, “while continuously taking captive every thought in the direction of obedience associated with Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Now that Paul has established the thought base believers should adhere to, he addresses how our dual-natured mind ought to react when exposed to clashing data. The next participle directing how we're to face this conflict is “continuously taking captive” (αιχμαλωτιζοντες) or *imprisoning* our “every thought” (Luke 21:24; Rom. 7:23; 2 Tim. 3:6).

The noun “thought” (νοημα) refers to a *concept generated in the mind*. Its plural form describes “schemes” or *attitudes* promoted by Satan to deceive our “old man” as well as blind the “thought processes” (νοηματα) of unbelievers from seeing their need to trust in Christ (2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4; 11:3). However, when we maintain a correct truth base and utilize the Spirit, we can pray within our “new man” and “the peace of God which exceeds every mind (νοου) will guard your

hearts and your thoughts (νοηματα) **in Christ Jesus**” (Eph. 4:22-24; Phil 4:6-9; Col. 3:9-10).

Since the seeds of sin germinate in our mind, believers need to be “continuously (present tense) **taking captive**” or *detaining* “**every**” (παν) *single* “**thought in the direction of obedience**” (υπακοην – 2 Cor. 10:5). This noun is composed of the preposition “υπο”, meaning *under*, and the noun “ακοη” from which we derive the word ‘acoustic’. Combined they portray the idea of *yielding under what is heard*, thus they signify *conformity* or *compliance*.

In every endeavor, Christians should seek “**obedience associated with Christ**” (Χριστου – genitive case) since this path aligns with God’s objective for us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:20-21). Furthermore, “υπακοην” and its verb form occur elsewhere to describe how we acquire “**righteousness**” and “**holiness**” while implementing our Lord’s qualities (Rom. 6:12, 16; Col. 3:20, 22; 1 Pet 1:14).

The third participial phrase explaining how Christians can destroy “**strongholds**” is designed to help avoid lackadaisicalness since this mindset inevitably causes lethargy. To do this, we need to be proactive “**while continuously holding** (εχοντες) **in a prepared state to avenge every disobedient act**” (2 Cor 10:6). This participle means *to have* or *possess*. It speaks of a “**holding**” *pattern* we must maintain and is further defined by the adverbial phrase “**in a prepared state**” (εν ετοιμω). Jointly, these terms mean we’re to *constantly* (present tense) *be ready to act*.

Then, with an infinitive, Paul declares what the *objective* of our vigilance is to be, “**to avenge** (εκδικησαι) **every disobedient act**” (2 Cor 10:6). This term is built from the preposition “εκ”, which means *out*, and the verb “δικαιοω”, meaning *to render justice*. Literally, it depicts *giving out justice* or *sentencing*, a punishment imposed at the end of criminal trials. This word teaches another key lesson, for other contexts containing its forms **Discourage Believers from Avenging Evil Acts Performed Against Us**. The reason given for why we shouldn’t take revenge for spiteful actions of fellow believers or the Lost is *God Reserves The Right to Avenge Every One of Them Himself* (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).

Accordingly, we’re to deal with “**every**” degenerate “**thought**” which enters our mind by *condemning it*, then *locking it away* so it can’t evolve into a “**disobedient act**”. Sin wields only one product – *death* and *destruction* (Rom. 6:12, 23; 1 Cor. 8:11-13; Gal. 6:7-8). So, if we fail to tap into the Spirit’s power to stop it, sin will wreak havoc and consume us. On the one hand, we should keep in mind we don’t have permission to personally retaliate against others for their sins against

us (Rom. 12:14, 17-21; 1 Thess. 5:15). However, in **The Divinely Sanctioned Warfare** described here, it's each believer's duty to utilize the "instruments" provided to eliminate our own temptations for the purpose of growing spiritually and becoming an example (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Phil. 3:10-16).

The noun translated "disobedient act" (παρακοην) is comprised of the preposition "παρά", meaning *beside*, and the noun "ακοη", part of the term "obedience" just covered. So, it conveys *going beside what is heard*, thus *defiance* or *rebellion* against the "knowledge of God", and it's the opposite of "υπακοην" which depicts *compliance* (2 Cor. 10:5-6). Therefore, "every" (πασαν) rebellious act a Body member performs is the direct result of not taking revenge on "every" evil "thought" (παν νοημα) which enters our mind.

This mode of defiance sets in motion the truism of Galatians 6:7, "whatever a man might sow, this he will also reap". Thus, whether we currently reap ungodly character, which never satisfies and grieves the Lord, or if we watch our works burn and suffer loss at the Judgement Seat, either represents a failure to do the job God saved us for (1 Cor. 3:12-18; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 12:1-2).

At this point, Paul closes with a positive note by using a phrase which reaffirms what God wants from His children, "whenever your obedience might be fulfilled" (2 Cor. 10:6). The conjunction "whenever" (οταν) is made up of "οτε", meaning *when in relation to time*, and the particle "αν", which *adds an indefinite sense*. This term is blended with the subjunctive verb "might be fulfilled" (πληρωθη) which also portrays *conditionality*. Both aspects of grammar emphasize if we're to advance toward the life goal of perfection, **Our Maturation is Conditioned Upon Daily Choices of "obedience"** (Phil. 3:12-17).

A more detailed meaning for "πληρωθη" includes the idea of *completion*, and its passive voice alludes to *outside help from the Spirit* which enables a believer to be filled with "obedience" (Rom. 15:14; Eph. 3:19; 5:18; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:9). Then, the term "obedience" (υπακοην) appears a second time in the text **highlighting it as the primary mechanism** which fuels our Christ-like walk (2 Cor. 10:5-6; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; 4:12).

Now, for the first time in Second Corinthians 10:3-6, Paul employs the pronoun "your" (υμων) to pinpoint the Corinthians' obedience. Otherwise, these four verses *consistently include he and his associates' need to obey* (1 Cor. 9:19-27). Every Bible teacher should take heed to the pattern seen here and in other passages. Rather than lecturing with phraseology like, 'You need to think such and such a way' or 'You need to do this'; *Lessons about Obedience Should be Directed to All The Saints, Because We All Have a Continual Need to Grow!*

Therefore, every exhortation should be prefaced by ‘**We . . .**’ since *All of Us* possess a high dose of the “old man”; *All of Us* have a daily need to “abound more” (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:1).

Summarizing this portion – **All Body Members Battle with Sin-Burdened “flesh” But can Have Success by Utilizing “powerful” Counter Measures from the Indwelling Spirit.** Young and advanced alike are soldiers drafted into this “warfare” in which the primary focus is personal transformation. Participation is designed to free us from all perverted philosophy and “high”-mindedness opposed to the “knowledge” of God.

To triumph, we must consciously and actively neutralize sinful “thoughts” that would otherwise result in disobedience. On the positive side, we’re to cultivate godly thoughts toward “obedience” which is a necessary step in the goal of being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:1-4; 4:7; Heb. 12:1-2).

This context is chocked full of practices promoting sanctification. And the most elementary principle I glean is **An Individual’s Need to Deal with our Own Sin Amid the Conflict with Evil Forces.** By taking this course, we can mature to the point of having tangible value to offer others. I believe these truths form the bottom rung on the procedural ladder for how we acquire holiness. Thus, **Ground Zero in Our Plan of Attack Should be To Expel Sinful Thoughts Entering Our Mind so We Can Obey Christ.** No wonder my mentor tactfully sought to direct my attention to these verses.

Additional Features of Our Spiritual ‘War’

Let’s touch on a few more Scriptures which throw light on *Our Spiritual Struggle*. The longest and best-known section describing this conflict is found in the Book of Ephesians. However, comments on it and other pertinent portions will target additional perspectives which weren’t addressed in the passage just covered.

Ephesians 6:10-20

“Finally, you’re to choose to be empowered in the Lord and in the strength of His might. You’re to choose to complete putting on the full armor of God toward the outcome for you to choose to be made able to stand against the methods of the Devil; because our struggle isn’t against flesh and blood but against rulers, against authorities, against world powers associated with this darkness, against spiritual things of wickedness in heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10-12).

Both the verb “**choose to be empowered**” (ενδυναμουσθε) and infinitive “**choose to be made able**” (δυνασθαι) occur in dual voice forms which emphasize *the believer’s responsibility to submit to* or “**choose**” (middle) *outside power* (passive) *from the Holy Spirit* to perform these feats.² These two action words express how we can put on “**the full armor** (πανοπλιαν) **of God**” to be able to “**stand against the methods of the Devil**”. This noun consists of the adjective “**πας**”, meaning *all* or *the whole*, affixed to the noun “**οπλα**”, previously discussed, which means *implements* or *instruments*. In the following verses, Paul itemizes *the full contingent of spiritual tools* God has provided for our impending fight.

Next, this conflict is said to be “**against**” (προς) or *directed toward* the “**methods** (μεθοδεις) **of the Devil**” and his minions – heavenly “**powers associated with this darkness**” who test us with “**spiritual things of wickedness**” (Eph. 6:11-12). This noun is built from the preposition “**μετα**”, which portrays the idea of *going across*, and “**οδος**” meaning *a road* or *way*. It transliterates into our word ‘method’ and colorfully conveys how *the Devil employs any technique* to lead his victims *across a road* to the unwanted destination of “**deception**”. This term’s other occurrence indicates Satan uses *secular teaching* or *instruction to divert believers from the truth* (Eph. 4:14, cf. 2 Cor. 10:4-5; 11:14).

It’s important to bear in mind the basic makeup of most philosophies which breed “**deception**” include a high amount of truth. That’s why *this technique is so effective in misleading people* because it only takes some error, no matter how little, to twist biblical truth into humanistic thinking. Furthermore, the false additions are then labeled and promoted as fact. But, in reality, *these counterfeit additions pervert any truth they’re combined with* and make the overall message fraud. The Devil uses this **Tricky Method** because it dupes the immature who naturally think they’re wise (Rom. 16:17-20; Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Before discussing specific “**implements**” Christians can use to fend off evil forces, it’s vital to grasp what the phrase “**flesh and blood**” implies, for our “**struggle**” (παλη) or *wrestling* isn’t against entities described as such (Eph. 6:12). Do you realize Satan and his cronies don’t occupy bodies, plus they don’t reside on earth? This is Paul’s point. We need to realize our Battle to stop the thoughts which enter our mind from germinating into “**disobedience**” shouldn’t be directed toward those who possess flesh and blood bodies (cf. Gal. 1:16; Heb. 2:14).

Because **Our Spiritual War Isn’t Against People**, that is, family members, neighbors, acquaintances, school officials, governing authorities, media members, or politicians. For, these people don’t have supernatural ability to tempt or persuade us to disobey like the above-mentioned celestial forces do.

Grasping this Principal helps Christians Maintain a Proper Perspective in Our Real Battle.

Sadly, *many are unaware of who these “powers” – OUR TRUE ENEMIES – are and get caught up fighting in the wrong arena.* The problem with opposing moral issues of fellow humans is this tactic isn’t included in our mandate, so *this sort of combat can only be flesh-based.* To be empowered by the Spirit, we need to make sure we’re following God-given orders. And as I read the Church Epistles, commands to alter lifestyle are exclusively directed to those who possess the indwelling Spirit, not the unconverted.¹

In reference to this topic, some cite Colossians 2:13-15 to justify the idea our adversaries are earthly by interpreting it to teach Christ’s crucifixion incapacitated wicked spiritual powers from having any influence over believers. It reads, “**He made you alive with Him (Christ) . . . after having blotted out the contrary handwriting in decrees which was opposed to us . . . after having put away rulers and authorities whom He displayed openly, after having triumphed over them in Him**” (εν αυτω – or “in it”, referring to *the cross*).

However, this passage teaches when Jesus “**triumphed over them**”, these evil “**rulers and authorities**”, just like our “**old man**”, were “**put away**” (απεκδυσαμενοι – Col. 3:9) in the sense they no longer have absolute control over us like before we were saved (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Tit. 3:3). Now, with superior ability from the Spirit, we can resist any enticement they may throw our way (Rom. 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:19-22; 3:10; 4:27; 6:16; 1 Pet. 3:22).

For, just like the “**handwriting**” of the Law was made inactive but still negatively affects believers who try to keep it, Jesus’ work on the cross “**triumphed over**” evil rulers and “**displayed**” them “**openly**” (εδειγματισεν εν παρηρησια – Col. 2:15, cf. Rom. 7:6; Gal. 2:19-20; 6:14; Eph. 2:15). Note, it doesn’t say they were eliminated, but *He exposed them for what they are.* Therefore, these entities no longer have free reign to hold us hostage to sin since the Spirit can enlighten us to spot temptation and provide power to overcome it. And because sin, the flesh, and evil heavenly forces collectively seek control of our “**old man**”, **The Holy Spirit is Truly Our Saving Grace** if we choose to walk in Him (Rom. 8:9-39; 12:1-2, 21; 1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 3:16, 20; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:16; 3:8).

This is why Paul, Peter and John all warn to be leery of Satan and his invisible contingent because *They are Our Real Arch Enemies.* So, again, **The True Battle Ground is Located Inside Each Believer’s Mind** (Rom. 12:2; 13:14; 2 Cor. 10:6; Eph 4:22-24).

When we grasp *Our Mind is The Major Field on Which Spiritual Development Occurs*, this vantage point clears up why we must “**avenge**” our own wicked thoughts and not take revenge against evil done to us (2 Cor. 10:4-6). For, God wants us to undergo beneficial suffering from both believers and unbelievers, forgive those who wrong us, love our enemies, and be subject to earthly leaders (Rom. 8:18-24; 12:14 – 13:10; 1 Cor. 4:12-13; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 1:27-30; 2 Thess. 1:4-9; 2:10; 1 Pet. 4:1-5). **Gains from Enduring Affliction Form a Large Part of The Blueprint to Advance in “obedience”, Triumph Spiritually, and Showcase Jesus’ Attributes to The World** (Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 15:54-58; 2 Cor. 10:5-6; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 1 John 4:4).

After identifying the nature of our actual opponents, Paul itemizes specific tools needed to succeed. These instruments are “**truth**”, “**righteousness**”, “**the gospel of peace**”, “**faith**”, “**salvation**”, “**the Spirit**” which energizes “**the Word of God**”, and “**prayer**” (Eph. 6:14-18). Many commentators end the list of armor with verse 17, but no point of grammar exists to indicate a break, so I believe “**prayer**” was intended to be another valuable tool (v. 18).

One final observation about these implements. All are tied to *initial salvation*, which is complete, yet we become more stable by better grasping what happened at our rebirth. Plus, to solidify our testimony, *we must continue to incorporate these essentials*.

Before moving on, it’s noteworthy Paul implores Body members to activate this tool of “**prayer**” in reference to his own ministry since their petitions could help augment his speech with greater “**boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel**” (Eph. 6:19-20). The reason he desires prayer-assistance is because *This Revelation Contains The Marching Orders Our Recruiter Made Known to Successfully Execute the Battle Plan* just set forth (Eph. 1:9-10; 3:2-10; Col. 1:25-29; 1 Tim. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 2:1-4).

Dealing with Blight-Causing Sin

This heading is inspired by Hebrews 12:1, “**And indeed, therefore, while having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, after having set aside every weight and sin which easily persists, through endurance let us run our continuous prevailing agony**” (αγωνία). Our word “**agony**” is derived from this noun which is regularly used to describe *the fight, struggle* or *conflict* involved with obeying the tenets of and sharing the gospel Paul received (Phil. 1:30; Col. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7 – its other four occurrences). Again, this verse indicates **Our Primary Enemy Lurks Inside of Us**, for we’re exhorted to first “**set aside every weight and sin which easily persists**” within our being.

This passage corresponds with how *The Christian Fight* is described elsewhere since we're instructed to take "captive every thought" unto "obedience" to "Christ" and to renew our "mind" (Rom. 12:2, 21; 13:14; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 10:6). In short, **Our "old man" Must Go Through the Process of Dying**. This doesn't happen naturally but is accomplished "through endurance" (υπομονης – Heb. 12:1). This noun is built from the preposition "υπο", meaning *under*, affixed to the noun "μονη", which signifies *a remaining* or *abiding*. The combined term is often translated 'perseverance' or 'patience'. In some contexts, it clearly portrays the idea of *remaining under through adversity*. And since this concept can be applied to every place it occurs, this is its basic meaning (Rom. 5:3-4; 8:25; 2 Cor. 6:4; Heb. 10:36; James 5:11; Rev. 14:12). Therefore, **The Practice of Dying to Sin Will Always Involve Discomfort and Hardship**.

Romans 6:11 confirms this need by saying, "you're to constantly choose to be made to consider yourselves dead ones (νεκρους) indeed in relation to sin (αμαρτια), also living (ζωντες) in relation to God in Christ Jesus." Then, we're warned not to "let sin (αμαρτια) reign in your mortal (θνητω, or "dying") body unto the outcome to obey its lusts" (v. 12). Finally, verse 16 asks, "Don't you know that to what you present yourselves as slaves resulting in obedience, you are slaves to what you obey, whether of sin (αμαρτιας) resulting in death (θανατον) or obedience resulting in righteousness?"

This context proves "sin" and "death" are inextricably tied. For, we're required to *discard transgression* by the Spirit's power if we want to *gain the righteous attributes* available in our new "life" (ζωη – vv. 22-23; Gal. 6:8-10; 1 Tim. 6:12, 19).

In like fashion, Colossians 3:5 begins a section detailing the process we're expected to take to be transformed into the "glory" we'll fully assume when Christ returns (vv. 1-4). Here, we're ordered to "put to death (νεκρωσατε) the members which are upon the earth". Then, we're told to "put off" several offenses associated with our "old man" which produce ungodly character. Finally, this renunciation of iniquity is described to occur in symphony with being clothed in the qualities of our "new" man, the final leg of putting on "life" (vv. 5-10).

With more parallel subject matter, Philippians 3 recounts Paul's salvation by referencing his own background of boast-worthy Jewish attributes which center around his "flesh" (σαρκι – v. 4). Then, it says "But I consider all things (previously bragged about) to be loss . . . and consider them as dung in order that I might gain Christ" (v. 8). So now, the superior God-sourced "righteousness" he possesses in Jesus replaced his own inadequate "righteousness" based on family lineage and keeping the works of the Law (vv. 4-6, 9, cf. Gal. 2:16).

Continuing, Paul links justification to post-salvation life, “associated with the outcome to know Him, both the power of His resurrection and the commonality associated with His sufferings, choosing to be made conformed with (συμμορφιζομενος) His death (θανατω), if somehow, I might attain unto the resurrection out of the dead (νεκρων – Phil. 3:10-11).²

This participle specifies our persona should be *morphed* (μορφωω) “with” (συν) the qualities of Christ, which is God’s ultimate purpose for his elect (noun forms of this word – Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21). For this transformation to take place, our “mind” must go through renewal by way of “death” so we can be liberated from the “sin” residing in our “flesh” (Rom. 12:1-2; 6:16; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Gal. 5:1, 13; Phil. 3:4, 10). Though we’ll never reach perfection, **Sinlessness Should Be Our Goal** since this is God’s endgame for us, which culminates when our lowly bodies are “conformed to the body of His glory” at the “resurrection” (Phil. 3:11-16, 20-21).

Second Corinthians equally addresses *our need to undergo death to sin*. “We have this treasure (the gospel message) in earthen vessels (weak bodies) in order that the exceeding power might be associated with God and not out of us” (4:7). Next, after detailing how he and others suffer while ministering, Paul says they’re constantly “carrying around the deadness (νεκρωσις) of Jesus in the body in order that the life (ζωη) of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (v. 10). Then, he explains the importance of this statement, “For, while living we’re constantly choosing to be delivered unto death (θανατον) because of Jesus, and in order that the life (ζωη) of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal (θνητη – or “dying”) flesh (σαρκι). So that death (θανατος) is working in us, also life (ζωη) is working in you” (vv. 11-12).

This section precedes the passage expounded earlier (2 Cor. 10:1-6). Both portions imply a contingent in Corinth was aggressively seeking to cause chaos by raising doubts about the legitimacy of Paul’s authority and message. So, among other responses, the Holy Spirit had him record many of the sufferings he endured while preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 4:8-21; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 4:1-2, 16-18; 6:4-13; 7:5). These torments combined with affliction from Paul’s own battle of dying to sin illustrate *the “agony” that accompanies personal growth as well as transmitting the qualities of a changed “life” to others* (1 Cor. 9:16-27; 2 Cor. 11:21-29; 12:7-10; Gal. 6:17; Col. 1:24 – 2:3; 2 Tim. 4:6-7; Heb. 12:1).

This same kind of misery will distress every believer who obeys the command to engage in gospel-warfare. Yet, *Triumph* along with the declaration **‘It’s Worth It!’** will reward those who steadily reinforce themselves with godly traits obtained

from “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new” (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3; 3:12).

For, affliction derived from modifying character in this temporal fight is a key part of **The Divine Plan** to make us “worthy of the kingdom of God” (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 1:27-30; 2 Thess. 1:4-5). So, just like we dispose of carcasses blocking a roadway, every evil intent which enters our sin-vexed mind should be corralled, then put away forever (2 Cor. 10:6).

On a personal note, after gradually recognizing the **Significance of these Victory-Assuring Procedures**, I’m again reminded of my mentor, Ruel, who often and openly admitted his own sinfulness and expressed his need to deal with it. Then he sought to demonstrate these convictions in word and deed. Now, more than ever, I’m thankful he was transparent about his own walk for the purpose of passing on these “deep”, life-altering principles (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18-19; Col. 2:1-3). Four decades later, I’m still profoundly affected by the residual impact of his example (1 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 6:8-10; Titus 3:8).

Section 2: Our Warfare among Non-Believers

While replacing sin with righteousness to *Become Battle-Ready*, the Spirit’s role is critical since He helps us with the training needed to prevail. For, “we didn’t receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit out of God in order that we might know the things having been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 3:16-19). At salvation the Spirit enlightens our heart to trust in Christ; after that He continues to provide capacity to comprehend the revelation which discloses who the Father is, what He’s done, how He’s made us acceptable to Himself, and how we’re to respond to life’s trials. And, just prior to this verse, the foundational truth the Spirit uses to accomplish this feat is stated, “the wisdom of God in a mystery, which has been hidden, which God predestined prior to the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7).

Initially, this “wisdom” (σοφιαν) “has been hidden” (αποκεκρυμμενην). This perfect participle acts as a *verbal adjective* explaining the “wisdom” was *initially hidden, then kept secret* or a “mystery”. The time it was formulated is expressed by the phrase “prior to the ages” (προ των αιωνων – 1 Cor. 2:7). Other contexts confirm this “mystery” wisdom was “hidden from the ages (των αιωνων) in God” and “kept silent in times eternal” (χρονους αιωνιους – Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:9-10).

Combined, these statements show this body of truth was “predestined” *before time began* in Genesis 1:1, then God “kept silent” about it until He chose to

reveal it. Because of His deliberate act, this *Secret Wisdom* can't be found in events documented prior to Christ's crucifixion but is first detected in the writings of "His holy apostles and prophets" during the next generation (Rom. 11:25, 33; 1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 3:5, 9; Col. 1:25-27).

In addition, the "wisdom" contained in this now-revealed "mystery" is described as "the deep things of God" which "the Spirit searches", "teachings of the Spirit", and "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:10, 13, 16). Of all Bible authors, only Paul directly speaks about it saying, "the mystery was made known to me", and he calls this revelation "my gospel" (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 3:10; 9:16-17; Eph. 3:3). Consequently, **Studying His Letters Can Teach Us Everything We Need to Know About Triumphant in Our "good fight"** (1 Cor. 11:1; 15:55-58; Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 2:1-4; 3:16 – 4:8).

Finally, the text says this "mystery" was revealed "for our glory" (δοξαν – 1 Cor. 2:7). This noun is derived from the verb "δοκεω" which means *to hold an opinion* or *think about* something, thus, *to perceive what that thing represents* (Mark 10:42; Luke 10:36; John 5:39; Acts 15:22; 1 Cor. 3:18; 8:2; Gal. 2:6, 9; Phil. 3:4; James 4:5). Its noun portrays the same idea of *perception* or *representation* (Matt. 6:29; Luke 4:6; 12:27; John 12:43; Acts 12:23; 1 Cor. 11:7, 15; 15:41; 2 Cor. 6:8; Phil. 3:19). Most of the time "glory" is used to *represent God's nature*, which is also what believers will be conformed to at Christ's coming (Matt. 16:27; Luke 2:9; John 1:14; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 15:43; Eph. 1:18; Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4).

However, First Corinthians 2:7 speaks to a less familiar feature of "glory" – *our current conformity with the Savior*. When Christians implement the qualities of Jesus, who exemplifies His Father, we bring "glory" to God as others *perceive His traits in us* (Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:15-17; Eph. 3:16). This witness is developed by using the Spirit's power to apply truth found in the "administration of the mystery" or "gospel of the glory (δοξης) of the blessed God, which I (Paul) was entrusted" (Eph. 3:2-3, 9, 16; 6:20; Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:11 – emphasis mine).

Then, as Ephesians 3:13 closes the most detailed portion about how Paul suffered while proclaiming this new truth which describes the gentiles' path into equal relation with God, he says "wherefore, I ask you not to despair in my afflictions on your behalf, which are your glory" (δοξα, 2:11 – 3:12, emphasis mine).

Having touched on how *The Spirit uses Church-Epistle Truth* to train Christians to "glorify" God in our all-out battle against evil forces, **Let's Consider Portions which Standardize the Conduct We're to Have while Deployed in the Arena of Evangelism.**¹

As previously noted, we experience ‘wins’ by obtaining “**new man**” qualities that pertain to motives, attitudes, and actions. Hence, from this point, each mandatory trait Body members are to “**put on**” will be tagged to represent these categories. *Intentions (motives)* will be specified with an ‘**I**’, *Attitudes* by an ‘**A**’, and *Deeds (actions)* with a ‘**D**’. In addition, *General Assets* not fitting these categories will be marked with a ‘**G**’. And since some attributes transcend individual labels, these will be classified by a multiplicity of tags.

Spirit-Approved Message for Evangelism

“And I, after having come to you, brethren, came not according to superiority of word or wisdom while proclaiming the testimony (or, “mystery”) of God to you. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and this one having been crucified.” (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

Paul takes these brethren back to the time he came to Corinth and preached to them as a non-Christian audience. Since verse 2 encapsulates his original message of the crucifixion of “**Jesus Christ**”, let’s start there. The perfect participle “**having been crucified**” (εσταυρωμενον – **G**) signifies Jesus *died on the cross, then what He accomplished continues*. This means, after He suffered the penalty of death for the sin of all men, anyone who places their trust in Christ’s substitutionary payment is exonerated by the Father, becomes His child, and receives the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:15-17; Heb. 9:24-28).

This is why Paul “**determined**” (εκρινα – **I, D**) or *judged* to limit his message to conversion, for without the indwelling Spirit the Lost can’t respond to other parts of the gospel which consist of altering behavior (Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 4:17-19; Titus 3:3). So, when partaking in The Battle for Men’s Souls, **He Focused Entirely on Redemption** (Acts 13:15-43; 17:22-34).

In verse 1, this proclamation is called “**the testimony**” (μαρτηριον – **G**) or *witness “of God*”. However, many manuscripts contain the word “**mystery**” (μυστηριον – **G**) instead of “**testimony**”. This is a common type of textual difference where two similar words which overlap in meaning appear in varying Greek texts. Since there’s solid evidence for both renderings, I’ll combine their meaning. This suggests Paul’s “**testimony**” to the Lost was comprised of the “**mystery**” message we’re dispatched to preach: “**Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

When this message is compared with Jewish preaching of that day, the significance of what Paul states here hits home. For, the gospel of the Kingdom

included believing in “**Christ**” (their *Messiah*) but also being “**baptized for the forgiveness of sin**” (a Jewish purification) and keeping the Law of Moses (Lev. 8:5-6; Num. 8:5-7; Matt. 5:17-20; 19:16-22; Mark 1:2-8; 16:15-18; John 1:31; 3:16-26; Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; Heb. 6:2; 9:10).

This is why Paul restricted his salvation message to the cross and several times contrasts *this “mystery” testimony of simple faith in Christ’s work* with keeping “**the works of the law**” (Rom. 3:19-23, 27-28; 4:2; Gal. 2:16-21). A study of his Letters show they contain the current patterns for both salvation and how Christians are sanctified; however, he only shared the former with the unsaved (1 Cor. 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:12-16; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Also, he didn’t approach them with “**superiority of word or wisdom**”, but “**in much weakness and in fear and trembling**” so potential converts wouldn’t be impressed by his intelligent sounding speech or philosophy but instead perceive him as mortal and humble (1 Cor. 2:1, 3). Then he adds, “**and my word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in display of the Spirit and power in order that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God**” (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

So, rather than flaunting his talents, Paul used methods which permitted the “**power** (δυναμει – **G**) **of God**” to perform through the “**Spirit**”, since He’s the one who prompts people to believe in Christ (Acts 13:48; 1 Cor. 1:18-24; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:28-29). We too should avoid evangelizing with flesh-based techniques, for they tend to usurp the Spirit’s role of convincing the “**chosen**” to trust the “**wisdom**” of the gospel.

Spirit-Inspired Allegiance

“**Suffer evil with as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Also, while choosing to be energized to wage warfare, no one chooses to be entangled in the practices of this life in order that he might please the one having enlisted him.**” (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

In *Our Ongoing Crusade of Evangelism*, each member in the Body is a “**soldier of Christ Jesus**”. To be “**good**” at this job, Paul *commands* (imperative) Timothy to “**suffer evil with**” (συγκακοπαθησον – **I, D**). This verb is made up of the preposition “**συν**”, meaning *together with*; the noun “**κακος**”, portraying *something bad*; and the verb “**πασχω**”, which indicates *being affected by some act*, here in a negative sense. Applying this triad of meaning, Timothy shouldn’t “**be ashamed of**” but *welcome hardship connected with* proclaiming the “**gospel**” he received from Paul (2 Tim. 1:8, 11-18; 2:9, 15; 4:2-5). *Being willing to accept affliction* as we share should be a top priority since our message details how God’s grace saves

sinners as well as the way believers attain the holiness needed for effective evangelism and service to the Lord (1:9-14; 2:9-10, 14-26; 3:10-17).

Persecution should be anticipated by everyone who chooses “to live godly in Christ Jesus” while they embrace the gospel “entrusted” to Paul. For, it’s the “pattern of sound words” we’re to “commit to faithful men who’ll be qualified to also teach others” (2 Tim. 1:12-13; 2:2; 3:12). And, **While Carrying Out These Marching Orders**, we need to realize “God didn’t give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind” (1:7, cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Titus 3:3-7).

Therefore, while waging this battle, we mustn’t choose “to be entangled in the practices of *this life*”, for ties like these will hinder our ability to “please” the one who “enlisted” us. The verb “chooses to be entangled” (εμπλεκεται – I, D) unites the preposition “εν”, meaning *in*, with the verb “πλεκω”, which means *to twist* or *braid*, and we derive the word ‘implicate’ from this compound term. So, just like Christians should evade circumstances that could implicate us as accessories in crime, we’re to *constantly* (present tense) *make choices* (middle voice) to be strong enough *not to be* (passive), *deceived by Satan or controlled by our flesh*, caught up in “practices” coupled with this “life”.² This type of discipline needs to dominate our routine “in order that” we might “please” Christ, our Recruiter.

The principles conveyed in this passage are a microcosm of what Paul teaches throughout his Letters: **Our Main Focus should be to Serve the Savior in a Way that Represents Him**. Initially, God “bought” us with the “price” of His precious Son’s blood; now He expects us to modify our behavior to display His virtues to the world (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:55-58; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; Titus 2:11-14).

In this pursuit, *He Demands Full Allegiance* while we navigate inevitable struggles linked with developing Christ’s qualities and sharing the gospel (1 Cor. 2:13-16; Col. 1:24 – 2:3; 3:1-2). Lack of commitment opens us up to chase “the practices of *this life*” and be corrupted by *idolatry* – serving self, persons, or earthly images and philosophies in the place of God (1 Cor. 10:14-33; Eph. 5:5). These choices impede our growth, grieve the Holy Spirit and, essentially, **Cause Us to Lose Ground in Our Real Battle**.

Spirit-Endorsed Partnerships

“You don’t choose to be made contrarily yoked with unbelievers; for what participation *exists* in relation to righteousness and lawlessness, or what commonality *exists* in relation to light toward darkness; also, what harmony *exists* with Christ toward Belial, or what part *exists* in relation to a believer with an

unbeliever; also, what agreement *exists* in relation to the temple of God with idols? For, we're the temple of the living God according as God said that 'I'll dwell and walk among them, and I'll be their God and they'll be my people.'" (2 Cor. 6:14-16)

While *Managing Our Conflict*, we're warned to be careful who we collaborate with. This caution is voiced by the participle **"contrarily yoked"** (ετεροζυγουντες – I, D) which consists of the noun "ετερος", portraying *something different*, affixed to the verb "ζυγωω", which means *to yoke a pair* (2 Cor. 6:14).³

This compound word occurs just once in the N.T., but its parts portray the intended meaning. First, "ετερος" refers to *something of another kind* such as in the term 'heterosexual' – being attracted to *the opposite sex* (Matt. 11:3; Luke 9:29; Acts 17:7; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6). Then, in high school Health class I learned the word 'zygote' (ζυγωω) is used for a fertilized egg in humans, that is, a yoked sperm and egg. Also, the crossbeam which connects a team of working animals is a 'yoke'. So, this term specifies **Christians are to Actively** (active voice) **and Routinely** (present tense) **Make Sure "not" To Team Up or Partner With "unbelievers"**.

To stress this point, a *command form* (imperative) of the verb of being is used with a negative, **"you don't choose to be made"** (μη γινεσθε – I, A, D). This verb is in dual voice form which signifies believers are *to make volitional choices* (middle) to insure we're **"not" caused to become** (passive) **"contrarily yoked with unbelievers"** (2 Cor. 6:14).²

For, we're inherently different than them since they aren't spiritually alive, so *improper affiliation can bring about detrimental consequences*. This verse is most often applied to marriage which is entirely valid. Nevertheless, considering the five couplet comparisons which follow, it's just as critical to *apply this practice to every area of life* since we can be influenced by behaviors of the unsaved or be perceived as agreeing with their ungodly acts. Our Father's always concerned about how His children, **"the temple of the living God"**, will guard His reputation and represent His **"glory"** (1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor. 6:16).

Accordingly, it's vital we concede our **"righteousness"** (δικαιοσυνη – D, G) is incompatible with the **"lawlessness"** that exemplifies unbelievers (Rom. 3:21-26; 6:12-16; 2 Cor. 6:14). Also, our **"light"** is opposite to their **"darkness"**; and **"Christ"**, whom we are **"in"** and to whom we should conform, has nothing in common with **"Belial"** (or **Satan**; 1 Cor 12:12-13; 2 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 1:4; 4:17-24). Furthermore, because the Spirit lives in us as the **"temple of God"**, we're to have no **"part"** or **"agreement"** with the Lost since they represent **"idols"** (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:15-20;

12:2; 2 Cor. 6:15-16). After mulling over these realities, **we should recognize it's necessary to maintain a separate lifestyle** so we can protect our social status and not be affected by their human-sourced beliefs or conduct.

Before examining the O.T. verses cited to support this practice, note the adverb used to introduce them, **“according as”** (καθως). This word combines the preposition “κατα”, which means *according to* or *in line with*, and the adverb “ως”, meaning *like* or *similar to*. Much like our *Simile* in English literature, this compound term specifies *principles in these quotes correspond to* the just-stated distinctions between us and **“unbelievers”**. Therefore, “καθως” is used *solely for the purpose of comparison*. Other terms such as “πληρωω” or “τελειωω” are employed in the Gospels to identify *exact matches* and, thus, indicate *Fulfillment of Prophecy* (Matt. 1:22-23; 2:15-18; 4:14-16; John 19:24, 28-30).

Although Paul cites dozens of O.T. passages, he never introduces them with these verbs. Instead, he regularly uses “καθως” and similar terms to *designate Body truths that align with O.T. teaching* (Rom. 1:17; 2:24; 4:17; 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 8:15; 9:9; 12:1-7; Gal. 1:11-12). Why is this? Because we're living in an unprophesied time when the Church is administered by **“mystery”** revelation which wasn't made known in the past (Dan. 9:24-27; Eph. 1:9-10). Consequently, **Though Paul's Letters Contain Many Truths which Parallel with O.T. Concepts, Not One of Them is Presented as a Fulfillment of Scripture.**

So, how do the quotes in this portion clarify these relationships? First, **“I'll dwell and walk among them, and I'll be their God and they'll be my people”** relates to our present condition since He's also our **“God”** and members of the Body are His **“people”** (Lev. 26:12; 2 Cor. 6:16). However, the fact God **“will walk and dwell among them”** won't happen until the future Kingdom when Israel obeys the Law of Moses as shown by its adjoining context (Lev. 26:13-46). In contrast, today we experience the presence of God through the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 3:17-18). And contrary to popular opinion, we're not defined by public associations or country of origin and residence, but **God's true community consists of all believers around the globe** (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 3:20).

“Wherefore, you come out of their midst, and you be made separate, says the Lord, and you don't choose to touch the unclean thing, and I'll receive you, and I'll be a Father for you, and you'll be sons and daughters for Me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:17-18 [Isa. 52:11; Jer. 31:9])

Like saints of the past, we're not to **“contrarily yoke”** with unbelievers but rather **“be made separate”** (αφορισθητε – I, D). This verb is built from the preposition “απο”, meaning *from*, prefixed to the verb “οριζω”, which means *to divide* and

comes across as our word ‘horizon’. Together, they signify *creating a boundary away from* the issues stated in verses 14-16, since connections like these can damage our testimony or “holiness” (αγιωσύνην – I, A, D; 2 Cor. 7:1). However, unlike Israel, we’re never taught to physically separate from pagans or their possessions but, instead, to *keep just enough social distance* so our convictions and routine won’t be adversely affected (Num. 25:1-18; Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18; 1 Sam. 15:2-23; Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:1-30).

For, we’re fundamentally different than past converts since *we possess the indwelling Spirit*, and they didn’t. With our Divine Protector, we can thrive in environments wrought with evil “because He (the Spirit) **who’s in you is greater than he** (the Devil) **who’s in the world**” (1 John 4:4-6, cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11; Phil. 2:14-16; Col. 4:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:11-12; 4:1-4). So, we don’t need to “**come out of their midst**” or maintain distance from “**the unclean thing**”, as Lot and others had to, since God unconditionally sees us as “**sons and daughters**” and “**holy and blameless**” in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:21; 6:17; Eph. 1:4; 2 Pet. 2:6-9). Now, we’re to “**cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh and spirit, while fully perfecting holiness in the fear of God**” so we can *Reflect His Pristine Integrity* (2 Cor. 7:1, cf. 3:17-18; Tit. 3:8).

Summing up, we’re ordered not to align with the unsaved in ways which can compromise our testimony. This same point is frequently repeated as the Church Epistles teach our lives shouldn’t be influenced by the world around us (Rom. 1:18-32; 12:1-2; Eph. 4:14, 17-24; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; 1 Pet. 1:13-16).¹ Moreover, nowhere are Christians taught to achieve spiritual goals by seeking to alter the norms of a secular community. On the contrary, God exclusively intended the lessons of sanctification to apply to His children who are personally and corporately responsible to perform Spirit-assisted acts that please Him (Rom. 8:7-8; Col. 1:9-11; Heb. 11:6).

Otherwise, anytime believers collaborate with a cause attached to this world’s system, we not only run the risk of having our own philosophy corrupted but also position ourselves to be judged by their ethics, morals, and values. The only way to retain the level of “holiness” God demands in **Our Spiritual Struggle** is to keep separate from humanly contrived pursuits. So, **If We Want to be Influencers for God, We Should become Gospel Activists, for This Cause is 100% Righteous, Trustworthy and Effective** since it’s anchored in Christ’s work on the cross and empowered by His Spirit (2 Cor. 1:18-22; 5:14-21; 1 Tim. 1:15-17). Let me repeat, the cross is the only message God authorizes for broadcast to “**unbelievers**” (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:1-2; Col. 4:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:15). Efforts expended elsewhere will draw us into **The Wrong Arena of Social Conflict** and **Stifle our Spiritual Growth**.

Spirit-Empowered Routine

“Also, we encourage you, brethren, to abound more (in love, see vv. 9-10a) and to choose to be caused to endeavor to act quietly and to practice your own things and to choose to be caused to work with your own hands just as we commanded you in order that you might walk with good outward form toward those outside and might have need of nothing.” (1 Thess. 4:10b-12)

As we please our Recruiter by sharing salvation with the world, this passage zeroes in on the regimen we should develop. After Paul urges to increasingly practice love, he says “to choose to be caused to endeavor” (φιλοτιμεισθαι – I, D) to develop three life habits. Before examining these, this infinitive is built from the noun “φίλος”, portraying the idea of *love*, and the verb “τιμᾶω”, which basically means *to value*. It signifies we’re to concentrate on *the outcome* of establishing *love-based values*. Also, it’s dual voice construct stipulates we’re to *continuously* (present tense) “choose” (middle) “to be caused” (passive), *by the Spirit’s power*, to *strive* or *be ambitious* to include the following behavior.²

Our first aim should be “to act quietly” (ἡσυχάζειν – I, D), another infinitive referencing *an outcome* or *end goal* (1 Thess. 4:11). Since this word occurs in the active voice, it calls for a *deliberate* pursuit of *restful* or *behind-the-scenes conduct* instead of overt activity which tends to divert attention from Christ’s redemptive work. So, the initial quality God wants us to implement is a *constant* (present tense) determination to operate with quiet methods so *cordiality* and *lack of pressure* will augment our verbal message (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

The second life-adjustment we’re to make is “to practice (πρασσειν – I, D) *your own things*” (1 Thess. 4:11). This is also a present active infinitive, so we’re to have the *end goal* of *continuously* and *deliberately* focusing on our “own things”. Simply put, we’re to *be engaged in our own business* rather than butting into the work or activity of those outside the Church. When we supplement a quiet existence by concentrating on our own affairs, the unsaved can observe us leading “a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and respectability” (1 Tim. 2:2).

These traits lower the probability of distracting prospects from the gospel since they *subtly bypass stumbling blocks* which can arise from social controversy. For, many community concerns are fraught with hazards which can damage people’s estimation of us and, in turn, harm their view of our message which promises eternal life in Jesus.

Lastly, we’re “to choose to be caused to work (εργαζεσθαι – I, D) *with your own hands*” just like Paul and his fellow-ministers “commanded” (Acts 20:33-35; 1

Thess. 4:11). This third infinitive targets another *end goal* and its dual voice form directs us “**to choose**” (middle) *to be empowered* (passive) to hold a job *by tapping into enablement from the Spirit*.² The principle all Christians should *regularly* (present tense) work with our own hands and be self-sufficient is a prominent standard modeled by Paul throughout his ministry (Acts 18:1-4; 20:33-35; 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:6-18; Phil. 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:6-9; 2 Thess. 3:6-13; 1 Tim. 6:6).

The *purpose* we’re to live in the fashion just detailed is “**in order that you might walk**” (περιπατητε – I, D), or *live life*, “**with good outward form** (ευσχημονως – I, A, D) **toward those outside**” (1 Thess. 4:12). This term is comprised of “εϋ”, meaning *well* or *right*, affixed to “σχημα”, which refers to *visible appearance* and comes across as the word ‘scheme’. As an adverb, it describes *the way we’re to conduct ourselves* “**toward those outside**” (εξω) – unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:12-13; Col. 4:5). For, God wants us *to be seen functioning with a decent witness* characterized by an unobtrusive, self-supporting, and quiet presence.

One more reason to assume these practices is “**in order that**” we “**might have need** (χρειαν – I, D) **of nothing**” (1 Thess. 4:12). This portion details how God expects believers to pursue a pattern of behavior which won’t provoke the unsaved to question our motives or think we’re trying to take advantage of them. Instead, to the extent we accomplish these tasks, they’ll be impressed by our ethics, self-reliance, and hard work. **These are the Best Practices We, as Foreign Agents, can Utilize to Operate Under Cover Yet Hide in Plain Sight** (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Phil. 1:27-30; 3:20; Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Pet. 2:11-12).

All in all, God wants non-believers to see **Success Stories Who Consistently Exhibit the Transformative Power of the Gospel** through above-reproach behavior which like a magnet attracts interest to the salvation message. Furthermore, Christians should recognize the obligation to obey this ideology is totally on us, not on the world. Therefore, **Effective Execution of This Code of Conduct is A Vital Part of Fighting the Good Fight**, it profits the world as well as the Church, and it pleases the Father (Gal. 6:10; Titus 3:8).

Spirit-Enabled Personality Traits

“**You’re to do all things apart from complaints and disputes in order that you might make yourselves become faultless and pure, children of God without blame in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, in which you choose to be made to shine as lights in the world while holding fast to the word of life . . .**” (Phil. 2:14-16a)

In *Our Preparation* to be controlled by the Spirit, we're told to “**choose to be caused to produce your own salvation**” (Phil. 2:12; 1:27 – 2:13; Titus 2:11-12).² Then, verse 14 begins to divulge what this entails, “**do all things apart from complaints and disputes**”. The noun “**complaints**” (γογγυσμων – I, A, D) occurs 4 times and is well translated *murmurings* and *grumbings* (John 7:12; Acts 6:1; 1 Pet. 4:9).

It's paired with “**disputes**” (διαλογισμων – I, A, D) which transliterates to our word ‘dialogs’ and can describe positive or negative exchanges. Since we're to do all things “**apart from**” (χωρις) or *separated from* “**disputes**”, this noun depicts *arguments* or *quarrels*. And circumventing these nasty traits isn't optional, for the present imperative verb “**you're to do**” (ποιειτε – I, D) *requires* us to *constantly* suppress a critical attitude from worming its way into our persona since this mindset incites contention and debate (2 Tim. 2:14-18, 24-26).

The purpose for this favorable disposition is that “**you might make yourself become**” (γενησθε – I, D) a certain way (Phil. 2:15). This middle voice verb suggests *the subject is to act upon itself*, so I rendered it to “**make**” *ourselves* “**faultless**” (αμεμπτοι – I, A, D), “**pure**” (ακεραιοι – I, A, D), and “**without blame**” (αμωμα – I, A, D).

All three of these nouns are prefixed by the letter *alpha* (α) which negates their meaning. The first precedes “μεμπτος”, signifying *a blame* or *fault*, so the pair conveys being “**faultless**” (Luke 1:6; 1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 8:7). The second alpha is linked with “κεραστος”, meaning *mixed*, so they portray being *unmixed with evil*, thus “**pure**” (Matt. 10:16; Rom. 16:19). The third occurs with “μωμος”, meaning *a blame* or *blemish*, so they portray *being unblemished* before God like Jesus is (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19).

Finally, Paul caps off the need to *eliminate flesh-sourced* “**complaints and disputes**” *from our repertoire* by using the subjunctive mode which *requires a response* before the verb action of “γενησθε” can happen (Phil. 2:15). This mode, along with the middle voice, stresses “**children of God**” must *choose* to draw on the Spirit's power *to fulfill the condition* of achieving a non-confrontive, sweet demeanor so we can “**shine as lights in the world**” (Phil. 2:15).

Then, rather than showing disgust for societal customs by countering with our “**old man**”, we'll be able to live in a manner “**worthy of respect**” so if prospects are offended by anything, it'll be the message of the cross we're mandated to preach (1 Cor. 2:2; 8:9; 9:19-23; 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:8).

The Father wants these qualities to enhance our witness “**in the midst of a crooked** (σκολιας) **and perverted generation**” (Phil. 2:15). Just as this adjective is used for the physical deformity of ‘scoliosis’ in our spine, here it describes the *twisted* or *corrupt morals* of fallen men (Luke 3:5; Acts 2:40; 1 Pet. 2:18, its other uses).

This verse also labels the world “**perverted**” (διεστραμμενης) by using a participle built from the preposition “δια”, which portrays the idea of *through*, and the verb “στρεφω”, meaning *to turn*. In perfect tense form it describes human culture as *having thoroughly turned away, then remaining isolated from God-ordained truth*.

So, it shouldn’t surprise us when we’re the ones stereotyped as weird, “**strange**”, to be “**pitied**”, or even mentally deranged. Yet, God instructs to us to demonstrate “**Christian**” character amid these false evaluations which, we should recognize, are egged on by our Adversary (Acts 26:24-29; 1 Cor. 15:19; 1 Pet. 4:1-19; 5:8-11).

Thus, we shouldn’t be offended when “**the world**” **Identifies Us as The Warped Ones** then labels us as ‘intolerant’, ‘bigots’, ‘racists’, ‘homophobes’, ‘misogynists’ and ‘sexist’. For, profiles like these represent part of the suffering God called us for, and He expects us to answer these attacks with gracious and beneficial responses from a changed heart (Rom. 12:14-21; Phil. 1:29-30; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

He definitely doesn’t want us to “**repay evil in the place of evil or slander in the place of slander**” but to disregard all fleshly desire to retaliate so we can “**shine as lights in the world**” (Rom. 12:17; 1 Cor. 9:19-27; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9).

The verb “**you choose to be made to shine**” (φαινεσθε – **I, A, D**) is a dual voice form which signifies to *make the choice* (middle) *to be enabled by an outside energy* (passive), *the Holy Spirit*, “**to shine**”.² Also, this present imperative form indicates we’re *perpetually ordered* to *illumine God’s virtues*, which we can do “**while holding fast**” (επεχοντες – **I, D**) or *paying attention to* “**the word of life**” (**G**, Acts 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:16). This approach **Enables our Gospel-Light to Provide a Divine Roadmap** for the Lost so they can get right with God. It also helps the saved avoid sin which edifies the Body (1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:6-16; Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-14; 3:3-7).

In conclusion, rather than allowing an attitude of victimhood to penetrate then dominate us, Christians should accept: **The Devil’s Children Will Never Stop Rejecting God’s Moral Order** because he and they are dead set against it (Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:2; 4:14). Therefore, instead of publicly

dissenting with the world's philosophies or view of us, God wishes His elect to fortify ourselves by making conscious decisions not to live like them plus meet every challenge posed by inevitable persecution sent our way. Remember, **Our Provisions for Victory in The Arena of Evangelism Consist of Jesus' Work on The Cross Shared by Spirit-Rehabilitated Converts.**

Spirit-Approved Submission to Government

“You remind them to choose to be made subordinate to rulers *and* authorities; to obey; to be prepared ones toward every good work; also, to blaspheme no one; to be non-fighters *and* fair, while choosing to be caused to display gentleness toward all men.” (Titus 3:1-2)

Not only can we access the Spirit's strength to render allegiance to God and represent Christ with a good testimony, but we can apply this same divine power to yield to secular authority. Since Paul *commands* (imperative) Titus to “**remind**” the saved Cretans how to appropriately relate with governing officials, it's clear they hadn't faithfully implemented this conduct, though they already knew it.

I translated the infinitive “**to choose to be made subordinate**” (υποτασσεσθαι – I, A, D) since it's in a dual voice form indicating *we're to act upon ourselves* or “**choose**” (middle) “**to be made**” (passive), or *caused by the outside force of the Holy Spirit, to practice submission* (Gal. 5:16-18).² This same kind of *surrender* is required in passages defining the relationship wives should have with their husbands, believers are to pursue with one another and Church leaders, younger men are to have toward elders, and Christian slaves are to practice toward their masters (1 Cor. 16:15-18; Eph. 5:21-24; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Beyond *yielding*, Timothy's to remind these Body members “**to obey**” (πειθαρχειν – I, A, D; Titus 3:1). This infinitive is from the verbs “πειθω”, meaning *to persuade*, and “αρχω”, which means *to rule*, and it possesses the same stem as the noun “**rulers**” (αρχαις) – *those who occupy first positions*. Apparently, the command to submit wasn't enough for these hard-headed Cretans. So, the Spirit added a second unique term for the purpose of emphasis, if “**possible**”, to *persuade them to comply with community leaders* and promote “**peace**”, while Executing God's Orders to Evangelize (Rom. 12:18; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 1:10-13). The concepts of subordination and obedience aren't hard to grasp, but they're very difficult to practice if we yield to the obstinate nature of our flesh which pushes non-compliance with secular rule of law.

Proceeding, Paul lists **Other Mandatory Forfeiture of Rights**. Specifically, Timothy's to remind these believers **"to be prepared ones (ετοιμους – I, D) toward every good work"** (Titus 3:1). This noun implies *the readiness we need to act or react* in a godly manner to chaotic situations, some of which may result from the dictates of governors.

Figuring out how we can respond to benefit those around us is *Pivotal to God's Purpose for the Church*. So, instead of repaying **"evil in the place of evil"** we're told to **"choose to be caused to think beforehand (προνοουμενοι – I, A, D; or make prior plans) for good in the presence of all men"** and to **"choose to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and not make a forethought (προνοιαν – I, A, D) in association with the flesh which results in lusts"** (Rom. 12:17; 13:14, see this term's meaning in Acts 24:2; 1 Tim. 5:8).

Next, Timothy is to jog their memory **"to blaspheme (βλασφημειν – I, A, D) no one"** (Titus 3:2). This term is derived from the verb "βλαστανω" which means *to bud or burst forth*, and it transliterates into our word 'blast'. It's affixed to "φημι", which portrays the idea of *speaking*, so together these terms graphically describe *blasting with speech*, thus, *defamation or slander*.

When believers realize we're the only ones on earth capable of desiring and practicing the will of God since we can draw supernatural power from the Spirit, this theology should help us deduce all unbelievers, including leaders, operate on a lower moral level in this Satan-dominated system (Rom. 8:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Yet, somehow, many still justify *speaking ill of* and *slandering* the person, decisions, or performance of governing officials, and sometimes on a frequent basis. This character flaw demonstrates immaturity, for it's counterproductive to the qualities we're supposed to **"put on"**. Remember, we've already seen Scripture state if unbelievers are offended by anything, it should be from the offense of the cross and not **"lust"** driven responses prefaced on a humanistic perception of reality (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; Gal. 6:12-17).

Also, believers are to recall how we're trained **"to be non-fighters"** (αμαχους – I, A, D, Titus 3:2). This compound word is from the letter *alpha* (α), which negates any term it's affixed to, and the noun "μαχη", denoting a *battle or fight*. This word is closely associated with "μαχαира" which refers to a *large knife or short sword*, weapons of that era (Rom. 13:4). So, "αμαχους" represents the quality of being *disinclined to fight* or *pacifistic* in reference to earthly authority, an idea repeated numerous times.⁴

Thus, Elder/Overseers aren't to be **“strikers but fair and peaceable”** (αμαχον – NASV; 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). Then, Paul tells Timothy, **“It's necessary for a slave of God to choose** (middle voice) **not to be caused** (passive) **to fight** (μαχεσθαι – *by temptation from the Devil*) **but to be gentle toward all”**.² Plus, he's **“not to fight about words”** (λογος + μαχειν) since flesh-based conflict results in **“the destruction of those who hear”** – *speakers and listeners alike* (2 Tim. 2:14 & 24, cf. John 6:52; Acts 7:26; James 4:2).

In place of harboring bitterness against bureaucrats, we're to recollect the need for the godly qualities of being **“fair”** (επιεικεις – **I, A, D**), or *equitable*, **“toward all men”** while **“choosing to be caused to display gentleness”** (πραυτητα – **I, A, D**), or *a soothing calmness* (Titus 3:2).² This phrase recaps God's wish for us to respect the office of and maintain a good testimony toward leaders as well as **“all men”** (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Furthermore, what's recorded next should provoke sympathy for the unsaved since it describes our own pre-redemptive condition: **“At one time we were foolish, unpersuaded, choosing to be caused to be deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, haters, and hating one another”** (Titus 3:3).² The memory of our depraved history should help jolt us to do our duty by developing a good witness so we can more effectively share reconciliation with the Lost that they too might be saved.

First Peter 2:13-17

This passage contains additional direction that helps us properly relate with secular agencies. We're told, **“You be subject to every human creation because of the Lord”** (1 Pet. 2:13). The noun **“creation”** (κτισει) is the same word used to describe God's formation of the universe, and 16 of its 19 occurrences refer to that event (Mark 10:6; 16:15; Rom. 1:20, 25). Twice it refers to the Body of Christ, God's **“new creation”** (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Only here it refers to something man creates which, in this instance, is *earthly governmental systems*. Keep in mind, God created humanity in His image which is why we have **‘creative’** ability (Gen. 1:26). Also, I rendered the adjective **“human”** (ανθρωπινη) since this term *describes the nature of this “creation”*; it's *a fabrication of mankind*.

In this verse, “κτισει” is translated **‘authority instituted’** in the NIV, **‘institution’** in the ESV and NASV, then **‘ordinance’** in the KJV, all of which *obscure how this “creation” was initiated*. The actual lesson is, **The “creation” of “every”**

Governmental System can Be Traced to “human” Brains, Not an Act of God. The footnote cites Versions which properly render this term.⁵

Why is this important? Because many believe the U.S. Constitution is inspired similar to God-breathed Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). This conviction is based on **Illegitimately Applying God’s Covenant Principles Made with Israel to America.**

Furthermore, no nation on its own has or will ever be able to obey God enough for Him to stand with them. And with regard to Israel, **Only after He Autonomously Initiates The New Covenant and Gives His Chosen Remnant the Holy Spirit** will they be capable of fully obeying His statutes (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:36-40; Ezek. 36:26-28; Rom. 9:27-29; 11:25-29).

Nevertheless, today many teach God will ally Himself with any nation that follows Him. This assumption is made from texts like Second Chronicles 7:13b-14, “. . . if I send a pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Anyone reading the context around this quote can see these promises are for the Nation of Israel, not any other country.

Centuries ago, the idea **God Sanctions Humanly Created Entities** provided justification for the Crusades. Subsequently, Lutheran factions fought to free themselves from Roman Catholic control; later England formed their own Church; then the Thirteen Colonies fought to escape what they described as Britain’s ‘**Tyranny**’. These are only a few past events which **Represent Christian Failure**. For, at those times *believers willingly compromised complete allegiance to God, aligned with unbelievers in rebellion, violated orders not to fight, and defied several other commands just deliberated.*

Don’t get me wrong, I have no problem with countries defending themselves from regimes which would destroy them, for this is a stark reality in our *Sin-Infested World*. What I want brethren to ponder is no divine mandate exists which endorses the Body of Christ to participate in revolt against secular governments, align with unbelievers in insubordinate behavior, or claim that ‘**God is with us**’ in an earthly conflict.

As we’ve seen, **God only supports His people – Body members world-wide – in activities tied to obeying His orders.** Check it out for yourself. I’m confident you won’t find One Directive Linked with Practicing Our Faith which Authorizes Us to Contribute to the defense/acquisition of territory or establishment and/or maintenance of freedom, wealth, or moral law.

So, how does God want His people to be engaged? Peter tells us, “**Because, the will of God exists likewise, while doing good** (which includes submitting to authority) **to silence the ignorance of foolish men**” (1 Pet. 2:15, cf. Titus 2:5, 8, 10). Thus, **God desires Our Prime Objective to be A Passive Demonstration of His Virtues**, not “**repaying evil in the place of evil**” (Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:23; 3:9). As we venture forward on this path, He wants us to perform “**as free ones and not holding the freedom as a covering for evil, but as slaves of God**” (1 Pet. 2:16).

The Church Epistles repeatedly teach we possess “**freedom**” (ελευθερια – **I, A, D**) or *liberty* from sin; however, this doctrine never refers to gaining freedom from terrestrial bondage (Rom. 8:21; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13, cf. Eph. 6:5-9; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-19).¹ In the O.T., God delivered His Covenant People from servitude countless times, but there’s absolutely no reason to expect this kind of divine intervention in the affairs of any nation today. In reference to this thought, the present State of Israel will be considered later.

Last of all, Peter commands, “**You value all men, love the brotherhood, choose to be caused to fear God, value the king**” (1 Pet. 2:17).² To grasp their full meaning, both imperative verbs should be translated “**value**” (τιμησατε – **I, A, D**) or *attribute proper worth to*. In particular, we’re ordered to “**value the king**” since every authority under them is sent “**for vengeance of those doing evil, also the praise of those doing good**” (v. 14).

Think about it; **Anarchy is The Alternative to Organized Government**. This term equates to the chaos which existed before the *Wild West* was regulated and today in non-policed areas during *Natural Disasters*. In almost every instance, lack of law and order to stem criminal behavior *Hinders Us from Carrying Out God’s Commission* in a peaceful environment (1 Tim. 2:1-7). Therefore, we should be thankful for the stabilizing “**value**” rulers provide in every locale we minister.

Romans 13:1-7

Last, but certainly not least, this context is most often cited to define *A Christian’s Relation to Secular Authority*. And for good reason, because it delves deepest into describing humanity’s God-given “**right**” to govern itself which includes determining what’s “**good**” and “**evil**” for their people (vv. 1-4). Verse 1 begins, “**Let every soul choose to be caused to subordinate itself to superior authorities, for no authority exists except by God, also those being exist as having been and continuing to be arranged by God.**”

This command (imperative) to **“be . . . subordinate”** (υποτασσεσθω – **I, A, D**) is the same verb appearing in the other portions just covered. Here, its subject is **“every soul”** (πασα ψυχη). The noun **“soul”** is the part of our person which entails our physical makeup and encompasses every aspect of our being except the *moral dimension* which is our **“spirit”** (Phil. 2:20 [ισο + ψυχον]; 1 Thess. 2:8; 5:23).

So, we're to submit to and **“be at peace”** with governing authorities on an emotional, attitudinal, and action-wise plane, unless we're being forced to violate specific conduct stipulated by God which, in our country, is practically unheard of (Rom. 12:18-21; Titus 3:1-2). I translated this verb **“choose to be caused to subordinate itself”** since its dual voice specifies we're held accountable *to act upon ourselves* or **“choose”** (middle) **“to be caused”** (passive), *by power from the Spirit*, to perform this *act of surrender*.²

Now, why do these officials have the divinely established **“authority”** (εξουσια), *power* or *right* to govern? Because *each* (singular in number) **“authority exists . . . by God”** (Rom. 12:1). Then, the text converts to a plural participle **“those being”**, *all those who function* in human institutions, currently (present tense) **“exist”** (εισιν) or *persist* **“as having been and continuing to be arranged** (τεταγμεναι – **G**) **by God”** (1 Pet. 2:13). This perfect participle indicates God *lined up* or *ordered* this right, then officials *retain this ordinance* of wielding justice.

Based on available revelation, I believe this came about after the Flood and will continue until the Lord returns (Gen. 9:5-6). For, when the Cataclysm ended, God changed from Personally administering humanity, such as handling justice for murder, to *granting men the authority to govern themselves* (Gen. 4:8-15, 23-24).

“So that the one who chooses to be caused to oppose (middle/passive) **authority** (εξουσια) **has and continues to stand against** (perfect tense) **the arrangement of God; also, those having stood against** (or, “opposed”) **will cause themselves to receive** (middle voice) **judgment in relation to themselves”** (Rom. 13:2).² Because of these realities, Christians are told if we **“desire not to fear authority** (εξουσιαν), **do good and you'll have praise from the same”** (v. 3). **“Also, if you might do evil, fear; for it** (an authority) **doesn't carry the sword in vain, for it's a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to one practicing evil”** (v. 4, cf. Prov. 8:15-16).

Then, Paul concludes **“it's necessary”** for us **“to choose to be caused to submit** (middle/passive) **not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience”** (Rom. 13:5).² Unbelievers primarily respond to **“fear”** and **“wrath”** for reasons anyone can understand. Christians also live in the flesh and can relate to fear of

prosecution, but *we're to function on a higher plane* which is the clue behind the phrase **“because of conscience”** (συνειδησις – I, A, D).

Our word **“conscience”** is derived from Latin and means *knowledge (science) with*, which matches the connotation of the Greek words forming this noun. Therefore, **The Compiled Knowledge of Truth** God wants us to believe and practice constitutes the **“things above”** or **“high calling”** which should regulate our lives (Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 3:1-2). Simply put, we're to **Develop a Spirit-Engrained Conviction to Obey the Directives Set Forth in the Church Epistles.**¹

Also key, Each Superior is said to be an **“avenger for wrath”** (Rom. 13:5). This statement stipulates **God extends the same “right” to Existing Rulers for taking vengeance on “evil”** that He will one day employ to pour out His own **“wrath”** against sin (Rom. 12:17-19; Heb. 10:26-31; 1 Pet. 2:14).

In contrast to this delegation of power, God only permits Body members to **“avenge”** sin-instigating thoughts which enter our mind, but not deviant acts performed against us (Rom. 12:19; 2 Cor. 10:6). Why? Because a massive part of our testimony is to step aside and trust Him to allocate **“vengeance”** and **“wrath”** for the **“evil”** of others. **This Model of Justice** seems more reasonable when assessed by how it complements the qualities we need to discreetly engage in evangelism and Christian growth, for both flourish when we squelch tensions by overcoming **“evil with good”** (Rom. 12:17 – 13:14).

Finally, **“because of this, you're to pay (imperative) taxes”** and, among other **“obligations”** (οφειλας – I, A, D) or *duties*, to **“render (imperative) . . . value (τιμην – I, A, D) to the one deserving value”** (Rom. 13:6-7). Just like the command to **“value the king”** in First Peter 2:17, **Christians should appreciate the worth of All Superiors** whom God has certified, then express this sentiment by subsidizing their efforts with decreed taxes.

In conclusion, submitting to local or national leaders doesn't mean we must agree with or trust everything they decide, otherwise *Why Would We Need Multiple Commands to Submit?* Yet, This Order for Pacifism is wholly compatible with **Our “calling” which Mandates Us to Evangelize and Edify but Doesn't Authorize Activism to Alter Social Norms** (Eph. 4:1).

These **Methods of Real Spiritual Warfare** represent the purpose for which God chose and gifted us. So, when we divert from These Objectives, we'll find ourselves fighting flesh-based battles to accomplish temporal victories. These achievements won't yield eternal value or reap lasting rewards since They Aren't Consistent with The Lord's Decrees for Us. Instead, *Secular Skirmishes*

Sidetrack Christians from doing our God-given job and, thus, **Hinder the Spiritual Advancement of Each Participant** (Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Tim. 2:3-4, 24-26).

Spirit-Certified Prayer for Leaders

“Therefore, first of all I encourage *you* to choose to be caused to make petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings on behalf of all men, on behalf of kings and all those being in a superior position for the purpose that we might lead a calm and quiet life in all godliness and respectability.” (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

While exhorting us “to choose (middle voice) to be caused” (passive), *by the Spirit*, to pray for “all men”, Paul singles out secular leaders since they assert greater influence over how a culture perceives our Christian faith.² The reason to petition our Father “on” their “behalf” is “for the purpose that we might lead a calm and quiet life”. The first adjective describing how God wants us to live is “calm” (ηρεμων – I, A, D), which depicts a *restful existence*, and the second means to be “quiet” (ησυχιον – I, A, D) or *inconspicuous* (1 Tim. 2:2). Basically, we’re asked to *portray a demeanor that blends into our environment* which allows us to covertly share the gospel message (vv. 3-6).

Now, the text indicates these mild qualities are attained by functioning “in all godliness and respectability” (1 Tim. 2:2). The noun “godliness” (ευσεβεια – I, A, D) literally means *good fear* and represents a lifestyle *reverent to God*. Then, the noun “respectability” (σεμνοτητι – I, A, D) speaks of *dignity*. In other places, these terms depict *Qualifying Behavior for Elders and Deacons plus Conduct All Body Members* are advised to gain (1 Tim. 3:4, 8, 16; 4:7-8; 6:2-5).

Paul’s plea for prayer is followed by the statement, “This is good and acceptable in the presence of God, our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:3). Demonstrative pronouns like “this” (τουτο) represent *concepts within their context*. Here, the idea articulated is **praying for “all men”, including governing authorities, is God’s method for constructing a stable atmosphere where we can have an Impactful Christian Witness**. For, He “desires all men to be saved and come unto a full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

Contrary to how this passage is often interpreted, it doesn’t reinforce the view believers should pray for rulers to institute or preserve biblical values in secular law or culture. Instead, it promotes behind-the-scenes prayer that *God May Silently Sway Leaders’ Decisions to Allow the Free Practice of Christianity*, so society can hear the hope of the gospel.

And these petitions will have the most impact if our actions aren't perceived as threatening, but *worthy of respect*. Consequently, this portion's primary lesson is: **Prayer is God's Sanctioned Means to Gain the Toleration needed to Optimize Our Causes of Evangelism and Edification.** So, **Spirit-Aided Prayer should Define the Kind of Social Activism we Participate in** to execute our commission in a non-confrontational manner.

Again, this appeal is frequently linked to pushing social and/or political activism, though that approach has no support in the Church Epistles.¹ We've already visited numerous passages instructing believers to develop the exemplary testimony of a Spirit-enabled, service oriented, gracious, noncomplaining, peaceable, and self-reliant routine.

On the other hand, when we criticize, malign, or actively protest the dictates of leaders, these actions create stumbling blocks and close doors. Hence, **That Behavior Is Counterproductive to Our Written Orders for Spiritual Warfare,** and **These Unauthorized Tactics** upset the Father's Spirit (1 Cor. 9:19-27; 10:29-33; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Eph. 4:29-32).

Summary of Section 2

Take note of Paul's encounters with local and regional authorities, including Ceasar. Nowhere do these exchanges suggest he smeared municipal leaders, criticized their decisions, or portrayed himself as a victim (Acts 24:10-27; 25:6-12; 26:2-32). Even when in custody, he improvised to evangelize everyone around him and spoke optimistically about entering glory, though he faced impending execution (2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18). Often, he gave up personal rights so he could preach; **"while being free from all, I enslaved myself to all . . . I've become all things to all men in order that by all means I might save some"** (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Also, while in prison, he took opportunity to minister to believers and penned at least five Letters (Acts 16:19-34; Eph. 3:1-13; Phil. 1:12-20; 4:22 – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Second Timothy, and perhaps Hebrews). At all times, he concentrated on **Being a Godly Example for Fellow Body Members** (1 Cor. 4:14-16; 10:29 – 11:1; Phil. 3:12-17; Titus 3:8).

Furthermore, Paul understood the psyche of unbelievers. He knew they wouldn't submit to many biblical teachings because they're firmly trapped under the control of Satan's agenda and lack the Spirit's illumination (Rom. 8:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). So, he never tried to use moral shame or legislation to pressure them into changing their lifestyle. And, when recounting our pre-salvation past, he affirms **God Doesn't Expect the Lost to Live by His**

Standards, “when you were slaves of sin, you were existing as free ones in relation to righteousness” (Rom. 6:20).

Since the unsaved are “**slaves of sin**”, he tailored his message to them around Christ’s work on the cross (Acts 17:16-32; 1 Cor. 2:1-5). Then, if anyone was offended, it wouldn’t be from Paul insulting their decency but from the “**foolishness**” God formulated in the gospel to humble man and glorify Himself (1 Cor. 2:21-31; 10:32-33).

So, why do many still propagate the idea Christians are responsible to secure temporal ‘**rights**’ when *Paul established the pattern of relinquishing “rights”* (εξουσιας – **I, A, D**, 1 Cor. 6:12; 8:9; 9:4-6, 12, 18 – emphasis mine)? And, why do Bible teachers proliferate the pursuit of ‘**social freedoms**’ when the Church Epistles define our “**freedom**” (ελευθερια – **I, A, D**) as **The Capability to be Liberated from the Power of Sin**, which includes giving up comforts to benefit others (Rom. 6:6-22; 1 Cor. 9:1, 19; 10:29; Gal. 5:1, 13; Phil. 2:1-5)?¹

Furthermore, why do I hear the term ‘**Tyranny**’ used to describe society’s resolve to be governed by the desired morals and policies of the majority (Rom. 1:18-32; Eph. 4:17-19)? Given that the passages covered so far Confirm Our Orders aren’t for combat in that arena, **We should Anticipate Suffering** when we seek to obey His Word, and we shouldn’t be surprised when *The World Regards Our Beliefs as Crazy* (Acts 26:24ff; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:1-4).

My response to these questions is: **For many Decades, A Guilt Trip has been Imposed on Christians to Shame Us into Becoming Socially and Politically Active**. It’s important to recognize *the basis for this viewpoint is entirely from mandates in the O.T.*, specifically those given to God’s Covenant Nation, Israel. So, when these promises are taken literally, they’re both true and will be fulfilled; but there’s no legitimate reason to currently apply them to the Church or any other country (Rom. 11:25-29).

Yet, in the 1980s, Jerry Falwell campaigned for his concept of righteous activism and lobbied us to join what he called ‘**The Moral Majority**’. Also, the theologian and philosopher, Francis Schaefer, urged Christians to engage in social change. His book titled *How Should We Then Live* became a film series, and both strongly encourage social activism. This title is a direct quote from **Ezekiel 33:10** and, once more, the surrounding context shows it relates to the Jewish People. Since that time, countless individuals and groups have continued to guilt believers into pursuing social reform, but **All Their Support is Drawn from O.T. Teaching Which Isn’t in Effect Today** (Rom. 6:14; Col. 2:20-22; 1 Tim. 1:3-11).

Check this out for yourself! Let alone all the Epistles, you won't find directives promoting social activism in the Gospel Accounts or Book of Acts either. The single N.T. exception is Revelation which records future events when Christ returns to reclaim earth. So, what should Christians do since local and national activism contradicts principles in the Church Epistles?¹ Just follow God's current directions for belief and obedience.

As deceptive teaching goes, I believe propaganda pushing Body members to address societal concerns is really spearheaded by the Devil. For, **His Number One Goal is to Entice Believers to Get Involved in Things Contrary to God's Will**. And this, by promoting "every wind of teaching" and "profane empty voices and oppositions of falsely named knowledge". These sources attract our flesh but will clash with the "deposit" (παραθηκην – I, D, G) of truth standardized for us to follow in Paul's writings (Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:4; 1 Tim. 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 1:8-14; 1 Pet. 5:8-10).

Finally, I'm aware some of my deductions go against the flow of current religious teaching. But I've decided I can best contribute to the Body by teaching the Word as I see it and applying my conclusions to issues of our generation. In fact, the methods of *Reorientation and Transformation* have always been God's remedy to preserve His founding principles (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Eph. 4:12 – 5:21). So, **The Church is Always in Need of Fresh Reformation**.

Scripture Contradicts Political Platforms

To better illustrate the principles highlighted in this section, I'm going to apply Scripture to deliberate four issues debated by the Republican and Democrat Parties. My goal is to show each Party espouses some biblical truth but also secular thought. When I hear fellow Body members say, '**My candidate and/or Party holds to biblical values**', I can't help thinking about the wrong ideals they adhere to as well. As discussed earlier, when the method of deception is employed, falsehood is always attached to truth. The Devil regularly uses this tactic, and it's also why believers are advised not to ally with the Lost. This is a chief reason why I consider **Overt Involvement to Change Society should be categorized as An Activity Outside of Our Lane**.

Issue 1 – The Bible Teaches Economic Socialism

No statement in the Church Epistles supports *Capitalism*, for this economic system promotes the ownership of property or conduct of business should primarily be free from governmental oversight.¹ But, we've seen God has given leaders the right to reign and maintain order as they see fit, then levy "taxes" for

that purpose (Rom. 13:1-7). Also, when Paul urges believers to financially fund the poor “**saints**” in Judea, he espouses the principle of “**equality**”, though this appeal for fiscal socialism was never intended for secular communities (2 Cor. 8:4, 12-15, cf. Rom. 12:13; Eph. 4:28). This charge was explicitly directed to Christians to help our spiritual family members.

To boot, God endorsed this same ideology with Israel when He founded the Year of Jubilee. Under this decree, every 50 years each Jew was returned to the original portion of land allotted to his tribe when they first entered the Promise Land. This practice was instituted so they wouldn’t take economic advantage and “**wrong one another**”, but instead “**fear your God**” (Lev. 25:8-17). Also, in monetary dealings, they were told not to “**charge interest to your countrymen**” (or “**brother**”), which safeguarded equity in their communities (Deut. 23:19-20). However, no restrictions were placed on their trade with infidels.

Not long ago, during the Pandemic of Covid 19, this biblical principle could’ve been better applied. For, I observed Christian owned businesses defy edicts from officials to remain closed. Many opened in protest, and in-so-doing violated God’s command to be “**subordinate**” (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Imagine *The News Headline about Our Testimony* had the financially capable among us backed these businesses until they could lawfully open. This fiscal rescue would’ve complied with God’s order to submit plus delivered a positive witness for the gospel.

Instead, **Resistance Broadcasted that Profit Was More Important than Compliance** and, thus, *The Lord’s Name was Sullied*. Next time we’re faced with similar circumstances, let’s focus on **Showcasing our Faith and Not, by fleshly default, Manufacture Stumbling Blocks** in reference to the message God wants us to make good-looking to the world.

Issue 2 – Social Justice Isn’t Part of Our Battle Plan

Passages in the Church Epistles speaking to Christians who are slaves or masters don’t encourage or discourage slavery – *They’re Neutral on The Subject* (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22 – 4:1; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:18). These lessons were included to address socio-economic realities which existed then, and God foresaw would persist throughout history.

When these teachings are examined, it’s evident they convict believing slaves and masters to watch their behavior since all the saved will account for our conduct when we face the Lord. Also, slaves are asked not to worry about their status, but if they’re “**able to become free, rather to make use of this**” (1 Cor. 7:21-24). Of course, every phase of liberation would have to reflect godly

character which forbids protests, fighting, slander, or not compensating their owners for their worth (Philemon 18-19).

In reference to the slavery long practiced in the United States, I despise professed Christians who used Scripture to classify dark skinned people as worth only 3/5ths the value of light-skinned people. Some even applied Noah's curse on Ham's offspring to Blacks, though no proof for this opinion exists (Gen. 9-10). In time, the Civil Rights Movement also incorrectly cited the Bible and used the phrase "**Let my people go**" to support their cause, though this plea specifically refers to the liberation of Israel from Egypt (Exod. 5:1).

I have no problem with humanity grappling over issues related to social justice, for cultures often need to address pertinent problems. I just don't see any reason to invoke God in these matters since there's no Church-Epistle support for that slant.¹ Instead, we're to live peaceful quiet lives, demonstrate qualities which complement our message, and know any suffering we undergo is temporary since we're on earth a short time (Phil. 2:12-16; 1 Thess. 4:9-12; 1 Tim. 2:1-6).

Moreover, I watch **Christians often Get Sidetracked from Our Mission** such as when the Black Lives Matter Movement emerged. I must admit, as a so-called white man, my first reaction to the mantra '**Silence is Violence**' was negative because I felt it attacked my life's core purpose of serving Christ. But, after evaluating the issues in light of the Word and the views of acquaintances, some of whom are Black, I could understand these citizens' sense of inequity in addition to their high level of frustration since full resolution for the Country's discrimination hadn't happened, though it's been over 150 years.

So, I concluded **The Body of Christ Should Be The Posterchild for Equity and Inclusion** because not only Blacks, but millions of Hispanic, Arab, Asian, Native American, and Island people make up our family. Therefore, we should insist no one in the Church harbors racist tendencies or affiliates with groups like the KKK, for this should make us sick.

Also, rather than challenging philosophies which contain some unbiblical aspects, we should concentrate on verbalizing positive comebacks such as, '**Jesus loves all people, and I'm involved in sharing the eternal life offered by Him**'. Keep in mind, the next new hot-button issue has already formed below the horizon and will soon captivate society's attention.

Now to hijack a notion, **We Should Advocate Godly Segregation** – God's children should sustain a healthy separation from secular American culture. For, Christians need to recognize who we are. We're "**foreigners**" and our key

“citizenship exists in the heavens” (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11). When we joined the Body, each of us lost all earthly identity since “there isn’t Jew or Greek, there isn’t slave or free, there isn’t male and female, for you’re all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). We’re “ambassadors” dispatched in a Battle for Souls, and each of us is a “soldier” *On a Heavenly Mission* so we shouldn’t get entangled in **World-Related Conflict** (2 Cor. 5:14-21; 6:14-18; Eph. 6:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Listen carefully to Influencers, including Politicians, who quote the Bible. You’ll find they either cite principles from Scripture intended for Israel or they pick out excerpts from the Church Epistles which apply to the Body of Christ. In simple terms, the Word was never intended to administer countries or non-Christians in **This Age of Satanic Rule**.

Issue 3 – Scripture Declares Life Begins at Conception

Romans 9 records, “Rebekka, while having a conception (κοιτην; literally “a bed”) from one, Issac our father”, produced their twins (vv. 10-13, cf. Heb. 13:4). This portion suggests from the time Rebekka conceived in their “bed”, she didn’t produce ‘fetuses’ but the persons of Jacob and Esau. The same idea is portrayed by Genesis 4:1, “Eve . . . conceived and gave birth to Cain.” In Hebrew, the verbs “conceived” and “gave birth to” have *the same direct object* which is “Cain”. So, Eve didn’t conceive one thing which turned into Cain, the “manchild” himself was initiated in her womb. Since the Bible teaches **Life Begins at Conception, Any Purposeful Termination of Pregnancy is Murder**.

Though this is the stance Christians should take, inevitably human reasoning enters the mix; **‘What about in cases of rape or incest?’ A Better Question is, ‘What solution would God endorse for believers?’** When we espouse abortion, this view immediately lowers the value of life for all decision makers and can affect anyone else who knows about it. Also, the residual guilt of condoning murder will haunt all who contribute the rest of their life.

Now, rape and incest are heinous crimes, and there’s nothing wrong with aiding in the prosecution of offenders. Although, we shouldn’t stop there but also do all we can to support the underaged child or woman who was violated. First, they should be assured the sexual assault wasn’t their fault. Second, we should encourage them to carry the child to term; and if they choose not to keep the baby, we should help find good adoptive parents. Third, if financial help related to this physical and emotional trauma is appropriate, believers should step up.

Another question often raised is, **‘What if the mother’s life is in danger?’** Perhaps circumstances exist where a physiological health problem would deem abortion acceptable to God; I don’t know. But, in such cases, I won’t take part

just like the *Multitude of Christian Medical Professionals* who hold similar convictions.

Having said this, I know a couple who had difficulty carrying pregnancies to term. During another, doctors told the wife she would die unless the child was aborted. They prayed about their dilemma, but knowing the probability still opted to trust the Lord and keep the baby. As it turned out, her body kicked in, so she and the child were fine. Then, she successfully gave birth to more kids. Personally, I'm very proud of their courageous and provocative witness.

Like the earlier Covid 19 illustration, instead of channeling funds into social or political concerns, how about believers contribute resources to matters we know fully agree with interests approved by God. Shouldn't we *Put our Money Where Our Mouth Is*? By applying assets to problems within our ranks, we can make a compelling argument for the gospel as the world observes a **Wonderful, Loving Christian Community which Supports Itself** (Phil. 2:12-21; Titus 2:1-14).

In summary, I'm not encouraging believers to get politically involved but to focus on taking care of terminating life and other problems in our own house. I'm persuaded the Church's current lack of moral conviction is directly proportional to the time and effort lost while we endeavor to change society rather than ensure our people are taught how to attain and maintain godliness.

Sometimes I hear the defense, **'Well, at least we're doing something'**. Yes, but *Is This 'something' Counterproductive to God-Given Mandates?* As I see it, one huge problem is uniting with Mormons, Catholics, and other heretical Groups on issues like abortion. For, these legitimizing alliances give them more clout to mislead people by doctrines like salvation by works and other destructive beliefs.

Therefore, I think it's unwise for Christians to engage in debates centering on secular narratives such as **'Women's Rights'**, **'Human Rights'**, or **'The Rights of the Child'**. Instead, we should frame our teaching to Body members around **What's Right Before our Virtuous Creator and Lord**.

Likewise, with reference to evangelism, we should search for ways to share without generating stumbling blocks. In chats about abortion, I've begun to ask, **'Aren't you glad your mother didn't abort you?'** Then, if this successfully diverts our conversation from that topic, which it normally does, I'm able to segue into how human beings are special creations of God, why mankind is separated from Him, and how Jesus is the answer.

Issue 4 – Today, Unbelieving Jews aren't God's People

Paul states, “Indeed, according to the gospel, *they're enemies* (εχθροί) *because of you*” (Rom. 11:28). The “you” in this verse refers to *the Church* which is comprised of saved Jews and gentiles. For, Christ eliminated the “enmity” (εχθρα) or *hatred* between these two groups as well as their *hostility* with God (Rom. 3:28-30; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:21-23). Although the Greek text lacks a verb of being, a present tense one is understood so I added the contraction “*they're*”.⁶

So, this verse teaches **Israelis Who Currently Don't Believe in Christ Should be Designated as God's Adversaries**, not His people (Eph. 2:1-3). This assessment is tempered by the fact, “according to election, *they're beloved because of the fathers*”. This means God will eventually keep everything He promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other patriarchs since the “*gifts and calling*” for His elect “*are irrevocable*” (Rom. 11:28-29).

Even though many Jews lived in parts of the Promised Land in Paul's day, neither he nor any other N.T. writer (excluding Revelation) indicates they had any divine right to occupy that Land prior to Christ's return. Instead, he describes “*the Jews*” in “*Judea*” as “*having killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and harshly persecuting us, and not pleasing God, and contrary to all men, while hindering us from speaking to the gentiles that they may be saved, unto the outcome to fill up their sins all the time; also the wrath has attained upon them unto the end*” (1 Thess. 2:14-16). This portion clarifies, at that time unbelieving Jews were piling up “*sins*” which in “*the end*” will receive the judgment of God's “*wrath*”.

Back in Romans, the “*mystery*” revelation, termed Paul's “*gospel*”, is said to “*establish*” Christians. As such, **it also explains the present nature of God's dealings with the Jewish Nation** (11:25; 16:25-26). Since “*a hardening has partially happened to Israel*”, this phrase and its context indicate God had suspended His relationship with them (11:25, 30-32, cf. 9:14-18). This occurred after the “*transgression*” of rejecting their Christ (or *Messiah*, John 1:41; 4:25, cf. Mark 3:28-29) which resulted in “*salvation*” going “*to the gentiles unto the outcome to provoke them (the Jews) to jealousy*” (παραζηλωσαι – Rom. 11:11, 25, cf. Acts 28:24-28).

And since saving more gentiles synchronized with God's purpose of postponing His New Covenant with Israel and starting the unprophesied Church program, Paul concentrated on his “*ministry*” of being “*an apostle to the gentiles . . . if somehow I might provoke my flesh (Jews) to jealousy (παραζηλωσω) and save some out of them*” (Rom. 10:19; 11:13-14). So, why did God change from treating Israel as His special people? To show His entire creation that even

though Jews had a past advantage, today all who enter a relationship with Him do so solely by His “mercy” (Rom. 11:30-32, cf. 3:1-2; 9:14-18).

This scenario will continue “until the full number of gentiles may come in”, that is, be saved and join the Body (Rom. 11:25). We’re not quite there in the annals of history, but **When This Divine Maneuver Concludes**, “in this manner all Israel will be saved”, “the Savior will come out of Zion” (O.T. name for Jerusalem), “their sins” will be forgiven, and their “acceptance” of Christ will result in “life out of the dead” (vv. 15, 26-27).

Since this divine strategy hasn’t transpired yet, how should Christians view the present State of Israel? For, data in the Church Epistles shows God’s people are comprised of believing Jews and gentiles, plus the Church has nothing to do with human borders or countries. Also, unlike times in the past, N.T. revelation provides no validation that God establishes or guides earthly Nations today.

By now, you’re probably tracking my rationale. For, I don’t believe it’s justified to think the current Country of Israel exists by divine intervention. I absolutely believe God will send Christ back to rule as promised. However, when this Occupation is Combat-Secured, not one person will be lost (Exod. 14:14; Deut. 20:4; Judges 7:7 – 8:32; Rev. 19:11 – 20:3). Second, when this “restoration of all things” occurs, God “will send Jesus Christ” accompanied by supernatural events (Acts 3:17-26). Third, this will happen quickly, such as “plagues” destroying “Babylon” in “one day” (Rev. 18:2, 8). Forth, the land mass Israel inherits will consist of far more real estate than they presently occupy (Gen. 15:18-21; Ezek. 47:13-23). And fifth, when this takes place, **God will make sure All Creation Knows He Alone Did It** (Ezek. 37:21-28; 38:23; 39:25-29).

Accordingly, the stance God used secular nations to establish the Jewish State in accordance with prophecy in 1948 contradicts biblical truth plus is premised on an allegorical approach to passages such as Matthew 24:32-35.¹³ Also, I believe current calls to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” direct Christians down rabbit holes which have nothing to do with the agenda God gave the Church (Psalm 122:6).

Again, don’t get me wrong, I’m not opposed to pacts or alliances between Nations of this world. For, at **This Time of Satanic Domination**, it’s incumbent on countries to be allied if they’re to survive and thrive. What I’m saying is there’s no evidence these affiliations have anything to do with God’s guidance or the Church, so believers should guard our testimony and not get too deeply involved. Though, there’s no scriptural issue with believers partaking in vocations like policing or the military (Acts 16:25-34; Phil. 1:12-14; 4:22).

On the other hand, I have a gigantic problem with anyone who **Invokes the Name of God in Secular Functions**, including the claim He endorses any military operation today. Remember, our allegiance is to God alone (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Therefore, our philosophy shouldn't be controlled by the O.T. concept of '**God and Country**', but the Church Epistle teachings of '**Edification and Evangelism**'. So, we should access power from the Spirit in everything we do which can enable us to respond to any circumstance in a godly manner. This is the key aspect of our testimony that differentiates us from unbelievers.

In closing, under the U.S. Constitution all should have equal rights. However, the functional reality for Christians is we can't use all the language or methods employed by unbelievers since **Our Conduct is Limited by a Heavenly Constitution Documented in The Church Epistles**.¹ We aren't supposed to "**repay evil in the place of evil**" or complain, fight, slander, deceive or lie, and the Word constantly preps us to expect affliction and suffering as we serve the Lord (Rom. 12:17).

Somehow, many still think it's okay to compromise and travel a flesh-surfaced road to alleviate hurt and make life relationally, psychologically, or financially easier. Instead, we should abandon backing '**the lesser of two evils**' and **Follow True Hero-Examples**. Mine are Jesus, Paul, Peter, and a few faithful brethren I've known. Who are yours?

With far less knowledge, back in the latter 1980s I dropped out of politics and stopped voting. At present, the same convictions outlined in this section are held by some Brethren and most Amish groups. Ironically, the Jehovah's Witness Cult holds this same position. The common thread is *A Recognition God's People Have No Current Ties To, thus, Shouldn't Function in Unison With Systems of This World* (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 4:17-24; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 1 Pet. 4:1-4).

So, beyond challenging believers to rethink the Word's counsel on this issue, I encourage Bible teachers who agree with my conclusions to stop being silent for fear of losing respect or numbers and begin vocalizing what they know to edify the Body. For, **Only God's Truth Equips Us Soldiers to Prepare for and Win in This Scary Earth-Bound Conflict**.

Section 3: Edification Creates Combat Readiness

Having covered many aspects of the Word that guide our all-out war of evangelism, this segment contemplates passages which typify the attributes needed for **Our Spiritual Battle related to Personal Growth and Edifying the Church**.¹ First, '**The Fruits of the Spirit**' will be examined since they embody

several traits essential for our maturation process. Then, First Thessalonians 2:1-12 will be explored to identify motives, attitudes, and actions vital for our Christian life and ministry. Finally, Romans 12:9-21 presents additional qualities required to integrate God’s love into our daily routine. Overall, these expositions target the Spirit-produced character we must obtain to effectively serve the Lord.

Keep in mind, the qualities, acts, and beliefs God wants us to “put on” will continue to be labeled with an ‘I’ to represent *Intent*s, an ‘A’ to signify *Attitudes*, and a ‘D’ for *Deeds*. Also, a ‘G’ will designate the *General character traits* we’re supposed to acquire.

Galatians 5:22-23

“Also, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, inner strength; there is no law against such things.”

The most common quality for Our Impending Battle which represents the essence of God and we can implement by the Spirit’s power is “love” (αγαπη – I, A, D, Eph. 4:24; 6:11). The simplest definition I’ve heard for “love” is *doing what is best for someone else* or, even, *ourselves*. Second on this list is the trait of “joy” (χαρα – A) which shows itself through *delight* or *pleasure* in our speech and actions. Next, we experience “peace” (ειρηνη – I, A, D) when the Spirit weaves *harmony* and *tranquility* into our hearts. For, unless *serenity* occupies our “inner man” and relationships, we’ll be stressed in Our Personal Struggle (Rom. 12:17-21; Eph. 3:16-20; Phil. 4:6-9).

Complementing these is “patience” (μακροθυμια – A, D). This term is often translated ‘longsuffering’ because it’s from “μακρος”, which speaks of *length*, and “θυμος” meaning *the life center of our being*. Forms of the second noun are used in reference to sacrifices, so this two-part word really refers to *being slow to pour out our inner self*. Then, regarding emotion, to *curtail anger* at others or, again, ourselves (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 10:5, 12). The fifth fruit we can be clothed with is “kindness” (χρηστοτης – A, D) which holds the idea of *providing what is needed*, therefore, being *beneficial* or *helpful*.

Next, “goodness” (αγαθωσυνη – I, D) represents *a broad spectrum of decent acts*. Excellent synonyms would be *all kinds of virtue* and *uprightness*. Then, “faithfulness” (πιστις – D) conveys *showing trustworthiness* or *fidelity*. This list also includes “gentleness” (πραυτης – A, D) which indicates *a soothing calmness* should augment our personality. Lastly, the Spirit can help us obtain “inner

strength (εγκρατεια – **A, D**), this term’s literal meaning, also well rendered *temperance* or *self-control*.

Just by incorporating these fruitful qualities goes a long way toward outfitting us to handle Satan’s coordinated and relentless onslaught designed to impede those who wish to obey the Lord. Also, the fact Paul states “**there is no law against such things**” shows these nine grace-traits are common with behavior taught in the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:31; 6:14).

First Thessalonians 2:1-12

Certain portions of Scripture impact Christians differently, and for a long time this passage has impressed me by how it portrays the overall nature of ministry. Prior to chapter 2, Paul describes “**what sort of entrance**” he, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy had with the Thessalonian believers. For, these converts took a significant turn from worshipping “**idols to serve a living and true God**” plus “**await His Son out of the heavens**” with a fresh hope of escaping “**the coming wrath**” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

The text also states this transformation was so profound they readily shared their “**faith**” in “**Macedonia . . . Achaia**” and “**every place**” so Paul and his comrades had “**no need to speak anything**”. Basically, that region no longer required outside evangelists since these new believers were doing such a great job proclaiming the gospel (vv. 7-8).

The “**entrance**” (εισοδον – **D**) Paul and his companions had with this community is conveyed by the preposition “εις”, which means *into*, affixed to the noun “οδος”, denoting a *road* or *way* (1 Thess. 2:9). This term represents the *way into*, or *inroad* they had during a brief three-to-four-week period (Acts 17:1-4). Its antonym “εξοδος” is the title of the Bible’s second Book which details Israel’s *way out of* or *exit from* Egypt.

The added adjective “**what sort of**” (οποιαν) further describes the *kind* or *quality* of reception achieved among these prospects. Then, following this overview of how the gospel penetrated this locale, “εισοδον” is repeated *to highlight the many Spirit-energized techniques* used to attain this dramatic pathway into the Thessalonian’s hearts (1 Thess. 2:1).

“**For you yourselves know, brethren, our entrance toward you that it has not become empty, but having suffered beforehand and been maltreated in Philippi, according as you know, we chose to be bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much agony.**” (1 Thess. 2:1-2)

Paul declares their “**entrance**” to these “**brethren . . . has not become empty**” (κενη). This noun means to be *vain* or *void* and refers to *absence of quality* (Acts 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:10, 14, 58; Phil. 2:16; James 2:20).⁷ Since this phrase implies their ministry *didn’t lack excellence*, and it’s paired with the adjective “**what sort of**” (οποιαν – 1:9), both concepts point to the *outstanding results produced by their methods* – **Enthusiastic and Passionate Believers**.

The first element enhancing this outcome was these saints’ knowledge of how Paul’s group had previously “**suffered**” and “**been maltreated in Phillipi**” (Acts 16:12-40). After realizing these ministers had endured trauma from proclaiming the gospel there, it was clear they were again willing to risk persecution by *choosing* “**to be bold**” (επαρρησιασαμεθα – **D**, middle voice) and preach at Thessalonica.

Boldness or **Openness of Speech** is a central feature of Paul’s ministry. It’s one of the reasons for his success and, thus, an attribute all believers are urged to “**put on**” (Acts 9:28; 13:46; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:20). The fact they asserted themselves in Phillipi and now at this town in the face of “**much agony**” (αγωνι – **D**) or *struggle* made a big impression on these prospects and converts. For, their courage amid opposition sparked crowds to consider the supreme importance of their message (Phil. 1:30; Col. 2:1; 1 Thess. 1:5-8; 2 Tim. 4:7).

“**For, our encouragement isn’t out of deception, also not out of uncleanness, also not in trickery, but just as we’ve been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, likewise we speak, not as pleasing men but God who approves our hearts.**” (1 Thess. 2:3-4)

Now, Paul addresses some of the *underlying motives* which reinforced his effective methodology. First, he says it wasn’t “**out of**” or *sourced in* “**deception**” (πλανης – **I, D**). This word depicts the *act of leading astray* or *fraud*, and it’s used to describe the work of sin and the Devil (Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:14; James 5:20; 2 Pet. 3:17; 1 John 4:6).

Second, their approach wasn’t *sourced in* “**uncleanness**” (ακαθαρσιας – **I, D**) or *impure objectives*. Nor was it instigated by “**trickery**” (δολω – **I, D**), the desire to *ensnare* or *entrap* the unsuspecting. By simply being real, upfront, and honest, they gained respect and proved their motives were pure.

In contrast to arriving with evil intent, Paul and his fellow ministers entered Macedonia with the knowledge they had been “**approved by God**”. Since they

knew they *operated with a divine mandate*, what kept their words and deeds in check while executing their plan?

On the one hand, they *vigorously* (active voice) sought to be “pleasing” (αρεσκοντες – I, D) to “God” and, on the other hand, they bore in mind He’s the one who “approves” (δοκιμαζοντι – I) or *validates* their hearts. Since they were *routinely* (present tense participles) concerned about displeasing the Father and reaping His disapproval, this accountability-producing mindset resulted in godward integrity which, coupled with the broadcast Word, attracted interest.

“For, neither once we were made to come with a message of flattery, just as you know, nor in a pretense associated with covetousness; God *is* witness; neither seeking glory out of men, neither from you, nor from others, while choosing to be made able to be a burden as apostles of Christ, but we were made to be gentle in your midst as a nurse might cherish her own children.” (1 Thess. 2:5-7)

“We were made to come” (εγεννηθημεν – I) is a verb of being which expresses how *their action emerged* or *came to fruition*. Appearing in the passive voice with the negative “ου” (inside “ουτε”) indicates *an outside energy didn’t cause* their “message” or *speech* to include “flattery” (κολακειας – I, D). Had they *sweet-talked* these converts even “once”, this behavior would’ve shown they were seeking to manipulate minds and hearts by their “flesh”. Instead, Paul and his colleagues purposely avoided this tactic which silently confirmed their motives were Spirit based (2 Cor. 10:3-4; 1 Thess. 1:5).

Neither were they caused to appeal to these brothers with a “pretense” (προφασει – I) or *pretext* of “covetousness” (πλεονεξιας – I, A, D, Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15; 2 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 4:19; 5:3). Again, *posturing* and *greed* would’ve led their audience to feel shammed and obligated to repay those who delivered the gospel message rather than being confident they could freely profit from its virtue.

Then, to prove these claims, Paul declares “God *is* witness” (μαρτυς – G); *He testifies on their behalf*. Just as someone swears to be truthful at a trial by placing their hand on the Bible, Paul realized the Spirit in tandem with their carefully crafted conduct would convince those reading this Letter his contingent was purely out to benefit everyone they met (1 Thess. 2:13).

Furthermore, Paul asserts they weren’t “seeking glory” (δοξαν – I, A, D) from the Thessalonians or “others”. On the contrary, their full intent was to *represent God* in a manner which all would *perceive, then glorify Christ* as the great and holy Savior. Once more, while demonstrating immaculate ethics, people never felt threatened or taken advantage of. Quite the opposite, prospects and new

believers were comfortable with their *obvious lack of selfishness*. It was clear they weren't looking for recognition or compensation – two of the most sought-after goals in this covetous world (1 Tim. 3:3; 6:5-11; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Continuing the claim greed had no part in their actions, Paul writes, “**while choosing to be made able** (δυναμενοι – **D**) **to be a burden as apostles of Christ**” (1 Thess. 2:7). This participle indicates Paul’s consortium “**as apostles of Christ**” *constantly* (present tense) had the ability *to choose* (middle voice) to “**be made able**” (passive) to be “**a burden**” (βαρει – **I, A, D**, cf. 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:16 [κατα + βαρεω]; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8 [επι + βαρεω]).² This term comes across as our word ‘bar’ and means *a weight*. It’s seen in the terms ‘barbell’ and ‘barometer’, a device that measures *atmospheric pressure*.

The kind of weight signified here is **A Financial Burden** since “**apostles**”, just like Levitical Priests, possessed God-given “**authority**” (εξουσιαν – **I, A, D**) to expect money or goods for their services (Matt. 10:1-15; 1 Cor. 9:4-12; 2 Thess. 3:9). However, even though they had this *right*, since Body members aren’t under the Law of Moses and “**apostles**” no longer exist, Christians aren’t authorized to apply this principle since it functions in conjunction with the “**tithe**”.

Instead, Paul and his fellows habitually worked with their hands to provide their own needs in order to *Typify Christian Responsibility* which all “**brethren**” including “**elders**” should “**imitate**” (Acts 20:17-35; 1 Cor. 9:1-18; 2 Thess. 3:6-16). **This Practice is An Essential Part of Our Christian Standard**, for “**It’s more blessed to give than to receive**” and “**if anyone doesn’t continuously** (present tense) **desire to work, also don’t let him eat!**” (Acts. 20:35; 2 Thess. 3:10).

Because of this conviction, Paul and his delegation never portrayed the idea they were owed anything for ministry nor tried to finagle compensation from anyone but purposely avoided asking to be paid for their efforts. So, he always maintained a *No-Strings-Attached Example* whether evangelizing or edifying believers. As stated, he never preached the gospel with a “**pretense**” of “**covetousness**” (1 Thess. 4:5). Therefore, **eliminating monetary barriers furnished another attractive incentive** which helped the Thessalonians focus entirely on the benefits of the gospel.

Granted, Paul did raise contributions for the poor saints at Jerusalem, but he never asked for financial support for his own ministry. Though, he did thank those who helped him during times of need like when he was running for his life or incarcerated since those conditions didn’t allow him to work (Acts 17:4-6, 12-14; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8 – 9; 12:14-18; Phil 4:15-19).

Otherwise, he labored to provide his own needs as well as those ministering with him (Acts 20:33-35; 1 Thess. 2:9). Also, he taught believers to supplement the “needs” or “burdens” of other Body members and leaders if circumstances, including ministry-time, caused a deficit in their ability to provide food and shelter for their family (Gal. 6:1-6; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 6:5-10).

Even so, **No Passage in The Church Epistles Justifies the Stance of Expecting Compensation for Ministry if A Person is Able to Provide Their Own Needs.**¹ And, with few exceptions, in developed countries Christians can finance their basic needs. By this standard, missionary pursuits where self-support is difficult would provide a credible reason to raise funds.

Finally, those heeding this lesson and working for their own needs remove a great “**stumbling block**” from Preaching The Blood of The Cross or Teaching Holiness. For these **Operations of Spiritual Confrontation** initiate plenty of resistance and “**offence**” on their own. Therefore, we must avoid an improper relation to money since it provides a cause for criticism and often results in compromise (Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 2:17; Gal. 5:11; 1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:8).

Instead of chasing monetary gain, Paul says, “**we were made to become** (εγενηθημεν – I, D) **gentle in your midst as a nurse might cherish her own children**” (1 Thess. 2:7). For a second time, this verb occurs in the passive voice stressing *how their behavior was under the Spirit’s control*. Hence, they were *made* “**gentle**” (ηπιοι – A, D), *mild*, or *kind* among these converts as a “**nurse**” (τροφος – A, D), or literally *any feeder* like a parent, “**might cherish**” their offspring.

To grasp the meaning of the verb “**cherish**” (θαλπη – I, A, D), consider its only other occurrence where husbands are told to “**cherish**” their wives just like their own bodies (Eph. 5:29). This term basically means *to warm* or *heat*, so bearing in mind the woman’s created makeup as the “**weaker vessel**” as well as the frail stature of children, we can picture the *gentle* and *warm-embracing care* which distinguished the demeanor of Paul and his associates (1 Pet. 3:7).

“**. . . likewise, while choosing to be made to have a strong affection for you, we thought it well to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but our own life-essence, because you were made to become beloved ones to us.**” (1 Thess. 2:8)

The adverb “**likewise**” (ουτως), or *in similar manner*, connects this verse with the preceding context and indicates what’s stated next continues to add evidence that Paul and his fellows practiced genuine concern. And since the participle

“choosing to be made to have a strong affection” (ομειρομενοι – I, A) occurs in a dual voice form, it shows they *personally decided* (middle) to *be caused* (passive), by outside power from the Spirit, to *deeply desire* these brethren.²

Stemming from this celestial feeling, Paul adds, “we thought it well to impart” (μεταδουναι – D) or *share* two things. First, they desired to distribute “the gospel of God” (G), *the message which can produce eternal salvation and subsequent holiness*. However, they didn’t stop there “but” also shared their own “life-essence” (ψυχας – I, A, D) or *lives*, a term often rendered “souls” (Acts 15:24; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:19; Rev. 6:9; 20:4).

Since the totality of our human condition is expressed by the phrase “spirit and soul and body” later in this Book, the “soul” (ψυχη) is defined as everything contained within our “body”, or *corpse*, other than the “spirit” dimension – *our moral center* (1 Thess. 5:23). So, this term specifies **they spent their entire mental and physical capacity** to serve these believers.

Why did they gladly expend this effort? The explanation given is, “because you were made to become (εγενηθητε – I, D) **beloved ones to us**” (1 Thess. 2:8). This verb depicts *coming into existence*, and its third passive voice form in this context indicates *an outside energy made these believers “beloved”* (αγαπητοι – A, G) or *precious*.

This phrase is clarified earlier in the Letter where these “brethren” are identified as “having been loved (ηγαπημενοι) **by God**” since *they know* they’re recipients of His “election” (1:4, cf. Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13). Viewing them as *personally selected by God*, just like he and everyone else in the Body, Paul regularly calls believers “beloved”, then pours out his life-energy to **Aid His Extended Family Members** (Rom. 8:15; 11:1-7; 1 Cor. 12:18; 2 Cor. 4:1-15; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 2:17-18).

“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil night and day while constantly choosing to be made to work toward the outcome not to put a burden on anyone of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God; you and God *are* witnesses how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we were made to come to you who believe, according as you know how *we were made to come* to each one of you as a father of his own children, while continuously encouraging and comforting and testifying unto the outcome for you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:9-11)

Next, Paul directs these “brethren” to “remember” how hard he and his associates worked while at their town. He wants them to recall the “labor” (κοπον

– **D**) or *exhausting work* and “**toil**” (μοχθον – **D**) or *hard employment* they took so as not to “**put a burden on**” (επιβαρησαι – **I, A, D**) these converts, that is, a *monetary weight*.

As outsiders and temporary laborers, they likely had to accept the most difficult jobs. And their willingness to do so complemented their objective not to come across as superior, have a “**pretense**” of “**covetousness**”, seek “**glory**”, or place an economic “**burden**” on them but, instead, to sacrifice as if they were family (1 Thess. 2:5-8). Besides, they were probably sleep-deprived since they kept busy “**night and day**” or *around the clock* (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).

The participle “εργαζομενοι” (**I, A, D**) specifies Paul and his colleagues preached the gospel “**while constantly**” (present tense) “**choosing**” (middle) “**to be made**” (passive) “**to work**” (1 Thess. 2:9).² This dual voiced term indicates *they tapped outside power from the Spirit* to sustain pure motives, attitudes, and deeds as they ministered. In particular, *He Repeats the Fact* they never put a financial “**burden**” on them **To Model the Principle All Christians Should Finance Their Own Needs**. Lastly, he affirms “**you and God are witnesses**” and “**know**” the character “**we were made to come**” (εγενηθημεν – **I, A, D**, passive voice) with, the kind of behavior “**a father**” warmly shows “**his own children**” (1 Thess. 2:10-11).

This **Narrative of Ministry Essentials** concludes by veering in on the reason they sustained this exceptional routine. For, Paul mentions their encouragement, comfort and testimony was “**unto the outcome for you to walk in a manner worthy of God**”. In other words, their aim for these brethren who entered this spiritual “**kingdom**” was to represent Jesus’ “**glory**” in all areas of life (1 Thess. 2:12, cf. 1:6-10; 2:4, 6). While contemplating this extended portion, **May Each of Us Take to Heart the Plethora of Sanctifying Motives and ABCs of Conduct to Boost Our Own Service for The Lord**.

Romans 12:9-21

This section’s final passage solidifies several more lessons and procedures which help believers advance toward Spirit-led maturity, **Becoming Equipped for Our Heavenly Conflict** (Eph. 4:24; 6:10-11; Col. 3:10; 2 Tim. 3:17). The Roman Church was privileged to have the power couple of Pricilla (Prisca) and Aquilla along with others who were “**beloved**” (αγαπητον – **G**), “**approved**” (δοκιμον – **I, D**), and “**labored in the Lord**” (Rom. 16:3-13). With these assets, Paul was confident their assemblies had what it takes to be ready for action, “**Also, I myself have been persuaded concerning you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, having chosen to be filled with all knowledge,**

and having chosen to be made able to counsel (or “admonish”) one another” (15:14).²

Most Christians are familiar with First Corinthians 13:4-7 which presents *Basic Qualities of Love* in a remarkable way. However, this Roman passage is another less-celebrated portion which delves deep into **The Essence of What Love Is** and **Brims with Life-Changing Properties**.

“Love is unhyprocritical, while abhorring evil, while choosing to be joined to good” (Rom. 12:9).

The Greek text doesn’t include a verb of being in the statement, “love is unhyprocritical”. Yet, it’s understood since every noun, including “love” (αγαπη – I, A, D), inherently contains *substance* and, as such, possesses *existence* or *being*.⁶ Furthermore, when adding a verb of being it’s always legitimate to insert its indicative mode form which *portrays a statement of fact*. Instead, many Translations add the imperative mode (command) sense, ‘let love be’, which is probably because it occurs in a behavior-modifying context (Rom. 12:1-2).

However, when *the basic idea set forth by the grammar* is followed, this phrase emphasizes **What The Core Essence of Love Is**. Carrying this construct forward, the rest of the chapter can more clearly be seen for what it communicates: **Expressions of Mentality and Action which Define the Functional Outworking of “love”**. Note, Versions that preserve this view.⁸

The first term which describes godly “love” is the adjective “unhyprocritical” (ανυποκριτος – I, A, D). It’s made up of the preposition “υπο”, meaning *under*, affixed to the noun “κρισις”, which transliterates to our word ‘crisis’ and conveys the concept of *judgment*. This compound word is prefixed with an *alpha* (α) which *negates its meaning*. The ancient Greeks called stage actors ‘hypocrites’ since its literal translation is *an interpreter from underneath*.

No wonder it’s still used for politicians caught in scandal or religious leaders acting counter to their creed.⁹ Other good renderings are ‘sincere’ (NIV), ‘genuine’ (ESV), ‘free from hypocrisy’ (TGNT), and ‘non-pretended’ (MLV). God doesn’t want us to *feign* truth, but to be straightforward in speech and lifestyle. For, hypocrisy amounts to putting on a show with the motive of manipulating fellow Body members to think and act in the flesh. This is unacceptable for any Christian, especially leaders (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; 3:1-13; 1 Pet. 1:22; 5:1-4).

The text continues, “while abhorring (αποστυγουντες – I, A, D) evil” (Rom. 12:9). Every participle acts as a *verbal adjective*, and this one describes a property of

sincere “love”. In its nominative plural form, this term *designates believers as its subject* who perform the action. Also, this nominative plural participle is just the first of many which appear in this chapter and encapsulate the kind of behavior God desires us to exhibit.

It’s composed of the preposition “απο”, which portrays the directional idea of *going away from*, affixed to the verb “στυγεω”, meaning *to hate*. So, we’re supposed to *continuously* (present tense) and *vigorously* (active voice) *loathe* or *despise* “evil” (πονηρον), a term used to represent anything *bad* or *wicked*.

After addressing how believers should view “evil”, Paul targets a constructive life direction, “**while choosing to be joined** (κολλωμενοι – I, D) **to good**” (Rom. 12:9). The meaning of this participle illustrates how we should *glue* ourselves to, thus *cleave to* “good” (αγαθω). This noun depicts the exact opposite of the term “evil” and stands for *all things virtuous; attributes and deeds* God wants His children to adopt. With this as our goal, we’ll dedicate time to “**choosing**” (middle voice) “**to be**” (passive), by enablement from the Spirit, *bound to the routine* (present tense) of “good”, another evidence of genuine “love”.²

“**being lovingly affectionate ones with brotherly love unto one another, while choosing to be caused to prefer one another in value, not being hesitant ones in relation to diligence, while being fervent in spirit (or “Spirit”), while serving the Lord, while rejoicing in reference to the hope, while choosing to be enabled to endure affliction, while persevering in prayer, while participating in the needs of the saints, while pursuing hospitality.**” (Rom. 12:10-13)

In these four short verses, I’ve rendered the present tense participles with “while” to emphasize we’re *to be constantly absorbed* in these behaviors since *each verbal adjective* contributes to the description of heartfelt “love”. Like these participles, “**lovingly affectionate ones**” (φιλοστοργοι – I, D) is a nominative plural noun, so it too represents *the temperament we’re to have*, though no verb of being is present (v. 10).⁶ It’s built from “φιλος”, which means *a loved one* or *friend*, and “στοργη”, signifying *natural affection* between family members.

Although “φιλος” is commonly taught that it doesn’t convey divine love like “αγαπη”, contexts like this contradict that opinion and show the two terms overlap in meaning. So, to demonstrate Spirit-sourced “love”, Body members should *display warm regard* to “**one another**” with “**brotherly love**” (φιλος + αδελφος – I, A, D), since at salvation we enter *a new and eternal family relationship*.

We’re not to simply pretend to like our spiritual siblings since this would equate to *hypocritical love*, but to relate “**while choosing to be caused to prefer**

(προηγούμενοι – I, A, D) **one another in value**” (Rom. 12:10). This participle is from the preposition “προ”, which means *before* or *prior*, tied to the verb “ηγεομαι”, meaning *to lead the way*. Even though this compound word only occurs here, its verb part by itself conveys the idea of *considering* or *regarding* which requires *making prior choices* (Phil. 2:3, 25; 3:7-8; 1 Thess. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:15).

Then, it’s dual voice form further emphasizes **“choosing”** (middle) **“to be caused”** (passive), *by the Spirit’s power*, to give preference to **“one another”** – me to you and you to me.² Thus, we’re *to condition our hearts* to see the **“value”** (τιμη – I, A, D) or *worth* all Body members possess to help facilitate working together.

Next, we’re **“not”** to be **“hesitant ones** (οκνηροι) **in relation to diligence”** (Rom. 12:11). This noun portrays *shrinking back* or *being unready*. Conversely, **“diligence”** (σπουδη – D) speaks of *hastiness* and, thus, *being busy*. How are Christians to develop this type of readiness? To empower the conduct taught here, this verse declares we should be **“fervent in spirit, while serving the Lord”**. The present participle **“while being fervent”** (ζεοντες – I, A) means *to boil up like a hot spring*, but both N.T. uses depict its metaphorical sense of *boiling with passion* **“in spirit”** or **“Spirit”** (Acts 18:25).¹⁰

The noun **“spirit”** (πνευματι – I, A, D, G) can refer to our human spirit or the Holy Spirit. Scripture reveals that after we’re saved and permanently receive the indwelling Spirit, He interacts with our human spirit. Many of these same passages explain how we must choose to **“walk by the Spirit”** if His fervency is to influence our behavior (Gal. 5:16-18; Rom. 8:9-16; 1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 4:22-24). Therefore, when we submit to His enablement, like Apollos, we can experience Spirit-energized service for the **“Lord”** (κυριω – I, G, Acts 18:24-28; Rom. 12:11).

Another attribute of fervent and unpretentious **“love”** is **“while rejoicing** (χαιροντες – A, D) **in regard to the hope”** (Rom. 12:12). This participle signifies we ought to *constantly* (present tense) *exhibit delight* in our **“hope”** (ελπιδι – A, G) – the Lord’s return when God *transforms us into full conformity with Christ’s sinless image* (Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:3-4; Tit. 2:13-14). When believers revel in our shared future **“glory”**, this virtual reality will positively modify the way we rally around one another while we **Mutually Fight the Presiding Conflict on Earth**.

This eternal perspective helps a lot when we find ourselves in need of **“choosing to be enabled to endure** (υπομενοντες – A, D) **affliction”** (Rom. 12:12). This participle is composed of two words literally meaning *to remain under* and always occurs in contexts which speak to the necessity of *sustaining through* **“affliction”**

(θλιψει – I, A). So, if we're to be even keeled and *withstand persecution*, we must *regularly* (present tense) *choose* (middle voice) “to be enabled” (passive), *by the Spirit*, so we won't deviate from God's purpose while battling evil forces (Rom. 6:11-23; 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 15:57-58; Col. 1:23; Heb. 6:19).²

Another indispensable factor for an ardent, love-motivated existence is, “while persevering (προσκαρτερουντες – A, D) in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). This participle consists of the preposition “προς”, meaning *toward*, and the verb “καρτερεω”, which conveys *being strong or persistent*. If we're to experience the full thrust of God's support, we need to *constantly* (present tense) and *vigorously* (active voice) draw upon *Spirit-aided fortitude* to approach the Father in “prayer” (προσευχη – G). This medium enables Christians to assist other Body members in a uniquely intangible way.

The next ingredient in a love-purposed life is “participating (κοινωνουντες – A, D) in the needs of the saints” (Rom. 12:13). This participle is also a present active form which specifies we're to get *constantly* and *vigorously* involved with *sharing in “the needs of the saints”* (αγιων – A, G).

In this concern, it's vital we aren't deceived by widespread theology which propagates the view only some Christians throughout history are ‘**Saints**’. This heresy purports certain folks should be venerated, and even prayed to, as if they've somehow achieved *perfect holiness*, which is what this Greek term really means. The truth is *all believers hold the position of being “saints” in God's sight* because we reside “in Christ”. Though, we still exist and function as a community of sinners who should look out for “one another” to ensure no one lacks basic needs (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; Eph. 1:4; 4:28; 1 Tim. 6:7-10, 17-19).

Some even designate Paul as a special ‘**Saint**’, though there's no indication he could or did reach perfection (Phil. 3:12-13; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). In fact, when he and Barnabas performed “signs and wonders” in Lystra, they “rent” their “garments” in strong protest when people wanted to “sacrifice” to them as if they were “gods” worthy of worship (Acts 14:1-18).

Growing up in Catholicism, I was taught to depend on so-called ‘**Saints**’, a practice I now know *promotes a corrupt view of the true holiness of God and diverts people from relying on the only Person who can help – Jesus*. For, Our Purity Comes Only By Grace as **God bestows sainthood on every Christian In a Judicial Sense** (Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:22).

In addition to providing the basic life-needs of others, we're to be “pursuing hospitality” (φιλοξενιαν – A, D, Rom. 12:13). Again, this word is made up of the

noun “φιλος” affixed to “ξενος”, which designates *a stranger*. So, this term means *the love of strangers* and, considering its context, most likely refers to caring for unknown believers visiting an area. As a point of interest, its opposite ‘xenophobia’ (ξενος + φοβια) describes *a fear of strangers*. Also, the adjoining participle tells us to *continuously* (present tense) and *vigorously* (active voice) be **“pursuing”** (διωκοντες – **D**) or *chasing after* accommodating this class of guests.

“You speak well about those persecuting you, you speak well about *them* and don’t curse. *You’re* to rejoice with those rejoicing, to weep with those weeping, while thinking the same thing unto one another, not thinking lofty things but choosing to be guided away with the lowly. You don’t choose to be made thinking ones beyond yourselves.” (Rom. 12:14-16)

Continuing the illustration of love in action, we’re commanded (imperative), **“You speak well** (ευλογειτε – **I, A, D**) **about those persecuting you”** (Rom. 12:14). This verb, from which we derive the word ‘eulogy’, combines the adverb “ευ”, meaning *well* or *good*, with the verb “λογεω”, which signifies *forming a message*. So, when others are *regularly* (present tense) **“persecuting”** (διωκοντας) us, or *pursuing with negative intent*, we’re not to respond in like manner but *habitually* (present tense) and *robustly* (active voice) *emphasize positive aspects* of our association. For, each friction-triggering aggression offers an opportunity to react with a Spirit-assisted reply which can benefit all. This practice **showcases the value of being delivered from the control of sin** (6:2-14).

The last admonition precedes two more *orders* (imperatives), **“you speak well about *them* and do not curse”** (μη καταρασθε – **I, D**, Rom. 12:14). This verb means to *invoke* or *pray for evil to come upon* someone. So, rather than stooping to this common flesh-based response which often surfaces in cussing a person out, Paul repeats **“you speak well about them”**. This command *holds us accountable to do the unexpected*. We should *eulogize* those who offend us, or *concentrate on their best side*, like when we share at a memorial. If we choose to **“walk in the Spirit”**, we can overcome any frustrations that result from hostile acts of others (Gal. 5:16, 20; Eph. 4:29-31; 5:18).

Now we’re told, **“*You’re* to rejoice** (χαρειν – **I, A, D**) **with those rejoicing”** (Rom. 12:15). Both the infinitive and participle in this phrase are in the present tense, so our *ordinary feedback* for those enjoying an achievement or receiving a gift should be *delight* and *celebration*. As we participate in their happiness, this act will please them even more.

Likewise, believers are **“to weep** (κλαιειν – **I, A, D**) **with those weeping”**. This present tense infinitive and participle also signify we’re to share *continuous*

mourning or *feeling of sorrow* with the *despondent* or *grieving*. And with the Spirit's assistance, we all have unlimited capacity to empathize with and support those who hurt.

Following the traits of love portrayed in verses 9-15 which we're to internalize, Paul says we can attain these qualities **"while thinking** (φρονουντες – I, A) **the same thing unto one another"** (Rom. 12:16). This present active participle teaches Body members to *consistently* and *fervently devote our minds* to make sure we're on the same page. When we mutually consider "the same thing" (το αυτο), *standards*, or *divine truths* **"unto one another"**, this practice helps us build a greater sense of camaraderie. It also insures we won't be sidetracked by **"thinking** (φρονουντες – I, A) **lofty things"**. Remember, Greek terms are repeated to accent a thought, and *both participles stress the need to develop a favorable frame of mind* if we're to carry out our **"calling"** (Eph. 4:1-16; Phil 2:1-5).

At the base, this requires not thinking **"lofty things"** (τα υψηλα – I, A) or *highfalutin' thoughts* about **"one another"**; judgements that give rise to hate, disunity, and condescension (Rom. 12:16; 2 Cor. 10:5). Then, Paul voices the way to avoid a critical attitude, **"choosing to be guided away** (συναπαγομενοι – I, D) **with the lowly"**. This participle joins the verb "αγω", which means *to go*, with two prepositions: "συν", meaning *with*, and "απο", signifying *from*. Together, they convey *going from with* which suggests we should *move away from* anyone who retains a proud line and *gravitate toward* **"the lowly"** (ταπεινους) or *humble* (1 Pet. 5:5). Don't get conned! **Any Christian will be Infected by the Personality of Those We Choose to Hang Out With – Good or Bad.**

Therefore, believers can best mature when we're **"choosing"** (middle voice) as *the Spirit guides us* **"away with"** (passive) **"the lowly"** (Rom. 12:16).² This approach consists of *regularly* (present tense) rubbing shoulders with those who use their gifts to exhibit Spirit-led modesty and, at the same time, renounce and circumvent the flesh-emitting poison of those who crave self-promotion.

The verse closes with one last charge, **"You choose not to be made thinking ones beyond yourselves"** (Rom. 12:16).² I translated this noun **"thinking ones"** (φρονιμοι – I, A) to demonstrate its stem directly relates to the two preceding participles. This *Threesome of Terms Screams a Warning*. We shouldn't *allow our brain to perceive* our worth as **"beyond yourselves"** (παρ' εαυτοις) and be duped by the view: **I'm more important than other Body members**. For, when we accept the Church-Epistle definition of our condition, we'll recognize everyone has equal value since we're all saved by grace, gifted by God, and have *identical Spirit-assisted access to the Father* for growth and ministry (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 4:6; 12:12-26; Eph. 2:18).¹

“Also, while not repaying evil in place of evil to anyone, while choosing to be caused to think beforehand about good in the presence of all men; if *you’re* able, the *ability which is* out of you, while being at peace with all men; while not avenging yourselves, beloved, but you consciously give a place to the wrath, for it has been written, ‘Vengeance is mine; I shall repay’ says the Lord. But ‘If your enemy hungers, you give him food; if he thirsts, you give him drink; for while doing this you’ll heap coals of fire on his head.’ You’re not to choose to be overcome by evil, but you’re constantly and vigorously to overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:17-21)

It’s intriguing the Spirit inspired Paul to write so much about how Christians should respond to malice sent our way. The number of reactive lessons contained in these five verses alone underline the importance of grasping **What God’s Approved Counter-Measures Are** plus our ability to implement them.

This capacity will correspond with how well we’ve “put on” the “new man” properties of “love” just prescribed; a link supported by two points of grammar. These are the connective conjunction “also” (δε – found in “μηδενι”) and the nominative plural present participle “while . . . repaying” (αποδιδοντες – I, D) which follows others in like form and designates we, as its subject, are to *continuously plug this godly behavior into our lives* (Rom. 12:17).

This term assembles the preposition “απο”, meaning *from*, and the verb “διδωμι”, which denotes *giving*. In English, good equivalents are “not” *to deliver* or *impart* “evil in place of” (αντι) or *in response to* “evil” (κακου), that is, *wickedness* directed at us. So, how should we react? The text specifies we’re to concentrate on “choosing to be caused to think beforehand (προνοουμενοι – I, D) about good in the presence of all men”.

This participle is from the preposition “προ”, meaning *before*, prefixed to the verb “νοεω”, which means “to think” or *use the mind*. Also, its dual voice form directs us to *habitually* (present tense) focus on “choosing” (middle) “to be caused” (passive), *with the Spirit’s help*, to devise reactions which center on “good” (καλα – I, D) or *anything beneficial*.²

This is *A Very Simple Principle*, yet it challenges our human condition. Because our natural reaction is to strike back with verbal and/or physical attacks. In secular encounters to protect life, limb or property, a harsh response may be warranted. But, pertaining to Battle-Exchanges in Our Heavenly Conflict, *this retort is highly inappropriate*. For, we’re obligated to personify a changed life which includes undergoing adversity, though this consequence doesn’t seem fair.

Think about it; we're not under the Law which allows "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" reactions (Lev. 24:20). So, we're to *take thought beforehand* and *get mentally prepared* to deliver good solutions "in the presence of" or *to be seen by* "all men", even if we're suffering oppression (Rom. 12:17; this term is in 2 Cor. 8:21 & 1 Tim. 5:8, see its noun "προνοιαν" in Rom. 13:14).

So, how can we fabricate "good" responses? Initially, we should implement the *Impeccable Character* needed to personally mature, help edify the Body, and supplement evangelism. The alternative is generating comebacks which, at best, exhibit anger or contempt and, at worst, show rage or retribution. If we don't *mentally prepare* to respond to persecution by allowing the Spirit to help us learn positive principles then act upon them, *we'll mess up, do things we regret, and reap appropriate discipline* (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 10:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Heb. 12:4-7). **This is How We Acquire Genuine Maturity for Combat-Readiness to Perform Well in the Most Complicated Situations** (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

In accord with this goal, verse 18 states, "if you're able, the ability out of you, while being at peace with all men." Let's begin by analyzing the present active participle which instructs us to *Secrete Spiritual Sweat on a regular and vigorous basis* so the community will perceive us as championing the cause of "being at peace" (ειρηνευοντες – I, A, D) or *sustaining serene relations*.

Note, this context holds us, not unbelievers, accountable to take the lead and go to great lengths to maintain calm exchanges "with all men", *fellow believers and the Lost alike*. This technique of non-confrontation – **A Divinely-Enabled Tactic of Triumph** – is diametrically opposed to the **Spirit-Grieving Deficiencies** of complaining, slander, fighting, or protest, which are excluded from our repertoire since they inevitably incite friction (Eph. 4:30; Phil. 2:12-18; 1 Thess. 4:9-12; 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Why are Christians held responsible to achieve and preserve peace? Because we have the *Indwelling Member of the Godhead* (Rom. 12:18; 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:4; Eph. 1:19; 3:16, 20; 1 Thess. 1:5). That's why the noun "able" (δυνατον – I, D, G) is used, for our *capacity* to succeed is from the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 6:20; 7:4-6; 8:7-8, 12-17). He enables us to operate with a 'dynamo' which helps steer negotiations toward armistice.

So, "if" the *possibility exists* "out of you" (εξ υμων – I, G), *from inside of us or within our grasp*, we should explore every option and pull out all stops to place the pursuit of peaceful relations as an overriding concern. **This Pacifistic Maneuver, Fueled by Divine Energy, is Central and Critical to Our Daily Warfare Against Heavenly Evil Forces.**

In addition, Paul advises the “beloved” at Rome not to get involved in “avenging (εκδικουντες – I, A, D) yourselves”. This participle combines the preposition “εκ”, which signifies *out*, with the verb “δικεω”, meaning *to judge*. In the present active form, this term states we’re *routinely* and *aggressively* “not” to seek *out-justice* or *retribution* for those who deliberately sin against us. In contrast with **This Call to De-escalate**, we’re told to aggressively “avenge”, or *condemn*, and “take captive”, or *imprison*, every evil intent entering our own mind (2 Cor. 10:6). With regard to wicked acts from outside sources which seek to harm us, we’re to “consciously give (δοτε – I, A, D) a place to the wrath” (Rom. 12:19).

This verb is a command (imperative), and I chose the term “consciously” to represent its *present active* form. So, in lieu of taking independent revenge, which may be permitted or even encouraged by human ethics, **we’re to Reject This Response and Commit Hateful Attacks to God**. For, at a time corresponding with His strategy, He’ll take His rightful “place” and pour out “wrath” (οργη – G) or *fury* with fairness and justice.

To grasp the horrific sense of this noun, it transliterates to our word ‘orgy’ and is used to describe the defiant behavior of people who reject the Creator in favor of worshipping His creation, then take license to use their bodies in aberrant ways (Rom. 1:18-27; Eph. 5:3-14). Because of this, God’s punitive “wrath” will ultimately send them to the “lake of fire”, the destination salvation allows us to escape (Rom. 5:9; 9:22; Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:5-6; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 6:16-17; 14:9-12; 20:10-15).

Reinforcing the thought *God is The Rightful Dispenser of “wrath”*, Paul cites, “vengeance is mine; I shall repay”, says the Lord” (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). Since the noun “vengeance” (εκδικησις – G) is made up of the same root words as its participial form in verse 19, it also expresses *divvying out justice* or *executing a sentence*. Keep in mind, God is jealous and will have His Day of Judgement so all Creation can see Him, and Him alone, execute “wrath”. Therefore, we mustn’t upstage Him by usurping His planned reprisal, but this is exactly what we do each time we repay “evil in the place of evil” (vv. 17-18).

At this juncture, rather than concluding how we should respond to those who wrong us, Paul cites another O.T. quote to expand upon the principle: “speak well about those persecuting you” (Rom. 12:14). Thus, “If your enemy hungers, you give him food; if he thirsts, you give him drink; for while doing this you’ll heap coals of fire on his head” (Prov. 25:21-22; Rom. 12:20).

The noun “enemy” (εχθρος – A, G) refers to a *hostile person* and describes *the enmity* between God and men (Rom. 5:10; Phil. 3:18; Col. 1:21). This adverse

relationship is solved when someone is justified before the Father by trusting in the blood of Christ. After reconciliation, God desires His children display spiritual fruit and practice good works, *Again With the Aim to Defuse* those who treat us cruelly (2 Thess. 1:5-8; 1 Pet. 3:8-18; 4:12-16).

To conclude, Paul sums up this portion by defining how we should react to conflict, “You’re not to choose to be overcome by evil, but you’re to constantly and vigorously overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). The phrase “you’re not to choose to be overcome” combines the *negative* “μη” and the verb “overcome” (νικω), which means to *triumph* or *be victorious*. The shoe company, Nike, used this Greek term to devise its brand. Here, it occurs as a present imperative which portrays a *constant command*, and its dual voice form signifies we’re *responsible* “to choose” (middle) “not . . . to be overcome” (passive), or *coerced by outside stimuli*, to perpetrate “evil”. Negative influences attempting to lure us to sin can be classified as the “world”, the “flesh” and the “Devil” (Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:14; 5:17-19; 6:10-13; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Following the *conjunction of contrast* “but” (αλλα), Paul utilizes a positive *charge* (imperative) directing us to “overcome (νικα) evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). This present active verb indicates we’re to “constantly” and “vigorously” partake in “good” (αγαθω) – *Spirit-energized activity pleasing to God* (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Titus 2:11-14).

While pursuing this path, we can experience victory as we encounter sin (1 John 2:13-14; 5:4-5). Furthermore, we should know all attacks are promoted by heavenly principalities and powers who oppose us as God’s ambassadors and propose to stir up our “old man” (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). Nevertheless, we can be optimistic since “death was swallowed up unto victory” (νικος), the “victory (νικος) through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54, 57).

One final observation about the verbs rendered “overcome” (νικω & νικα). Both are 2nd person singular in form unlike all the other action words in verses 9-19, which are plural. These singular forms transfer all exhortations made to the Body down to *Its Individual Members which Holds Each Believer Responsible* to know how to “overcome evil with good”. Many other contexts combine individual and plural directives to draw attention to personal accountability. And, in truth, individual acts of obedience are foundational for “building up” or “edifying” the Church (Eph. 4:12-16).

Consequently, if we follow **God’s Guidebook of Conduct** by utilizing the Spirit to perform its instructions, We Can **Triumph in Our Formidable Battle**. With Jesus by our side, we can be confident “no temptation has taken you except

what is common to man, also God is faithful who won't allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able to bear, but with the temptation He'll make a way out (or "an escape") to be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

And we should take courage "my beloved" and "become seated, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor isn't futile in the Lord" (15:58). To review, God not only trains us through His Word and provides power through His Spirit to succeed in our Combat Mission, but **Compliance Reaps Divine Benefits Now Plus Future Rewards** (2 Cor. 10:6; Gal. 6:7-10; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; Titus 2:11-14).

To wrap up, all three contexts expounded in this section contain essential lifestyle-attributes which are facilitated by the Spirit and available to all Body members. These qualities result from modifying our beliefs, intentions, attitudes, and actions – the groundwork for holiness. Therefore, if we claim to be led by the Spirit in any deed, let's make sure that act is supported by *Specific Lessons from Our Training Manual* and produced in tandem with divine energy. For, **The Church Epistles Provide Both the Spiritual Movements and Power Necessary for Winning "the good fight" for which God Chose (Drafted) and Gifted us** (Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 4:7).¹

Other portions bursting with renovating truth and have had a vast impact on my Christian walk are: Romans 6 – 15; First Corinthians 5 – 15; Galatians 5 – 6:10; Ephesians 4 – 6:20; Philippians 1:27 – 3:9; Colossians 3 – 4:6; Second Thessalonians 3:1-15; First Timothy 2 – 6:21; Second Timothy 2 – 4:8; Titus 1:5 – 3:11; Hebrews 11 – 13:17; First Peter 1:13 – 5:11; and Second Peter 1 & 3. May each of us encounter incalculable revitalization from His Word to help strengthen our service for the Lord Jesus Christ! (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 3:20)

Section 4: Permanent Roles of the Spirit

Having touched on how the rudiments of Christian conduct apply to our interactions with the world and fellow believers, this final section evaluates the comings and goings of the Spirit during the Acts period when Israel expected their New Covenant Kingdom to commence. Instead, this Jewish program was postponed, it was replaced by the Body of Christ, and some of the Spirit's movements are shown to cease by direct statement or standards detailed in the post-Acts Letters. Usually, the scope of this topic is limited to termination of gifts and certain aspects of prayer. However, other Spirit-generated activities performed within this timeframe will also be addressed.

The Word Teaches Some Gifts Will Cease

During this transition period, gifts which show “the manifestation (φανερωσις) of the Spirit” were “being given” to Body members “toward the profit” (1 Cor. 12:7). These *Outward exhibitions* are itemized: “a message of wisdom”, “a message of knowledge”, “faith”, “gifts of healings”, “workings of miracles”, “prophecy”, “discernment of spirits”, “kinds of tongues (or “languages”), and “interpretation of tongues” (vv. 8-10).

Then, chapter 13 highlights the relevance and temporary nature of “prophecy” and “knowledge” as these gifts are compared with the overriding need to do all things with the never-ending quality of “love” (vv. 1-3, 8-13; 16:14).

Here, Paul declares “prophecy” and “knowledge will be deactivated” (καταργηθησονται – 1 Cor. 13:8). This verb is from “εργεω”, signifying *to work*, preceded by an *alpha* “α” which *negates this meaning*. Together, they specify these gifts will become *unworking* or *idle*. By adding the preposition “κατα”, which depicts *downward motion*, this three-term word mimics the action of an engine *idling down* when a vehicle *stops*. I think the translation “deactivated” most vividly portrays its meaning since it’s used to represent a thing which is currently active becoming inactive (Rom. 6:6; 7:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:24, 26; 2 Cor. 3:14; Gal. 5:11; Eph. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10). Then, the text alerts us to *the time these two gifts will become inactive* – when the “perfect” (τελειον) or *complete* “might come” (1 Cor. 13:10).

In reference to himself and the Corinthians, Paul states *currently* (present tense) “we know in part and prophecy in part” (v. 9). However, when the “perfect” comes, that which is “in part” or *partial* “will be deactivated” (καταργηθησεται – v. 10). Since this passage references truth received by “prophecy” along with the gift of “knowledge”, which allowed the holder to *retain divine messages like a human server*, when revelation for the Church was completed, these gifts would no longer be required but *become extinct*.

The question is, ‘**When did this happen?**’ After employing a metaphor to illustrate how everyone “now”, or presently, saw truth in a partial manner, Paul says “then I will fully know (επιγνωσομαι) just like I was fully known” (επεγνωσθην – 1 Cor. 13:12).

These two verbs consist of “γινωσκω”, which by itself means *to know*, prefixed by the preposition “επι”, adding the idea of *upon* or *on top of*. Thus, it conveys the concept of *knowledge upon knowledge* or *completely knowing*, much like the noun “perfect” in verse 10. In this passage, many Translations including the NIV,

NASV, and ESV render these forms of “ἐπιγινώσκω” to ‘**know fully**’, although these Versions hardly ever translate its other 42 occurrences this way.

At this point, it’s noteworthy that *Passages in The Church Epistles* which define core teachings of the “**dispensation of God**”, made up of “**mystery**” revelation, include this verb’s noun form “**full knowledge**” (ἐπιγνώσις) plus the noun “**perfect**” (τέλειον – Rom. 12:2; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10, 24 – 2:3; 3:10; Titus 1:1; Philem. 1:6; 2 Pet. 1:2-3, 8).¹ Two of these portions pair both nouns to describe how “**mystery**” truth can *transform believers into Christ’s image* (Eph. 4:13, 16-19; Col. 1:25-28). This grouping of terms supports the view after *Church truth was fully revealed*, the gifts of “**prophecy**” and “**knowledge**” became obsolete and passed away.¹¹ Versions which usually render “ἐπιγνώσις” with its full meaning are DBY, YLT, & LITV – “**full knowledge**” and TGNT – “**perfect knowledge**”.

Why is this important? Because **Grasping the Gift of “prophecy” has Ceased Safeguards Christians** from being taken in by individuals or groups who claim to receive revelation beyond the biblical text. To some degree, Cults, the Catholic organization, and numerous Denominations claim Apostles and/or Prophets still exist. This doctrine puts those willing to listen in danger because they’ll be deceived by *so-called new revelations* which contradict parts of Scripture (Rom. 16:17-20). That’s why existing contexts assert we don’t need added instructions (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, believers must study and be personally convinced of what the Word teaches if we’re to be spiritually stable and capable of detecting, circumventing, and withstanding error.

Another gift cited in this portion is “**tongues**” which “**will cause themselves to cease**” (παυσονται) or *stop* (1 Cor. 13:8; other uses: Luke 5:4; 8:24; Acts 20:1; 31; Eph. 1:16; Heb. 10:2; 1 Pet. 3:10; 4:1). This verb is in the middle voice which indicates *the subject, “tongues”, will act upon itself* to cease. It’s also in the future tense showing this Spirit-energized gift “**will**” stop sometime after this Letter was received. Based on the context’s subject matter and this phrase’s position couched between statements about “**prophecy**” and “**knowledge**” discontinuing, both points suggest “**tongues**” will become inactive in a similar timeframe. It would follow “**interpretation of tongues**” would simultaneously end.

This same principle of cessation can be applied to “**gifts of healings**” (1 Cor. 12:9). For, the fact many believers had this ability is confirmed in the record of Acts along with the Epistles written during that time (Acts 3:1-10; 28:1-10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4; James 5:15). But something changed, for on three separate occasions the post-Acts Letters indicate Paul was no longer able to heal (Phil. 2:25-27; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20). These instances exist in stark

contrast to the last historical record of divine healing in Acts 28:1-10, when Paul restored the health of all those who were sick on the Island of Malta.

The Word Infers Other Gifts Cease

Now that we've covered Scripture which explicitly indicates certain supernatural gifts of the Spirit discontinued, let's examine the remaining gifts on the list of First Corinthians 12:8-10. Initially, I'll identify passages describing how these gifts functioned during the Acts period, then compare this activity with what can be learned about them in the post-Acts Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, First & Second Timothy, Titus, and First & Second Peter).

Evaluating these in order, let's look at “a message (λογος) of wisdom” and “a message of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8). This noun in both gifts is generally translated “word”. It's used in John 1:1 and 14 referencing Christ's pre-creation existence, His historic birth, and the “glory” exhibited during His life. Based on its overall usage, “λογος” is widely held to refer to *the complete message about Christ* since it represents everything written about Him in the Gospels and Epistles. Thus, the totality of this record has been properly titled, ‘**The Word**’ (Acts 1:1; Heb. 1:1-3). This “message” is “of” or *associated with* (genitive case) both “knowledge”, or *revealed truth*, and “wisdom”, which refers to *the correct application of truth*.

Accordingly, “λογος” represents the “message” or “word” early prospects heard and responded to (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 8:4; 10:44; 11:1). On the Day of Pentecost, prior to proclaiming “the great things of God”, some 120 believers were “all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, 11). Peter was one of these, and **Some of His Discourses Became Part of The Permanent Record Since They Consist of Spirit-Energized Verbiage He'd Received** (vv. 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:19-22).

Then, thousands who believed “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” and, “with one accord”, were “speaking the word (λογος) of God with boldness” (Acts 4:24-31). This unnatural unison among new converts was only possible because they were being divinely led.

After that, Stephen is depicted as having the “face of an angel” when, with the Spirit's help, he boldly preached a message, angered Jews by accusing them of killing the Messiah, then was stoned to death (Acts 6:15; 7:2-60). Based on Jesus' teaching, these disciples expected this kind of Spirit-backing, “Don't be concerned about how or what you might speak . . . for you aren't the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you” (Matt. 10:19-20, cf. Jer. 1:9; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 2:27).

So, it's my understanding the speech exercised in early Acts "through the Spirit" was similar to the *messages* "of wisdom" and "knowledge" possessed later by the Corinthians and others which enabled them to speak the "word" of God with 100% accuracy (1 Cor. 1:5; 12:7-8). For, some of these also found their way into *The Inspired Record* (Acts 10:34-43; 13:16-47; 15:7-11; 17:22-31; 18:6; 26:1-29; 28:23-28; 1 Cor. 14:37-38; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16). Conversely, the post-Acts Letters give no indication this early ability of infallible speech continued.

On the contrary, in reference to evangelism, Christians are charged (imperative mode) to "walk in wisdom toward those outside" and for our "message" (λογος) to "always be in grace, having been seasoned with salt, to know how it's necessary for us to answer each one" (Col. 4:5-6). This passage doesn't say the Spirit will provide our words, but it places responsibility on us to formulate a message from the truth of "grace . . . to answer each" inquiry we encounter.

Then, Ephesians 4:29 portrays this same accountability by commanding (imperative), "let no rotten word (λογος) proceed out of your mouth, but if anything is good toward edification of need in order that it might give grace to those who hear." Also, we're exhorted to "fearlessly speak the word" (λογον) and hold fast to "the word (λογον) of life" in order to be effective witnesses (Phil. 1:14; 2:16).

Furthermore, we're ordered (imperative) to "let the word (λογος) of Christ dwell in you richly", and "everything you might do in word (λογω) or deed" is to be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:16-17). Then, Paul instructs Timothy to be "nourished by the words (λογους) of the faith" as well as not allow others to "despise your youthfulness but become a pattern of believers in speech (λογω, "word" or "message"), manner of life", etc. (1 Tim 4:6, 12). Finally, to set an example, Timothy is told (imperative) to "strive" to accurately handle "the word (λογον) of truth" and persistently "preach the word" (λογον – 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2).

All these verses support the belief we're responsible to draw upon the Spirit's power to understand the Word and develop our "message" (1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 5:18). Moreover, **No Portion in the post-Acts Letters Supports the Idea the Spirit Gives Us Words to Speak.** And, to accentuate this point, we're warned our speech and actions will be judged when "each of us will give an account (λογον – "word" or "message") concerning himself to God" (Rom. 14:1-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-11). Now, how can this principle be practically applied? **No Christian, Including Bible Teachers, Should Ever Claim the Message They Communicate was Given to Them by God.** And anyone who states or implies this shouldn't be trusted.

The next Spirit-energized gift mentioned is “faith” (πίστις – 1 Cor. 12:9). The only other place this aspect of “faith” appears in the Church Epistles is where Paul says, “if I might have all faith to the extent to move mountains, but might not have love, I’m nothing” (13:2). Some declare this statement wasn’t intended to be taken literally, however it parallels Jesus’ teaching if his disciples had “faith as a mustard seed”, they could move a “mountain” (Matt. 17:20; John 4:46-54). Apparently, some believers in Corinth and beyond possessed a comparable gift.

So, what incidents similar in magnitude to moving mountains are found in the Acts period? How about the faith Peter and Paul demonstrated when they raised the dead (John 11:1-44; Acts 9:32-42; 20:9-12)? And, how about Paul’s faith which gave confidence to all the folks on his ship that none would perish because of the storm or subsequent wreck on Malta’s rock-laden coastline (27:33-44)? Also, what about his lack of concern when he was bitten by a poisonous “viper” (28:3-6)?

Finally, what about the teaching in James that a “prayer of faith” by elders wouldn’t just heal a person, but also cause their “sins” to “be forgiven” (John 20:23; James 5:14-17)? Then, he equates these prayer results with Elijah’s faith which caused the heavens to start and stop rain? Aren’t these the exact kind of outcomes from “faith” that Jesus predicted (Mark 16:15-18; John 14:12-14)?

Consequently, if this gift remained today, we’d expect to see believers routinely performing similar feats. However, miracles like these don’t take place from the beckoning of individuals which suggests the Holy Spirit has ceased empowering this gift. Today, God may choose to perform wonders to further His purpose or in response to prayer, but there’s rarely if ever proof to verify His involvement. Finally, the point of view this kind of “faith” has also been “deactivated” is legitimized by its non-existence in the post-Acts Letters.

The next gift itemized is the “workings of miracles” (1 Cor. 12:9). The noun “workings” (ενεργηματα) is derived from two words which mean *to work in*. It’s pronounced like our word ‘energizing’ and used to describe the Spirit’s activity (1 Cor. 12:11; Gal. 3:5; Eph. 1:19; 3:16-20; Phil. 2:13). Next, “miracles” (δυναμεων) is replicated by the English noun ‘dynamo’. Thus, *it’s the Ability to Perform Miracles on Demand through the Dynamic of the Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). And there’s plenty of evidence this gift was prolific (Acts 1:8; 2:22; 3:12; 4:7; 6:8; 10:38; 16:25-34; 19:11; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4).

However, not one clue in the post-Acts Letters corroborates the idea anyone should currently expect to possess this gift. Instead, this sensation is shown to emerge next when God revives His dealings with Israel and sends two witnesses

to perform miracles the “Beast” can’t match. This will happen during the first half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:24-27; Rev. 11:3-6).

The next gift is “discernment (διακρισεις) of spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10). This noun comes from two words which depict *judging through* and mean to *decide* or *discriminate*. It’s function is clarified in chapter 14, “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern” (διακρινετωσαν); then, “the spirits of the prophets are to choose to be made subject (middle/passive) to the prophets” (vv. 29, 32).²

This gift existed to provide another level of accountability by making certain those who claimed they taught “prophesy” were accurately sharing revelation from the Spirit. Prior to the written record, this is how the Church sustained doctrinal purity. In contrast to this, the latter Epistles teach we’re to verify all instruction by “the pattern of sound words” found in the now-revealed “mystery” truth (1 Cor. 14:37-38; Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:24-28; 1 Tim. 1:4-11; 3:8-10; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 4:2-3; Tit. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:15-18).

Listed last is “interpretation (ερμηνεια) of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:10). Our term ‘hermeneutic’ is derived from this noun which is why *courses on biblical interpretation* are frequently titled ‘Hermeneutics’. This Spirit-infused gift enabled its bearer *to translate* what was spoken by another brother in a “tongue”, or *language*, foreign to the assembly (14:2-4, 28). For, if no one understood his teaching and his words weren’t translated, “edification” couldn’t take place (14:5, 12, 26-28). Therefore, those who possessed the gift of “tongues” were to remain “silent” if an interpreter wasn’t present. Likewise, it’s logical to assume when “tongues” ceased, the gift to translate them went by the wayside too.

Other Events Appearing to Discontinue

More “signs” occur in the record of Acts which are linked to God’s dealings with the Nation of Israel or to authenticating His new “mystery” program, but their continued operation isn’t affirmed in the post-Acts Letters (1 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). Note the following deliberations.

The appearance of “visions” (οραματα & οπτασιας) was prevalent in this transition period (Acts 7:56; 10:3-6, 9-19; 16:9-12; 18:9-10; 27:23-24; 1 Cor. 15:5-8; 2 Cor. 12:1). Then, First Peter 1:8 states, “whom (Jesus), not having seen (ιδοντες), you love, unto who now not seeing (ορωντες) but believing, you rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.” These two participial forms of the verb “οραω”, which means *to see*, share the same stem as the noun “οραμα”. The

first occurs in aorist tense form with the negative “οὐκ” which indicates they “love” Christ *though they had never seen Him*. The second participle is in the present tense which specifies *they weren’t currently seeing* Jesus either. This verse corroborates everything recorded in the latter Epistles, for they’re silent about the presence of or expectation to see “visions”.

Also, *Audible Directions were Widespread* during this time (Acts 8:26; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7-9; Gal. 1:11-12). This trend went beyond written revelation explaining God’s current purpose, the nature of the Church, and how He wants us to live. For in Acts 13:2, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Indeed, separate Barnabas and Saul to me for the work which I have called them to’” (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). Later, on Paul’s way to Jerusalem he said, “city by city, the Holy Spirit is thoroughly testifying to me while saying that bonds and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:23). In similar fashion, leaders in Antioch decided Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem to deal with the issue of whether gentiles should be required to “be circumcised in relation to the custom of Moses” (Acts 15:1-2). Then, when Paul references this same event, he says, “I went up (to Jerusalem) according to revelation” (Gal. 2:2).

This raises the question, ‘**Does the Spirit still give audible directions today?**’ Once more, the absence of this phenomenon in the latter Epistles suggests the answer is ‘**No**’. Furthermore, at least three passages indicate the “Lord” did the same thing. The first two instances occur when Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus then assured “Ananias” it was safe to contact him (Acts 9:3-16). Later, the “Lord” told Paul he would reach Rome (23:11). However, the post-Acts Letters never hint that Christians should expect to hear the voice of the Spirit or the Lord, but always direct us to **Obtain Guidance from Recorded Revelation** (Col. 3:16; 1 Tim 4:6-16; 2 Tim. 1:8-14; 2 Pet. 3:14-16).

Next, let’s consider *Divinely Choreographed Movements* during this period. After Phillip was told by an angel to take the road heading to Gaza, he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch who was Treasurer for the Queen. When their meeting ended, “the Spirit of the Lord seized Phillip and the eunuch no longer saw him . . . also Phillip was found at Azotus.” This instantaneous transport from one locale to another is similar to what we witness on the sci-fi TV show ‘Star Trek’ (Acts 8:39-40). Another divinely directed journey was when Barnabas and Saul, “after having been sent forth by the Holy Spirit”, evangelized and established churches while heading to and in the region of Galatia (13:4).

Later, the Spirit “hindered” Paul, Silas, and Timothy from speaking “the word in Asia” or going to “Bithynia”, then directed them by a “vision” to “Macedonia” (Acts 16:6-10). This corresponds with First Thessalonians 2:18 which states Satan “hindered” them twice from coming to that town. Keep in mind, the Devil’s goal is

to prevent the gospel from being proclaimed anywhere. At the same time, the Spirit retained control of the sequence in which these areas were evangelized, though it wasn't always in the order Paul “purposed” or “desired” (Rom. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:18). In a comparable manner, “the Lord” assured Paul he would “testify” in “Rome”, yet his Epistle to them clarifies he had desired to travel there for “many years” (Acts 23:11; Rom. 1:13; 15:22-23).

Even though Physical Guidance is common in Acts, *similar expectations are absent from the post-Acts Letters*. So, yet again, I think *this Spirit-Aided Activity had Ceased* by the time these Epistles were written. Given this is true, anyone who currently claims to be sent to a locale by God may easily be motivated by other factors. And to repeat: if we can't support our desires or actions with solid evidence from the Church Epistles, we're setting ourselves up to operate outside the Spirit's control.¹ Consequently, **Believers Shouldn't Invoke the Name of God to Sanction Any Kind of Geographic Relocation.**

A Special 'Calling' No Longer Exists

As I perceive it, the predominant view of ‘A Divine Call’ today is: *The Lord Leads Individuals to Locations, Causes, Relationships, and Vocations, including Ministry*. This perspective is indefensible when the way God presently works is ascertained from the Church Epistles.¹ For, this belief is *formed from how leaders were commissioned under the Law*, particularly prophets, priests, and kings.

Then, this practice continued as apostles were ‘called’ throughout the Gospel period and Acts (Matt. 10:1-15; 16:16-20; John 15:14-17; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 4:6-13; 9:15-18; 15:9-11; Gal. 1:15-16). This procedure is defined in the Book of Hebrews which states no “high priest . . . takes the value (or *honor*) for himself, but the one being called (καλουμενος) by God, according as also Aaron” (5:1-4, cf. Exod. 28:1-3; 2 Chron. 26:16-21).

More documentation for this tradition is found in Acts 13:2, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Indeed, separate Barnabas and Saul to me for the work which I have called (προσκεκλημαι) them to’”. This verb is composed of the preposition “προς”, carrying the idea of *toward*, prefixed to the verb “καλεω”, which means *to call*. The chapters which follow show the exact “work” they were “called” for was evangelizing and edifying believers. Later, Luke uses this same term when Paul received a “vision during the night” to head for “Macedonia” since “God has called (προσκεκληται) us to evangelize (or “preach the gospel to”) them” (Acts 16:9-10). Furthermore, both verbs are in the perfect tense specifying *the call happened, then the purpose for that call continued*.

In review, *God regularly selected individuals* to spread His truth and provide organization during O.T. and Gospel times when few had the Holy Spirit. Then, He continued using this same mechanism while the Church was being established and didn't have access to the written revelation of truth.

In contrast to the just discussed use of “καλεω”, when this verb refers to God's current activity **it exclusively defines how believers “were called” to salvation** (Rom. 8:30, 33; 9:24; 1 Cor. 7:20-24; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:15; 2 Tim. 1:9). Accordingly, we're labeled “**called ones**” (κλητοι, Rom. 1:6-7; 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24). Then, in some passages this “**calling**” (κλησεως), or *summoning*, is correlated with God's *chosen* or *elect* (compare Rom. 8:28 – 9:24 with Rom. 11:29 & Eph. 1:4-5, 18 with 4:1, cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-31; 2 Pet. 1:10).

However, instead of always translating “κλητος” as a noun, most Versions render it as a verb in Romans 1:1, 6, and 7, saying Paul was ‘**called to be an apostle**’ and we were ‘**called to be saints**’ (see also 1 Cor. 1:1-2). Literal renderings of these verses are, “**Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called one** (κλητος), **an apostle**” (v. 1), “**among whom you are the called ones** (κλητοι) **of Christ Jesus**” (v. 6), and “**to all who're in Rome, beloved ones of God, called ones** (κλητοις), **saints**” (v. 7). Translations in this footnote properly render these nouns.¹²

Therefore, when the Church-Epistle use of this term is applied, **All Believers are Called to Salvation and We All Have the Same Calling**. Yes, Body members have different gifts for ministry, but **We're All In The Ministry**. First, all the saved are responsible to evangelize (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Phil. 2:12-18; Col. 4:5-6; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 3:13-16). Also, all members are to be involved with “**teaching and admonishing one another**” to generate personal and corporate growth within the Church. And these activities fulfill the “**calling**” (κλησεως) for which we “**were called**” (εκληθητε – Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:1, 11-13; 5:15-33; Phil. 3:14-17; Col. 3:5-17; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 2 Pet. 1:10).

At the end of the day, the only reason labels like ‘**Clergy**’ and ‘**Laity**’ survive is because Bible teachers and Organizations continue to wrongly incorporate and promote O.T. principles. As a former Catholic, *this practice of elevating some and demoting others* turns my stomach since it hinders Body members and, therefore, the entire Church from realizing our full potential. In addition, it feeds the mindset: “**The Called**” **Aren't All Equally Vital to Gain Victory in Our Spiritual Battle** (1 Cor. 12:18-26; Eph. 4:1-16).

Another factor which works against believers grasping this doctrine is when the statement “**many are called but few are chosen**” is applied to the Church (Matt. 22:1-14). This portion teaches *the elect* and *the called* aren't the same group

which contradicts what's taught in the Church Epistles.¹ However, when this verse's historical setting is correctly linked with God's Jewish-oriented Law program, it specifies all of Abraham's descendants were called or *invited* to follow God, but only the "chosen" or "elect" answered that call (cf. Rom. 9:6-13). On the other hand, when the terms "called ones" and "elect" apply to the Body, they're used interchangeably and refer to everyone who's saved (8:28-30, 33; 9:14-33; 11:1-32; 1 Cor. 1:21-31; 2 Pet. 1:10).

In Bible School I was lucky to learn everyone "called" to salvation is placed into the ministry. This truth greatly impacted me, so at age 20 I wrote a paper titled '**The Christian Call to Ministry**' which included prooftexts from the Word, though my understanding of the issue was far inferior to how I see it today. Furthermore, Martin Luther didn't derive all his doctrine from the Church Epistles, but he did promote '**The Priesthood of All Believers**'.

Some say it's wrong to call Body members '**priests**'. Yet, Paul tells us to "present your bodies as a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice (θυσιαν) to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5 – emphasis mine). Later he asserts he was "working the gospel of God as a priest (ιερουργουντα) in order that the offering (προσφορα) of the gentiles might become acceptable" (Rom. 15:16; Heb. 10:14, 18 – emphasis mine, cf. Phil. 3:17-18; 2 Tim. 4:6-7). Also, *All Believers Have Direct Access* to "the Father" and "grace" through "Christ" (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; 4:15-16; Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-25).

Today, Leaders Are Appointed by Men

Like the '**divine call**', *Spirit-Ratification* is often applied to appointing "elders". This view draws support from Acts 14:23 where Paul and Barnabas "designated elders church by church". But note, they did this "after having prayed with fasting", another Law practice that survived during this transition. In addition, they were apostles (cf. Acts 20:28).

So again, claiming *Divine Sanction in This Process*, which has its N.T. roots in Jesus' teaching about the "kingdom of heaven", basically requires the belief "apostles" or their equivalent still exist. This view is founded on the same Scripture from the Gospels and Acts which the Roman Catholic Church uses to back their dogmas of Divine Appointment and Apostolic Succession (Matt. 16:16-20; John 20:21-23; James 5:13-18).

Now, let's consider what the post-Acts Letters say about seating "elders". In First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, no instruction points to any basis for installment

other than whether a brother meets the recorded qualifications. Then, Paul provides high-bar procedures for both choosing and disciplining elders (1 Tim. 5:19-25). In this portion, all leaders are charged to deal fairly and dispassionately with other elders who fail to maintain these requirements, for the integrity of the assembly must be preserved. This is to go down no matter how long the man has been a leader, how much clout they have, and how knowledgeable, well-liked, rich, famous, or charming they are.

Moreover, nothing in the later Epistles signals we should expect intervention in this activity. In fact, First Corinthians declares, **“the house of Stephanus . . . appointed themselves for ministry to the saints”** (16:15-16). Prayer is the closest heavenly function that can be applied to this process, as identified next, but presently there’s no guarantee God will answer this kind of request. So, if the Spirit no longer facilitates this endeavor or other similar procedures detailed in this section, **Any Person or Group that Claims Their Teaching, Practices, or Appointments are Divinely Led Shouldn’t be Followed**. Bear in mind, *Cults Thrive Using These Exact Methodologies*.

Aspects of Prayer Have Changed

In addition to termination of gifts which enabled believers to receive prophecy and heal physical maladies, a large portion of Christendom recognizes there’s been a significant change in how prayer functions. For, some prayer expectations which Jesus spoke about, were in effect during the Acts period and upheld in some General Letters, are totally absent from the Church Epistles.¹

While on earth, Christ made all-encompassing assurances to His disciples which pertained to getting whatever they may ask, especially after they received the promises of the Holy Spirit and Law placed in their heart (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-39; Ezek. 36:26-27). He said, **“Ask and it will be given to you . . . for everyone who asks receives”** (Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-13; 1 John 3:22; 5:14-15). Then, **“where two or three are gathered for My name”** they can be confident **“concerning every practice which they might ask, it will come to pass for them from My Father”** (Matt. 18:19-20).

Further proof for the *Efficacy of Kingdom Prayer* is found in Mark 11:24, where the Lord says they’ll receive the things they request if they **“believe”**. Also, **“whatever you might ask in My name, this I will do in order that the Father might be glorified in the Son”** (John 14:13). Then, when the New Covenant’s Spirit inhabits the Jewish faithful, **“in that day . . . whatever you might ask the Father in My name, He’ll give to you . . . ask and you’ll receive”** (16:12-15, 23-24).

These same truths are mirrored in the Book of James where “elders” are to convene to heal a person who is “ill”. They’re to “pray over him, after having anointed him with oil”, and this “prayer of faith will save (or restore) the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up”, plus his “sins . . . will be forgiven” (Mark 11:24-25; John 20:23; James 5:13-15). If anyone questions whether these directives should be taken literally, James solidifies his intent by citing an O.T. miracle. **His Readers can Expect Results Equal to Those Achieved by Elijah when His “effective prayer” as “a righteous man”** initiated 3.5 years of famine when it “didn’t rain”, then another 3.5 years of abundance when “the sky poured rain” (1 Kings 17:1; 18:42-45; James 5:16-18).

In contrast with *These Unconditional Guarantees Tied to Kingdom Prayer*, expectations in the Church Epistles are quite different.¹ For instance, we’re assured our prayers will result in “the peace of God” and “will guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Also, Romans 8:26-27 contains a comforting promise, “the Spirit helps in relation to our weakness”, and when we don’t know “what (τι) we should pray”, He “intercedes on our behalf” and makes our petitions palatable to the Father.

However, Body members are never assured to receive the things we ask. It’s been said, ‘**God answers prayer with a yes, no, maybe, or not yet**’. That’s fair. Still, if we source revelation pertaining to the Church, there’s no reason to think we can predict which reply He’ll choose.

So, what specific prayers should believers utter based on lessons found in the Church Epistles?¹ In Romans 10:1, the heart of Paul is exposed in his “petition to God on behalf of . . . salvation” for his Jewish kinsmen, though he knew this plea wouldn’t automatically be answered (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 7:16; 9:19-23; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 1 Pet. 3:1). For, the surrounding context makes it clear *everyone who responds with faith in Christ does so because of the grace and mercy received as one of God’s elect* (Rom. 9:6-24, 30-33; 11:1-10, 30-32; 2 Thess. 2:10-14).

Moreover, Paul’s insight of how salvation comes about was *a major reason he was able to endure affliction while evangelizing*. For, he knew God’s “elect” would respond: “as many as had been ordained for eternal life believed” and “I endure all things because of the elect in order that they might obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (Acts 13:48; 2 Tim. 2:10). Unexpectedly, to my knowledge, Romans 10:1 is the only portion in the Church Epistles which promotes praying for the redemption of unbelievers.¹

Otherwise, prayer is prescribed for virtually every need connected with *Our Spiritual Warfare* (Eph. 6:10-13, 18; Col. 4:2-4). To help ground believers, Paul

asked for prayer so he would “boldly make known the mystery of the gospel . . . as it’s necessary for me to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20). And his recorded prayers teach we’re to implore God that, through the Spirit’s capacity, all saints might grasp truths which help “establish” and cause us to mature by being “filled unto all the fullness of God” (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:22-28). In the end, comprehending and knowing how to apply His Word **Outfits Believers to Handle Most Pivotal Issues in Our Conflict Against Evil.**

Paul also mentions appeals from fellow believers were a factor in his release from danger and captivity (2 Cor. 1:8-11; Phil. 1:19). Then, as our example, he regularly prayed for all Christians in every church (Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:28; Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:2-4).

Furthermore, we’re exhorted to “persevere in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). Then, a key aspect is to “pray without ceasing; give thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” and “all the time giving thanks on behalf of all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God” (Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:17-18 – emphasis mine).

These passages indicate gratitude for what He’s accomplished for us will change the trajectory of our lives. When all’s said and done, I see “prayer” as *Reliance on and Consulting the Father in Reference to His Will*. In essence, He wants “the things above” to govern our consciousness, not “the things upon the earth” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:15-18; Col. 3:2).

To summarize, we’re not limited to what we can pray for since we’re told to “be anxious for nothing, but in every prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6; Heb. 4:16). Still, there’s no guarantee these appeals will be answered with outcomes like physical health, material things, or extrabiblical direction for what we should do, who we should marry, and where we should live or work. And, though Christians emphasize praying for ailments, have you noticed the Church Epistles don’t advocate this?¹

Instead, **Most of Our Training, Including the Documented Prayers, are Formulated to Foster Spiritual Development.** Conversely, many O.T. and Law contexts support the expectation God will answer all prayers which is a major difference between His past and future dealings with Israel when compared with **Prevailing Procedures related to Sanctification and Growth.**

Concluding this section, whether we consider the topic of supernatural gifts, calling, guidance, or prayer by specifications in the Church Epistles, we’re instructed to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7, cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-25; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Col. 2:16-19).¹ Keep in mind, the only recorded failure to heal is when

Paul, who possessed the gift, asked for his “**thorn in the flesh**” to be removed (2 Cor. 12:7-8). Rather than getting anticipated relief, God responded by allowing Satan to continue inflicting Paul so he wouldn’t become “**proud**” from the “**abundance of revelations**” he’d received (12:1, 7). Plus, God taught him a valuable lesson which has lingered for us: “**My grace is sufficient for you, for power** (δυναμις – **I, A, D**) **is perfected in weakness . . . for whenever I’m weak, then I’m powerful**” (δυνατος or “**strong**”; 12:9-10).

Article Summary

Section One *Identifies the Primary Battlefield on which We Wage War.* Turns out it’s the turf of our own mind and heart as we encounter **THE ENEMY** – celestial principalities and powers united with the Devil. In this conflict, we’re “**to avenge**” (εκδικησαι) each devious thought entering our head, so we won’t respond with “**disobedience**” (2 Cor. 10:5-6). We need to learn to head off every malignant threat by *sentencing it, then incarcerating it* to never see the light of day.

But, when others sin against us, we’re not to resort to the “**flesh**” and repay “**evil in the place of**” their “**evil**”. Instead, our Spirit-aided response should be to “**overcome evil with good**” by “**taking thought beforehand**” so we can react in a profitable way. Also, we’re to aim to be at “**peace**” with all and commit evildoers to God who, in His own time, will dole out appropriate “**vengeance**” (εκδικησις – Rom. 12:17-21; 13:12-14).

The latter part of this section contemplates passages that speak to putting to “**death**” sin which rises from our “**old man**” – an essential function of Christian growth. The Church Epistles lay out precise procedures to accomplish this goal as they guide us to **Utilize God’s Provided Implements, Be Willing to Tolerate Wounds to our Ego, and Proudly Bear Battle Scars Suffered while We Forge Ahead with the Winning Strategy** (Gal. 6:12-17; 2 Tim. 1:7-8; 2:3-4; 4:6-8). All other methods which claim to produce spiritual maturity will fail. This is why so many who presently trust flesh-based philosophy, psychology, and counseling **Face A Spiritual Identity Crisis** which yields *Discouragement* and *Depression*.

Section Two veers in on how *Christians should Carry Out Divine Orders In The Arena of Evangelism*. At ground level, God wants us to share the Message of The Cross, for people must be saved and receive the Spirit before they can even desire to espouse other biblical training (Rom. 8:7-8). Since regeneration provides the only means to escape Satan’s “**authority**” and begin relating with God, **The Presumption Non-Christians should Live By His Ethical Standards is A Denial of the Gospel** (Rom. 6:20; 2 Cor. 4:2-6; Col. 1:13-14; 2

Tim. 2:25-26). Yet, this faulty conviction sways Body members to become social influencers, then rationalize this quest by Scripture intended for Israel.

However, when we search the Church Epistles to frame what our relationship with the “world” should be, these Letters paint a very different picture. We’re taught to maintain a low profile; avoid getting into the business of others; provide for our own needs; aspire to live at peace; steer clear of contention, debate, or allying with unbelievers; circumvent slander and complaints; be subject to officials; and pray for all men. Compliance with these principles prevents us from creating undue “offences” or “stumbling blocks” which *Inhibit the Message We were Dispatched to Preach* (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11; 2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Since these values align with our “calling”, I’m very negative on Christians becoming involved in politics. In the United States, every citizen has the right to partake in choosing leaders and formulating law, but is this really how God wants us to spend our time and energy? If you’ve read this paper, you already know my answer. I’ve come to believe **Political Affiliation is One of The Most Destructive Deterrents for Witness-Based Evangelism** since both major Parties operate on fleshly platforms which insidiously affect their members. Both accuse the other of advocating ‘Fear’ and ‘Hate’. And all Coalitions propagate some truth and some error, routinely quote Scripture out of context, and ignore most of the Bible’s teaching.

With regard to my political background, I was molded in the Republican wing of Christendom. I remember hearing one Bible teacher exclaim, ‘**I don’t know how a Christian can be a Democrat!**’ Well, I’ve been friends with many good believers who identify with both Parties. I’ve not only dropped out of *This Civil Melee* but increasingly encourage others to do so and **Become Engaged in God’s Spirit-Based Platform**. Assessing the situation, my wife says it best, ‘**God’s not concerned about what goes on in our government or country, He’s just interested in how we represent Him in it**’ (Phil. 3:20; 1 Pet. 2:11-13).

Why then are Body members so captivated by patriotic songs, pledges, and documents composed by sinful men? For, no human creed is fully consistent with revelation for the Church which provides all the guidance we need (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Eight years ago, a week before the presidential election, I shared in an assembly whether Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton prevailed, my ministry wouldn’t change one bit. And it didn’t. Then, Joe Biden won in 2020, and again my service to the Lord wasn’t affected. Why? Because **Elections and Legislation have Nothing to Do with God’s Purpose in this Dispensation of Grace**.

Moreover, just like the process of death begins the moment we're born, at the onset, Nations and everything else in this sin-fated world are doomed to corrupt and collapse. The only entity having upward potential to evolve is God's "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:16-17; Eph. 2:14-18). For, with the indwelling Spirit, members in the Body can undergo routine "renewal" by being "transformed" from our wicked ways and getting clothed with "righteousness". And all of this by "dying" to sin (Rom. 6:16-19; 8:12-14; 12:1-2; 13:12-14; Phil. 3:10-16; Col. 3:5-11).

Lastly, because I'm not partisan, don't vote, and am transparent about my stance, this gives me a **Huge Advantage in sharing the gospel**. For, when non-believers learn my perspective, **The Barrier You-Want-to-Force-Me-to-Live-Like-A-Christian** swiftly fades. A more peaceful atmosphere emerges which makes it far easier to bypass most of the stereotypical issues Christians push, begin dialogue about why evil exists in the world, and proceed to how reconciliation is possible with a holy God. When it comes to evangelism, *Real Victory Occurs* when God's elect are saved through the "savor" of the gospel, and this same "smell" condemns those who reject (2 Cor. 2:14-17; 2 Thess. 2:10-14).

Section Three catalogues a sampling of traits and behaviors Christians must "put on" to be equipped for *Our Ensuing Battle*. Our agenda consists of implementing godly character so we can grow individually, then serve others to edify the entire Church (Eph. 4:12-16). In *This Mission*, success isn't gauged by money, fame, or power but by how each member performs in our conscience, marriage, family, assemblies, and other relationships.

To become "qualified" for this type of ministry, we need to learn "mystery" instruction, then "pattern" our lives to this "sound teaching" (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:12; Col. 1:24-29; 1 Tim. 1:4-11; 2 Tim. 1:8-14; 2:2). At the same time, we mustn't succumb to misleading "profane empty voices and oppositions of falsely named knowledge", a course the world deceptively promotes as 'Intelligence' or 'Common Sense'. Don't forget; the Devil utilizes identical rationale to advance his "schemes" (Rom. 16:17-20; Eph. 4:14; 6:10-16; 1 Tim. 6:20; Heb. 4:12).

Therefore, **Paul Challenges Christians to Wake Up** and "rise . . . out of" our "dead" state. We can do this by becoming "wise ones" to "understand what the will of the Lord is" while being "filled in the Spirit" (Eph. 5:6-21). Furthermore, we're told to be *Vigilant, Maintain a Holy Lifestyle, and Expect to Suffer* as we Complete Our Mission (2 Cor. 1:3-7; Phil. 1:27-30; 1 Thess. 5:5-11; 2 Tim. 3:12). Just like the oppressed saints in Judea, we need to "resist" with the Spirit's help. The nature of their stand was to "make" their "ways straight", "endure" the Lord's "discipline", not become "depressed", and realize they may have to shed "blood"

for their faith like Jesus did (Heb. 12:1-14). Yet, the author of this Book didn't tell them to flee their region to preserve their own lives since all people need a living witness.

Section Four just ended, so I'm not going to re-summarize it. But the conclusions reached take me back to when I was a young believer. One of the thoughts motivating my circle of friends was, **'God said it; I believe it; that settles it'**. Truly, this is a great statement to live by.

However, a problem arises when an excerpt of Scripture which no longer represents how God works is cited to address a current issue. For instance, the time Jesus arrived at Martha's home after Lazarus had died. Then, she said, **"I know that as much as you might ask God, God will give to you"**, referring to her confidence He could raise her brother from the dead (John 11:22). And He did.

Later, Acts records Peter and Paul each reviving at least one person who had died (9:36-43; 20:7-12). So, based on events like these, each believer needs to determine for him or herself what part of the Word represents how the Spirit currently works among Body members and humanity. It's evident, when we actively apply principles intended for the Church, we're **'Practicing Our Faith'**. Operating outside of this standard is **'False Religion'**.

Concluding Thoughts

Today, believers should adopt the simple acrostic **'WWPD'** as our compass since *Paul received his revelation for the Church from our Risen Savior* (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 9:16-17; 14:37; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:2-3; Col. 1:24-28; 1 Tim. 1:4-11; Titus 1:2-3). This slightly differs but significantly varies from the one traditionally embraced. Keep in mind, **Just Because the Majority Follows Some Quip Doesn't Make It Right**. And God holds each of us accountable to know what we believe and why we believe it.

I once had a teacher who repeated a lesson over and over to drive home a point. Then, he explained the reason for using this method was because it worked so well for Hitler. Added to this erroneous tactic, *Compromise* is just as destructive as *Indoctrination*. For, when teachers understand truth but keep quiet because of inevitable opposition, *They Starve Body members from Spirit-Nurturing Truth* (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:6; Heb. 4:12). The Devil loves strategies like these since they neutralize the potential **"increase"** of the Church and, simultaneously, **Inflict Collateral Damage from Friendly Misfiring** (Eph. 2:21-22; 4:11-16; Col. 2:19).

In this same vein, I'm reminded of when we travel to camp on the Oregon coast in our RV. From home, we take I-5 north, then turn west on U.S. 34. In a few miles we pass a town called 'Tangent' which invariably reminds me of what happens to Christians who aren't "**established**" in Church truth – *They Get Off on Tangents* (Rom. 16:25-26).

Too many naively follow Scripture not intended for us and are deluded to think they're being led by the Spirit. A poor grasp of the Word also exposes us to be misled by tradition which isn't even in the Bible. This is one reason Paul used the phrase "**I don't desire you to be ignorant**" (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:13). For, not being "**grounded**" opens us up to all sorts of sinful acts, deviant theology, humanistic philosophy, conspiracy theories, etc., etc., and so forth (1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 3:17-19; Col. 1:23).

To address this downward spiral of failure and defeat, we should follow the model we've been given (Rom. 7:14-25; 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 3:10-12). And, **sometimes, doing the right thing means we need to stand alone**. After the Jerusalem Conference, Paul did this very thing in Antioch when Peter caused all the Jewish brethren, even Barnabas, to commit hypocrisy "**choosing to be caused to fear those out of the circumcision**" – the Law-Keeping Jews who "**came from James**" (Gal. 2:11-14).²

Later, when he received a death sentence from Ceasar, Paul was all alone. How deserted he must have felt, yet he was able to declare, "**the Lord stood beside me and empowered me**" (2 Tim. 4:16-18). Each of us should ask ourselves, '**Do I have this kind of spiritual grounding and fortitude to stand for the Lord in every circumstance?**' And '**Is this My Combat-Frame-of-Mind?**'

Sadly, I'm aware of many brothers and sisters who have the mindset, '**I know the truth**'. These Body members tend to hang out with likeminded converts and *Get Caught Up in a Whirlpool of Theological Stagnancy*. For, they think they know almost everything about the Word except perhaps a few small tweaks of insight which, when learned and applied, don't really change a thing. A term I think describes this outlook is '**Christi-phony-anity**'. Those who pursue this Course will reach their destination, but it'll be distinguished by **A New and Mostly Fruitless Tradition**.

To avoid *This Attitudinal Pitfall*, we should routinely test our beliefs and actions by contemplating the reformative properties of grace. We can accomplish this by simply learning the contents of the divine record intended for the Church, seek to adhere to each part of it, and be careful not to fall short of or go beyond its scope. Then, **We can Proceed with Solutions, Solutions, and more**

Solutions! By staying on point, we'll maintain a clear vision, portray transparency, and exude a humble boldness as we live for the Lord. So, those who want to **Successfully Contribute to the Body, Our Community, and Society**, should make sure we're involved in **Solution-Oriented, Spirit-Aided Activities**.

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New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek texts. Old Testament quotes are from the NASV unless otherwise indicated. Rarely studied Bible Versions cited in this article can be accessed at studybible.info

Footnotes:

- 1) In my assessment, the central portions of Scripture which form the basis for the *Church Epistles* are Paul's 13 Letters since their content expounds God's present "**administration**" (οικονομία), *household management* or *dispensation*, that defines the nature and function of Christ's Body. This record is stated to be the revelation of formerly un-prophesied "**mystery**" (μυστηριον) truth which Jesus made fully known to Paul (Eph. 3:2-3; Col. 1:24-28). Also, I believe the content of Peter's two Letters and The Book of Hebrews fully align with Paul's writings and, as such, should be equally applied to the Church (2 Pet. 3:15-16). My perspective on John's Letters and the Book of James is explained in the text and footnote 21 of the article, 'Our Spirit Connection – Accessing His Power' found under the 'articles' tab on edifiedliving.net
- 2) In Koine Greek of the New Testament era, the **Middle Voice** in verbs, participles, and infinitives which express action (or being) basically indicates *the subject acts upon itself to perform their action (or being)*. This activity can be conveyed by the concept of *causing itself* to do (or be) something thus, in reference to people, it's well translated with the idea of *making a choice*. The **Passive Voice** indicates *the subject is acted upon by a force outside of itself*. This function *effectively turns the subject into a direct object* since the subject is *made* to do (or be) something by that outside force. Action words (or words of being) which occur in a Middle/Passive Form convey the meaning of both voices.
- 3) Other Translations render "ετεροζυγουντες" as 'yoked differently' – JMNT; 'bear a strange/stranger's yoke' – Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew; 'unequally yoked' – KJV, ASV, TGNT, LITV; 'diversely yoked' – DBY, Rotherham, CLV; 'incongruous ties/relations' – Moffatt, Goodspeed; 'unevenly yoked' – ISV, LEB, JMNT; and 'enter a mismatch' – WPNT, VIN.
- 4) This term is equally well translated 'not quarrelsome' – YLT, LITV, MLV; 'to avoid quarreling' – ESV; 'not to be contentious' – DBY, ASV; 'to be peaceable' – TGNT, NIV; 'be pacific' – CLV; 'to be no brawlers' – KJV; and 'adverse to strife' – Rotherham.

- 5) More literal Translations render this phrase as ‘every human creation’ – YLT, TGNT, MLV, CLV, Rotherham, Diaglott, JMNT; ‘every creation proceeding from man’ – Julia Smith; and ‘every human framing’ – JMNT.
- 6) Greek nouns refer to a person, place or thing just like in English. These designations represent real things containing *essence* or *substance*. So, when a verb is absent in the Greek text, a *present indicative verb of being is always understood* since essence (or being) already exists within the noun itself. This is why nouns, pronouns, adjectives, participles, articles, and infinitives with articles (parts of speech with declension endings) are called **Substantives** because they possess inherent substance and, therefore, essence or being.
- 7) The meaning ‘absence of quality’ is derived from *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine, 1966, Vol. II, p. 25.
- 8) ‘The love unfeigned’ – YLT, Diaglott; ‘Love, eunhypocritical’ – ECB; ‘Love unfeigned’ – Julia Smith; ‘Love without hypocrisy’ – ACV. Also, see JMNT renderings.
- 9) The following definitions for ‘hypocrite’ are from merriam-webster.com: ‘a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion’ and ‘a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings’.
- 10) Meanings for “ζεω”, plus its Latin equivalent *fervere*, are from *Abridgment of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, October 1871, p. 298.
- 11) For more detailed exegesis of First Corinthians 13:8-13, see ‘First Corinthians 13:8-13 – The Perfect Scenario’ by Chuck Schiedler under the ‘articles’ tab on edifiedliving.net
- 12) In Romans 1:1, Etheridge renders the nominative singular noun “κλητος” ‘called’, then adds ‘and an apostle’, and JMNT translates it ‘a called person’. In verse 6, the nominative plural form “κλητοι” is rendered ‘the called’ by KJV and NASV, ‘called’ in Etheridge and TGNT, ‘called ones’ in Williams, and ‘called-out ones’ in LITV. In verse 7, the dative plural form “κλητοις” is translated ‘called-out’ in LITV, ‘called’ in Etheridge, ‘called ones’ in JMNT, and ‘having been called’ by TGNT (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1-2 in JMNT, Julia Smith). Because most Versions don’t consistently translate this noun according to its form, English readers can get the wrong idea, then use its verb action portrayal to support the teaching/doctrine of *A Specific Call to Ministry*.
- 13) See the article “‘This Generation’ & ‘These Things’ – Re-Examining Matthew 24:34’ by Chuck Schiedler under the ‘articles’ tab on edifiedliving.net