TEACHINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

By
Giacinto Butindaro
INTRODUCTION

In this book there are several teachings and exhortations God has enabled me to write by His grace for the edification of His Church; therefore their aim is to edify the brotherhood.

I know that many will say that some of the exhortations (as well as some of the teachings) I wrote are not for their edification. There is nothing to be surprised at, because among the Church of God many don’t endure sound doctrine, but according to their own lusts, because they have itching ears, they have heaped up for themselves teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear and who understand neither what they say nor what they affirm (1 Timothy 1:7), and they have turned their ears away from the truth and have been turned aside to fables. These so called teachers and their followers say: “This man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt”, the same words the rebels spoke against the prophet Jeremiah, who was a holy man of God who spoke from God (Jeremiah 38:4). However, as far as I am concerned, I will continue to say that I speak for the profit of the saints (1 Corinthians 7:35), because the authority the Lord gave me is for their edification, and not for their destruction (2 Corinthians 10:8). Let the rebels continue to slander, let these arrogant people resist the truth; but let them know that the day is coming when their folly will be manifest to all men, as the folly of Jannes and Jambres, who resisted Moses, was manifest to all men. I would like the rebels, who harden their hearts, to come to their senses and recognize the truth and do works worthy of repentance! I would like all those who are my enemies (because of the truth I speak to them) to become my friends! But their conversion depends on the will of God and not on my will. For I know it is God who grants repentance that leads to the knowledge of the truth. Therefore I pray God that He may grant them repentance.

I know also that many will be spiritually edified and they will rejoice in the Lord at all the things they will read (so they will rejoice even at those exhortations which make the rebels gnash at me with their teeth), for they love the truth which has set them free from sin and from this evil world. These people are the humble in heart, as it is written: “The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Psalm 34:2); they have found wisdom and they strive always to live honestly before God and before men, so that they may keep their conscience clear toward God and men. May God guard them from the evil one and confirm them to the end, that they may obtain the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

The grace of the Lord be with all the saints

Giacinto Butindaro

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version; those marked (NIV) are taken from the New International Version; those marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible; those marked (ASV) are taken from the American Standard Version; those marked (YLT) from Young’s Literal Translation; those marked (NAB) from the New American Bible; those marked (IBRV) are taken from the Italian Bible, Riveduta Version; and those marked (IBDV) are taken from the Italian Bible, Diodati Version.
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If my writings have been useful to you, contact me (my e-mail is butindaro@lanuovavia.org). I will be very happy to hear from you.
GOD

The existence of God

God exists. That is what the Holy Scripture declares in various ways. The Holy Scripture does not attempt to prove that God exists, but it assumes His existence from the very first verse, which says: "In the beginning God ….." (Genesis 1:1), and it states that anyone who comes to God “must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6 - NIV) in order to please Him. So we say together with the prophet Daniel: “There is a God in heaven” (Daniel 2:28).

But there is something else which declares in various ways that God exists, that is, the universe – the heavens, the earth, the sea and all the things which are in them - because all things were created by God through the Word. He created them out of nothing, as it is written: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3 - NKJV); and they continue this day according to His laws, as it is written: “They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants” (Psalm 119:91) and He sustains them by His powerful word. Therefore the universe we see is not God or part of God, but the work of His hands. Of course, He fills the universe, as God Himself says through the prophet Jeremiah: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:24). but He remains separate from it, for He is the Creator of the universe. Therefore, since the heavens, the earth, the sea and all the things which are in them, are the work of God, they bear witness to Him. The apostle Paul expressed this concept in this way: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:18-21). In other words, Paul stated that the universe which God has made speaks to men of His eternal power and Deity. Centuries before the apostle Paul wrote the above mentioned words, the Psalmist said: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). So the universe itself declares the existence of God, for it did not come into existence by accident or blind chance but by the will and power of God.

Besides the testimony of the Scripture and that of the universe, my personal experience also assures me that God indeed exists. For I have known God, I have tasted His goodness, I have experienced His power, He has spoken to me through visions and dreams, He has saved me out of all my troubles, I feel His presence for He dwells in me, He comforts and guides me, He teaches and disciplines me. Blessed be His name now and forevemore. Amen.

Those who deny the existence of God are fool, as it is written: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).
The nature of God

The terms that describe the nature of God are known as His attributes. They are classified as 'natural' attributes and 'moral' attributes. Let us look closely at them.

Natural attributes

God is a Person – God is a Person (I use this term because it describes a being who has intellect, emotion and will).

God thinks, as it is written: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

God sees what happens on the earth, for He saw what Laban did to Jacob, as He Himself said to Jacob in a dream: "I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (Genesis 31:12); and He saw that the Ninivites turned from their evil ways, for it is written: "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:10).

God hears, for when Aaron and his sister Miriam murmured against Moses God heard what they said, as it is written: "And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it" (Numbers 12:1-2). God "heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29).

God speaks, as it is written: "When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens... " (Jeremiah 10:13). However, not always God speaks to men through this kind of voice (that is, through His thundering voice), for sometimes He uses a soft voice. Let me quote just one of the numerous Bible verses that state that God speaks: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

God remembers, as it is written: "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations" (Psalm 105:8); and He also forgets, for He has promised He will remember no more our sins, as it is written: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

God rejoices, for it is written: "The Mighty One will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness ..." (Zephaniah 3:17 – NKJV); He can be grieved, for in the days of Noah "He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:6 – NKJV) because He saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; He gets angry with those who refuse to keep His commandments, as it is written: "And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight ...." (2 Kings 17:15-18); and He can be provoked to jealousy, for He Himself said: "They [the Israelites] have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God" (Deuteronomy 32:21 – NKJV).

God is spirit - God is spirit, as it is written: "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24 – The NIV reads: "God is spirit"). Therefore, since "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39 – NKJV), He does not have a physical body. However, that does not mean He is formless, for one day Jesus, the Son of God, said to the Jews: "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness
of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape” (John 5:37 – The NKJV reads “His form”) and Paul states that Jesus Christ, before coming into this world, was “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6).

**God is invisible** - Since God is spirit, He is invisible to the human eye; the Scripture calls Him “the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 – NKJV), and He “who is invisible” (Hebrews 1:3 – NKJV). No man has seen God at any time (John 1:18) except the Son of God, as Jesus said: “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father” (John 6:46). God said to Moses: “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20 – The NIV reads: “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live”). Someone may ask: ‘How is it then that the Scripture states that Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, saw God (Exodus 24:9-11)?’ The reason is this: they saw a temporary visible manifestation of God (known as theophany), but not the face of God. In other words, they saw “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezekiel 1:28 – NKJV).

**God is eternal** – God never had a beginning and will never have an end; He is the Everlasting God. In the Psalms we read: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). God is the “One that inhabiteth eternity” (Isaiah 57:15). Therefore, when someone asks us who created God we answer that no one created Him because He exists from eternity. He is completely self-existent. There was never a time when He did not exist.

**God is unchanging** - God is immutable, that is to say, His character and attributes never change. He Himself proclaimed through the prophet Malachi: “I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6).

It is true that God sometimes repents, that is to say, He changes His course of action in relation to man, but this is only because man changes his actions. His nature remains the same. For example, God threatened to destroy the Ninivites but when He saw that they turned from their evil way, He repented of the evil that He had said He would do to them and He did not do it (Jonah 3:10). Also, the Scripture sometimes speaks of God repenting in the sense of grieving or sorrowing rather than in the sense of changing His mind. For example, in the book of Genesis it is written: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:5-6); and in the first book of Samuel: “Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night” (1 Samuel 15:10-11).

**God is One** - The Holy Scripture, which is the Word of God, teaches that there is only one God, the Father, as it is written in the book of Isaiah: “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6), and in the first epistle to the Corinthians: “…. to us there is but one God, the Father…..” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Therefore together with the Jews we proclaim: “The LORD our God, the LORD is one [echad]” (Deuteronomy 6:4 - NKJV). So, while many people in this world believe that there are many gods, we believe there is but one God and the gods beside Him are nothing but idols: “For all the gods of the nations are idols” (Psalm 96:5 – The IBRV reads: “Tutti gli dèi dei popoli sono idoli vani”, that is, “All the gods of the nations are vain idols”).

However, it must be said that the Oneness of God is not an absolute oneness, that is to say, when we say that God is one we don’t mean that the Godhead consists of one person, because,
as we will see later, according to the Scripture, the Godhead consists of Three divine Persons, who are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Oneness of God can be explained in this way: as husband and wife are “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5), yet they are two different persons, so the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are One God, yet they are three distinct Persons. So the oneness of marriage reflects somehow the oneness of God. Therefore the Hebrew word echad, which means ‘one’ and which is used in the Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4) to proclaim the oneness of God, refers to a composite oneness (or compound unity).

**God is omnipotent** - God is called the Almighty (Genesis 17:1; 35:11) for He is able to do anything. One day God put this question to the prophet Jeremiah: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). Of course, the answer is that there is nothing too hard for Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, said: “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26) and also: “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27). God is indeed a great God, His power is infinite. That’s why we call upon His name when we are in need of something, because He can do anything. “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

The omnipotence of God is limited by His moral character. In other words, God cannot do anything opposite to His nature. Thus God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), for He is “the God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16 – NKJV).

**God is omnipresent** – God is everywhere at the same time, for David said to God: “Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Psalm 139:7-8) and God said through the prophet Amos: “Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good” (Amos 9:2-4).

The Scripture states that God fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). That means that His presence and power pervade His entire creation. However, He is not so immanent that He is indistinguishable from the universe; that is to say, we can’t say that the universe is God and God is the universe, because He is separate from His creation. Did not God Himself say that the heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1)? It is evident, therefore, that just as we can’t equate the one who is sitting on the throne with the throne, or the feet of a person with the footstool which is under his feet, so we cannot equate God with the heaven and earth, for He is separate from them. He has individuality, personality and intelligence.

Since God is present in all places at the same time, He sees everything, as it is written: “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3), and He hears everything.

**God is omniscient** – God knows everything, as it is written: “The LORD is a God of knowledge” (1 Samuel 2:3 – The IBRV reads: “L’Eterno è un Dio che sa tutto”, that is, “The Eternal is a God who knows everything), and again: “God .... knows all things” (1 John 3:20 – NKJV). He “is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16 - NKJV).

He knows our movements, our thoughts, our ways, our works, our words and all our needs. Here are some verses taken from the Scriptures which confirm His infinite knowledge: David said to God: “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my
tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:1-6); and Jesus said to His disciples “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:8).

God knows the past and present. And sometimes, through His Spirit, He does reveal to His servants some of the past events as well as some of the present events. God revealed to the prophet Elisha a sin that his servant Gehazi had committed secretly (2 Kings 5:20-27); He revealed to the apostle Peter that Ananias and his wife Sapphira had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11); and He revealed to Ananias (a disciple of the Lord who lived in Damascus) in a vision that Saul of Tarsus was praying (Acts 9:10-12). These revelations were the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit called ‘word of knowledge’.

God knows the future as well, and sometimes He, through His Spirit, foretells some of the events of the future (the foretelling of future events is the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit called ‘word of wisdom’). God says through Isaiah: “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:9-10). However, God not only foreknows and foretells what will happen, but He also acts to bring it about. For He says: “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please …. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that I will do” (Isaiah 46:10,11 - NIV). For example, God knew that the Egyptians would mistreat the Israelites four hundred years, and He foretold Abraham that future event (Genesis 15:13), but He also caused the Egyptians to mistreat the Israelites, for in the Psalms it is written: “Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants” (Psalm 105:23-25). Another biblical example that confirms this concept is the following one: God knew that the Messiah would suffer many things at the hands of the Jews and that He would be put to death - and He foretold those things through the prophets of old - however it was God who caused those things to happen to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah; for one day Peter said to the Jews: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:22-23 – NIV); and the disciples of Jesus said to God in prayer: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28). Therefore, according to the Word of God, God not only foreknows or foresees the events of the future, but He has also foreordained them and in His own time He brings about all of them. As we will see later, God not only foreknew that we would believe, but He also foreordained us to believe, and thus in His time He gave us repentance and faith so that we might be saved, so that His purpose might be fulfilled. In other words, we believed in Christ because God had foreordained us to eternal life.

**Moral attributes**

**God is wise** – The attribute of wisdom in God is His disposition to use His knowledge and power in the most benevolent manner. God has made all things in wisdom. The Psalmist said to God: “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches” ( Psalm 104:24), and Salomon said: “The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens” (Proverbs 3:19). His wisdom is exceedingly great, for the apostle Paul said to the Romans: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For
who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:33-36).

Among the works of God there is also our body, and when we consider the function of every organ of our body we are compelled to acknowledge that God made our body in wisdom too. And together with David we say to God: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!” (Psalm 139:13-17 - NKJV).

God has worked in wisdom in our personal life so far. He has caused the right things to occur always at just the right time and in the right way. And we are full of confidence that He will continue to work in wisdom in our life. Even though sometimes it is hard to accept certain things from His hand, and what happens to us is incomprehensible from our point of view, we know for sure that His loving hand is working for our good. God has done all things well till now, and He will surely continue to do things well. He doesn't make mistakes, He is the wise God who created the universe! Blessed be His holy name forever. Amen.

God is good – God is a good God, as it is written: “Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way” (Psalm 25:8) and again: “Thou art good, and doest good…. “ (Psalm 119:68) and also: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Psalm 73:1).

God has shown His goodness toward us first of all by saving us from our sins, and then by blessing greatly our new life in Christ. We can say that we have tasted that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). Therefore we have to praise God for His goodness, as it is written: “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south” (Psalm 107:1-3).

God – as the Psalmist stated - is “good to all” (Psalm 145:9) and not only to us who are His children. Jesus, the Son of God, confirmed this by saying that God “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35). Is it not true that God gives children to the wicked also? Is it not true that He gives food to them also, or that He sends rain also upon them, etc…? However, while the goodness of God toward His sons endures for ever, the goodness of God toward the wicked will finish one day. When they die, they will go to hell. Because God is also a righteous God.

God is merciful – that is to say, He is willing to forgive men their sins, and this He does when men humble themselves before God and repent of their sins. The Psalmist said: “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” (Psalm 103:8-18). God is indeed merciful, for He forgave us all our old sins, and when we confess our sins He forgives us them all. We have tasted His mercy. Blessed be His name for His mercy. Amen.
God is righteous – God is morally right and fair. So He always does what is right, correct and lawful. “Everything he does is right and all his ways are just” (Daniel 4:37 – NIV). There is no unrighteousness with Him. The Holy Scripture states that He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), thus He does not regard the rich more than the poor, or the wise more than the unwise, or the Jews more than the Gentiles, for they are all the work of His hands (Job 34:19); and that He “without partiality judges according to each one’s work” (1 Peter 1:17 – NKJV), for He is “a righteous judge” (Psalm 7:11 – NIV), so He rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. The Bible contains many examples of how God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. Here are some of them.

God rewarded Abraham (by blessing him and making his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky) for his obedience, that is to say, because when God commanded him to offer his only son as a burnt offering he obeyed God and offered up his only son (Genesis 22:1-18); He rewarded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian (by not giving him into the hand of the men of whom he was afraid) for he had put his trust in God (Jeremiah 39:15-18); He rewarded that notable woman of Shunem (by giving her a child) for the hospitality she offered to the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-17).

God punished Cain (by making him a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and by preventing the ground worked by Cain from yielding its crops for him) for he murdered Abel his brother (Genesis 4:1-15); He punished Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them (by turning them into ashes) for they had given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh (Genesis 19:1-29; Jude 7); and He punished king Nebuchadnezzar (by driving him away from the sons of men, and by giving him the mind of an animal) for his arrogance (Daniel 4:1-37).

Since God is righteous, He rewards even those who don’t know Him for any good they have done, for Jesus said to His disciples: “And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42) - please note that Jesus said ‘whosoever’ – and He punishes even His sons for their sins. For instance, God punished Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who were among the early Christians, by putting them to death for they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10). The Holy Scripture teaches that just as there is a temporary reward (such as a son, a house, or something else), as well as a temporary punishment (such as a disease, the loss of something, etc.), so there is an everlasting reward as well as an everlasting punishment. One day we sons of God will appear before God’s judgment seat, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). So each one will receive his own reward – which will endure forever - according to his own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8). Instead, the wicked will appear before the throne of God in order to be judged according to what they have done and they will be cast into the everlasting fire (Revelation 20:11-15), where they will be tormented forever and ever.

God is faithful – God is a faithful God, which means that He keeps His word. He cannot deny Himself. In the Scriptures we read: “God is not a man, that He should lie; nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19 - NKJV). In the Scripture we find many examples of God’s faithfulness.
God had promised a son to Abraham and Sarah, who were old, well advanced in age (Abraham was about a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety years old), and in His own time He gave them Isaac (Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-3). God had promised He would deliver the people of Israel from their bondage and in His own time He sent Moses to Egypt to set free the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage (Genesis 15:13-14; Exodus 12:41,51). God in ancient times promised He would send the Messiah, and in the fullness of the time He kept His word by sending Jesus Christ to save the world (Isaiah 35:4; Psalm 72:13-14; Luke 19:10). God had promised He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and in His time He poured out His Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-21).

Now let me speak very briefly of some other promises made by God, which have been fulfilled in our life. God has promised remission of sins to all those who believe in the name of His Son, and His promise was fulfilled in our life when we believed in Jesus (Acts 10:43; 1 John 2:12). On that day we received remission of sins through faith in Jesus and began to live a new life, and as time went by we discovered other promises of God. For instance, we found that He has promised to answer our prayers, to supply all our needs, to keep us, and we have believed in these promises too, and by His grace we have seen many times the fulfillment of these promises in our life. Great is His faithfulness; it “reaches to the clouds” (Psalm 36:5 - NKJV).

To conclude, let me speak of a promise which is yet to be fulfilled in our life, that is, “the promise of entering his rest” (Hebrews 4:1 – NIV). God has promised us that we will enter His rest if we stand firm in the faith to the end, and when we enter that rest we will rest from our own works, just as God did from his (Hebrews 4:10). Therefore “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23 - NKJV), and “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Let us not imitate the Israelites, who could not enter God’s rest because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:19), but rather let us “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” (Hebrews 6:12 – NIV).

It is true that sometimes we are not faithful to God, for we all stumble in many things (James 3:2), but the apostle Paul says: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13 – NKJV. The IBRV reads: “Se siamo infedeli, egli rimane fedele, perché non può rinnegare se stesso” that is, “If we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself”) and John says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Glory be to His name both now and forevermore. Amen.

**God is holy** – God is called ‘The Holy One” (Proverbs 9:10 - NKJV), for He is absolutely pure, perfect, and sinless. He is totally separated from sin and cannot have fellowship with it. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord of Hosts seated on the throne, above Him were seraphs “and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). The apostle John says in the book of Revelation that he saw God sitting on the throne and in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures that “do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8 - NKJV).

Therefore, since God is Holy and He is the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, we His sons must be holy, that is to say, we must pursue holiness. The apostle Peter says to us in his first epistle: “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:14-16 - NKJV). Without holiness “no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 - NKJV). To pursue holiness means to abstain from every kind of evil, and to live soberly, righteously and godly.

**God is love** – The only and true God, of Whom I am speaking, “is love” (1 John 4:8), and in the fullness of the time He manifested His love toward us by sending into the world His only
begotten Son to make atonement for our sins, so that through faith in His name we might receive remission of sins and eternal life. Jesus Christ said: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), and John the apostle said: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). And Paul wrote to the Romans: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

**God’s providence**

God’s providence is a manifestation of His omnipotence, unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness. Here is a very brief exposition of the Biblical teaching on the providence of God. God is called the Creator of all things for He “created all things” (Ephesians 3:9). He is the One “who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein”; (Revelation 10:6); by His will “they were created and have their being” (Revelation 4:11 - NIV). He created the heavens, the earth, the sea and all the things which are in them in six days, as God Himself said to the Israelites: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11). God not only created the world but He also designed and fixed the laws of nature. However, after God created the universe and fixed these laws, He did not withdraw, leaving the world to its fortune and the out-working of these laws. In other words, after God made the universe and equipped it with natural laws, He did not let it go like a machine. For God sustains all things by His powerful word, and all things perform the word of His power and fulfil His Sovereign pleasure, as it is written in the book of Psalms: “They stand this day according to Your ordinances, for all things are Your servants” (Psalm 119:91 - NASB), and again: “The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths” (Psalm 135:6 – NIV).

_God governs the inanimate creation_ through the laws of nature (that is, His ordinances). Here are a few examples taken from the Scripture which show that God governs the inanimate creation. The sun rises at God’s command, for Jesus said that God “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good” (Matthew 5:45 - NKJV). The rain falls on the earth at God’s command, for it is written that He “giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields” (Job 5:10) and Jesus said that God “sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45 - NKJV). The clouds go where God wants them to go, as it is written: “He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love” (Job. 37:11-13 - NIV). Ice is produced by God, as it is written: “The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen” (Job 37:10 - NIV). The snow falls on the earth because God commands it to fall: “For He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth’” (Job 37:6 - NKJV). The wind is created by God, as it is written that God “creates the wind” (Amos 4:13 - NKJV) and that He “brings the wind out of His treasuries” (Jeremiah 10:13 - NKJV). It is God who makes the grass and the plants grow, as it is written: “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth” (Psalm 104:14). Of course, He who fixed the laws of nature can suspend or modify them at pleasure, and He can command the sun, the wind, the stars, the planets, the rain and the snow, etc. to do whatever pleases Him. According to the Scripture, in the days of the prophet Elijah God did not send rain on the earth for three years and six months (James 5:17); in the days of Amos He made it rain on one city and withheld rain from another city (Amos 4:7); in the days of king Hezekiah God made the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it had gone down on
the stairway of Ahaz (Isaiah 38:7-8); and before Jesus comes God will give power to the sun to scorch people with fire (Revelation 16:8). These few examples taken from the Bible clearly show that the natural laws established by God are subject to His control and He can suspend their operation according to His pleasure.

*God governs the whole animal creation.* too, through His ordinances. Not only does He preserve all animals, by providing food for the beast of the earth, as well as for the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, - for God said to Job: "Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, When they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat" (Job 38:39-41); Jesus said to His disciples: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:26); and the Psalmist says: "This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great .... These all wait for You, that you may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in ..." (Psalm 104:25, 27-28 – NKJV) - but He also directs and disposes them to the end for which He designed them, and sometimes He commands some animals to perform some peculiar things in accordance with His will and they obey Him. Here are a few examples taken from the Bible which show how even animals are at God's beck and call: God caused a dumb donkey to speak with a man's voice in order to rebuke the prophet Balaam for his iniquity (2 Peter 2:16); He commanded a great fish to swallow the prophet Jonah and to vomit him onto dry land (Jonah 1:17; 2:10); and He commanded the ravens to feed the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-6).

*God governs the affairs of nations.* The Holy Scripture teaches that God has determined the times set for the nations and the exact places where they should live, as it is written: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26); and it teaches that He increases the nations and destroys them, as it is written: "He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again" (Job 12:23). I will give you a few examples taken from the Bible to confirm these words. As for the exact places where the nations should live, God gave the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, that is, the Israelites (Genesis 12:7); He gave Mount Seir to the descendants of Esau (Deuteronomy 2:5); and He gave Ar to the descendants of Moab as a possession (Deuteronomy 2:9). However, God can modify at pleasure the boundaries of a nation; for example, God determined the boundaries of Israel (Genesis 15:17-21), but in the days of Jehu king of Israel He reduced the size of Israel and in the days of Jeroboam king of Israel He restored its boundaries (2 Kings 10:32; 14:25). As for the times set for the nations which were determined by God, we learn from the book of Daniel that the kingdom of Babylon, as well as the kingdom of Persia, and the kingdom of Greece and the Roman Empire, arose at God's appointed time and were destroyed at God's appointed time (Daniel chapter 2, 7 and 8). Furthermore, the Scripture teaches that God sets over the kingdoms of men anyone He wishes (Daniel 5:21), and He uses the governing authorities to perform His purposes. For example, He set Nebuchadnezzar over the kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 5:18), and He used him to inflict punishment on Jerusalem (Jeremiah 32:28-29; 2 Chronicles 36:17-20); and He set Cyrus over the kingdom of Persia (Isaiah 45:13) and He used him to make the Israelites return to their own country and to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-11). As Solomon stated: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1 – NKJV). So whatever the nations do is under God's control, nothing happens apart from His will. God reigns over all the nations!

*God governs the life of men.* The birth of each man, the length of his life, and all the events of his life, are regulated and superintended by God, as it is written: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23), and again: "A man's heart plans his way: but the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9 - NKJV) and also: "A man's steps are of the LORD; how then can a man understand his own way?"
In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28); He has decreed the number of our months and has set limits we cannot exceed (Job 14:5). The very hairs of our head are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). Since a man’s steps are directed by God, his salvation does not depend on his desire but it depends on the will of God. The apostle Paul clearly states that it does not depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy (Romans 9:16), for He has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy (Romans 9:18). Thus, God determines who will believe in Christ (Acts 13:48). Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus was not only foreknown by God but also foreordained or predestined by God to believe (Acts 13:48: Romans 8:29-30).

In conclusion, I want to say this. It is evident that since God controls the universe and He has decreed all things that come to pass, even evil deeds are decreed (or included in God’s decree). Is it not written in the book of Lamentations: “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?” (Lamentations 3:37-38)? And doesn’t God state in the book of Isaiah: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [adversity]: I the LORD do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7)? As you can see, God ordains bad things, too, to occur. However, that does not mean that those who sin are not responsible for their sinful deeds, for the Scripture clearly teaches that God holds persons responsible for their sinful deeds. I give you a few examples taken from the Bible: even though the Jews, by putting to death Jesus Christ, did what the hand of God and His purpose determined before to be done (Acts 4:28), God held them responsible for the crime they committed, and He punished them by sending against them the roman army, which killed thousands of Jews, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and led many Jews away captive into all nations (Luke 21:20-24); even though Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, for God had hardened his heart (Exodus 4:21), he was held responsible for his refusal and God punished him for it (Exodus 8:1-6) by striking Egypt with ten terrible plagues; even though Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God (Acts 1:16, 20), God held him responsible for his sin, for Jesus said: “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24 – NKJV); even though the Chaldeans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and led away many Jews captive in obedience to God’s command (Jeremiah 32:28-29; 2 Chronicles 36:17-20), God held the Chaldeans responsible for all the evil they did in Jerusalem and at the appointed time He punished them (Jeremiah 51:24); even though God incited David to number Israel (2 Samuel 24:1), after David took the census God held David responsible for that sin (1 Chronicles 21:7) and thus He struck Israel. Nor does it mean that God takes pleasure in sin or is the doer of the evil deeds, for God is absolutely pure and sinless. The prophet Habakkuk stated that His eyes are too pure to look on evil, and He cannot tolerate wrong (Habakkuk 1:13). Know this, then, that even though God uses wicked people to accomplish His purposes or He uses evil in the accomplishment of His plan, He remains blameless, no one can charge Him with wrongdoing, He cannot be blamed for evil. To His Name be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

The names and titles of God

The different names and titles of God used in the Bible reveal something about His nature and character. Let’s look at them. I will begin from the names and titles of God written in the Old Testament (first some of His names in Hebrew and their meaning and then His names and titles only in English), and then I will speak about the names and titles of God we find in the New Testament. When you read them bear in mind that some of them refer to the Son as well.
In the Old Testament

God’s personal name is **YHWH** (the TETRAGRAMMATON, meaning ‘The four letters’), which is a Hebrew name, which is pronounced YAHWEH and which means ‘The Self-Existent-One’ or ‘He who is’ or ‘I am’. God revealed His Name to Moses when He appeared to Moses and commanded him to go to Egypt to set His people free, for on that occasion Moses asked God to tell him His name and God answered him. Here is what we read in the book of Exodus: “And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:13-14). God was not known by that name to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for God said to Moses: “I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name YAHWEH was I not known to them” (Exodus 6:2-3). In the writings of the Old Testament, Yahweh is the name of God which occurs most frequently (about 6830 times). In the English translations of the Bible it is generally translated as ‘LORD’ (in the IBRV it is translated as ‘L’Eterno’, that is, ‘The Eternal’; while in the IBDV it is translated as ‘Signore’, that is, ‘Lord’). Here are some examples of the name YHWH used in the Scripture. God is **YHWH-Rapha**, that is, ‘Yahweh who heals,’ as it is written: “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee [Yahweh-Rapha]” (Exodus 15:26). He is **YHWH-Nissi**, that is, ‘Yahweh my banner,’ as it is written: “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Yahweh-nissi” (Exodus 17:15). He is **YHWH-Shalom**, that is ‘Yahweh our peace,’ as it is written: “Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Yahweh-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites” (Judges 6:24). He is **YHWH-Jireh**, that is, ‘Yahweh will see/provide,’ as it is written: “And Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen” (Genesis 22:14). He is **YHWH-Sabaoth**, that is, ‘Yahweh of Hosts’ (1 Samuel 1:3). He is **YHWH-Roi**, that is, ‘Yahweh my Shepherd’ (Psalm 23:1). He is **YHWH-Hoseenu**, that is, ‘Yahweh our maker’ (Psalm 95:6). He is **YHWH-Elyon**, that is, ‘Yahweh most high’ (Psalm 7:17). He is **YHWH-M’kaddesh**, that is, ‘Yahweh who sanctifies you’ (Exodus 31:13). He is **YHWH-Shammah**, that is, ‘Yahweh is there’ (Ezekiel 48:35). The Jews stopped pronouncing the name YHWH by the third century A.D. for fear of breaking this commandment: “You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7 - NKJV). Some Jewish rabbis asserted that a person who pronounces YHWH according to its letters (instead of using a substitute) has no place in the world to come, and should be put to death. Instead of pronouncing the name YHWH, the Jews usually substitute it with ‘Adonai,’ or simply say ‘Ha-Shem’ (which means ‘The Name’).

**Yah** is a shortened form of YHWH. It means the same thing as YHWH, and is used approximately 40 times in the Scriptures. Yah appears primarily in the book of Psalms (for example: Psalm 105:3; 106:1; 147:20; 149:1). It is also found in the compound word ‘hallelu-Yah’, which means ‘praise Yah (the LORD).’

God is called **Elohim**, which means ‘Gods’ but it is translated as ‘God,’ as it is written: “In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). This name is plural in form but it is commonly construed with a singular verb or adjective. The name Elohim is used throughout the Old Testament over 2,300 times. Elohim is combined with other words to describe certain characteristics of God. Here are some examples.
Elohay Mishpat - God of justice, or God of judgment (Isaiah 30:18). God is a righteous God, a Judge who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and who rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness.

Elohay Selichot - A forgiving God (Nehemiah 9:17). He is a God who freely pardons all those who forsake their evil ways and turn to the Lord (Isaiah 55:7). He forgives all our iniquities (Psalm 103:3).

Elohay Marom - The High God or The exalted God (Micah 6:6). God is exalted by his power (Job. 36:22) and above all the nations (Psalm 99:2; 113:4). His name is exalted (Isaiah 12:4)

Elohay Mikarov - God who is near (Jeremiah 23:23). God “is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27 - NKJV), for in Him we live and move and have our being. However, He is also a God far away because He fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:23). Nobody can hide himself in secret places so that God cannot see him. God is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) but He is far from the wicked (Proverbs 15:29).

Elohay Mauzi - God of my strength (Psalm 43:2). He gives us strength. The prophet Isaiah says that “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isaiah 40:29 – NIV) and the Psalmist said: “You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox” (Psalm 92:10 - NIV).

Elohay Tehilati - God of my praise (Psalm 109:1). He is “most worthy of praise” (Psalm 96:4; 145:3 - NIV) and we praise His name for all the wonderful and countless things He has done in our life so far. Each one of us must say: “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1 - NKJV).

Elohay Yishi - God of my salvation (Psalm 18:46; 25:5). He is the One who has saved us from sin through Jesus Christ, and the One who delivers us out of all distresses and afflictions. Salvation belongs to God (Psalm 3:8; Jonah 2:9; Revelation 7:10).

Elohim Kedoshim - Holy God (Leviticus 19:2; Joshua 24:19). God is Holy. He is absolutely pure, perfect and sinless. His name is holy.

Elohim Chaiyim - Living God (Jeremiah 10:10). The gods of the nations have ears but cannot hear, have eyes but cannot see, have mouth but cannot speak, for they are vain idols, but He is the living God.

Elohay Elohim - God of gods (Deuteronomy 10:17). He “is greater than all gods” (Exodus 18:11); “great is our God above all gods” (2 Chronicles 2:5); He “is to be feared above all gods” (Psalm 96:4), for all the gods of the nations are vain idols but the Lord made the heavens, and one day He will destroy all the gods of the earth (Zephaniah 2:11).

Elohay Tz’vaot - God of hosts, or God of Armies (2 Samuel 5:10). He is the commander in chief of the angelic armies in heaven and of the army of God who is on the earth (we are the army of God because each of one of us is a soldier of Jesus Christ called to fight the good fight of the faith). God “is a warrior” (Exodus 15:3); in ancient times He fought many times for Israel against the enemies of Israel (Exodus 14:14; 2 Chronicles 20:17). God is the One who gives us the victory, for Paul says: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Elohay Chasdi - God of my Mercy (Psalm 59:10, 17). God is kind and merciful to us. He is the source of the kindness and the mercy we taste every day.

Elohay Kol Basar - God of all flesh (Jeremiah 32:27). He is the Creator of all the living creatures which are on the earth.

Elohay HaRuchot LeKol Basar - God of the spirits of all flesh (Numbers 16:22). God created all flesh, and He gives breath to the people who live on the earth and spirit to those who walk on it (Isaiah 42:5).

Eloah is the singular of Elohim, and it too is translated as ‘God.’ It occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament (mostly in the book of Job).
El, which means ‘God,’ is another name used for God in the Scripture. It occurs about 200 times in the Old Testament. El is the simple form arising from Elohim and is often combined with other words in order to emphasize different attributes of God. Here are some examples.

**El Olam** - The Everlasting God or The God of eternity (Genesis 21:33). He exists from eternity. Moses said to God: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2).

**El Shaddai** - The Almighty God or God the all sufficient (Genesis 17:1). With Him all things are possible (Luke 18:27; Matthew 19:26). God cares for His people and supply all their needs.

**El Elyon** - The Most High God (Genesis 14:19). Height signifies power and position.

**El Roi** - The God who sees (Genesis 16:13). “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

**El HaNe’eman** - The Faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9). He always keeps His word, as it is written: “‘God is not a man, that He should lie; nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?’ (Numbers 23:19 - NKJV). No matter how long ago God said He will do a certain thing, we are sure He will keep His word. His promises are faithful and truthful and will never fall to the ground. If we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

**El HaGadol** - The Great God (Deuteronomy 10:17). He is indeed a great God; the Son of God, declared that God, His Father, “is greater than all” (John 10:29).

**El HaKadosh** - The Holy God (Isaiah 5:16). He is absolutely pure and perfect. He is totally separated from every kind of evil.

**El Yisrael** - The God Of Israel (Psalm 68:35). The people of Israel is the nation whom He foreknew, with whom God made a covenant, and to whom God revealed His laws and decrees (Psalm 147:19). However, it must be said that God is also the God of the Gentiles (Romans 3:29).

**El HaShamayim** - The God of heaven (Psalm 136:26). He created heaven and He is in heaven. Heaven is His throne.

**El De’ot** - The God of knowledge (1 Samuel 2:3). He knows everything.

**El Emet** - The God of truth (Psalm 31:5). He is always true. “Let God be true, but every man a liar,” Paul says to the Romans (Romans 3:4)

**El Kana** - The Jealous God (Deuteronomy 4:24). He is a God who wants His people to be devoted to Him alone. They must worship and serve only God. That’s why God is angry with His people when they become idolaters; because they provoke Him to jealousy. His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14).

**El Tzadik** - The righteous God (Isaiah 45:21). He loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Everything He says or does is right.

**El Sali** - God my rock (Psalm 42:10). God is the foundation of my life, in Him I trust with all my heart. In the midst of all my distresses I know I can rely upon Him for in Him there is everlasting strength. He is my stronghold, my fortress, my strong tower, my protection from all attacks.

**El Chaiyai** - The God of my life (Psalm 42:8). God is the One who gives me life, in Him I live and move and I have my being. God is the Lord of my life because my life belongs to Him, since He has purchased me with His own blood. Therefore, whatever He wants me to do I will do, and wherever He wants me to go I will go, in order to please Him. I will serve Him alone during all my life.

**El Yeshuati** - The God of my salvation (Isaiah 12:2). He is the One who saved us from our sins and from all distresses. Blessed be His Holy Name for ever. Amen.

**El Simchat Gili** - God the joy of my exaltation or God my exceeding joy (Psalm 43:4). He is the source of a great joy to all those who love Him and fear Him.

**El Rachum** - The God of Compassion or The merciful God (Deuteronomy 4:31). He is a God full of compassion and mercy; we taste His mercy continually.

**El Chanun** - The Gracious God (Jonah 4:2). God is good; we have tasted His goodness.
Elah is another name for God, used about 70 times in the Old Testament. When it is combined with other words, different attributes of God are emphasized. Some examples:

**Elah Yerush'lem** - God of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:19). The city of Jerusalem is the place chosen by God from among the tribes of Israel to put His Name there for His dwelling (Deuteronomy 12:5). Jerusalem is called the city of the great King (Matthew 5:35).

**Elah Yisrael** - God of Israel (Ezra 5:1).

**Elah Sh'maya** - God of Heaven (Ezra 7:23).

**Elah Sh'maya V'Arah** - God of Heaven and Earth (Ezra 5:11).

Another divine name is **Adonai**, which is an emphatic form of the word ‘Adon’, which means ‘master’ or ‘lord’. It can literally be translated as ‘my lords’, but it is usually translated as ‘Lord’. The meaning of this name reflects the attribute of sovereignty. It means that God is the Lord who rules. It is used approximately 450 times.

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I AM (Exodus 3:14)  
I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14 - NKJV)

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The LORD strong and mighty (Psalm 24:8)  
The LORD mighty in battle (Psalm 24:8)  
The LORD who formed it [the earth], and established it (Jeremiah 33:2 - NIV)  
The LORD that created thee, O Jacob (Isaiah 43:1)  
The LORD that is faithful (Isaiah 49:7)  
The LORD who is worthy to be praised (2 Samuel 22:4)  
The LORD who sees/provides (Genesis 22:14)  
The LORD that healeth thee (Exodus 15:26)  
The LORD my banner (Exodus 17:15)  
The LORD is there (Ezekiel 48:35)

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The LORD God of recompenses (Jeremiah 51:56)  
The LORD God of heaven (Genesis 24:7)  
The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Exodus 34:6-7)

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The Lord of lords (Psalm 136:3)  
The Lord of heaven (Daniel 5:23)  
The Lord of the whole earth (Psalm 97:5)

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Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17)

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Lord my salvation (Psalm 38:22)

LORD my rock (Psalm 28:1)
LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart (Jeremiah 11:20)

The LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb (Isaiah 44:2)
The LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers (Isaiah 44:24-26)

The glorious LORD (Isaiah 33:21)
The righteous LORD (Psalm 11:7)

A Lord of kings (Daniel 2:47)

He that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion (Daniel 4:34)
He that sitteth in the heavens (Psalm 2:4)
He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth (Isaiah 40:22)
He that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (Isaiah 40:22)
He that by wisdom made the heavens (Psalm 136:5)
He that stretched out the earth above the waters (Psalm 136:6)
He that made great lights (Psalm 136:7)
He who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number (Isaiah 40:26)
He that created the heavens, and stretched them out (Isaiah 42:5)
He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it (Isaiah 42:5)
He that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein (Isaiah 42:5)
He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth (Amos 4:13)
He that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth (Amos 9:6)
He that rideth upon the heavens (Psalm 68:4)
He who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice (Psalm 68:33 – NIV)
He that planted the ear (Psalm 94:9)
He that formed the eye (Psalm 94:9)
He that doth speak: behold, it is I (Isaiah 52:6)
He who alone doeth great wonders (Psalm 136:4)
He that pondereth the heart (Proverbs 24:12)
He that is mightier than man (Ecclesiastes 6:10)
He who avenges blood (Psalm 9:12 – NIV)
He that ought to be feared (Psalm 76:11)
He who giveth food to all flesh (Psalm 136:25)
He who is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16 - NIV)
He that is mighty (Luke 1:49)
He that teacheth man knowledge (Psalm 94:10)
He that chastiseth the heathen (Psalm 94:10)
He that is most just (Job 34:17)
He that is higher than the highest (Ecclesiastes 5:8)
He that keepeth thee (Psalm 121:3)
He that keepeth thy soul (Proverbs 24:12)
He that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you (Deuteronomy 20:4)
He that comforteth you (Isaiah 51:12)
He that took me out of the womb (Psalm 22:9)
He that seeth me (Genesis 16:13)
He in whom I trust (Psalm 144:2)
He who vindicates me (Isaiah 50:8 - NIV)
He against whom we have sinned (Isaiah 42:24)
He that hath mercy on them (Isaiah 49:10)

A great King over all the earth (Psalm 47:2)
A great King above all gods (Psalm 95:3)
A warrior (Exodus 15:3 – NIV)
A mighty terrible one (Jeremiah 20:11)
A righteous judge (Psalm 7:11 – NIV)
A judge of the widows (Psalm 68:5)
A shield around me (Psalm 3:3 - NIV)
A sun and shield (Psalm 84:11)
An everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19)
A revealer of secrets (Daniel 2:47)
A very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1)
A refuge for the oppressed (Psalm 9:9)
A refuge in times of trouble (Psalm 9:9)
An house of defence (Psalm 31:2)
A refuge from the storm (Isaiah 25:4)
A shadow from the heat (Isaiah 25:4)
A place of broad rivers and streams (Isaiah 33:21)
A buckler to all those that trust in him (Psalm 18:30)
A buckler to them that walk uprightly (Proverbs 2:7)
A father of the fatherless (Psalm 68:5)
A strength to the poor (Isaiah 25:4)
A strength to the needy in his distress (Isaiah 25:4)
A strong tower from the enemy (Psalm 61:3)
A shelter for me (Psalm 61:3)
Our own God (Psalm 67:6)
Our God for ever and ever (Psalm 48:14)

You who hear prayer (Psalm 65:2 - NKJV)
You who lift me up from the gates of death (Psalm 9:13 – NKJV)
You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them (Psalm 17:7 – NKJV)

The God of gods (Psalm 136:2; Daniel 11:36)
The God of hosts (Amos 4:13)
The God of heaven (Psalm 136:26; Jonah 1:9; Daniel 2:37)
The God of heaven and earth (Ezra 5:11)
The God of the whole earth (Isaiah 54:5)
The God of all the kingdoms of the earth (2 Kings 19:15)
The God of all flesh (Jeremiah 32:27)
The God of glory (Psalm 29:3)
The God of salvation (Psalm 68:20)
The God of truth (Isaiah 65:16)
The God of judgment (Malachi 2:17)

The God of my salvation (Psalm 25:5; Psalm 18:46; Micah 7:7)
The God of the rock of my salvation (2 Samuel 22:47)
The God of my mercy (Psalm 59:10)
The God of my rock (2 Samuel 22:3)
The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways (Daniel 5:23)
The God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies (Psalm 18:47-48 - NIV)

The God who avenges (Psalm 94:1 - NIV)
The God that doest wonders (Psalm 77:14)
The God that is above (Job 31:28)

The God of our salvation (Psalm 68:19)

The great and dreadful God (Daniel 9:4)
The great God that formed all things (Proverbs 26:10)
The great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments (Nehemiah 1:5)
The great, the mighty, and the terrible God who keepest covenant and mercy (Nehemiah 9:32)
The living God (Psalm 42:2)
The true God (Jeremiah 10:10)
The everlasting God (Genesis 21:33)
The eternal God (Deuteronomy 33:27)
The most high God (Genesis 14:19; Daniel 3:26)
The Almighty God (Genesis 17:1)
The Mighty God (Psalm 50:1; Isaiah 10:21; Jeremiah 32:18)
The Great [God] (Jeremiah 32:18)
The faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9)

The First and the Last (Isaiah 48:12)
The Ancient of days (Daniel 7:9)
The Almighty (Joel 1:15)
The Saviour (Isaiah 45:15)
The righteous (Isaiah 24:16)
The governor among the nations (Psalm 22:28)
The Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25)
The Holy One (Isaiah 40:25)
The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy (Isaiah 57:15)
The Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4)
The Rock eternal (Isaiah 26:4 - NIV)
The rock that is higher than I (Psalm 61:2)
The Most High over all the earth (Psalm 97:9 - NIV)
The Highest (Psalm 18:13)
The possessor of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:22)
The habitation of justice (Jeremiah 50:7)
The fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13)
The tower of salvation for his king (2 Samuel 22:51)
The glory of their strength – of the people that know the joyful sound (Psalm 89:17)
The former of all things (Jeremiah 51:19)
The Creator of the ends of the earth (Isaiah 40:28)
The Maker of the poor (Proverbs 14:31)
The Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south (Job 9:9 – NIV)
The confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea (Psalm 65:5)
The help and shield of those who fear Him (Psalm 115:11)
The helper of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14)
The saving strength of his anointed (Psalm 28:8)
The revealer of mysteries (Daniel 2:29 - NIV)
The guide of my youth (Jeremiah 3:4)

A God of gods (Daniel 2:47)
A God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth (Psalm 86:15)
A God who expresses his wrath every day (Psalm 7:11 – NIV)
A God of judgment (Isaiah 30:18)
A God that judgeth in the earth (Psalm 58:11)
A God of truth and without iniquity (Deuteronomy 32:4)

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A God that hidest thyself (Isaiah 45:15)

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A great God (Psalm 95:3)
A great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward (Deuteronomy 10:17)
A gracious and merciful God (Nehemiah 9:31)
A forgiving God (Psalm 99:8 - NIV)
A jealous and avenging God (Nahum 1:2 - NIV)
A just God (Isaiah 45:21)
A jealous God (Exodus 34:14)

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God the LORD (1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 85:8)

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God of my righteousness (Psalm 4:1)
God of my salvation (Psalm 51:14)
God of my praise (Psalm 109:1)
God my rock (Psalm 42:9)
God my maker, who giveth songs in the night; who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven (Job 35:10-11)
God of our salvation (Psalm 65:5)
God our strength (Psalm 81:1)
God our shield (Psalm 84:9)
God of gods (Deuteronomy 10:17)
God most high (Psalm 57:2)
God that performeth all things for me (Psalm 57:2)

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The King (Psalm 98:6)
The eternal King (Jeremiah 10:10 - NIV)
The King of heaven (Daniel 4:37)
The King of glory (Psalm 24:9)
The King of all the earth (Psalm 47:7)

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King over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9)
King for ever and ever (Psalm 10:16)

Most upright (Isaiah 26:7)
Preserver of men (Job 7:20)
Judge of the earth (Psalm 94:2)
Jealous (Exodus 34:14)
The portion of mine inheritance and of my cup (Psalm 16:5)
The rock of my refuge (Psalm 94:22)
The strength of my life (Psalm 27:1)
The strength of my heart (Psalm 73:26)
The strength of my salvation (Psalm 140:7)
The health of my countenance (Psalm 42:11)
The horn of my salvation (Psalm 18:2)
The lifter up of mine head (Psalm 3:3)

Our shade at our right hand (Psalm 121:5 – NIV - I have put ‘our’ in place of ‘your’)
Our father (Isaiah 64:8)
Our potter (Isaiah 64:8)
Our judge (Isaiah 33:22)
Our lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22)
Our king (Isaiah 33:22)
Our captain (2 Chronicles 13:12)
Our refuge (Psalm 62:8 - NIV)
Our strength (Psalm 46:1)
Our dwelling place in all generations (Psalm 90:1)
Our guide even unto death (Psalm 48:14)
Our fear (Isaiah 8:13 – I have put ‘our’ in place of ‘your’)
Our dread (Isaiah 8:13 – I have put ‘our’ in place of ‘your’)

Names and titles of God associated somehow with the Israelites and their forefathers

Remember that Israel means ‘He struggles with God’ and that it is the name given by God to Jacob

The God of Israel (Genesis 33:20, Isaiah 48:1; 45:15)
The God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things (Psalm 72:18)
The God of all the families of Israel (Jeremiah 31:1)
The God of the armies of Israel (1 Samuel 17:45)
The LORD God of Israel (Psalm 41:13)
The Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 1:4; 10:20; Psalm 71:22)
The Mighty One of Israel (Isaiah 1:24)
The Creator of Israel (Isaiah 43:15)
The Shepherd [of Israel] (Genesis 49:24 – NIV. Psalm 80:1)
The Rock of Israel (Genesis 49:24; Isaiah 30:29 - NIV)
The King of Israel (Zephaniah 3:15)
The Hope of Israel (Jeremiah 17:13)
The Redeemer of Israel (Isaiah 49:7)
The help and shield of Israel (Psalm 115:9)

A father to Israel (Jeremiah 31:9)
The God of Jacob (Psalm 20:1; 46:7)  
The Holy One of Jacob (Isaiah 29:23)  
The Mighty God of Jacob (Psalm 132:2)  
The Mighty One of Jacob (Genesis 49:24 - NIV)  
The King of Jacob (Isaiah 41:21)  
The portion of Jacob (Jeremiah 10:16; 51:19)

The God of Nahor (Genesis 31:53)  
The God of Abraham (Genesis 26:24)  
The God of Isaac (Genesis 28:13)  
The God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky (Deuteronomy 33:26). Jeshurun, which means ‘upright,’ is another name for the people of Israel.  
The God of David (Isaiah 38:5)  
The God of Elijah (2 Kings 2:14 - NIV)  
The God of Daniel (Daniel 6:26)  
The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6). In Hebrew Elohay Avraham, Yitzchak v’Yaakov.  
The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Daniel 3:28)  
The God of Bethel (Genesis 31:13)  
The God of the Hebrews (Exodus 5:3; 9:13)

God their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt (Psalm 106:21 - NKJV)

The hope of their fathers (Jeremiah 50:7)

The Rock of his [of Jeshurun] salvation (Deuteronomy 32:15)

The LORD God of Shem (Genesis 9:26)  
The LORD God of Israel (Exodus 5:1)  
The LORD God of our fathers (Deuteronomy 26:7)  
The LORD God of thy fathers (Deuteronomy 27:3)

The Lord GOD who gathers the outcasts of Israel (Isaiah 56:8 - NKJV)

The Fear of Isaac (Genesis 31:42)
The LORD, who redeemed Abraham (Isaiah 29:22)
The LORD of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion (Isaiah 8:18 - NKJV)
The LORD, whose fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem (Isaiah 31:9)
The LORD who dwells in Zion (Psalm 9:11 - NKJV)
The LORD that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers (Isaiah 44:26-27)

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He who is the Glory of Israel (1 Samuel 15:29 – NIV) or The Strength of Israel
He that made him [Israel] (Psalm 149:2)
He that keepeth Israel (Psalm 121:4)
He that inhabitest the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3)

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He who struck Egypt in their firstborn and brought out Israel from among them with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm (Psalm 136:10-12 - NKJV)
He who divided the Red sea in two and made Israel pass through the midst of it but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red sea (Psalm 136:13-15 - NKJV)
He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together (Isaiah 43:16-17 - NIV)
He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock (Isaiah 63:11)
He that led them [the Israelites] by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name (Isaiah 63:12)
He who led His people through the wilderness (Psalm 136:16 - NKJV)
He who struck down great kings and slew famous kings, Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan, and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His servant (Psalm 136:17-22 - NKJV).
He who remembered us in our low estate (Psalm 136:23)
He that hath redeemed us from our enemies (Psalm 136:24)
He that put his Holy Spirit within his flock (Isaiah 63:11)
He from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted (Isaiah 31:6)
He who struck them [the people of Israel] (Isaiah 9:13 - NIV)
He that scattered Israel (Jeremiah 31:10)

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The LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (Psalm 81:10 - NKJV)
The LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Exodus 20:2 - NIV)
The LORD your God dwelling in Zion (Joel 3:17)
The LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go (Isaiah 48:17 - NKJV)
The LORD your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared (Isaiah 51:15 - NKJV)
The LORD that hath mercy on thee (Isaiah 54:10)
The LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you (Isaiah 44:2 - NKJV)
The LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth (Isaiah 51:13 - NIV)

Your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb (Isaiah 44:24 - NIV)
Your Sovereign LORD (Isaiah 51:22 - NIV)
Your refuge (Deuteronomy 33:27)
Your Saviour (Isaiah 43:3 - NIV)
Your Holy One (Isaiah 43:15)
Your King (Isaiah 43:15)
Your helper (Hosea 13:9 - NIV)
Your shield (Genesis 15:1 – NKJV. Words said by God to Abraham)
Your exceedingly great reward (Genesis 15:1 – NKJV. Words said by God to Abraham)

The Holy One in the midst of thee (Hosea 11:9)
The Rock that begat thee (Deuteronomy 32:18)

The sword of thy excellency (Deuteronomy 33:29)
The shield of thy help (Deuteronomy 33:29)
The rock of thy strength (Isaiah 17:10)

Your God, who defends his people (Isaiah 51:22 - NIV)

The God of thy salvation (Isaiah 17:10)

The God who fathered you (Deuteronomy 32:18 - NKJV)

God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim (Isaiah 37:16 - NKJV)

In the New Testament

The Godhead (Acts 17:29)
The Majesty (Hebrews 1:3)

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The Most High (Luke 1:32,35; Acts 7:48)
The Most High God (Hebrews 7:1),

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The living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them (Acts 14:15 - NKJV)

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The only true God (John 17:3)
The living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9)
The only wise God (1 Timothy 1:17)
The only wise God our Saviour (Jude 25)

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God the Father (John 6:27)
God, for whom and through whom everything exists (Hebrews 2:10 - NIV).
God that made the world and all things therein (Acts 17:24)
God, who has called us into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9 - NIV)
God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13 - NKJV)
God only wise (Romans 16:27).
God our Saviour (Titus 1:3)

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The Creator (Matthew 19:4 – NIV)
The Creator, who is blessed for ever (Romans 1:25).

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The LORD (Matthew 22:44)
The LORD your God (Luke 4:8; 4:12 - NKJV)

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The Lord of sabaoth (James 5:4)
The Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:18)
The Lord God of the holy prophets (Revelation 22:6)

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Lord God Almighty (Revelation 11:17)
Lord of heaven and earth (Luke 10:21; Matthew 11:25; Acts 17:24)
Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be (Revelation 16:5 - NKJV)

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:31; Ephesians 1:3). Jesus called Him "My God" and "My Father"
The God of Jacob (Acts 7:46)
The God of Israel (Matthew 15:31)
The God of the Gentiles (Romans 3:29)
The God of the spirits of the prophets (Revelation 22:6 - NIV)
The God to whom I belong and whom I serve (Acts 27:23 - NKJV)

The God of heaven (Revelation 11:13 – NKJV)
The God of the earth (Revelation 11:4 – NKJV)
The God of glory (Acts 7:2)
The God of patience and consolation (Romans 15:5)
The God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3)
The God of hope (Romans 15:13)
The God of peace (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20)
The God of love (2 Corinthians 13:11)
The God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10)

The Father (Matthew 28:19; Mark 13:32; John 5:20)
The living Father (John 6:57).
The Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work (1 Peter 1:17).
The Father of mercies (2 Corinthians 1:3)
The Father of glory (Ephesians 1:17)
The Father of lights (James 1:17)
The Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9)

Our Father who is in the secret place (Matthew 6:6 – NKJV. I have put ‘our’ in place of ‘your’)
Our Father who sees in secret (Matthew 6:6 – NKJV. I have put ‘our’ in place of ‘your’)
Our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9 - NKJV)
Abba [Aramaic for ‘Father’] (Romans 8:15)

Righteous Father (John 17:25)
Holy Father (John 17:11)
The blessed God (1 Timothy 1:11)
The power of God (Luke 22:69)
The invisible God (Colossians 1:15)

The Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 21:6 - NIV)
The Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6 - NIV)
The Mighty One (Matthew 26:64; Luke 1:49 - NIV)
The Holy One (Revelation 16:5 - NIV)
The blessed and only Potentate (1 Timothy 6:15)
The King eternal, immortal, invisible (1 Timothy 1:17)
The King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see (1 Timothy 6:15-16)
The head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3)
The Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe (1 Timothy 4:10)
The Judge (James 5:9)
The Judge of all (Hebrews 12:23)
The gardener (John 15:1 - NIV)
The potter (Romans 9:21)

The one who sits on the throne (Matthew 23:22)
The one who can destroy both soul and body in hell [geenna] (Matthew 10:28 - NIV).
The one who is able to save and destroy (James 4:12 - NIV)

Love (1 John 4:8)
Light (1 John 1:5)
Lawgiver (James 4:12)
Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6 - NIV)

King of the ages (Revelation 15:3 – NIV)

A faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).
A rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6)
A consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)

He who is declared to be living (Hebrews 7:8 - NIV).
He who is and who was and who is to come (Revelation 1:4; - NKJV)
He who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27)
He who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever (Revelation 4:9 – NIV)
He that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein (Revelation 10:6).
He that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters (Revelation 14:7).
He who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11 - NKJV)
He who speaks from heaven (Hebrews 12:25 - NKJV)
He who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5 - NKJV)
He who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23 - NKJV)
He who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:4 - NKJV)
He who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell [geenna] (Luke 12:5 - NIV)

He that sent John to baptize with water (John 1:33)
He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all (Romans 8:32)
He that sent Jesus (John 5:24)
He that was able to save Jesus from death (Hebrews 5:7)
He that raised up Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11)
He who put all things under Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:27-28 - NKJV)

He who calls (Romans 9:11 - NKJV)
He who called us (1 Peter 1:15 - NKJV)
He who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9 - NKJV)
He who calls us (1 Thessalonians 5:24 - NKJV)
He who is able to establish us according to the Gospel of Paul and the preaching of Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25)
He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision (Galatians 2:8)
He that was also at work in the ministry of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8 - NIV)
He that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Ephesians 3:20)
He with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13) or He to whom we must give account (NIV)
He that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24)

Our God and Father (Galatians 1:4; Philippians 4:20 - NIV)
Our God who sits on the throne (Revelation 7:10 – NIV)
Our Saviour (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3)
Our Lord (Revelation 11:15 – NKJV)

That Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17)
God can be known

This great and wonderful God, of whom I have spoken, can be known. That is what the Bible teaches. He can be known through Jesus Christ, His Son, for the apostle John stated: “No one has ever seen God, but the Only Begotten Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18 - NIV). So, if a man wants to know God, he needs to know His Son Jesus Christ. We have known God, and bear witness that God is a knowable God and that He can be known only through His Son Jesus Christ.

Do you know God? If your answer is ‘yes,’ I exhort you to retain the knowledge of God to the end, so that you may receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who know Him. But if your answer is ‘no,’ I exhort you to repent of your sins and believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again the third day for our justification, for this is the only way to know Jesus Christ, who is the only way to know God. Therefore, right now, humble yourself before God, recognize that you are a sinner, repent of your sins and believe in the name of the Son of God.
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The story of Jesus

In the days of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, it came to pass that a virgin from Nazareth (a little town in Galilee, which is a region of the land of Israel), who had been pledged to be married to Joseph the son of Jacob, who belonged to the house of David, had a heavenly vision: a holy angel of God appeared to her and foretold her that she would conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son, who would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High; and she had to give Him the name JESUS. The Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David and He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. When Mary, this is the virgin’s name, heard those words she asked the angel how that would be since she was a virgin. The angel told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her; so the Holy One who would be born of her would be called the Son of God. Then Mary answered: “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38 – NIV). What the angel told her was fulfilled some time later. Mary was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit before she and Joseph came together. But when Joseph saw that Mary was pregnant, he decided to put her away secretly. However, while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21 - NKJV). Jesus means ‘YHWH saves’ (YHWH is the Hebrew name of God, which is pronounced Yahweh). Joseph was reassured by those words spoken by the angel, and when he woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife, knowing for sure that the messenger of God who had appeared to him had not lied to him.

In those days it came to pass that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world, and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because – as I said before – he belonged to the house of David. He went there to register with Mary, his wife, who was expecting a child. And while they were at Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

On the same day He was born, an angel of God appeared to some shepherds, who were living out in the fields nearby keeping watch over their flocks at night. The angel said to them: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). The word Christ comes from the Greek word CHRISTOS, which means ‘the Anointed One’. The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about that child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

On the eight day, He was circumcised and was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived.

When the days of her purification according to the law of Moses (which states that a woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, and then she must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding) were completed, Joseph and Mary took the Child Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.
Then, when Jesus was a few weeks old, some wise men came from the East to Bethlehem, to worship the Child Jesus. The Scripture states that they came into the house where the young Child was, and they fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. How did those men come to Bethlehem? In this way: while they were in the East they saw His star and they came to Jerusalem, saying: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:2 – NKJV). When Herod, the king of Judea, heard this, he was disturbed and called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They replied that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet Micah had written. So the king sent the wise men to Bethlehem (after he had found out from them the exact time the star had appeared), telling them to go and make a careful search for the child, and when they would find Him they had to report to the king so that he too might go and worship Him. However, when the wise men had found the Child Jesus, they did not go back to Herod, for they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod; so they returned to their country by another route. When Herod saw that he was deceived by the wise men, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the wise men. However, the Child Jesus was not put to death because God had warned Joseph through an angel, telling him to take the Child and his mother and to flee to Egypt, where he had to stay until He told him. After Herod died, God spoke again to Joseph through an angel, telling him to take the Child and his mother and to go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life were dead. So Joseph got up, took the Child and his mother and went to the land of Israel; but when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and, having been warned in a dream, he went and lived in a town called Nazareth, which was in the district of Galilee.

Jesus was brought up by Joseph and Mary in Nazareth; He grew in wisdom and stature, and He became strong in spirit; and the grace of God was upon Him. When Jesus was about thirty years of age, He came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist, who came baptizing in the wilderness of Judea and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Who was John the Baptist? He was neither Elijah, nor the Christ; this is what he himself said to some priests and Levites who asked him who he was. John the Baptist was the one about whom God had said through the prophet Malachi: "Behold, I send My messenger, and He will prepare the way before Me" (Malachi 3:1 - NKJV). Therefore John was a man sent by God before His Christ to prepare His way. But how did the messenger of God prepare the way before the God’s anointed? By bearing witness of the Christ, that all through him might believe: that's what John did. When Jesus had been baptized by John, He went up out of the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting upon Him. And a voice came from heaven, saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). From that time on, John bore witness, saying to the people: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34). Therefore on the same day Jesus was baptized in water He was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. After Jesus was anointed, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After He had fasted forty days, the tempter came to Him and attempted to make Him fall into sin, but Jesus resisted the devil successfully with the law of the Lord, which He had put into His heart, as it is written: “The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm 37:31). When the devil had ended every temptation, he left Jesus until an opportune time and angels came and ministered to Him.
After that, Jesus returned to Galilee, where He began to preach and to teach, being glorified by all. He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. But his fellow-citizens who were in the synagogue were filled with wrath and rose up and thrust Him out of the city, and they led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way. Why were His fellow-citizens full of wrath? And why did they seek to kill Jesus? Because Jesus, after He had read these words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:1-2), declared that on that day that Scripture was fulfilled in their hearing. And also that no prophet is accepted in his own country, and to confirm this He said to them: "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27).

So Jesus left Nazareth and went and lived in Capernaum, a city in the district of Galilee, which was upon the seacoast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali, which the Scripture calls "his own city" (Matthew 9:1).

Jesus went through every city and village, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He said to the people: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15 - NKJV). Therefore Jesus exhorted people to repent of their sins and to believe the Good News which was the message God had commanded Him to proclaim. The prophet Isaiah had said that the Christ would preach good tidings to the poor, and God in His own time fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah. But what was the Good News in which Jesus commanded people to believe? It was the News that God in the fullness of the time sent His Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. In other words, it was the wonderful News that God in His great love sent His Son into the world to save the world through Him, and that a man, in order to be saved, must believe in Him. So Jesus preached repentance and faith in Him. He also taught the multitudes many things by parables, that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psalm 78:2 - NKJV). And in addition to this, He wrought many healings among the Jews, He raised up the dead and He cast out many demons, for God was with Him. But even though Jesus went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with Him, many people did not believe in Him (that is to say, they did not believe He was the Christ); they said He was a glutton and a drunkard, a deceiver, a person who was beside himself, a person who had the prince of demons by whom He cast out demons, a sinner because He did not keep the Sabbath day, a blasphemer for He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. But all these things were false accusations, nothing but false accusations; for Jesus was self-controlled; He never sought His own gain, unlike the deceivers who teach things which ought not for the sake of dishonest gain; He was a man full of wisdom, yet not of the wisdom of the rulers of this age but of God’s secret wisdom; He was a man full of the Holy Spirit, who cast out demons by the Spirit of God; He never broke the Sabbath day for it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, it is lawful to save a person on the Sabbath, and Jesus did just that on the Sabbath by healing all those who needed healing; He was a truthful man, who did not make Himself equal with God presumptuously, but He made Himself equal with God because He was equal with God by nature, being the Only Begotten Son, who existed from eternity in the form of God with God the Father in heaven. However, even though the Son was equal with God, He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. For this reason
many did not realize that He was the Son of God, because He appeared to men in the form of a humble servant, who outwardly was not different from all other men.

Of course, those false accusations caused great sorrow to Jesus, for He saw that His own did not receive Him; He suffered as the prophets of old, who were sent by God to the people of Israel for their good, yet they were rejected and falsely accused by the people, who thought that the prophets were not seeking the welfare of the people but their harm. Thus were fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah, who had said that the Christ would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3), and Jesus Christ was indeed a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Among those who rejected Jesus Christ were the chief priests and the Pharisees, who, because they did not know the voices of the prophets which were read every Sabbath, decided to take Jesus and to kill Him.

A few days before the Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem and entered it sitting upon a donkey. On one of those days that preceded the Passover, it came to pass that Satan entered Judas Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve disciples of Jesus, and he went to the chief priests and captains and conferred with them how he might betray Jesus to them, and they were glad and agreed to give him money: thirty silver coins. Judas consented and from that time he watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them. So it happened that during the feast of Passover, after Jesus and His disciples had eaten the Passover, Judas went out of the house where they were all gathered. And after a short time, Judas went to a place called Gethsemane (Jesus was there because after He had eaten the Passover He went there with His disciples to pray) and with him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them, 'The one I kiss is the man: arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas greeted Jesus and kissed Him. Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him. Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.

As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Jesus into their council, and condemned Him to be deserving of death for He declared before them that He was the Son of God. When the members of the Council said: “He is guilty of death” (Matthew 26:66), they spit in His face and struck Him with their fists, and others slapped Him and said: “Prophesy to us, Christ. Who hit you?” (Matthew 26:68 - NIV).

Then they delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor, and asked him to crucify Jesus. Pilate, having examined Jesus in their presence, decided to release Jesus for he found no reason for death in Jesus Christ (Pilate sent Jesus to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time, and Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus, but even Herod found no fault in Jesus concerning those things of which the chief priests and the scribes accused Him, so Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate), but since the whole multitude cried out saying: “Crucify Him, crucify Him!,” and with loud shouts they insistently demanded that He be crucified, their shouts prevailed, and so Pilate decided to grant their demand. Therefore Pilate delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple and twisted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and began to salute Him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they struck Him on the head with a reed, and spit on him, and bowing the knee they worshipped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to the place called Golgotha to crucify Him.

They crucified Him that it might be fulfilled what was spoken through David: “They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16 - NKJV); two robbers were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left, that it might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12 - NKJV).

While Jesus was on the cross, the soldiers took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part. As far as His tunic is concerned, they said among themselves: “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be;’ this happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which
Another thing that took place while Jesus was suffering on the cross was this: He was mocked by those who passed by and by the chief priests, the scribes and the elders; they said: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God” (Matthew 27:42-43). This happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled which says: “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (Psalm 22:7-8), and, as another Scripture says, “They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (Psalm 22:13). Before He died, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46). Some of those standing there, when they heard this, said: ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’ And immediately one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. This happened that the Scripture would be fulfilled which says: “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21).

After Jesus breathed His last, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs, but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear. This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:36; Psalm 34:20). That evening this Scripture also was fulfilled which says: “And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10).

But why did Jesus Christ die? Isaiah says: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). Therefore His death on the cross (the Jews decreed that He had to be put to death and the Gentiles crucified Him, so they were both responsible for His death) was nothing but the fulfilment of what the prophet Isaiah had said. Therefore we declare that God turned the heart of the Jews and the Gentiles to gather together against His Christ and to kill Him, so that through His death He might set us free from sin.

Let me explain this very important concept. Sin entered into the world through one man, whose name was Adam, and sin passed upon all men, so all have sinned. What is the strength of sin? The law, for Paul says: “The strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Paul confirms this when he says to the Romans: “Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Romans 7:11). In other words, sin brings death into man by the law. Of course, the law is good and holy, yet sin uses the law to work death in man. I will make a comparison. Just as a killer uses a piece of wood (which was created by God) to kill another man and it is not the piece of wood (which was created by God and which is good in itself) that kills that man, but the killer, who uses that piece of wood to fulfil his evil plan, so sin uses the law, given by God to Israel and thus is a good law, to kill people spiritually. Therefore it was necessary that sin should be put away, that is to say, that sin should be deprived of its power over man. And this is what Jesus did by His death, He put away sin: He was able to do this for He bore our sins in His own body on the cross. That’s why whoever believes in Him is set free from sin, because Jesus Christ on the cross crucified the old man of those who believe on Him. Therefore the believing people died with Christ to sin, and thus the law no longer has dominion over them, for the law has dominion over a man only as long as he lives; after his death the law cannot have any dominion over him. And the believers have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, they have become dead to what they were held by, that they might belong to Jesus Christ.

After Jesus died on the cross, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple. He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock. It was in
this way that it was fulfilled the Scripture which says: “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Isaiah 53:9).

But on the third day God raised Him from the dead, because it was not possible that Christ should be held by death. God had foretold also the resurrection of Christ, for David had said: “You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27; Psalm 16:10 - NKJV). It is evident that David did not speak of himself for he was buried and saw corruption, but he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, one of his descendants, for he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would place the Christ on his throne forever, as it is written: “The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it; I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body” (Psalm 132:11 - NKJV).

After Jesus rose from the dead, He presented Himself alive to the apostles whom He had chosen; He ate and drank with them, and He spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and gave commandments to them. After that, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

And at God’s appointed time, He will come back from heaven with glory and power.

**The messiahship of Jesus**

One day Jesus of Nazareth asked His disciples who they said He was, and Peter answered that He was the Christ of God, and Jesus commended Peter for his answer. Here is what Matthew wrote: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:13-19).

We also believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. What does the word Christ mean? Christ derives from the Greek word Christos, which means ‘the Anointed One’. But there is another word which has the same meaning, that is, Messiah, which derives from the Hebrew word Mashiach. So we can say that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and also that He is the Messiah.

Why do we believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ or the Messiah? Because in Him were fulfilled the things God had foretold about the Anointed One through the prophets of old, who lived centuries before the birth of Jesus.

God, through the prophets of old, had predicted many things about the Anointed One: His virgin birth, the place where He would be born, the place where He would be brought up, His ministry, His way of life, His sufferings, His death, His resurrection and His ascension to heaven, and other things. And when the fullness of the time came, He brought them to pass: they were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the son (as was supposed) of Joseph the son of Jacob. That’s why we believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ or the Messiah. Now let’s see the predictions the prophets had made about the Messiah and how they were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.
He would be born in Bethlehem

The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judah, the city of David, for the prophet Micah had said: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judah, as it is written: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:1-11) and again: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:1-7).

He would be born of a virgin

The Messiah would be born of a virgin, for the prophet Isaiah had said: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Mary the mother of Jesus conceived Jesus in her womb through the Holy Spirit, before she and Joseph (to whom she had been pledged to be married) came together. Here is the story of the birth of Jesus according to the Gospel written by Matthew and that written by Luke. Matthew says: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for he will save His people from their sins’. So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’, which is translated, ‘God with us’. Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS” (Matthew 1:18-25 – NKJV), and Luke says: “And
in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. 

And so it was, that, while they were there [that is, in Bethlehem of Judah], the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 1:26-38; 2:6-7).

He would be called out of Egypt

God foretold through the prophet Hosea that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hosea 11:1). Jesus, when He was a child, was taken to Egypt by Joseph, His putative father, and then after some time He was brought back to Israel. Here is what Matthew wrote: “The [an] angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. …. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)

He would descend from David

The Messiah would descend from David, for the prophet Isaiah had said: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse [the father of David], and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:1-2), and the prophet Jeremiah confirmed this with the following words: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch…..” (Jeremiah 23:5). Jesus was a descendant of David, for Joseph, the putative father of Jesus, was of the house of David. According to the Gospel written by Matthew, the angel of the Lord who appeared to
Joseph in a dream (to tell him not to be afraid to take to him Mary his wife, for that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit) called him “son of David” (Matthew 1:20), and according to the Gospel written by Luke, “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:4 - NKJV). That’s why Jesus is called “the Son of David” (Matthew 1:1) because - as Paul says to the Romans – He “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3 - NKJV).

He would be called the Son of God and would reign over the house of Jacob

According to the prophet Isaiah, who spoke by the Spirit of God, the Messiah would be called the Son of God and would reign over the House of Jacob. Here is what he said: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7). Note that the prophet said, ‘Unto us a son is given’, for with these words God predicted that the Messiah would be called His Son. God foretold through David the same thing, that is to say, that the Messiah would be His Son and would reign over the house of Jacob, for He said to David concerning the Messiah: “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Samuel 7:14), and again: “One of your own descendants I will place on your throne” (Psalm 132:11 - NIV). As we saw before, the angel Gabriel, when he appeared to Mary the mother of Jesus, said to her, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). Jesus Himself stated that He was both the Son of God and the King of the Jews. When the members of the Jewish council asked Him, “Are You then the Son of God?” He said to them, “You rightly say that I am” (Luke 22:70 – NKJV), and when Pilate the governor asked Him if He was the King of the Jews, He answered him, “It is as you say” (Matthew 27:11 – NKJV).

He existed before His conception

As we saw before, the prophet Isaiah said about the Messiah: “Unto us a son is given” (Isaiah 9:6) and the prophet Micah said: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). Therefore the Messiah existed before His conception.

On several occasions Jesus asserted His preexistence before His conception. Here are some of His words which assert His preexistence: “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38); “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” (John 6:62); “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28); “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). John the Baptist (who was six months older than Jesus) said to the Jews about Jesus: “This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me” (John 1:15). And Paul stated: “He [Christ] is before all things” (Colossians 1:17). You may ask, ‘Did His preexistence in heaven have a beginning? No, it didn’t, because Jesus is God. He Himself said: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). Therefore, before His
conception, Jesus existed from eternity with God the Father in heaven. He is coeternal with the Father.

He would be anointed with the Holy Spirit

As I said before, the word Messiah means 'the Anointed One'; so the Messiah would be anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. His anointing was foretold by the prophet Isaiah in various ways. Here are his words: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him ...." (Isaiah 42:1); “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2); “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD ....” (Isaiah 61:1-2). Also in the Psalms there is a prediction about the anointing of the Messiah, as it is written: “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psalm 45:7).

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Here is what Matthew wrote: “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:13-17).

His way would be prepared by a messenger

God had foretold that He would send a messenger, who would prepare the way of the Messiah, as He had said through the prophet Malachi: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Malachi 3:1), and the prophet Isaiah: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

These words were fulfilled in John the Baptist the son of Zechariah, who was a contemporary of Jesus. Let’s see the Scriptures of the New Testament which refer to his birth and his ministry: “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of
the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men......... Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwell round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Luke 1:5-25; 57-80); “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. And this
is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who
art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked
him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered,
No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us.
What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make
straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the
Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that
Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but
there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred
before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in
Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming
unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he
of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And
I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing
with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove,
and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same
said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same
is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of
God” (John 1:6-34); “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance
for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of
Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John
was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts
and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of
whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water:
but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mark 1:4-8); “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign
of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of
Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias
the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto
John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan,
preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the
words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the
way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill
shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made
smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came
forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath
to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within
yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones
to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every
tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the
people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that
hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.
Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he
said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise
demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no
man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in
expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John
answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh,
the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost
and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the
wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in
his exhortation preached he unto the people” (Luke 3:1-18); “And John calling unto him two of
his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?
When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children” (Luke 7:19-35).

He would live in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali

God had foretold that the Messiah would dwell in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. Here is what the prophet Isaiah said: “Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Jesus, after His baptism, left Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and went to live in Capernaum, which was by the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, as it is written: “And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali” (Matthew 4:13 - NKJV). The Scripture calls Capernaum “His own city” (Matthew 9:1 – NKJV).

He would preach the Gospel and perform healings and miracles

God had foretold through the prophet Isaiah that the Messiah would preach the Gospel and would deliver the demon-possessed persons and heal the sick and perform miracles. Here is what the prophet Isaiah said: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD’ (Isaiah 61:1-2), and again: “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert”
(Isaiah 35:4-6), and again he said: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4 - NIV).

Jesus of Nazareth preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God and delivered many demon-possessed persons and healed many sick people. Here are some Scriptures of the New Testament asserting this: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils [demons], and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan” (Matthew 4:23-25); “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils [demons]: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick” (Matthew 8:16); “And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:30-31); “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35).

He would warn people not to make Him known

God, through the prophet Isaiah, had said about the Messiah: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law” (Isaiah 42:1-4). These words were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, for He commanded those who were healed by Him not to make Him known. Here are some words taken from the New Testament asserting this: “But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known” (Matthew 12:15-16). Jesus warned His disciples, too, not to make Him known, for it is written: “Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ” (Matthew 16:20 – NKJV).

He would speak to men in parables

God had foretold that the Messiah would speak to men in parables, as it is written in the book of Psalms: “I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old” (Psalm 78:2). Jesus of Nazareth spoke to the multitudes in parables, as it is written: “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (Mark 4:33-34). Why did He speak to them in parables? Because to those who were outside it was not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples when they asked Him why He spoke to the multitudes in parables: “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they
seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matthew 13:11-17). The same answer given by Jesus is recorded in Mark in this way: “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them” (Mark 4:11-12). From the answer given by Jesus to His disciples we learn that the reason why Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables was that God did not want most of the Jews to turn to the Lord Jesus to obtain the remission of their sins. Why? Because they were predestined not to hear and not to see, and therefore God hardened their hearts, made their ears dull and closed their eyes. In other words, because they were predestined to stumble at the Word, as the prophet Isaiah had said: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isaiah 8:14-15). That’s why most of the Jews did not accept Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. Listen to what John, one of the apostles of Jesus, wrote about this: “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:37-40). The apostle Paul confirmed this concept saying: “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Romans 11:7-10).

He would be a prophet

Here is what God said to Moses about the Messiah: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). Jesus was a prophet, for He spoke to the people the words God commanded Him to speak (John 12:48-50), comforting, exhorting and rebuking the people. However, not only did He comfort and exhort and rebuke the people, but He also predicted many things, as the prophets of old did. For example, He foretold the events that must happen before His second coming, as He said to His disciples: “Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall
be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains: And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days. And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors" (Mark 13:5-29). We know that these things Jesus foretold will come to pass at God's appointed time, for God “fulfills the predictions of his messengers” (Isaiah 44:26 – NIV). Just as the predictions made by the prophets of old were fulfilled at the appointed time, so also the predictions made by Jesus will be fulfilled at the appointed time. Actually some of the predictions He made (such as the predictions concerning wars, famines, earthquakes, and the persecution against His disciples) have been already fulfilled and are being fulfilled in many regions of the world today.

That Jesus was a true prophet, who spoke from God, is evident from the following facts. First, whoever keeps His words is blessed, just as He said (Luke 11:28; Matthew 7:24-25); for example, He said: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28 – NKJV), and all those who come to Him find rest for their souls; He said: “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7 – NKJV) and again: “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16:23 – NKJV), and we receive from God what we ask the Father in Jesus’ name. Second, in the days of His flesh He made some predictions which were fulfilled during His life: He predicted that He would lose none of those the Father had given Him (John 17:12), and His prediction was fulfilled (John 18:9); He predicted that Peter would deny Him three times (Matthew 26:34), and His prediction was fulfilled (Matthew 26:69-75); He predicted that He would be crucified (John 12:32-33), and His prediction was fulfilled (John 18:31-32; 19:18). So we are full of confidence, and firmly believe that all the predictions made by Jesus who are yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled at God’s appointed time.

**He would be a witness**

God had said through the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people.... " (Isaiah 55:4).
Jesus of Nazareth was a witness for He bore witness of what He had heard and seen. He said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:11-13), and He spoke these words to the Jews: “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me ... I speak that which I have seen with my Father ... For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 5:30; 8:38; 12:49-50). John the Baptist, the man sent by God to prepare the way of the Messiah, said about Jesus: “He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:31-34).

He would gather the remnant of the sheep of Israel and shepherd them

According to the prophets, who spoke from God through the Holy Spirit, the Messiah would gather the remnant of the sheep of Israel and would shepherd them and rule over them. Micah had said: “In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever .... I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them ....But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (Micah 4:6-7; 2:12-13; 5:2-4). Ezekiel had said: “I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment ..... Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:15-16,22-23). And Isaiah had said: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11).

Jesus of Nazareth is the Shepherd, who was born in Bethlehem, and the servant of God, who is called David. He Himself said that He was the Shepherd and that He had come to save the lost sheep of Israel. Listen to what He said: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd..... My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand .... I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (John 10:14-16,27-28; Matthew 15:24).

He would gather other sheep, which were not part of the house of Israel

The prophet Isaiah had said that the Messiah would gather not only the lost sheep of the house of Israel but also other sheep from among the Gentiles. Here are his words: “And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth .... The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him” (Isaiah 49:5-6; 56:8).

Besides the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth gathered other lost sheep, which were not Jews by birth, for He said: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

He would lighten the Gentiles

God had said through the prophet Isaiah these words concerning the Messiah: “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles.... It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

Jesus of Nazareth is the Light of the world. That old man named Simeon, to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ, when he had taken the child Jesus up in his arms, said: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32), and Jesus said: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

He would satisfy the spiritual hunger and thirst of people

The prophet Isaiah had said: “They shall not hunger nor thirst; .... for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them ... When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them ....The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen” (Isaiah 49:10; 41:17; 43:20).

Jesus of Nazareth satisfied the spiritual hunger of people and quenched their spiritual thirst. He said: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35) and again: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

He would save the souls of people from the bondage of sin

The prophet Isaiah had said about the Messiah: “Behold, your God will come .... he will come and save you' (Isaiah 35:4), and the Psalmist had said: “He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight” (Psalm 72:13-14). Jesus of Nazareth is the One whom God sent to save the souls of men from the bondage of sin. The angel of God who appeared to Joseph said to him about the son Mary would bring forth: “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), and Jesus Himself declared that He came into this world to save people, as He said: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10) and again: “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47).

He would comfort those who mourned

The Spirit of the Messiah had said through the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me …. to comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:1,2). Jesus of Nazareth comforted those who mourned. For example, He said: “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Luke 6:21).

He would bring peace

The prophet Micah had said about the Messiah: “And this man shall be the peace...” (Micah 5:5 – The IBRV reads: “Sarà lui che recherà la pace”, that is, “He is the one who will bring peace”). Jesus of Nazareth “is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14), because by Him we have been reconciled to God. He has given us His peace (John 14:27), which is a peace that surpasses all understanding.

He would give a great joy to people

The prophet Isaiah had said: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me ….to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning ... The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel …. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 61:1,3; 29:19; 9:3-7).
Jesus of Nazareth gave people the oil of joy. The wise men, who came from the East to worship Him, “rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matthew 2:10); and “all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him” (Luke 13:17). And John the Baptist also rejoiced, as he said: “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled” (John 3:29). All those who believed in Jesus rejoiced with joy inexpressible and full of glory, for their sins were forgiven them for His name’s sake (1 John 2:12; Romans 4:7).

He would build the house of God

God had said to David about his seed (that is, the Messiah): “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Samuel 7:12-13). And He had said through the prophet Zechariah: “Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zechariah 6:12-13). The man called ‘THE BRANCH,” according to the prophet Jeremiah, was the Messiah: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Jesus of Nazareth, the Seed and Branch of David, built the house of God, that is, the Church, as He said to one of His disciples, called Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The Church is a spiritual house, which is formed by all those who have believed in His name (who are living stones) and it is a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). That’s why it is called “God’s house” (Hebrews 3:6 – NIV). The Church is called both the Church of Jesus Christ and the Church of God, for Jesus said to God: “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine” (John 17:10 – NIV).

He would be hated without reason

The Spirit of Christ had said through the Psalmist: “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head…..” (Psalm 69:4), and again: “They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries; but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love” (Psalm 109:3-5). So the Messiah would be hated without reason.

Jesus of Nazareth was hated without reason. He did only good to the people and He pursued only what was good for the people, but the world hated Him. Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, said to His disciples: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you …… He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ’They hated Me without a cause’ (John 15:18, 23-25 – NKJV). However, it must be said, that several months before Jesus had said to His brothers these words: “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7).
He would be despised and reviled

The prophet Isaiah had said about the Messiah: “He was despised … by men” (Isaiah 53:3 - NIV), and David had said: “But I am a worm, and not a man; scorned by men and despised by the people” (Psalm 22:6 - NIV). Jesus of Nazareth was despised and reviled by the people. His own people said about Him: “He is beside himself” (Mark 3:21); the scribes and the Pharisees said: “He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons He casts out demons” (Mark 3:22 - NKJV); the Pharisees “derided Him” (Luke 16:14 - NKJV); and many Jews said: “He deceives the people” (John 7:12 - NKJV) and also: “Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matthew 11:19). Later we will see how Jesus was despised and reviled by the members of the Sanhedrin and by king Herod and his soldiers and by the soldiers of the governor and by those who passed by the cross while He was hanging on the cross.

He would be rejected by the Jews

The Messiah had been foreordained to be rejected by the Jews, for the Psalmist had said: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22 - NKJV), and Isaiah had said: “He was …. rejected by men” (Isaiah 53:3 – NIV). Jesus of Nazareth was rejected by the elders of the Jews, by the chief priests and by the scribes and the Pharisees and Sadducees. They did not acknowledge Him as the promised Messiah, but they regarded Him as a blasphemer and so they condemned Him to be deserving of death. One day Jesus spoke this parable to the chief priests and the elders of the people, according to which He would be rejected by them: “There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him” (Matthew 21:33-39). However, the stone which was rejected by the builders, became the cornerstone of the Church of God, a very precious stone to us, as it is written: “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:7)

He would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey

The prophet Zechariah had said that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you: He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9 - NKJV). Jesus of Nazareth entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, for Matthew wrote: “And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. ….. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and
the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (Matthew 21:1-3, 6-11).

He would be betrayed by one of his friends

The Psalmist had said: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9). So the Messiah would be betrayed by one of his friends.

Jesus of Nazareth was betrayed by one of His disciples, named Judas Iscariot. Here is what Matthew wrote: “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him” (Matthew 26:14-16) and again: “And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him” (Matthew 26:47-50). Then Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, when he saw that Jesus had been condemned, committed suicide, as it is written: “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5). And with that money the Sanhedrin bought the potter’s field, to bury strangers in, that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD” (Zechariah 11:12-13). That field was called ‘The field of blood.’

His followers would be scattered

The Shepherd-Messiah would be forsaken by his own sheep, for the prophet Zechariah had said: “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones” (Zechariah 13:7).

Jesus of Nazareth, when He was arrested, was forsaken by all His disciples, as it is written: “And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of
angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:47-56).

He would be beaten, mocked and spat and he would not open his mouth

The prophet Isaiah had said that the Messiah would be beaten, spat and mocked; but he would not open his mouth. Here are the words of the prophet: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting ... He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 50:6; 53:7).

Jesus of Nazareth, after He was arrested, was led before the Jewish council, that is, the Sanhedrin, which condemned Him to be deserving of death, and after the members of the council said: “He is deserving of death”, “they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, ‘Prophesy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?’” (Matthew 26:67-68 - NKJV). Then they delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor, who sent Jesus to king Herod. Hear what happened to Jesus when He was before king Herod: “And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate” (Luke 23:8-11). And after Pilate had given sentence that Jesus had to be crucified the following things occurred: “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him” (Matthew 27:27-31). And they crucified Him, “and those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!’ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:29-32 – NKJV).

He would be crucified with some transgressors

According to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the Messiah would be crucified, as it is written: “They pierced my hands and my feet” (Psalm 22:16) and again: “And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10); and He would be crucified with some transgressors, as it is written: “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified between two robbers, as it is written: “Then they crucified Him .... Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left” (Matthew 27:35,38 – NKJV).
They would part his garments among them and cast lots upon his vesture

In the book of Psalms is written this prediction concerning the Messiah: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18). While Jesus of Nazareth was hanging on the cross that Scripture was fulfilled, as it is written in the Gospel according to John: “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be” (John 19:23-24).

In his thirst they would give him vinegar to drink

The Psalmist had said: “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21). That is what happened to Jesus of Nazareth while He was hanging on the cross, as it is written: “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:28-30).

None of his bones would be broken

The Psalmist had said about the Messiah: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20). That prediction was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, for even though He was crucified, not one of His bones was broken. As it is written in the Gospel according to John: “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe” (John 19:31-35).

They would make his grave with the rich at his death

As we saw before, the Messiah would be numbered with the transgressors, yet at his death they would make his grave with the rich. Here is what Isaiah had said: “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). The body of Jesus of Nazareth was laid in the tomb of a rich man, as it is written: “When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed” (Matthew 27:57-60).
He would rise again

The Messiah, after his death, would rise again, for David spoke of his resurrection, saying: “I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:8-11 - NKJV). David, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne; He, foreseeing this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul would not be left in Sheol (or Hades), nor would His flesh see corruption. God foretold the resurrection of the Messiah through these words also: “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7).

Jesus of Nazareth rose again the third day and He appeared to His disciples. Here is what Luke wrote: “Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest” (Luke 24:1-9). John confirmed the resurrection of Jesus by saying: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:19-29).

As you can see, the resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection, not one of ‘spirit,’ as some say. For Jesus invited doubting Thomas to put his finger in the nail-prints and put his hand in the pierced side. Therefore the risen body of Jesus had flesh and bones. Did He not say to His disciples, who on first seeing Him after He rose thought they were seeing a spirit and were frightened, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:38-39 – NKJV). His risen body, however, differed from our bodies and from His own previous body, because – as we saw before – the Lord Jesus passed through closed doors when He met with the disciples for the first time, and besides this, because His body was immortal (as well as imperishable), as it is written: “Christ, having been raised from the
dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him” (Romans 6:9 – NKJV), and
glorious (Philippians 3:21).

He would sit at the right hand of God

David had said by the Spirit: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I
make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psalm 110:1)
Jesus of Nazareth, after He rose again, was received up into heaven and sat at the right hand of
the Majesty, as it is written: “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up
into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19) and again: “And he led them out as
far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he
blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50-51).
What is Jesus doing in heaven? He is reigning (1 Corinthians 15:25); He is making intercession
for us (Hebrews 7:25), having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek;
He is acting as our advocate due to the sins we commit (1 John 2:1); and He is preparing a
place for us, as He said to His disciples: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not
so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3 - NKJV).

The sonship of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God.
The angel Gabriel said to Mary about Jesus, before He was conceived in the womb, “The Holy
Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also,
that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35 – NKJV).
In the days of His flesh, God spoke twice from heaven declaring that Jesus was His Son. The
first time at the Jordan river, after Jesus was baptized by John, as it is written: “And Jesus, when
he was baptized, went up straightway of the water, and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him,
and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from
heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17). The
second time on the holy mountain, when Jesus was transfigured before three of His disciples, as
it is written: “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth
them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine
as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them
Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for
us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses,
and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a
voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye
him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid” (Matthew 17:1-
6).
Jesus Himself declared that He was the Son of God on many occasions. I will cite just two of
them. One day Jesus asked a man, who was born blind to whom He gave sight, ‘Do you believe
in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And
Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said,
‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him (John 9:35-38). When Jesus was led before the Jewish
Council, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, asked Him, ‘Are You then the
Son of God?’ So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am’ (Luke 22:70).
The Jews condemned Jesus to be deserving of death because He declared that He was the Son of God. Here is what Mark wrote: “Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think? And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (Mark 14:61-64 – NKJV). And when they delivered Him to Pontius Pilate they said to him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God” (John 19:7 – NKJV). The reason why according to the Jews Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, and thus He had to be put to death, was that by calling God His own Father He made Himself equal with God (John 5:18), that is to say, He made Himself God (John 10:33).

Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

The apostles of the Lord believed and confessed that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 14:33; 16:16; Acts 9:20).

Demons know that Jesus is the Son of God, for in the days of His flesh demons came out of many, crying out and saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ (Luke 4:41).

To conclude this teaching on the sonship of Jesus, I want to point out that Jesus did not become the Son of God, either at His birth or sometime during His earthly life, for He existed prior to His conception. In other words, He existed in heaven with God the Father before He was conceived in the womb of Mary his mother. He Himself said that He came down from heaven (John 6:38), and that He came forth from the Father and came into the world (John 16:28). Was Jesus eternal in His preexistence or was He a created being? He was eternal, because He existed with God the Father from eternity. For Jesus said to the Jews, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58 - NIV), and the apostle John states that Jesus was “that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2 – NKJV). As you can see, these words confirm His everlasting pre-existence in heaven with God the Father. Therefore we proclaim that the Son of God is the First and the Last. He was and is the eternal Son, coexistent and coeternal with the Father.

**The lordship of Jesus**

One day the apostle Peter said to the Jews: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Therefore Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord. “He is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36), as Peter said to Cornelius and his household. He received from God the name which is above every name, because, even though before His conception He existed in the form of God with God the Father from eternity, He took the form of a bondservant and humbled Himself and became obedient to the death of the cross. As Paul wrote to the Philippians: “Who [Jesus Christ], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11).

The Scripture states that God set Jesus “at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet. …"
(Ephesians 1:20-22), and also that angels and authorities and powers have been made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:22), so that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by David, saying: “You have crowned him with glory and honor ... You have put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:5,6 – NKJV).

The Scripture says that the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him for whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:12-13). Therefore there is only one name that a man must call upon in order to be saved, and that is the name of Jesus Christ. He is the Lord who saves all those who call upon His holy name. No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

**The deity of Jesus**

Jesus of Nazareth was, is and forever will be fully God. When I say that He is fully God I mean that He is divine (or Deity) like the Father, that is to say, He is one in essence and nature with God the Father and therefore He is without beginning and without end. Here are some Bible verses, taken from the New Testament, that clearly show that Jesus is God.

- John says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. …. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3,14). Therefore, since the apostle John states that the Word was God and the Word was made flesh, we proclaim that God was manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. The following words written in the book of Psalms: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:6) confirm what John said, that is to say, that “the Word was God” (John 1:1), because we know that the heavens were made by God, as it is written: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

- Jesus said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). The meaning of these words is clear, isn’t it? He and the Father are God, even though they are two distinct persons. The unity between the Son and the Father (who are one God, but at the same time two distinct divine Persons) is like the unity between husband and wife, as it is written: “… and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) and again: “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh” (Matthew 19:6 - NKJV), for it is evident that husband and wife are two distinct persons even though before God they have become one flesh. It is also like the unity between the saints and the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is written that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17 – NKJV), for this is a kind of unity which does not exclude the individuality and diversity of those who are joined to the Lord, for the Scripture does not mean that he who unites himself with Christ becomes the Spirit of God or that he merges into the Spirit of God or that he becomes Christ and thus God. If the above mentioned words of Paul meant that the saints have become God, the Scripture would contradict itself, for it teaches that a man, even after His conversion to Christ, continues to be a man, and his spirit continues to remain distinct from the Spirit of God, for Paul says to the Romans that “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16 - NKJV). Therefore the unity existing between husband and wife, and also between a believer and the Lord, is a unity in the diversity. Some people say that the words of Jesus on His unity with the Father mean simply that the Son and the Father are one in agreement and purpose. But I ask you this question: ‘It that were the only meaning of those words of Jesus, why then did the Jews – immediately after Jesus spoke those words - pick up stones to stone him?’ Actually the reason why the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus was another, that is, because Jesus with those words made Himself God. For it is written that the Jews said to Him: “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10:33). If Jesus by those words had meant simply
that He and the Father were of one accord (or that He agreed with the Father), the Jews would not have tried to stone Him.

- Jesus said to the rich man who called Him "Good Master" (Mark 10:17): "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). Now someone may ask: 'Why do you quote this verse to prove that Jesus is God?' Well, the reason is this, because Jesus did not refuse to be called 'Good', but He just asked that man why he called Him good, since only God is good. And therefore, since only God is good, the Master is God for He also is good. If Jesus were not good, certainly He would have told that man to call only God 'Good' (or not to call Him good), and thus He would have declared implicitly that He was only a man. However, He was good like the Father, because He was one in essence with God the Father. That's why He did not refuse to be called good.

- Paul said to the Colossians: "It pleased the Father that in him [Christ] should all fulness dwell" (Colossians 1:19). And it is because in Christ dwell all the fullness of the Godhead that we have received from Him one blessing after another, for John says: "And of his fulness have we all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). If in Christ had not dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, we could not have received from Him salvation from sin, nor eternal life, nor peace or joy and the other blessings.

- The apostle Paul said to the Romans: "Whose [of the Israelites] are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:5). Therefore Jesus Christ, even though He was found in appearance as a man, is the eternally blessed God.

- The apostle Paul said to Titus: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13 – NKJV). Now the prophet Daniel called God "the great God", for he spoke to king Nebuchadnezzar saying: "The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Daniel 2:45); Jeremiah also called God 'the great God,' as he said: "Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name" (Jeremiah 32:18); and David acknowledged that only God is great, for he said: "For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods" (Psalm 135:5). Therefore if Paul called Jesus 'our great God' that means that he firmly believed that Christ was God. If Jesus were not God, and thus if he were not equal with God, Paul would not have called Him "our great God," lest he should call a creature "God", and thus lest he should commit the sin of idolatry. Remember that Paul was a Jew by birth and he knew very well that God had said: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3), and therefore if Jesus were only a man he would not have dared to call Him "our great God". Also the fact that Paul called Jesus Christ "our Saviour" shows that the apostle believed that Jesus was God. He knew that God had said through the prophet Isaiah: "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:21); however, he did not call only God the Father 'our Saviour' (he says to Titus: "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour" [Titus 1:3], and to Timothy: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope" [1 Timothy 1:1 - NKJV], and again: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" [1 Timothy 4:10]) but he called also His Son Jesus Christ 'our Saviour," as it is written in the epistle to Titus: "To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 1:4).

- The apostle Peter also called Jesus Christ "our God and Saviour," for at the beginning of his second epistle he wrote: "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as
precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1 – NIV). Peter also knew that there is only one God and only one Saviour, yet he called the Christ, whom he knew in the days of His flesh, “our God and Saviour”, because he is indeed our God and our Saviour.

● According to the book of the Acts of the apostles, one day Paul spoke to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, saying to them among other things: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28 - NKJV). Now Paul said that God purchased the Church with His own blood; that seems incredible, for we know that it was not God who died on the cross and shed His blood for us, but His only begotten Son. But if we examine this verse carefully and we compare it with other verses of the Scripture we will note that Paul with those words did refer to the Son of God and not to God the Father, for the Father, during the days of the flesh of His Son, was sitting on His throne in heaven. Remember that when Thomas said to Jesus: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28), he acknowledged implicitly that his God had died on the cross, that He had shed His own blood to purchase us with it, and then He had risen again. But pay attention to this: Thomas did not mean that God the Father had died on the cross. I say this so that you may realize that there is always a clear distinction to be made between God the Father and God the Son. They are two Persons, united and of the same substance (that is to say, the Son and the Father are one in essence by nature) from eternity, yet at the same time they are different from one another and they must be mentioned separately in order not to confuse them (that is to say, in order not to confuse the Son with the Father and vice versa). In conclusion, according to the words of Paul, Jesus Christ is the God who has purchased His own Church with His blood.

● In the epistle to the Hebrews it is written: “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8). Also from these words it is evident that the Son is God.

● In this same epistle it is written: “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6). Now we know that the angels worship only God, as it is written: “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Nehemiah 9:6). Therefore, since the angels know that only God is worthy to be worshiped (the angel of Jesus who appeared to John on the isle of Patmos, when he saw that John fell down to worship before his feet said to him: “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book, Worship God” [Revelation 22:9 - NKJV]) and they are commanded by God to worship the Son of God, it follows that Jesus Christ is God. If Jesus were not God, the Father would not have commanded His angels to worship Him.

● The apostle Matthew says that the wise men, “when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him....” (Matthew 2:11). These words attest that Jesus was God even when He was a young child, for those wise men who had come from the East worshiped Him, that is to say, they did something which can be done only toward God. The worship of men is due to God alone.

● The same apostle, at the end of the Gospel he wrote, says that after Jesus rose again, when He met the women, “they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him” (Matthew 28:9), and that the eleven disciples “went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him....” (Matthew 28:16-17). Now, since it is written in the law: “Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10; cf. Deuteronomy 6:13), Christ was God. If the Son were not God, not only He would not have been worthy to be worshiped, but for sure He Himself would have rebuked both the women and His disciples when they worshiped him. Remember that Jesus did not hesitate to rebuke His disciples when they deserved to be rebuked: for example, He rebuked James and John when they asked Him if He wanted them to command fire to come down from
heaven and consume those Samaritans who did not welcome Him because He was heading for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-56); and He rebuked Peter for he did not want Him to suffer and to die (Matthew 16:22-23). Therefore if the women and His disciples, by worshiping Him, had committed the sin of idolatry, Jesus would have rebuked them and He would have said to them: ‘Worship God!’ So the fact that He accepted their worship confirms that Jesus was fully God.

● In the epistle to the Hebrews it is written: “But ye are come unto ….. God the Judge of all” (Hebrews 12:22,23). As you can see, in this verse God is called the Judge of all. But the Son also is the Judge of all, for Peter said about Jesus that “it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42 - NKJV). Therefore, since we know that judgement belongs to the Eternal One, that is, to the only true God, it is evident that Jesus Christ is God.

● Mark tells us that Jesus said to the paralytic who was carried by four men: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5). Then some scribes who were sitting there reasoned in their hearts saying: “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). But Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, and “he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mark 2:8-11). As you can see, Jesus Christ had power to forgive men their sins. So He must be God, because in the book of Psalms David says about God: “He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases” (Psalm 103:3 – NIV), and he says to God: “Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). If Jesus were only a man, then He would have blasphemed, but the fact is that besides being fully man He was also fully God, and thus He had authority to forgive men their sins. To His holy and blessed name be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

The humanity of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth was not only fully God, as it is written: “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Colossians 1:19), but He was also fully man, fully human, for it is written that He shared in our humanity (Hebrews 2:14) coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

Even though His conception was supernatural, for He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, His birth was that of a normal child born of a human mother (Matthew 1:18). He is spoken of as being “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4 – NIV).

Jesus, as a normal child, grew physically and mentally, as it is written: “And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom … and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:40, 52 – NKJV).

Jesus referred to Himself as a man, as He said to the Jews: “But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God” (John 8:40 – NKJV). He was recognized by others as a man (John 10:33; Luke 23:4, 41). Jesus called Himself the Son of Man (Matthew 16:13; 26:24; 24:30) to assert His identification with us as sons of men (but also to assert His preeminence over all men), for ‘son of man’ means ‘having the nature or character of man.’

He had a body, soul and spirit, and shared our physical and emotional experiences. He got hungry (Matthew 4:2) and thirsty (John 4:7; 19:28). He got weary from travelling (John 4:6). He slept (Matthew 8:24). He expressed love and compassion; for it is written that He loved His disciples to the end (John 13:1) and He was moved with compassion for the multitudes, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He was grieved by the hardness of His enemies’ hearts (Mark 3:5); He was angry at those who made His Father’s house a den of robbers (Matthew 21:12-13); He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35), and He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). And on the night He was betrayed,
while He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death (Matthew 26:38).

Since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was born without sin, that is, free from hereditary depravity. Furthermore, during His earthly life He committed no sin, even though He was in all points tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15). The Scripture states that He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). One day He challenged His enemies to convict Him of a single sin, as He asked them this question: “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46 – NKJV), and His foes had no reply. As we will see later, it was necessary for Jesus to be born without sin and to live a sinless life in order to make atonement for our sins through the offering of His body.

As we have seen, Jesus was a real man, therefore as a man He was inferior to God, for He was subject to human limitations. That’s why the Scripture says: “You made him a little lower than God” (Psalm 8:5 – NIV ‘Than God’ is in a footnote. The IBRV reads “Tu l’hai fatto poco minor di Dio,” that is, “You made him a little lower than God,” in the text, while in the footnotes we find ‘Tu l’hai fatto poco minor degli angeli,” that is, “You made him a little lower than the angels”. However, even if we accept ‘than the angels,’ as the KJV reads, it is evident that since the angels of God are heavenly beings inferior to God, Jesus also – as a man - was inferior to God).

Now, by comparing some Bible verses, referring to Jesus, with some others referring to God, I will show you what the Scripture means when it states that Jesus was made a little lower than God.

- John says: “Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour” (John 4:6). Therefore Jesus got weary. But we know that in Isaiah it is written about God that He “fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isaiah 40:28. The NIV reads: “He will not grow tired or weary”). However, this does not lead us to say that Jesus was not God, because His tiredness was due to the fact that He had a human body, which was subject to some limitations.

- Matthew says: “And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep” (Matthew 8:23-24). While in the book of Psalms it is written about God: “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). Now, as you can see, on the one hand the Scripture states that the Son of God fell asleep while He was on the ship together with His disciples, and on the other hand it states that God cannot fall asleep. However, although Jesus fell asleep on that occasion, we don’t say that Jesus was not God, because we know that the Son, being a man like us, needed to sleep. He had a physical body like ours, which got tired and needed rest, that’s why He fell asleep.

- Jesus said: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). Now we know that God “is a God who knows” (1 Samuel 2:3 - NIV) everything, why then did Jesus Christ, who was God, said that He knew neither the day nor the hour of His second coming? Because He was also fully man. Therefore we must not be surprised if Jesus, on the night He was arrested, said to His disciples: “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), for He, as a man, was inferior to God, as it is written: “You made him a little lower than God” (Psalm 8:5 - NIV), and on that occasion Jesus spoke as a man.

In conclusion, I want to say this. Of course, when we speak about the two natures of Christ – that is, the divine and the human nature of Christ – and we explain the mystery of how they were united in Him (as to the union between them we believe and teach that they were organically and indissolubly united, yet so that no third nature was formed thereby), we acknowledge that we are talking about something that we don’t understand fully and thus we can’t offer a complete explanation as to how Christ’s humanity and deity were united, for in this life the Incarnation will always contain areas of mystery for us, but that does not prevent us from believing and proclaiming that He was truly man and truly God. “Without controversy great is the mystery of
godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16). To Christ Jesus, our great God and Saviour, be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

The character of Jesus

The holiness of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a holy man, that is to say, He was absolutely pure, for He was born without sin and He lived a sinless life. That's why the Scripture calls Him “the Holy One” (Acts 3:14).

The holiness of Jesus Christ manifested itself in a love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity, for God said to Him: “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness” (Hebrews 1:9 – NKJV). So Jesus always loved what was right in the sight of God, but hated what was wrong in His sight.

His love of righteousness and His hatred of iniquity were manifested in word. His love of righteousness was manifested in His urging His disciples to be perfect as God, to love their neighbour as themselves, to love one another as He loved them, to seek the righteousness of God, to be humble, merciful and peaceful, to forgive one another, to be patient, to have faith in God, etc. while His hatred of iniquity manifested itself in His warning His disciples against sexual immorality, covetousness, unbelief, pride, falsehood, contentions, drunkenness, revelries, idolatry, etc. We see a verbal manifestation of His love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity also in the following incidents recorded in the Gospels. He commended the centurion and the Canaanite woman for their faith (Matthew 8:10; 15:28), but He rebuked the chief priests and the elders of the people for their unbelief (Matthew 21:31-32). He defended His disciples’ action, when the scribes and Pharisees accused them of transgressing the tradition of the elders for they ate with unwashed hands, saying: “To eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man” (Matthew 15:20 – NKJV), but He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for breaking the commandment of God for they did not allow the people to honor father and mother, saying to them: ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’ - then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’ (Matthew 15:3-9 – NKJV). He commended that woman who broke an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard and poured it on His head, saying to His disciples: “She has done a good work for Me. … Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Mark 14:6-9 – NKJV), but He rebuked Judas Iscariot calling him “a devil” (John 6:70) and saying: “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24 – NKJV).

His love of righteousness and His hatred of iniquity were manifested not only in word, but also in deed. For He always took delight in doing the things which pleased God His Father, as He Himself said: “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29), and He committed no sin nor did He practice any falsehood, for it is written that He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He lived a holy life indeed! He even challenged His enemies to convict Him of a single sin (John 8:46), but they had no reply.

The humility of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a humble man. He Himself said: “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29 – NIV). His humility was manifested by His becoming poor for
us, though He was rich, that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9); in His not seeking His own glory (John 8:50), in His avoiding notoriety and praise (Isaiah 42:2; Matthew 12:15-16; 16:20; Mark 5:43); in His associating with the despised and outcast (Matthew 9:10; Luke 15:1-2); in His entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-10); in patient submission to outrageous injury and injustice (Isaiah 50:5-6; Hebrews 12:3); in silence under outrageous injury and injustice (Isaiah 53:7); in silence under false accusations (1 Peter 2:23; Matthew 26:60-63; Luke 23:8-10); in His coming to minister and not to be ministered unto (Matthew 20:28); in His washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:4-5); in His being "obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8 – NKJV).

The meekness of Jesus Christ. Meekness is that attitude of mind that is opposed to harshness and contentiousness, and that shows itself in gentleness and tenderness in dealing with others, especially in dealing with and correcting the errors of others. Jesus Himself said He was meek (or gentle) in heart (Matthew 11:29). His meekness was manifested in His not breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax (Matthew 12:20); in the gentleness with which He rebuked the stubborn unbelief of doubting Thomas (John 20:27-29); in the tenderness with which He rebuked Peter's thrice-repeated and flagrant denial of his Lord (John 21:15-17).

The compassion of Jesus Christ. Jesus had compassion on the multitudes, as it is written: “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36 – NKJV); He had compassion on mourners (Luke 7:12-13; John 11:33), as well as on the sick and the demon possessed (Mark 1:40-41; Matthew 20:34). His compassion, however, was not manifested in mere feelings or words, but in action, in ministration to the needs of those upon whom He had compassion. For instance, Jesus was moved with compassion for the hungry multitudes and fed them (Matthew 14:14-21; 15:32); He was moved with compassion for a widow who had lost her only son and comforted her and raised her son (Luke 7:11-17); He had compassion on the sick and healed them (Mark 1:40-41; Matthew 20:34), and on the demon possessed and set them free from demon possession (Mark 9:25).

The love of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved His Father, as He Himself stated: “I love the Father” (John 14:31). His love to the Father manifested itself in His doing the will of His Father (John 15:10; 6:38), which included His own sacrificial death (Psalm 40:8; Matthew 26:39-42; John 10:18). He loved His own, as it is written: “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1 – NKJV). Jesus Christ’s own were those whom God the Father had given unto Him (John 17:2, 9, 12). His love toward His own was manifested in His making known to them all the things He had heard from His Father (John 15:15); in His comforting them in their sorrow (John 14:1), in His rebuking them for their mistakes (Matthew 16:22-23; Mark 16:14; 14:5-6; Luke 9:54-56); in His praying for them (John 17:15; Luke 22:32); in His keeping them so that not one of them might be lost (John 17:12); in defending them against the accusations made by the Pharisees (Matthew 12:1-8; 15:1-9; Luke 5:29-32); in His laying down His life for them (John 15:13-14).

Jesus loved men in general and His love toward them manifested itself in His having compassion on them and healing them of their diseases (Matthew 14:14), in supplying their physical needs (Matthew 15:32), in His teaching them the Gospel so that they might be saved (John 5:34). Jesus loved His enemies, for while He was on the cross He prayed for them asking God to forgive them (Luke 23:34).

Jesus loved us and manifested His love toward us by becoming poor that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), and by laying down His life for us, as it is written: “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2 – NKJV), and again: “By this we know love,
because He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16 – NKJV), and again: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25 – NKJV).

The prayerfulness of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a man a prayer. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit while He was praying (Luke 3:21-22); He often withdrew into solitary places to pray (Luke 5:15-16); He prayed before He ate (Matthew 14:19; Luke 24:30); He prayed after He performed miracles, in order to recruit His strength and to guard against temptations to pride, or satisfactions with the work already achieved (John 6:15); He prayed on God’s behalf, that is, for God’s glory (John 12:28), on His own behalf (John 17:1; Hebrews 5:7), on behalf of His disciples and all those who would believe in Him through their word (John 17:9,20), and also on behalf of His enemies (Luke 23:34). He prayed in faith and in perfect submission to His Father’s will (Matthew 26:42), and with vehement cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7).

The names and titles of Jesus

The different names and titles of Jesus used in the Bible reveal something about Him (that is, about His deity, His humanity, His character, His earthly life, the greatness of His glory and power after His resurrection, His work in heaven and among His Church after His ascension to heaven, etc.). Let us look at them, bearing in mind that Jesus derives from the Hebrew “Joshua” (Y’shua), which means ‘Yahweh saves.’

The Christ - from the Greek ‘Christòs,’ which means ‘the Anointed One’ - (Matthew 1:16; Matthew 16:16)
The Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:26)
The Christ of God (Luke 9:20)
The Christ, who has been appointed for you [the Jews] (Acts 3:20 - NIV)

The Messiah - from the Hebrew ‘Mashiach,’ which means ‘The Anointed one’ – (Psalm 2:2; John 1:41; 4:25-26)

The Son (Psalm 2:12)
The Son of God (Romans 1:4)
The Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16)
The Son of God, who was to come into the world (John 11:27 - NIV)
The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze (Revelation 2:18 - NIV)

The Son of the Father (2 John 3)
The Son of the Blessed (Mark 14:61)
The Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32)

The beloved son of God, in whom God is well pleased (Matthew 3:17)
The only begotten of the Father (John 1:14), who is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18 - NKJV)

The Lord (Luke 24:34 – Greek ‘Kurios’)
The Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8 - NKJV)
The Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:8; James 2:1)
The Lord of peace (2 Thessalonians 3:16)
The Lord God of the holy prophets (Revelation 22:6)

The LORD of hosts (Psalm 24:10).
The LORD our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)
The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle (Psalm 24:8)
The LORD my God (Zechariah 14:5)

Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16)
Lord both of the dead and living (Romans 14:9)
Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5 - NKJV)

God (Hebrews 1:9 - Greek ‘Theos,’ translated as ‘God’)
God blessed for ever (Romans 9:5)

The true God (1 John 5:20)
The mighty God (Isaiah 9:6)

I am (John 8:58)

My God (John 20:28)

Our God (2 Peter 1:1 - NKJV)
Our great God (Titus 2:13 - NIV)

The image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4)
The image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)
The express image of his person [that is, of God] (Hebrews 1:3)
The brightness of his glory [that is, of God’s glory] (Hebrews 1:3)
The Firstborn [of God] (Hebrews 1:6 - NKJV)
The Holy One of God (John 6:69 - NIV)
The Word of God (Revelation 19:13).
The servant of God (Matthew 12:18; Acts 3:13 - NIV; Isaiah 41:8)
The holy servant of God (Acts 4:30 – NIV)
The righteous servant of God (Isaiah 53:11)
The power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24)
The wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24)
The righteousness of God (Isaiah 46:13)
The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29 - NKJV)

The angel of the LORD (Genesis 16:7)
The Branch of the LORD (Isaiah 4:2)
The arm of the LORD (Isaiah 53:1)

The Son of Man (Matthew 26:24; 24:30)
The Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13 - NKJV)

The Son of David (Matthew 1:1)
The root and the offspring of David (Revelation 22:16; 5:5)
The seed of David (Psalm 89:36)

The Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1),
The seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16)

The everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)
The Mighty One of Jacob (Isaiah 49:26)
The Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 54:5)
The messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1)
The angel of his presence (Isaiah 63:9)
The beloved (Ephesians 1:6)
The way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)
The Word (John 1:1)
The Word of life (1 John 1:1)
The Prince of Life (Acts 3:15)
The bread of life (John 6:35)
The living bread which came down from heaven (John 6:51)
The light of the world (John 8:12)
The light of men (John 1:4)
The true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9 - NKJV)
The dayspring from on high (Luke 1:78)
The author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Hebrews 5:9)
The mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:24)
The Saviour of the world (John 4:42)
The Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5:12 - NKJV)
The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8 - NKJV)
The seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15)
The spiritual rock that accompanied them [the Israelites] (1 Corinthians 10:4 - NIV)
The prince of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5)
The Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5 - NKJV)
The Nazarene (Mark 16:6 - NIV)
The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee (Matthew 21:11)
The prophet who is to come into the world (John 6:14 - NKJV)
The glory of thy people Israel (Luke 2:32)
The consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25)
The redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38 - NIV)
The First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life (Revelation 2:8 - NKJV)
The Deliverer (Romans 11:26)
The good shepherd (John 10:11)
The chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4)
That great shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20)
The door of the sheep (John 10:7)
The chief cornerstone (Matthew 21:42 - NKJV)
The foundation which is laid (1 Corinthians 3:11)
The stone which the builders rejected (Matthew 21:42)
The tent peg (Zechariah 10:4 - NKJV)
The battle bow (Zechariah 10:4)
The bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29)
The head of the church (Ephesians 5:23)
The head of the body (Colossians 1:18)
The head of every man (1 Corinthians 11:3)
The head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10)
The saviour of the body (Ephesians 5:23)
The true vine (John 15:1)
The vine (John 15:5)
The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
The peace (Micah 5:5)
The rose of Sharon (Song of Solomon 2:1)
The lily of the valleys (Song of Solomon 2:1)
The propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)
The end of the law (Romans 10:4),
The Sun of righteousness (Malachi 4:2)
The Branch of righteousness (Jeremiah 33:15)
The bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16)
The righteous judge (2 Timothy 4:8)
The Judge of quick and dead (Acts 10:42)
The Man whom He [God] has ordained (Acts 17:31 - NKJV)
The eternal life (1 John 1:2; 5:20 - NIV)
The resurrection (John 11:25)
The hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)
The blessed hope (Titus 2:13 - NKJV)
The firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29)
The firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1:15)
The firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18) or The first begotten of the dead (Revelation 1:5)
The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20 - NKJV)
The Beginning and the End (Revelation 1:8; 22:13 - NKJV)
The beginning of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14)
The first and the last (Revelation 22:13)
The Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8; 22:13 - NKJV)
The Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 1 John 2:1 - NIV)
The faithful and true witness (Revelation 3:14)
The Amen (Revelation 3:14)
The One who serves (Luke 22:27 - NKJV)

The King (Matthew 25:34,40)
The King who comes in the name of the LORD (Luke 19:38 - NKJV)
The King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11 - NKJV)
The King of Israel (John 1:49)
The King of the Daughter of Zion (John 12:15 - NKJV)
The King of glory (Psalm 24:9)

The Apostle and High Priest of our profession (Hebrews 3:1)
The author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2)
The captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10)
The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25)

A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3)
A lamb without blemish and without spot who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for us (1 Peter 1:19-20)
A covenant of the people (Isaiah 42:6)
A horn of salvation (Luke 1:69 - NKJV)
A great light (Matthew 4:16 – NIV)
A great prophet (Luke 7:16)
A prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people (Luke 24:19)
A man approved of God among the Jews by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of the Jews (Acts 2:22)
A Nazarene (Matthew 2:23)
A sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16)
A precious corner stone (Isaiah 28:16)
A living stone (1 Peter 2:4)
A tried stone (Isaiah 28:16)
A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (1 Peter 2:8)
A leader and commander to the people (Isaiah 55:4)
A teacher who has come from God (John. 3:2 - NIV)
A merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God (Hebrews 2:17)
A great high priest (Hebrews 4:14)
An advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1)
A minister of the sanctuary (Hebrews 8:2)
A minister of the circumcision (Romans 15:8)
A crown of glory (Isaiah 28:5)
A diadem of beauty (Isaiah 28:5)
A righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5)
A root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:10)
A witness to the people (Isaiah 55:4)
A Man who has told us the truth which He heard from God (John 8:40 - NKJV)

One greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6)
One greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42 - NIV)
One greater than Jonah (Matthew 12:41 - NIV)

Our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30 - NIV)
Our Lord (Romans 5:1)
Our Saviour (Titus 1:4)
Our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7)
Our life (Colossians 3:4)
Our hope (1 Timothy 1:1)
Our peace (Ephesians 2:14)

He that was to come (Romans 5:14)
He that came by water and blood (1 John 5:6)
He who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21)
He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world (John 6:33)
He whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world (John 10:36)
He whom God hath sent (John 3:34)
He who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:39 - NKJV)
He who comes from above (John 3:31 - NKJV)
He who comes from heaven (John 3:31 - NKJV)
He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him (John 7:18)
He whom man despiseth (Isaiah 49:7)
He whom the nation abhorreth (Isaiah 49:7)
He that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself (Hebrews 12:3)
He who was priced (Matthew 27:9 - NKJV) by the children of Israel
He whom they pierced (John 19:37)
He whom God raised again (Acts 13:37)
He that liveth (Revelation 1:18)
He who died for us and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15 - NKJV)
He that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Revelation 1:5)
He that is holy (Revelation 3:7)
He that is true (Revelation 3:7)
He that is in us (1 John 4:4)
He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33 - NKJV)
He that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3)
He that soweth the good seed (Matthew 13:37)
He that is from the beginning (1 John 2:13)
He who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:23 - NIV)
He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth (Revelation 3:7)
He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Revelation 2:1)
He which hath the sharp sword with two edges (Revelation 2:12)
He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars (Revelation 3:1)
He of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write (John 1:45)

Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 10:38 – NKJV)
Jesus of Galilee (Matthew 26:69)
Good Master (Mark 10:17)
All and in all (Colossians 3:11 - NKJV)
Heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2)
Wonderful (Isaiah 9:6)
Ruler in Israel (Micah 5:2)
Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23-24) which means ‘God with us’
David (Ezekiel 37:24)
Counsellor (Isaiah 9:6)
Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11)
Master (Matthew 22:36; 23:10)
King of kings (Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16)
High Priest of the good things to come (Hebrews 9:11 - NKJV)

The carpenter (Mark 6:3)
The son of Mary (Mark 6:3)
The brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda and Simon (Mark 6:3)

Shadows in the law of Moses

Moses wrote about Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, in the law. For Jesus said to the Jews: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46 - NKJV). Therefore, since the law has a shadow of the good things to come and not the very image of these things, in it we find persons and things that foreshadowed the Messiah and His redemptive work. Let’s look at some of them.

Joseph, the son of Jacob
Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age, and when the brothers of Joseph saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. When Joseph was seventeen years old he had two dreams. In his first dream he saw this: he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly his sheaf rose and stood upright, while the sheaves of his brothers gathered around his sheaf and bowed down to it. And in his second dream he saw the sun and moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. He told his dreams to his brothers, but they hated him all the more because of his dreams. One day, since the brothers of Joseph had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, Jacob sent his son Joseph to his brothers in order to see if all was well with his brothers and with the flocks. So Joseph went to his brothers and found them near Dothan. But when they saw him in the distance they plotted to kill him. However, God frustrated their plot through Reuben, one of the sons of Jacob, who suggested that they should throw him into a cistern in the desert. So they took Joseph and threw him into a cistern. Then Judah suggested that they should sell Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelites; his brothers agreed and so they sold Joseph for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood, and they took the robe back to their father, who recognized it and came to the conclusion that some ferocious animal had devoured Joseph. In Egypt Joseph was bought by Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard. The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered. His master saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, and so Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. However, the wife of Potiphar cast longing eyes on Joseph and tried to seduce him, but Joseph refused to lie with her. One day she even caught him by his cloak and said: “Lie with me”, but he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. But that evil woman said to his husband that Joseph had come in to her to mock her, but as soon as she screamed for help, he left his cloak beside him and ran out of the house. Her husband got angry and took Joseph and put him in prison. But God was with Joseph even in prison and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two servants and put them in prison, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. After they had been in prison for some time, both of them had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were sad, so he asked them why their faces were so sad and they answered him that it was because they both had had dreams but there was no one who could interpret them. So Joseph asked them to tell him their dreams, and after he had heard them he interpreted them, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. According to the interpretation given by Joseph, the chief cupbearer would be restored to his position within three days, while the chief baker would be killed by Pharaoh within three days. And things turned out exactly as Joseph had interpreted for them. When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had two dreams and his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. He told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them. So Joseph asked them to tell him their dreams, and after he had heard them he interpreted them, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. According to the interpretation given by Joseph, the chief cupbearer would be restored to his position within three days, while the chief baker would be killed by Pharaoh within three days. And things turned out exactly as Joseph had interpreted for them. Therefore Pharaoh sent for Joseph. He told Joseph his two dreams and Joseph interpreted them for Pharaoh. According to the interpretation given by Joseph, God would send seven years of great abundance throughout the land of Egypt, and those years would be followed by seven years of famine. Therefore Joseph advised Pharaoh to look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt so that he might take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance, and that food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine, so that the country might not be ruined by the famine. The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials, and Pharaoh put
Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt. So Joseph was made ruler over Egypt. At God’s appointed time the seven years of abundance came throughout the land of Egypt, and Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. When the seven years of abundance had ended, the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. Joseph was the governor of the land, and it was He who sold grain to all the people of the land. When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons to Egypt to buy some grain, so that they might live and not die. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and he sent for his father Jacob and his whole family. Then Jacob went down to Egypt with all his family and they did not die for Joseph provided for them (Genesis chapters 37, 39-47).

In reading the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, we cannot but acknowledge that he foreshadowed the Messiah. Let’s see why.

As Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers to see if all was well with them, and they despised him and plotted to kill him but God prevented them from fulfilling their evil purpose, so Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of God, in the fullness of the time was sent by God to Israel, that is, to His own house, so that they might be saved through Him; however, His brothers according to the flesh, that is, the Jews, did not receive Him, as it is written: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). They rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love, they despised Him and several times they sought to kill him. But God delivered him from their hands because His hour had not yet come (Luke 4:28-30; John 7:30; 10:31).

As Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites by his brothers, so Jesus was sold to the chief priests and the elders by one of his disciples, called Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:14-16).

As Joseph was numbered with the evildoers when he was put in prison because of the false accusation of the wife of Potiphar, so Jesus was numbered with the transgressors for He was crucified between two robbers (Matthew 27:38). However, just as what happened to Joseph was decreed by God, so also what happened to Jesus was decreed by God; for the enemies of Jesus – by putting Him to death – did what the hand and purpose of God had determined before to be done (Acts 4:28).

As God granted Joseph justice against his adversaries by setting him free from prison, so God granted His Holy Servant Jesus justice against His many adversaries by raising Him from the dead on the third day, loosing the pains of death because it was not possible that He should be held by it (Acts 2:24).

As Joseph, after he was released, was put in charge of all the land of Egypt by the king of Egypt and he saved Jacob and his family and also the Egyptians from death, so God, after He raised Jesus from the dead, exalted Jesus to His own right hand as Prince and Saviour so that He might give repentance and remission of sins to the Jews and to the Gentiles, that they might be saved (Acts 5:31; 11:18).

As Joseph saved the life of many people by a great deliverance, so Jesus Christ has saved many people all over the world by a great deliverance. However, whereas Joseph saved those people by selling grain to them, Jesus saved us by giving us freely His flesh to eat and His blood to drink (John 6:47-58); and furthermore, whereas Joseph saved those people just from physical death, Jesus saved us from the second death, that is, from eternal punishment. For He said that he who eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life, and He will raise him up at the last day (John 6:54). Therefore the deliverance worked by Jesus is much more glorious than that worked by Joseph.

The Passover

As we saw before, while Joseph was the ruler of Egypt, Jacob went down to Egypt together with his whole family (seventy-five in all). Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten, and the
Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous. This troubled
very much the king of Egypt who was reigning at that time (he was a king who did not know
about Joseph), who decided to put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor.
So the Israelites became slaves of Pharaoh, and their slavery was very hard. That slavery lasted
four hundred years. At God’s appointed time God sent His servant Moses down to Egypt to bring
His people out of Egypt. So Moses went to Pharaoh and told him to let the Israelites go out of
His country, but he refused to let them go. Then God struck the Egyptians with some terrible
plagues in order to force them to let His people go out of Egypt. When God sent the tenth
plague, Pharaoh decided to let the Israelites go. Here is what God said to Moses about the tenth
plague, which forced Pharaoh to let the Israelites go from Egypt: “Yet will I bring one plague
more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you
go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. … About midnight will I go out into the midst
of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that
sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all
the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as
there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more” (Exodus 11:1,4-6). So God said that about
midnight He would put to death every firstborn son in Egypt. However, He said also that on that
same night the Israelites were to eat the Passover. Here is what God said to Moses and Aaron:
“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to
you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they
shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an
house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his
house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make
your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall
take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of
the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.
And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of
the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and
unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with
water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let
nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall
burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your
staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s passover. For I will pass through
the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and
beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood
shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass
over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.
And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD
throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall
ye eat unleavened bread: for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt:
therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first
month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one
and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your
houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the
congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing
leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:2-20). As you can
see, the Israelites were to take some of the blood of the lamb and put it on the two doorposts
and on the lintel of the houses where they would eat the lamb. And that blood would be a sign
for them on the houses where they were and when God would see the blood He would pass
over them and the plague would not be on them to destroy them when He would strike the land
of Egypt. The Israelites did what God had commanded them through Moses and Aaron, and on
that night God killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians and spared all the firstborn of the Israelites.
Now the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed
for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7 - NKJV). Why did Paul call Jesus ‘our Passover’? Because Jesus
Christ is the true Passover Lamb, who in the fullness of the time was killed for us, so that by His
own blood we might be redeemed from our sins and delivered from the wrath to come. So the
lamb which was killed on that night in Egypt was only a shadow of the true Passover Lamb. Let
me explain to you why that lamb killed in Egypt was a shadow of Jesus Christ.
● The lamb that the Israelites took on the tenth day of the first month and killed on the fourteenth
day, was a male of the first year and without blemish. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God (John
1:29) “without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19 – NIV), who was foreordained before the
foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for us. In other words, in the
fullness of the time God sent the Passover Lamb (that was with Him in heaven from eternity) into
this world so that He might die for our sins on the cross of Calvary.
● The blood of the Passover Lamb which was put by the Israelites on the two doorposts and on
the lintel of their houses, was a sign for them, because it prevented the angel of the Lord from
entering their houses and killing their firstborn. Likewise, the blood of Jesus Christ, which was
sprinkled on us (1 Peter 1:2) – and remember that we are God’s house (Hebrews 3:6) – will be a
sign for us, because by it we will be saved from the wrath to come. On that day, God will destroy
his enemies and will spare us, as it is written: “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts,
in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that
serveth him” (Malachi 3:17). God will spare us because the blood of Jesus Christ, the Passover
that was sacrificed for us, is on us, and when God sees the blood of Jesus Christ He will pass
over us and will not bring judgement on us. We are washed in His blood, and by faith in His
blood we will be saved from wrath. And as on that day in Egypt the Israelites knew that the Lord
made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites (Exodus 11:7), so on the day of the
Lord, which is still to come, we will again see “the distinction between the righteous and the
wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not” (Malachi 3:18 - NIV).

The bronze serpent

In the book of Numbers we read: “And the people spake against God, and against Moses,
Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread,
neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery
serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore
the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD,
and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses
prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it
upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it,
shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that
if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” (Numbers 21:5-9).
The serpent of brass foreshadowed Jesus Christ, because just as the Israelites who had been
bitten by the fiery serpents, in order not to die because of their sins, had to look at the serpent of
brass which Moses had made and set on a pole; so now those who are dead in their sins and
trespasses and are on the way which leads to destruction (that is, to the second death, which is
the lake of fire burning with brimstone) because of their sins, in order to be made alive and to
escape the second death, must look at the Son of God, that is to say, they must believe in Him.
Jesus Christ is the One at whom men must look to be saved, for He himself said: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Therefore salvation is not by works but by grace, because it is obtained only by faith in Jesus Christ.

The manna

In the book of Exodus we read the following story: “And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD. And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall
be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. And Moses said, This is the thing which the LORD commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations. As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan. Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah” (Exodus 16:1-36)

The bread God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness foreshadowed Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the true bread God has given us from heaven, which gives life to the world. Listen to what Jesus said to the Jews one day: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world … I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst … Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:32-33,35,47-51). As you can see, while the bread given by God to the Israelites did not prevent the Israelites from seeing death, the bread of God which came down from heaven, that is, Jesus Christ, enables those who eat it (that is, those who believe in Him) to live forever; and while that bread did not satisfy the hunger of the Israelites once for all because in the wilderness they needed to eat it every day, the bread of God which came down from heaven has satisfied the spiritual hunger of those who have believed in Him, for Jesus said that he who comes to Him will never go hungry.

The rock

In the book of Exodus we read the following story: “And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smostest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:1-7).

That rock foreshadowed Jesus Christ, because as that rock was stricken so that water might come out of it, so Jesus Christ was stricken – the prophet says: “Yet we considered him stricken
by God, smitten by him, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4 – NIV) - so that the water of life ‘might come out of Him’ and we might drink it. However, while the Israelites after they drank that water were thirsty again, those who drink the water Jesus gives them, will never thirst; for one day Jesus said to a Samaritan woman: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

The High Priest and the atoning sacrifices

After God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt through Moses, He led them to Mount Sinai, where He made a covenant with the people of Israel. God ordained the law and commanded Moses to tell the Israelites to make Him a sanctuary, as He said to Moses: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it” (Exodus 25:8-9). The sanctuary (or tabernacle) was built, but it was only a copy and shadow of the perfect sanctuary which is in heaven. The sanctuary was divided into two parts, that is to say, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Here is a brief description of it: “For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary [the Holy Place]; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat” (Hebrews 9:2-5 - NKJV).

The covenant made by God with the Israelites had ordinances of divine service, and God chose Aaron and his sons to perform them. Aaron was ordained High Priest for the Israelites, that He might offer both gifts and sacrifices for the sins of the people, while his sons were ordained priests. Now the High Priest had to offer sacrifices also for his sins, and not only for the people’s sins, for he himself was also subject to weakness and it was because of that weakness that he could have compassion on those who were ignorant and going astray (Hebrews 5:2-3). The High Priest offered those sacrifices for sins once every year, for according to the law he had to enter the Most Holy Place once every year with the blood of some animals, that he offered for himself and for the people’s sins. However, he himself and the sacrifices which he had to offer for sins were only a shadow of the true High Priest and the true sacrifice which the true High Priest in the fullness of the time would offer for the sins of the whole world. As for the priests, they were not allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, but only the Holy Place, where they entered regularly to carry on their ministry.

I have just said that the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place only once a year: that occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month. Let us look closely at what he had to do on that day to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people of Israel, in order to understand the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In the book of Leviticus we read: “And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat … For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the
LORD. ..... And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year” (Leviticus 16:11-15, 30,34). That’s how the High Priest on that particular day made atonement for his sins and for the sins of the people.

Now, since God has made a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah and with us believing Gentiles (a covenant which is better than the one God made at Mount Sinai with the Israelites), He has appointed another High Priest for men in things pertaining to God. And He took him from among men and ordained Him High Priest forever. What’s the name of this High Priest? His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for God has said to His Son: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 5:6; Psalm 110:4). Now let me explain to you what the Son of God, who was with God the Father from eternity in heaven, had to do in order to become the High Priest of the New Covenant. First, He had to become a man, for the Scripture teaches that the Son of God, in order to have compassion on us and to be able to help us, who are the seed of Abraham, had to be made like us in every way (Hebrews 2:17); therefore, because we have flesh and blood, He too shared in our humanity. So the Son of God, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God and that He might make atonement for our sins, took the form of a bondservant and came in the likeness of men. Second, He had to suffer, and we know that He suffered many things in the days of His flesh, and because of His sufferings He is able to help us, as it is written: “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18 - NIV). Brothers in the Lord, the Son of God had to suffer, that’s why He suffered many things at the hands of the chief priests, the scribes and the elders and He was rejected by that sinful generation. The Scripture says: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10 - NKJV), and in fact it was through His sufferings that the Son of God was made perfect forever and He became a faithful and merciful High Priest. Beloved, it was because the Son of God shared in our humanity that He could destroy death and “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14) and “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). An angel, being a spirit, could not do what Jesus Christ has done, for only a true man, holy, just and perfect could help us and save us from our sins, and thanks be unto God for He ordained for us such a High Priest, who through all His sufferings was made perfect for ever; yes, we needed such a High Priest and God knew that and so He raised Him up; His name is Jesus.

As Aaron did not take upon himself the glory of becoming High Priest, so also Jesus Christ “did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You” (Hebrews 5:5 – NKJV. cf. Psalm 2:7), and “as He also says in another place, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6 – NKJV. cf. Psalm 110:4). So Jesus Christ is High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedec and not after the order of Aaron; let’s see then who was this Melchizedec. The Scripture says: “This Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually” (Hebrews 7:1-3). As you can see, the greatness of this Melchizedec is shown by the fact that Abraham, the patriarch, gave him a tenth part of all, but also by the fact that Melchizedec blessed “him that had the promises,” and “without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better” (Hebrews 7:6,7). Therefore Melchizedec is greater than Aaron and all the levitical priests, for Levi himself (who at that time was still in the loins of his father Abraham) who received tithes from the people according to the law, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, and gave the tenth to someone who did not trace his descent from Levi, that is, to Melchizedec.
Jesus, the High Priest of our profession, according to the flesh descended from the tribe of Judah and not from the tribe of Levi, to whom God entrusted the priesthood. Someone may ask: ‘Why was there need for another High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec and not after the order of Aaron, to come?’ Brothers, it was necessary for another priest to come because perfection could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood, so God raised up another priest from the tribe of Judah, a priest who is after an order more excellent than the order of Aaron, through whom we have been made perfect in regard to the conscience. The High Priest of our profession is greater than the High Priests of the Old Testament because those High Priests were made priests without an oath, while Jesus Christ was made High Priest with an oath, as it is written: “The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:” (Hebrews 7:21; Psalm 110:4); that is the reason why the Covenant (that is, the New Covenant) of which Jesus became the guarantee is better than the first Covenant, that is, the Old Covenant.

The High Priests under the Old Covenant were weak or imperfect, but “the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever” (Hebrews 7:28 – NIV); those High Priests were many “because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:23-25). Brothers, Jesus Christ died, but the third day He rose again and death no longer has dominion over Him; He is at the right hand of God where He intercedes for us continually. Jesus is the Mediator between God and us, and therefore we draw near to God in full assurance of faith, being sure that His ears are open to our prayers and He answers our prayers, for we draw near to Him in the name of His Son, who is High Priest for ever.

The High Priests, under the law, had to offer each year the blood of goats and bulls to make atonement for their own sins and the sins of the people, but Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all for our sins. The Scripture says: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:1-4). That means that even though the Israelites offered those sacrifices for their sins, God remembered their sins each year; their sins were never blotted out from their conscience, because those sacrifices were imperfect and they were only a shadow of the atoning sacrifice which the Son of God offered in these last times for us; the Israelites continued to have conscience of sins for the ordinances concerning the sacrifices were just fleshly ordinances imposed by God until the time of reformation, that is, until the fullness of the time. That’s why it is written that those sacrifices “could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9). They were just fat animals, it was just blood of animals, how could then those things put away sin by blotting it out from the conscience of those who offered those sacrifices? But what the blood of bulls and of goats could not do was done by the blood of Jesus Christ, as it is written: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

Brothers, our conscience was defiled by sins, but it was purged from them by the blood of Christ; when we were washed in His blood and sprinkled by it, our sins were taken away or removed, and God remembers them no more, for God has made this promise: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12; Jeremiah 31:34). So God says: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins …” (Isaiah 44:22); for our old sins like dark clouds were darkening and enveloping our conscience, but Christ with His own blood made them disappear and now they can’t be seen even on the horizon. Listen to what Paul says: “And you, being dead in your sins
and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13), yes, all trespasses, not just some of them, because “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The work which is done by the blood of Jesus in the heart of those who accept the Lord is a perfect work, because the blood of Jesus takes away all the old sins; that’s why we are bound to thank God for the blood of the Lamb without blemish and without spot which was shed at Golgotha. Furthermore, the High Priest of our profession, after He offered Himself to make our conscience perfect entered “into heaven itself”, says the Scripture, and not into a man-made sanctuary “that was only a copy of the true one” (Hebrews 9:24 - NIV). It is written: “He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-12 - NIV) for us, and again: “Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world” (Hebrews 9:25-26 - NIV). What Jesus did, when He offered Himself, was done by Him once for all at God’s appointed time, so that He might establish the New Covenant or the New Testament. For in order that the Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ might be dedicated it was necessary to prove His death, because it is written: “In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living” (Hebrews 9:16-17 - NIV). The death of Jesus Christ was proved, therefore the New Testament is in force; in it He has promised us an eternal inheritance. But remember that in order that we might become heirs of this everlasting and glorious inheritance, He, the Only Begotten who came from the Father, had to die. It is written: “Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:18-22). Now, as the first Covenant was dedicated with blood, so also the second Covenant was dedicated with blood, not with blood of calves and goats, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, for Jesus, after He had proclaimed the commandments of God (as He said: “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” John 12:49), pointing to His death, said to His disciples, when He gave them the cup during the night on which He was betrayed, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Therefore the blood Jesus shed at Calvary is the blood of the New Testament (or New Covenant), by which the New Testament was dedicated. Jesus Christ, by His blood, disclosed and opened for us the way to the Most Holy Place and thus allowed us to come boldly before God; as long as the first tabernacle was still standing, only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, the priests were not allowed to enter it; but through Jesus Christ, the curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in two, and now we, as priests of God, have the freedom of approaching the throne of grace in full assurance of faith. We have free and confident access into the very presence of God at any time and at any place (Hebrews 9:7-9; 10:19-23). What a privilege, what a honour! Brothers in the Lord, let us hold fast our faith in the High Priest of our profession until the end.
The death and the resurrection of Jesus

In the fullness of the time Jesus Christ (the Son of God, who was in the bosom of the Father before He came into the world) died “for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

As for His atoning sacrifice, it was foretold centuries before by the prophet Isaiah in these terms: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:5-12). As you can see, according to the Scripture, Jesus had to die that He might make atonement for our sins through the offering of His body. Perhaps you are wondering why His sacrifice was necessary for the atonement or remission of our sins. Well, the reason was this. Divine justice - God's holy law - requires death as the penalty for sin. God chose to bind Himself by the principle of death for sin, thus without the shedding of blood (the giving of an innocent victim) there could be no release from this penalty and no restoration to fellowship with the Holy God. That's why according to the law sins were atoned by the blood of animals, as it is written: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11), and those animals had to be perfect and pure in order to be accepted by God. However, those atoning sacrifices (or sin offerings) were only a shadow of the perfect atoning sacrifice of the Messiah – that’s why the blood of those animal sacrifices could not take away sins –, who was the Innocent Victim, that God foreordained before the foundation of the world. So Jesus of Nazareth, being the promised Messiah, had to shed His own blood for the atonement or remission of our sins. The death of animals was not sufficient to remit our sins, because we are much greater than they in that we were created in the image of God; neither could an ordinary person suffer the penalty in our place, for each one deserves eternal death for his own sins. Only a sinless person could atone for our sins, but there was none. So God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, who existed with Him in heaven from eternity and who was pure and innocent, in order to provide a suitable substitute. Jesus Christ was without sin for He was born without sin and lived a sinless life, and thus He could be a perfect substitute. Thus God provided a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins through the death of the sinless man Jesus Christ, as John wrote: “He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10 – NIV). Jesus was the “lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20) but was sacrificed in these last times for us, so that through His precious blood we might obtain the remission of our sins. His perfect sacrifice, in laying down His life for us, has fully met the holy and just requirements of God’s law. Christ suffered the penalty of sin on our behalf. God inflicted the penalty for sin on Christ, so that through His atoning death we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. He did not become a sinner, but He became the sin bearer, the sin offering, the sacrifice for our sins, as it is written: “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28 – NKJV), and
again: “For He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21 – NKJV). In the light of what the Scripture teaches, therefore, the death of Jesus Christ was the manifestation of the love of God toward us.

As for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it also was foretold by God centuries before it occurred, for David said concerning the Christ: “I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hebrew: Sheol; Greek: Hades]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:8-11). It is evident that David did not speak of himself but of the Christ, for the patriarch David died and was buried and saw corruption; but Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, did not see corruption. David, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne; He foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. But why was the resurrection of Jesus Christ necessary to our salvation? To answer to this question I need to speak about certain things the High Priest had to do on the day of atonement with the blood of the sacrifices he offered for his own sins and for the sins of the people of Israel. Now on that particular day the High Priest had to offer some animals to make atonement (through their blood) for his own sins and for the sins of the Israelites; here is what is written in the law of Moses: “And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat” (Leviticus 16:11-15). Now, as you can see, the blood of both animals (the bullock and the goat) had to be brought by the High Priest within the veil, that is, into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled upon the mercy seat and before it. Those sin offerings, of course, were a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ, only a shadow, for the law has a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things (Hebrews 10:1). And in fact the blood of those sacrifices, which were offered year by year, could not take away sins from the conscience of the worshipers, while the blood of Jesus, which He offered once for all for our sins, can take away sins from the conscience of those who believe in Him. But let’s go back to the place where the blood of the sin offerings had to be brought by the High Priest after the killing of the goat of the sin offering and the bull of the sin offering on the day of atonement. The law says that the blood of those sin offerings had to be brought into the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, which was a man-made sanctuary. Therefore, as the High Priest had to bring the blood of both the bull and the goat into the Most Holy Place, so Jesus, the High Priest of good things to come, after having offered Himself as a ransom for our sins, had to enter the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary which is in heaven (which is not man-made and of which the sanctuary on earth was only a copy), not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, to obtain eternal redemption for us. So He had to enter into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us. It is evident therefore that if Jesus after His death had to enter into heaven by means of His own blood in order to finish (or to complete) His work of redemption, He had to be raised from the dead as well. And that is what happened after three days; then after forty days He was taken up into heaven at the right hand of the Father. The Scripture says: “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect
tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-12 - NKJV), and again: “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:24-26 - NIV). That’s why the Scripture declares that the resurrection of Jesus took place “for our justification” (Romans 4:25), and also that if Christ has not been raised – as some say – our faith is vain and we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Conclusion

Therefore Jesus Christ bore all our sins in His own body, and through His death we have been reconciled to God. The Just suffered for the unjust “that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). As Paul says to the saints of Colosse: “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight” (Colossians 1:19-22). So it is very evident that if a man wants to be reconciled to God he must believe in the blood of Jesus Christ, as it is written that God has set forth Jesus Christ “to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26). There is no other way for a man to be reconciled to God, I say it again, no other way. A man can be reconciled to God only through faith in Jesus Christ, for it is only by faith that a man is justified.

**Jesus can be known**

To many people Jesus of Nazareth is only an historical personage, who lived about two thousand years ago somewhere in the land of Israel, of whom the Bible says that He lived a holy life, did many miracles and then He died. To us Jesus of Nazareth is much more than that, for He is the Son of the Living God who was sent by God into this world to die for our sins. But His story did not end with His death, for the third day Jesus rose again by the power of God and after forty days He was taken up into heaven. He lives! And we have known Him; yes, we know Him personally. We came to know Him when we repented of our sins and believed in His name. Formerly we did not know Him, to us He was a stranger, even though we knew that He had lived many centuries ago in the land of Israel, He had lived a sinless life, and He had died on the cross for our sins and risen again the third day. But that glorious day, on which we repented of our sins and believed in Him, we tasted His love, His power, His goodness, His faithfulness; in other words, we discovered His reality. He forgave our sins and caused us to be born again; by His mercy we were born again, we became new creatures in Him and from that time on we have never been the same again. He manifested Himself in our life, and came to dwell in us. We now feel He lives in us, He is always with us, His divine presence never leaves us. Blessed be His holy name now and forevermore. Amen.
If you don’t know Jesus, I urge you to humble before Him, acknowledging that you are a sinner, then repent of your sins and believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who died on the cross for our sins and rose again for our justification. Talk to Him as if He were physically near you. When you do these things you will feel immediately forgiven and will experience the new birth. The peace and the joy of the Lord will flood your heart, and you will never be the same.
THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person distinct from the Father and the Son, who is part of the Godhead, equal – in His personal nature – to God the Father and God the Son. Therefore He, like the Father and the Son, is God.

Now, first of all, I am going to show you from the Scriptures that the Spirit is both a person and God. Afterward I will speak of the names of the Spirit, the symbols of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit both before and after the day of Pentecost, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The personality of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit speaks. Here are some Bible verses according to which the Spirit speaks: “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness” (Hebrews 3:7-8); “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:29); “While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19-20); “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2); “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13); “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]” (1 Timothy 4:1).

The Holy Spirit hears, for Jesus said about Him: “Whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit sees, for the seven eyes which the Lamb has (John saw these seven eyes in a vision while he was on the isle of Patmos) “are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (Revelation 5:6) or, as the prophet Zechariah said, “the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10).

The Holy Spirit has a mind, for it is written: “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). The word here translated ‘mind’ is a comprehensive word including the ideas of thought, feeling and purpose.

The Holy Spirit has a will, for it is written: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11 – NKJV).

The Holy Spirit has an awareness of goodness, for the apostles and elders wrote to the believing Gentiles who were in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:28-29).

The Holy Spirit loves, for Paul wrote to the Romans: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30).

The Holy Spirit searches and knows, as it is written: “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).
The Holy Spirit reveals, as it is written in the Gospel according to Luke: “And it was revealed unto him [Simeon] by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26).

The Holy Spirit teaches, as it is written: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things…” (John 14:26), and also: “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12), and again: “You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth” (Nehemiah 9:20 - NKJV), and again: “Which things [the things that have been freely given to us by God] also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

The Holy Spirit guides, as it is written: “‘Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit prays, as it is written: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27 - NKJV).

The Holy Spirit convinces, for Jesus said about Him: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (Romans 8:26-27 - NKJV).

The Holy Spirit regenerates, as it is written: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5-6).

The Holy Spirit brings the words of the Lord to our remembrance, as it is written: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit makes men overseers, as Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The Holy Spirit commands, as it is written: “‘Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work wherunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).

The Holy Spirit forbids believers to do certain things on certain occasions, as it is written: “Now when they [the apostles] had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6 - NKJV).

The Holy Spirit does not permit believers to go to certain places on certain occasions, as it is written: “After they [the apostles] had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” (Acts 16:7 - NKJV).

The Holy Spirit can be known, for Jesus said to His disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

The Holy Spirit can be grieved, for it is written: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30) and again: “But they [the
Israelites] rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them” (Isaiah 63:10 – NKJV).
The Holy Spirit can be resisted, for Stephen said before the Sanhedrin: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).
The Holy Spirit can be tempted, for Peter said to Sapphira: “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9).
The Holy Spirit can be lied to, for Peter said to Ananias: “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” (Acts 5:3).
The Holy Spirit can be spoken against, as it is written: “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matthew 12:32).
As you can see, the Holy Spirit has personal characteristics and does things which only a person can do. An impersonal force cannot speak or hear, nor can it be lied to, spoken against, grieved, tempted, etc.

The deity of the Holy Spirit

Now I am going to compare some verses of the Scripture referring to the Holy Spirit with other verses referring to God, in order to show you that the Holy Spirit is God.

- The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says to the saints: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14), while Moses says to God: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). Therefore the Spirit is eternal like God.
- David said to God: “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” (Psalm 139:7 - NKJV), while God said to Jeremiah: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:24). Therefore the Spirit is omnipresent like God.
- Paul said: “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10), while Hannah said: “The LORD is a God of knowledge” (1 Samuel 2:3 – The IBRV reads: “L'Eterno è un Dio che sa tutto”, that is, “The Eternal is a God who knows everything”). Therefore the Spirit is omniscient like God.
- Elihu said: “The Spirit of God hath made me” (Job 33:4), while David said to God: “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb” (Psalm 139:13 – The NIV reads: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb”). Therefore the Spirit creates as God does, thus He is omnipotent like God.
- Jesus said: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5-6), while John says that those who believe in the name of the Son of God “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Therefore the Spirit regenerates as God does.
- Peter said to Ananias: “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” (Acts 5:3) and also: “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). Therefore to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God.
- In the book of the Acts of the apostles it is written that Paul said these words to those Jews in Rome who refused to accept the Gospel: “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be
converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:25-27). As you can see, it was the Holy Spirit who spoke those words through the prophet Isaiah. However, according to the book of the prophet Isaiah, it was God who spoke those words, as it is written: “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:1-10). Therefore it was both the Holy Spirit and God who sent Isaiah to prophesy against the people of Israel.

● In the book of the Acts of the apostles it is written: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister” (Acts 13:1-5). Therefore it was the Holy Spirit who sent Paul and Barnabas to preach. However, Jesus said: “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38), making it clear that it is God who sends forth labourers into His harvest. Therefore the Holy Spirit is God because He sent forth Paul and Barnabas into God’s harvest.

● Jesus called the Holy Spirit “the Comforter” (John 15:26). Therefore He comforts those who are downcast. However, Paul says to the Corinthians: “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Corinthians 7:6), and also: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Therefore the Holy Spirit comforts believers as God does.

● In the book of the prophet Isaiah it is written: “But they [the Israelites] rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them” (Isaiah 63:10 - NKJV), while in the book of Psalms it is written: “How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!” (Psalm 78:40 - NKJV). Therefore to grieve the Holy Spirit is to grieve God.

● Paul said to the Corinthians: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19) and also: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Therefore the Holy Spirit indwells believers as God does.

● Jesus said: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26), but He said also: “And they shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45), and David said: “The meek will he [God] guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psalm 25:9). Therefore the Holy Spirit teaches as God does.
Jesus said about the Holy Spirit: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13), and David said in the book of Psalms to God: "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me" (Psalm 25:5). Therefore if the Spirit of truth guides into the truth as God does, that means that He is God.

As you can see, according to the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit possesses attributes which belong only to Deity (for He is eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent like God); He is equated with God and does work that only God does.

**The names of the Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is called by different names in the Holy Scriptures, which reveal something about His nature and attributes.

**The Spirit of God** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of God’ (Genesis 1:2; Matthew 12:28), ‘the Spirit of your Father’ (Matthew 10:19-20), ‘the Spirit who is from God’ (1 Corinthians 2:12), ‘the Spirit of the living God’ (2 Corinthians 3:3), ‘the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead’ (Romans 8:11) for He proceeds from God the Father.

**The Spirit of Jesus Christ** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 1:19), ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (Romans 8:9) ‘the Spirit of His Son’ (Galatians 4:6), ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ (Acts 8:39), because Jesus Christ sent Him to His Church from the Father. It was the man Jesus Christ exalted to the right hand of the Father who received and sent the Spirit.

**The Spirit of truth** – The Holy Spirit is called the ‘Spirit of truth’ (John 14:16-17; 16:13), for He speaks the truth, or rather, He “is the truth” (1 John 5:6 - NIV).

**The Spirit of life** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of life’ (Romans 8:1-2), for He imparts life, that is to say, He quickens those who are dead in their trespasses when they repent and believe in the Lord (John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

**The Spirit of adoption** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of adoption’ (Romans 8:14-16) for He bears witness with our spirit that we have been adopted by God as His sons (Ephesians 1:5).

**The Spirit of grace and supplication** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the spirit of grace and supplication’ (Zechariah 12:10; Hebrews 10:28-29) for He imparts the grace of God and prompts us to make requests to God and aids us in making our requests (Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:26).

**The Spirit of judgement and the Spirit of burning** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the spirit of judgement’ (Isaiah 4:4 - NKJV) and ‘the spirit of burning’ (Isaiah 4:4 – NKJV), for He is involved in justice, law and order. One of the aspects of His ministry concerns purity and sanctification. The name ‘the Spirit of burning’ emphasizes His searching, refining and illuminating work.

**The Spirit of glory** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of glory’ (1 Peter 4:14), for He is a glorious spirit and testifies the glory which will be revealed in us.

**The Spirit of holiness** - The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of holiness’ (Romans 1:4), because He is holy and sanctifies those who believe in Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The Holy Spirit’s work involves sanctification.

**The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord’ (Isaiah 11:1-2) for He imparts all these things.

**The Spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind’ (2 Timothy 1:7). for He imparts power, love and a sound mind.

**The good Spirit of God** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the good Spirit of God’ (Nehemiah 9:20), for He is good (Psalm 143:10).

**The eternal Spirit** – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the eternal Spirit’ (Hebrews 9:14), for He is without beginning and end.
The promised Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit is called ‘the promised Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:33 – NIV), for God, first through His prophets of old (Joel 2:28-30) and then through His Son (John 14:26; Acts 1:4), promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. And at God’s appointed time He came in fulfilment of God’s promise.
The Comforter – Jesus called the Holy Spirit ‘the Comforter’ (John 14:26) for He comforts the downcast. The Greek word translated ‘Comforter’ is parakletos, which means also ‘Counsellor’ and ‘Advocate’.

The symbols of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Scripture uses various symbols for the Holy Spirit.
Fire – On the day of Pentecost, just before the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit, it came to pass that “there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:3 - NKJV). So the Holy Spirit who came upon the disciples was represented by the fire. The fire cleans things up, illuminates and warms, so it is an appropriate symbol of the Holy Spirit, who cleans up, illuminates, and warms up those saints who have become cold spiritually.
Wind – One day Jesus, in speaking to Nicodemus about the new birth, said: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 - NKJV). And on the day of Pentecost, before the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2). The Holy Spirit is represented by the wind because of His power and His unpredictability, and because just as the wind sweeps away the cobwebs and it blows away the dust, so the Holy Spirit blows away bad habits, wrong attitudes and false beliefs.
Water – One day Jesus said to the Jews: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). He spoke these words concerning the Holy Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:39). Actually, when a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit he feels as if rivers of living water are flowing out of his belly. That’s a glorious experience. Jesus used the symbol of rivers of living water in relation to the Holy Spirit because sometimes in the prophetic Scriptures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was compared to water being poured out. Here are some verses of the Scriptures which confirm this. In the book of the prophet Isaiah it is written: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring…. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.….. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water….. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes (Isaiah 44:3; 43:19,20; 41:17,18; 35:6,7). Just as water refreshes, quenches our thirst, and brings life to the desert, so the Holy Spirit does these things in the spiritual field.
Oil – Under the Old Testament the High Priest, the priests, and the kings, were anointed with oil (Leviticus 8:6-13, 30; 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13) before they began to carry out the task which God had entrusted to them. Oil represented the Holy Spirit, with whom they were anointed by God to
perform their task. That oil represents the Holy Spirit is evident from the fact that the Scripture says that God anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness (Hebrews 1:9). What does oil do when it is poured upon someone’s head? Well, it brings a sense of refreshment and it illuminates his face. The Holy Spirit refreshes and illuminates our life.

The dove – The Scripture says that when Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (just after Jesus came up from the water) “the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matthew 3:16). The dove is tender, gentle, innocent, and peaceful, so it is an appropriate symbol of the Holy Spirit, for He is tender, gentle, innocent, and peaceful.

The seal – Paul says to the Ephesians: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). Therefore we believers were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Now in Biblical times a ‘seal’ was used for various reasons, including: 1) To guarantee the genuine character of a document (Esther 3:12), or, figuratively, of a person; (1 Corinthians 9:2); 2) To mark ownership (Song of Songs 8:6); 3) To protect against tampering or harm (Matthew 27:66; Revelation 5:1). The context of Ephesians makes me think that when Paul compares the Holy Spirit to a seal, he refers to a mark of ownership. So the seal of the Holy Spirit indicates that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28). In other words, the Holy Spirit was given to us as evidence that we truly belong to Christ. That’s why the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9 – NIV), because the Holy Spirit is the seal with whom those who belong to Christ were sealed, who bears witness that they are children of God, and therefore anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit in his heart does not have the witness of the Spirit in him.

The earnest – The apostle Paul said to the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit “is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:14), and to the Corinthians that God “hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:22) and again He wrote: “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:5). The Greek word translated as ‘earnest’ is arrhabon which means ‘part of the purchase-money or property given in advance as security for the rest.’ Why is the Holy Spirit represented by an earnest? Because just as when one person enters into a contract he gives an earnest to bind the bargain (that is to say, he gives some money as a pledge or down payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid), so God, who has made a covenant with us, has given us the earnest of the Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. In other words, the Spirit is a sign of what is to come, that is, of the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23-24). That’s why we are waiting patiently and confidently for the redemption of our body, because we have the earnest of our redemption in our hearts. We are sure that the God who has given us the earnest of our inheritance, will give us the inheritance He has promised to us.

The work of the Holy Spirit before the day of Pentecost

Usually, when we speak about the Holy Spirit, we stress the things He has done from the day of Pentecost until now. Why? The reason is evident, because on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured upon the Church, on that day the promise of the Father was fulfilled and a new dispensation began. However, the Holy Spirit was present and worked powerfully also before that day. The Scripture speaks of the things He did before that particular day. Therefore it is a good thing to speak also about the things the Spirit of God did or enabled people to do before the day of Pentecost.
The Spirit of God was in Joseph the son of Jacob, who interpreted the dreams of the king of Egypt and gave wise counsels in order to save the Egyptians from death during the seven years of famine. Pharaoh said to his officials about Joseph: “Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?” (Genesis 41:38). The plan suggested by Joseph seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials and thus Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over Egypt and all his palace, so that Joseph might accomplish the plan that he had suggested to Pharaoh. Indeed, it is the Spirit in a man who “gives him understanding” (Job 32:8 - NIV). He is a Spirit of wisdom, who imparts wisdom to those who fear God.

God filled Bezaleel with the Spirit to enable him to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, and to work in all manner of workmanship. After God showed Moses the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings and told him how to build the tabernacle, He said to him: “See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:2-5).

The Spirit of God was upon Moses and the seventy elders of Israel, and gave them wisdom to guide the Israelites, as it is written: “So the LORD said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone. … So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again” (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25 - NKJV). Please note that when the Holy Spirit came upon the seventy elders He made them prophesy, for that was something that occurred several other times under the Old Testament when the Spirit came upon someone. For instance, when the Spirit came upon Saul he prophesied, as it is written: “And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them” (1 Samuel 10:10).

The Spirit was in Joshua, the successor of Moses (Numbers 27:18). God said to Moses to chose Joshua for in him the Spirit was.

The Spirit came upon the Judges and gave them power and courage, so that they might deliver the Israelites from their enemies, and enabled them to rule over the people of Israel. The Spirit came upon Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (Judges 11:29), and Samson (Judges 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14).

The Holy Spirit came upon Balaam and made him prophesy, as it is written: “And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open …. " (Numbers 24:1-4). The Spirit came upon the prophet Azariah and made him prophesy, as it is written: “And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:1-2). The Spirit came upon Jahaziel, as it is written: “Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Beniaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye
inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's ..." (2 Chronicles 20:14-15). He came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, as it is written: “And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you” (2 Chronicles 24:20). The prophet Isaiah was sent by God with His Spirit, as it is written: “Come near me and listen to this: 'From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.’ And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit” (Isaiah 48:16 - NIV). The Spirit came upon David, as it is written: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13), and He spoke by him, as David himself said: “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2). Jesus Christ confirmed that David spoke by the Spirit, for it is written: “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? 'The son of David,' they replied. He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'?''” (Matthew 22:41-43 – NIV). The prophet Ezekiel was lifted up between earth and heaven by the Spirit and in visions of God the Spirit took him to Jerusalem, as it is written: “The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, .... “ (Ezekiel 8:3; read also 11:1;11:24;43:5 - NIV). The prophet Micah was filled with the Holy Spirit (Micah 3:8). Therefore, according to the Scriptures, the prophets of old were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke by the Spirit. They spoke by the Spirit not only when they warned the people to repent of their sins and to come back to the Lord, as it is written: “For many years you were patient with them [the Israelites], By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets” (Nehemiah 9:30 – NIV), but also when they predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow, as it is written: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Peter 1:10-12 – NIV).

The Spirit moved some men (such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc) to write the books of the Old Testament, for the apostle Peter says: “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21 – NIV).

The Spirit dwelt among the Israelites, as God said to His people. “My Spirit remains among you” (Haggai 2:5 – NIV); He instructed the Israelites, as it is written: “Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst” (Nehemiah 9:20), and admonished them when they forsook the Lord, as it is written: “Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands” (Nehemiah 9:30). God sent them His words by His Spirit through His prophets (Zechariah 7:12).

The Spirit guided, as David said to God: “May your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Psalm 143:10 - NIV).

The Israelites were given rest by the Holy Spirit, as it is written: “Like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name” (Isaiah 63:14 – NIV).
The Spirit of the Lord put the adversary to flight, as it is written: “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will put him to flight” (Isaiah 59:19 - NIV).

The purposes of God were accomplished by the Spirit, as it is written: “This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, when she heard the greeting of Mary, was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41).

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, eight days after the birth of John, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (Luke 1:57-79).

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15), so he also spoke by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon and had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ, and then prompted Simeon to come to the temple in Jerusalem to see the child Jesus (Luke 2:25-28).

Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38); when He was about thirty years old He was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16), that is to say, He was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) - concerning this, it must be said that God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Jesus (John 3:34); Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1); He returned from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit to Galilee (Luke 4:14); He cast out demons by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28); He rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21); He, through the Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God in order to purge our conscience from dead works (Hebrews 9:14); His dead body was quickened by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18) and He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4); He was vindicated by the Spirit (1 Timothy 3:16); through the Holy Spirit He gave commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:2).

The disciples of Jesus received a measure of the Holy Spirit before the day of Pentecost, because when Jesus appeared to them, He said: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22).

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**The day of Pentecost; the day on which the promised Spirit was sent to the Church by Jesus Christ from the Father**

Jesus Christ, on the night He was betrayed, told His disciples that when He would go back to the Father He would send to them the Holy Spirit, and He told them also what the Holy Spirit would do. Here are the words of Jesus: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you .... But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you ....But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me .... I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall
shew it unto you” (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15). Therefore – according to the words of Jesus - the Holy Spirit would be always with His disciples, He would guide them into all truth, He would teach them all things, He would bring His words to their remembrance, He would testify about Him, He would glorify Him and tell them things to come, and would convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

After Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, He received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and poured out Him upon His Church. Here is what happened on the day of Pentecost, that is, a few days after His ascension to heaven: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” (Acts 2:1-13).

Peter, with regard to the above mentioned event, said these words to those Jews who came together and were all amazed and confounded: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:16-21). Therefore, what happened on that day was nothing but the fulfilment of the promise which God had made under the Old Testament through the prophet Joel and which was confirmed by Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh.

Of course - and I have already demonstrated it - the Holy Spirit was present and worked also before the day of Pentecost, for prior to that day there were people who were filled with the Holy Spirit, who prophesied by the Holy Spirit, who predicted future events by the Holy Spirit, who wrought signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit, who wrote holy books because they were moved by the Holy Spirit; but it must be pointed out that at that time the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out upon all flesh, and also that the sign of speaking with other tongues was missing in all those who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus Christ, when He was filled with the Holy Spirit, did not speak with other tongues, for the sign of speaking with other tongues has been marking the infilling of the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost on. Therefore – as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned - the day of Pentecost was the beginning of a new dispensation.

*The work of the Holy Spirit after the day of Pentecost*

The Spirit convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. For Jesus said to His disciples: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when
he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:7-11). Therefore when a man acknowledges that he is a sinner and he repents of his sins and he believes in the Son of God, we know that it is the Holy Spirit who has convicted him of sin. He is indeed the One who brings convictions of sin to an individual.

The Spirit regenerates those who repent and believe and makes them children of God, because Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8). He gives life to them, as it is written: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63 - NKJV) and again: “The Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6 - NKJV); He renews them, as it is written: “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:4-5); and He baptizes them into the body of Christ, as it is written: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13 – NIV).

The Spirit dwells in our hearts and bears witness that we are children of God, as it is written: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15-16 – NKJV), and again: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit testifies that our sins are forgiven, as it is written: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them: And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:14-17). We know that God lives in us by the Spirit, as it is written: “And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24 – NKJV). Therefore we Christians are sure we are children of God because the Spirit of God (or of Christ) is in us; when we open our mouth and call God ‘Father’ we do it by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who bears witness that we have been forgiven by God, that we have eternal life and that God abides in us.

The Spirit sanctifies those God foreknew and predestined to be adopted as His sons, as it is written that we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2) and again that God from the beginning chose us for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13). That’s why we are called ‘the saints.’

The Spirit gives us freedom and transforms us into the image of the Son of God, as it is written: “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). We enjoy so much the freedom which comes from the Spirit, it is a wonderful freedom; however, we must see to it that we do not lose this freedom, as some Christians have done for they have started to live after the lusts of the flesh and now they are again entangled in the pollutions of the world.
Through the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, as it is written: “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). So the Holy Spirit helps us to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

The Spirit brings forth good fruit in our life, as it is written: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Spirit produces the unity among us Christians. However, we must keep this unity through the bond of peace, as it is written: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3 - NIV). Why do we Christians feel we are all one in Christ? Because the Spirit has baptized all of us into one body, that is, the body of Christ.

The Spirit strengthens our inner man (Ephesians 3:16). That’s why we feel strong in the Lord.

The Spirit makes us abound in hope, as it is written: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15:13). Therefore, if we confidently hope that God will fulfil His promises in our life, if we hope that Jesus Christ will come again, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit; not by our own power, but by the power of the Spirit.

The Spirit helps us to keep the good deposit, for Paul wrote to Timothy: “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:14 - NIV). Therefore the help of the Spirit is necessary in order to hold fast the confession of our hope till the end of our life. The Spirit makes those who live by the Spirit reap eternal life, as it is written: “He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:8). Therefore, if we walk in the Spirit, in due season we will certainly of the Spirit reap eternal life.

Through the Spirit we have access to God the Father, as it is written: “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18), and by the Spirit we worship God, as it is written: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God ….” (Philippians 3:3 – NIV), for He is the One who inspires worship on the part of the believer.

The Spirit prompts us to confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, as it is written: “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Therefore the Lordship of Jesus can be confessed by a man only by the Spirit.

The Spirit is jealous for us and longs jealously, as it is written: “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (James 4:5). Therefore we must not love the world or the things in the world, lest we grieve the Spirit by our conduct and provoke Him to jealousy.

The Spirit comforts us, for one of His names is “the Comforter” (John 14:26). In the Book of the Acts of the apostles it is written: “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:31). That’s why when we are downcast we feel comforted, for the Holy Spirit who is in us comforts us.
The Spirit accomplishes the purpose of God in our life, as it is written: “This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

The Spirit brings the words of Jesus to our remembrance and teaches us everything, as it is written: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26) and again: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 - NKJV). Have you ever wondered how you can remember the words of Jesus you have heard or read? Well, the answer is that you can remember them by the help of the Spirit. Have you ever wondered why you can speak about the things of God with words of God’s wisdom? Well, the answer is because the Spirit teaches you those words. I would like to point out that the fact that the Holy Spirit teaches us all things does not mean, of course, that we may not learn much from those who are taught by the Holy Spirit, for the Lord Jesus gave some to be teachers for the edifying of the Church (Ephesians 4:11-12), and we are commanded to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16); nor does it mean that when we are taught by the Spirit we are independent of the Word of God, for the Holy Scripture is the instrument through which He instructs us.

The Spirit guides us into all the truth, as Jesus said: “‘Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13). This means that He always leads us to believe and practice what is right in the sight of God.

The Spirit warns us that afflictions await us (Acts 20:22-23). In other words, He warns us that we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

The Spirit reveals to us things to come, for Jesus said that He will tell us things to come (John 16:13). He revealed to the prophet Agabus that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world (Acts 11:28), and that Paul would be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). And He revealed to Paul that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

The Spirit reveals to us God’s secret wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6-10). For He revealed the mystery of Christ to the apostles and prophets, as Paul said to the Ephesians: “When you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:4-5 – NKJV).

The Holy Spirit on certain occasions prevents us from doing certain things, which are not bad things in themselves, for they are not according to the will of God for us. Here is what happened to Paul and his fellow workers during one of their missionary journeys: “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:6-7). The Spirit knows the will of God for us, therefore at God’s appointed time He leads us to do what God wants us to do, and to go where God wants us to go. So, if you are trying to do a certain thing which is not according to the will of God for you, or you are trying to go where God does not want you to go, He will reveal to you that you must not do that thing or you must not go to that place. That does not mean that you will never do that thing or you will never go to that place, but it means simply that at that particular time your doing...
that thing or your going to that place was not according to the will of God. So you may do that thing or go to that place in the future. Know this, that the Holy Spirit is willing to make God’s will known to us, however on our part we must be open and sensitive to His guidance.

It is through the Spirit that we are delivered from our distresses, for Paul, while he was in prison, wrote to the Philippians: “I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19 - NIV). Therefore when we pray for our brothers so that God may deliver them from their distresses, we are sure that the Spirit is working in order to deliver them.

The Spirit puts the adversary to flight, as it is written: “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will put him to flight” (Isaiah 59:19 - NIV). That’s why we do not fear the devil, for we know that when he comes to us in order to harm us, if we resist him, the Holy Spirit will put him to flight.

The Spirit infills us and makes us speak with other tongues when He comes upon us. We have seen that according to the book of the Acts of the apostles, on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples gathered together they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. In the same book, however, are recorded other incidents in which some believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. For instance, when the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household they began to speak with other tongues, as it is written: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46). And when the Holy Spirit came upon about twelve disciples at Ephesus, after Paul had laid his hands on them, they spoke with other tongues, as it is written: “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve” (Acts 19:6-7). The coming of the Spirit upon a believer is called ‘the baptism with the Holy Spirit,’ for Jesus, before He was taken up into heaven, said to His disciples about the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church: “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). Through this baptism the believer is endued with power from on high, for Jesus said to His disciples: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 - NKJV). Later I will speak about the baptism with the Spirit extensively.

The Spirit helps us to pray, as it is written: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27 – NKJV; cf. Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20). When does the Spirit make intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered? Whenever we pray in other tongues. For when a believer prays in other tongues, he prays in the Spirit to God for the saints. In other words, the Spirit enables him to ask God (with the spirit) for the things he is not able to ask God (with the understanding) because of his limited knowledge. He makes intercession for the saints asking God for things that are unknown to the one who prays in other tongues. Later I will speak about praying in other tongues extensively.

The Spirit distributes His gifts to us according to the will of God, as it is written: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit
the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by
the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of
miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of
tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the
selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Later I will
speak about the gifts of the Spirit extensively.

The Spirit makes men overseers. Paul said to the elders of the Church of Ephesus: “Take heed
therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you
overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
Therefore when a believer has the qualities he must have to become an overseer, the Holy Spirit
will lead the assembly of the saints to appoint him overseer (or bishop).

The Spirit commands to set apart for Him some men for the work to which He has called them
and then He sends them out into the harvest of the Lord, as He did in Antioch, as it is written:
“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas,
and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought
up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost
said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when
they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being
sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus”

We preach the Gospel by the Spirit, as it is written: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired
and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or
what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified
beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed
that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported
to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven –
things which angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12 - NKJV).

The Spirit will speak through us when we are before governors and kings for the sake of Jesus.
This is what Jesus said to His disciples the Spirit will do: “And ye shall be brought before
governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they
deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same
hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh
in you” (Matthew 10:18-20). Many Christians throughout history have experienced for
themselves the truthfulness of this promise made by Jesus.

The Spirit glorifies Jesus, for Jesus said: “He will glorify Me ….” (John 16:14 - NKJV). So when
we give praise, honour and glory to Jesus, we do this by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who prompts us
to glorify the name of Jesus.

The Spirit testifies about Jesus Christ, for Jesus said: “He will testify about me” (John 15:26). He
testifies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, as it is written: “Hereby know ye the Spirit of
God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit
that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of
antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1
John 4:2-3); He testifies that Jesus came by water and blood, as it is written: “This is he that
came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is
the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6); and He testifies that
Jesus rose from the dead, for He was a witness of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 5:32). Of
course, the Spirit testifies of many other things concerning Jesus Christ, for He testifies of all the things written in the Bible which concern Christ (His Deity, sonship, offices, etc.). Therefore when a man or a woman comes to us and tells us something about Jesus which is not true, the Spirit, who is in us, warns us that it is not He who is speaking through him or her.

The Spirit can take away a man, that is, He can bring him from one place to another, as He did with the evangelist Philip on one occasion, as it is written: “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). This is what happened in the last century to David Du Plessis in South Africa; one day he was asked to go to a certain place and as he made his way towards that place, all of a sudden the Spirit took him away and brought him to that place. This incident is written in the book *A man called Mr. Pentecost* (pages 82-87)

### The baptism with the Holy Spirit

One day John the Baptist, the messenger sent from God to prepare the way of the Lord, who baptized Jesus Christ in the Jordan river, said these words to the Jews: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11) and after he had baptized Jesus, he said: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34).

Therefore there is a baptism called ‘the baptism with the Holy Spirit,’ which is administered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

### The promise of the Father confirmed by the Son

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days. And a short time before He ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, He commanded the apostles “that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5). As you can see, the promise of the Father, about which Jesus spoke to His disciples, was nothing but the baptism with the Holy Spirit. For, first He told them to wait for the promise of the Father and then He told them that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days. Therefore when they would be baptized with the Spirit, the promise of the Father would be fulfilled. So let me explain to you what God had promised, let me explain what the promise of God was, so that you may understand the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Under the Old Testament God had said that He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon the house of Israel, for He said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah: “Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: …. I will pour my spirit upon thy seed… ” (Isaiah 44:1,3). God confirmed that promise through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 39:28,29), and also through the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10). Therefore the Lord had promised to bless His people (whom He foreknew) by pouring out His Holy Spirit upon them. However, the Lord said that He would pour out His Spirit not only upon Israel but also upon the Gentiles, for He said through the prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit...
upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....” (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). As you can see, God, by saying “upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17), predicted that He would show personal favouritism to no man, for He would give the Holy Spirit to all, that is to say, both to Jews and to Gentiles. So we have seen that God through the prophets of old promised that He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Now let us see when and how Jesus confirmed and predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, because, as we have said, His disciples heard Him speak of the promise of the Father.

Jesus confirmed and predicted the outpouring of the Spirit while He was in Jerusalem, during the feast of the Tabernacles, as it is written: "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39 - NKJV). As you can see, the expression “as the Scripture has said” (John 7:38) shows that the promise of the Holy Spirit was in the oracles of the prophets of old, and we saw it just a short time ago. However, why did Jesus speak about rivers of living water in relation to the Holy Spirit, who would be given? Because the prophets compared the outpouring of the Spirit to rain sent upon dry and thirsty ground. For instance, the prophet Isaiah said from God: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring…. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. ….. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water….. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes ..... and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 44:3; 43:19-20; 41:17,18; 35:6,7; 58:11). As you can see, God promised that He would pour out water upon the wilderness and He would open rivers and fountains in the midst of the dry and thirsty land. And which is the water that can quench the thirst of a soul? It is the living water that our Lord Jesus Christ gives to those who come to Him, and this living water is the Holy Spirit, which becomes in them a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. However, as it is necessary for the rain to fall upon the desert in order to see rivers and fountains in the midst of the desert, so it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be poured out in order to see rivers of living water flowing out of the belly of the believers in Jesus Christ. Therefore the “rivers of living water,” of which the Scripture had spoken, refer to the Holy Spirit, who is received by those who believe in Jesus. Yes, because in order to receive the Holy Spirit it is necessary to believe in Jesus Christ. Paul confirms this when he says to the Ephesians: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13), and to the Galatians: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13-14). Therefore the words of Paul confirm fully the following words of Christ: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Another important thing that must be said in relation to the above mentioned words of Jesus is this: when Jesus spoke those words, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been taken up into heaven. So it was necessary for Jesus to be glorified so that the Holy Spirit might be given; that is to say, it was necessary for
Jesus to die, to rise again and to leave this world to go back to His Father who had sent Him, so that the Holy Spirit might be poured out (therefore the promise of the Father could not be fulfilled while Jesus was still on the earth).

Jesus confirmed and predicted the outpouring of the Spirit also on the night He was betrayed, for on that night Jesus spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit. For instance, He said: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17), and: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which [who] proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27), and again: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-8). These last words confirm what I said before, that is, it was necessary for Jesus to be glorified so that the Holy Spirit might be given. And in fact the promise of the Spirit was fulfilled a few days after He was taken up into heaven, precisely on the day of Pentecost.

Someone may ask me: 'If the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, and the disciples received Him on the day of Pentecost, which followed His ascension to heaven, why is it written that when Jesus appeared to His disciples He said to them: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost”? The answer is this: because when Jesus (the day on which He rose again) said to His disciples: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22), the disciples received a certain measure of the Holy Spirit, but they did not receive the fullness of the Spirit (that is to say, they were not filled with the Holy Spirit), because one receives the fullness of the Spirit when he is baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then you will say: ‘Why do you say that the disciples were not baptized with the Holy Spirit on that occasion?’ Well, because forty days after His resurrection, Jesus said to them: “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). I ask you: ‘How could we say that they were baptized with the Spirit on the day Jesus appeared to them and spoke to them those words, if forty days later Jesus Himself told them that in a few days they would be baptized with the Spirit? Don’t you think that if the disciples of Jesus had been baptized with the Spirit on the day Jesus rose again, forty days later Jesus would not have told them that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days? Don’t you think that if on that day the disciples of Jesus had been baptized with the Spirit, Jesus would have contradicted Himself by saying to them just before His ascension that a few days later they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

The fulfilment of the promise on the day of Pentecost

So Jesus told His disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days (I say it again, He said this forty days after His resurrection). And His words were fulfilled a few days later, just as He had said: for on the day of Pentecost, which according to the law is seven weeks after the Passover, at nine o’clock in the morning, while the disciples were praying, they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Here is the biblical record of the fulfilment of the prediction concerning the baptism with the Holy Spirit: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4). So at nine o’clock in the morning on the day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit, and ‘rivers of holy words,’ spoken in other tongues, began to flow out of their
belly. Being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

It must be said also that on that day those who received the Holy Spirit were Jews by birth, there were not any Gentiles among them. However, after some time the Gentiles also received the Spirit. The first Gentiles who received the Spirit were Cornelius, a roman centurion, and his household. One day, the apostle Peter was sent by God to the house of Cornelius to preach the Gospel to him and all his household, and while Peter was speaking to them the Spirit fell on them and they began to speak with other tongues, as the apostles and the other disciples did on the day of Pentecost. Here is what Luke says: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46). That event confirmed that the promise of the Holy Spirit was not only for the Jews and their children but also for all those whom the Lord would call, as Peter had said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). And after Cornelius and his household many other Gentiles received the Spirit in the days of the apostles. Till now millions of Gentiles across the world have received the Spirit.

The fact that the Holy Spirit was received first by the circumcised believers and then by the uncircumcised believers, confirms also that just as the Gospel of the grace of God had to be preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47; Romans 15:8-12), so the promised Holy Spirit had to be received by the Jews first and then by the Gentiles. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His great faithfulness. Amen.

The sign of tongues

As we have seen, Luke says that when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit “they began to speak with other tongues” (Acts 2:4). So let us dwell upon this spiritual manifestation which occurred when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Speaking with other tongues was a phenomenon that had never occurred before that day. It is true that under the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon someone a particular thing happened. For instance, every time the Holy Spirit came upon Samson, He gave him a superhuman strength (Judges 14:6,19; 15:14); when the Spirit came upon Saul he prophesied among the prophets (1 Samuel 10:10); and when the Spirit came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, he prophesied against the people (2 Chronicles 24:20). However, no one began to speak with other tongues when the Spirit came upon him, for it was on the day of Pentecost that men started to speak in other tongues when the Spirit came upon them. In other words, for speaking in other tongues began to mark the coming of the Spirit upon men from the day of Pentecost on. That is confirmed by the following facts written by Luke in his second book to Theophilos.

Here is what happened to Cornelius and his household immediately after they believed in Jesus: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46). The apostle Peter was at the house of Cornelius, a roman centurion, and was speaking to a group of Gentiles, and while he was preaching the Gospel to them, the Spirit came upon those Gentiles, and they began to speak with other tongues. The believing Jews who had come with Peter to the house of Cornelius, were astonished at seeing that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also, because they had thought till that moment that the promised Spirit was only for the Jews. But how did those circumcised believers realize that God had given the Holy Spirit to those Gentiles
also? They realized it because while Peter was speaking they suddenly heard them speaking with other tongues.

Here is what happened in Ephesus to some disciples of the Lord: “And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve” (Acts 19:1-7). Those persons whom Paul met at Ephesus were disciples of the Lord, therefore they were believers, and Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit after they believed. Now perhaps somebody will say: ‘When someone believes in the Lord, he receives the Holy Spirit, doesn’t he? Why then did Paul ask that question to those believers?’ Because ‘to receive the Holy Spirit,’ according to what the Scripture teaches, means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is to say, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Had those believers received the Holy Spirit when they believed, Paul would not have asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Don’t you think? So when a person believes, he receives the remission of his sins and eternal life, but he does not receive the Holy Spirit, that is to say, he does not receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit, for the baptism with the Holy Spirit is an experience subsequent to the new birth. The new birth and the baptism with the Holy Spirit are two different experiences, for when one is born again he is purified from his sins, while when he is baptized with the Holy Spirit he is endued with power from on high and he begins to speak with other tongues. Please note that those believers who were in Ephesus did not say to Paul: ‘No, we have not yet received Him’ but: ‘We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.’ Then Paul realized that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and after he knew that they had received John’s baptism, those believers were baptized in water in the name of Jesus, and after Paul laid his hands upon them, they received the Holy Spirit and they began to speak with other tongues and to prophesy. As you can see, after the Holy Spirit came upon those believers, they not only spoke in other tongues, but they also prophesied; that shows us that when a believer receives the Holy Spirit he begins to speak in other tongues, and he may prophesy, if the Spirit enables him to prophesy, of course.

Some people say that these Bible verses (that is, Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6) are not enough to state that when we receive the Holy Spirit we begin to speak in other tongues; on the contrary, we say that they are sufficient for us to declare that if a believer has received the Holy Spirit he speaks in other tongues, but also that if a believer does not speak in tongues by the Spirit, he has not yet received the Holy Spirit (that is, the fullness of the Spirit or the baptism with the Holy Spirit).

With regard to speaking in tongues I want to say one more thing, the words spoken in other tongues (that is, in the Spirit) are directed toward God, for Paul says to the Corinthians: “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God ….” (1 Corinthians 14:2 - NKJV). I will come back to this subject shortly.

**The Holy Spirit is given when and how God wills**

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God, therefore we can’t earn or merit it. The Bible verses which attest that the Holy Spirit is the gift of God are these: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38); “And they of the circumcision which believed were
astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45).

Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is the gift of God, it is lawful to ask God for Him, as Jesus said to His disciples: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13). Perhaps you will ask: ‘Does God give immediately the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?’ If by ‘immediately’ you mean ‘on the same day they ask God for the Holy Spirit,’ my answer is this: ‘Sometimes yes, some other times no.’ However, we know that God has made everything beautiful in his time, therefore whether He gives the Spirit immediately, or some days or months or years later, we know that the Holy Spirit comes upon the believer at the time set by God and not by men.

‘How do believers receive the Holy Spirit from God?’ Some receive Him through the laying on of hands and others without the laying on of hands. Just as in the days of the apostles; for the believers who were in Samaria, the disciples whom Paul met at Ephesus, and Timothy and Saul of Tarsus received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, as it is written: [the believers who were in Samaria] “Then laid they [Peter and John] their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:17); [About twelve disciples in Ephesus] “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6); [Timothy] “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6 - NKJV); [Saul of Tarsus] “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17). While the disciples on the day of Pentecost and Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands, as it is written: [The disciples who were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost] “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4); [Cornelius and his household] “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46).

The baptism with the Holy Spirit and the new birth are not the same experience

Some believers think that on the very moment they were born again they received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In other words, they think that the new birth is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They associate the baptism with the Spirit with the new birth, saying that the baptism with the Spirit occurs at regeneration. To them the baptism with the Spirit spoken of by John the Baptist and the new birth of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus are one and the same event occurring at justification. However, that is wrong, for the baptism with the Holy Spirit is received after the new birth, that is to say, after one has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; the example of the disciples on the day of Pentecost and that of the disciples (about twelve) whom Paul met at Ephesus show this very clearly.

In relation to the first example, we read in the Gospel according to John that when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He said to them: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). Now listen, this happened about 50 days before the day of Pentecost, on which - as you know - the apostles were filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. It is evident, therefore, that when Jesus told them to receive
the Holy Spirit they did not have the same experience that they had about 50 days later. Don’t you think that if on that day (that is, the first day of the week, on which Jesus appeared to them) the apostles had experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit or the infilling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, just before ascending into heaven, would not have spoken to the same apostles saying that within a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5)? Therefore, as you can see, before the day of Pentecost the apostles had a measure of the Spirit, but they were not yet filled with Him. So this is what must be said about those Christians who have not yet received the baptism with the Holy Spirit: they have the Spirit but have not yet received the fullness of Him. Of course they have the Holy Spirit in their heart, how could they call God “Father” without the Holy Spirit? How could they feel in their heart they are children of God without the witness of the Holy Spirit? Is it not written: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ….” (Romans 8:14-17 – NKJV)? But they are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. I mean that they are not yet full of the Holy Spirit, for the filling up with the Holy Spirit is experienced only through the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Therefore every born again Christian who is not yet baptized with the Holy Spirit has a measure of the Holy Spirit but is not full of Him. And He must seek this fullness asking God for the Holy Spirit.

In relation to the second example, we read that when Paul met those disciples he asked them: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2). Now it is evident that if Paul believed that the baptism with the Holy Spirit occurs at regeneration, or that a man is filled with the Holy Spirit when he believes, he would not have put that question to those believers. Therefore Paul believed that a man receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit after he has believed in the Gospel. I know that some people say that Paul asked them a different question, for both the NKJV and the NIV read: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2), but this is a mistranslation, for according to the original Greek this question must be translated as was translated by the translators of the King James Version. Nevertheless, I would like to point out to you that this mistranslation does not nullify the doctrine of the baptism with Holy Spirit, because we know that those disciples answered that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit, and that after Paul laid his hands upon them the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began to speak in other tongues; which means that Paul believed anyway that when a believer receives the Holy Spirit he begins to speak in other tongues. Therefore, even if we grant for the sake of argument that Paul inquired if they had received the Spirit when they believed, the reception of the Holy Spirit must be immediately followed by speaking in tongues. So I would like to put this question to all those believers who reject speaking in tongues as the outward sign (that is, the evidence) of the baptism with the Holy Spirit: ‘If – as you say – Paul believed that the Holy Spirit is received at regeneration, if Paul believed – as you think – that a man receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit when he believes, why did you not speak in tongues when you received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, as the disciples in Ephesus did after Paul laid his hands upon them? I tell you the answer, because when you believed in the Lord you did not receive the fullness of the Spirit, that is to say, you were not baptized with the Holy Spirit. You received another baptism when you believed, which is the baptism administered by the Holy Spirit, as it is written: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13 - NKJV). This baptism – as I said before - is administered by the Holy Spirit and through it we all became members of the Church when we believed. But the baptism with the Holy Spirit is administered by Jesus Christ and through it He clothes those who believe with power from on high.

There is even a third example I can mention to confirm this, it is the example of the believers of Samaria. Listen to what Luke says: “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip
spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:5-17). Now it is out of doubt that those people in Samaria had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they had believed in the death and the resurrection of Christ, therefore they were born again, for the new birth is experienced when one believes. Yet the Scripture says that the apostles who were at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to those believers to pray for them; why? Because those believers, those born again Christians, had not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit (the expression used by Luke is “for as yet he was fallen upon none of them”). Of course, they had a measure of the Spirit, by whom they could say that they were children of God, but they had not yet experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, they had not yet had the same experience that the apostles had on the day of Pentecost. Now I know you will ask me: ‘Why then didn’t Luke write that when they received the Holy Spirit they spoke in other tongues?’ Because the Holy Spirit did not move Luke to write it. Those believers spoke in other tongues, as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance, but it is not clearly written that they did speak in tongues, as it is written in the case of the disciples at Jerusalem as well as in the case of the disciples at Ephesus. I have said ‘it is not clearly written,’ for in this particular case Luke wrote some words concerning Simon which imply that those believers spoke in other tongues. Here are the words of Luke: “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:18-19). As you can see, Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given. What did he see? What kind of spiritual manifestation did he see, which convinced him immediately that the Holy Spirit was given to those believers through the laying on of the apostles’ hands? Of course he saw those believers speaking in other tongues.

The utility of the baptism with the Holy Spirit

I have shown you from the Scripture that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is for all believers, for both Jews and Gentiles; that it is received freely from God by faith; that it can be received through the laying on of hands or without the laying on of hands; that when a believer receives it the Spirit enables him to speak in other tongues, and I have explained that it is an experience subsequent to the new birth. Now I am going to explain to you why the baptism with the Holy Spirit is useful to the believer.

It is useful because it imparts power to those who receive it, for Jesus said to His disciples: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) and also: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Therefore whoever has been baptized with the Holy Spirit has received power from on high, that is, he has
been endued with power. Nobody can say that he has received the baptism with the Holy Spirit but he has not received power from on high. Power to do what? Power to bring the Gospel to the lost (that is, power to witness for Jesus), for Jesus said to His disciples that when the Spirit would come upon them they would be witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8); power to be strengthened in the inner man, as it is written: “That he [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16); power to fight more efficaciously against the devil and all his schemes, for when a believer is baptized with the Spirit he begins to pray in the Spirit (that is to say, he begins to pray in other tongues) and the prayer in the Spirit is one of the spiritual weapons God has given to the believer to fight against the devil, as it is written: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

Let us dwell upon the prayer in the Spirit. Paul says to the Romans that “the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27 - NKJV). How does the Spirit make intercession for the saints? Here is the answer. As I said before, whoever is baptized with the Holy Spirit speaks in other tongues to God, as the Holy Spirit gives him utterance. What does he say to God? Paul says: “In the spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Corinthians 14:2 - NKJV). What are these mysteries? Sometimes they are intercessions made by the Spirit for the saints. So anyone who prays in the Spirit, that is to say, who prays in other tongues, does speak mysteries in the Spirit because the Spirit makes intercession for the saints, asking God to do certain things on their behalf which are unknown to him who is praying in other tongues, for the Bible verse “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26) means that we, because of our limited knowledge (which is one of “our weaknesses”), do not know what we should ask God to do on behalf of the saints. For instance, we don’t know the specific need in which a believer (whether we know him or not) may suddenly find himself, but the Spirit knows it, for He knows all things. What does the Holy Spirit do then? He helps us (that is, he helps our lack of knowledge) making some specific intercessions for that believer through our mouth, for this is what happens when somebody prays in other tongues: the Spirit is praying for the saints. The “groanings which cannot be uttered” are those groanings that the Spirit makes a believer utter when he prays in other tongues. As we have seen, Paul says that the Spirit “makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). What does he mean? He means that the Spirit asks God to do certain things on behalf of the saints which are according to the will of God for them, that is to say, He asks God for things which they need and are according to the will of God for their life. Certainly you have read these words of John: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15). Well, I want you to know that whenever we pray in other tongues (that is, in the Spirit) we ask God for things which are according to His will because the Spirit makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Therefore the baptism with the Holy Spirit is useful because it enables believers to pray in other tongues.

So, in the light of what the Scripture teaches about the baptism with the Spirit, no wonder that today some Christians say that the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a false doctrine and thus it must not be taught to the Church!! For we know that the devil hurls himself against every true doctrine, because every true doctrine edifies the Church of the living God, and the devil does not want the Church to be edified. And therefore he has deceived these Christians into believing that this doctrine is false. That’s why we are not surprised to see that those who receive the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in other tongues, begin to be persecuted and reviled even by some believers, who don’t know the Scriptures nor the power of God. Is it not true that the devil tries to discourage the children of God from doing whatever opposes efficaciously the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual hosts of
wickedness in the heavenly places? And the prayer in the Spirit is a powerful weapon the Church has received from God to fight the good fight. Therefore, brothers in the Lord, don’t be surprised to see that Satan has deprived some believers of this weapon by deceiving them into believing that tongues are not of God, or that they are not useful, or that they have ceased. I want you to know this: had the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit been a false doctrine it would have proved to be a lie and thus it would not have edified the Church of God and would not have helped to save many souls, and besides this, God would not have confirmed this doctrine in such a powerful and marvellous way.
The baptism with the Holy Spirit imparts power to the saints and produces love in them, and it opens the door to the gifts of the Spirit; that’s why our enemies make every effort to prevent believers from teaching it and desiring it. But thanks be to God because the baptism with the Holy Spirit, even though it meets with much opposition, is taught diligently across the world; and not only taught, but also received by many Christians and the effect it produces in them is the same effect that produced in the early disciples. To the One who in His faithfulness baptizes with the Holy Spirit, be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

A warning

Since I am acquainted with the situation of the Pentecostal Churches in this nation also, I feel I have to warn those who are seeking the baptism with the Holy Spirit, so that they may not fall victim to the devices of the devil.

Today among many Churches many believers are deceived by many Church leaders into speaking with false tongues. Now I am going to explain to you how these Church leaders deceive these believers. Usually, during the prayer meeting or an evangelistic crusade they ask those believers who want to be baptized with the Spirit (or filled with the Spirit) to come forward so that they may pray for them. And while they are standing near the pulpit or the platform, the church leaders tell them to begin to speak a word then another word and so on, or they even put strange words in the mouth of these believers, or they begin to shout in their ears, ‘Speak in tongues, speak in tongues, come on, speak in tongues!’, or they pound their backs, so they, being influenced by these Church leaders and this kind of atmosphere, begin to utter syllables and vowels, which give the impression to themselves as well as to those who hear them speaking that they have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, for the Scripture teaches that speaking in tongues is the sign that accompanies the reception of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, they actually have received nothing, for those strange words they speak are not true foreign languages which the Spirit enables them to speak, but just meaningless words. So these believers have deceived themselves, for they think they have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, while as a matter of fact they have not yet received it. Of course, those church leaders who act in this way have deceived themselves too, because it is evident that since they teach believers to do these things they also one day were deceived into speaking meaningless words. Unfortunately, this is something that has been dragging on for many years and has brought forth bitter and evil fruits.

Therefore, brothers, lest you be deluded into thinking that you have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, besides praying God in faith so that He may give you the Holy Spirit, you must wait confidently (and without any anxiety) for the Holy Spirit to come upon you and enable you to speak in other tongues. Do not worry, because it is the Holy Spirit who will make you speak in other tongues. You will have to open your mouth, and the Holy Spirit will make you speak. That you may understand what I have just said, I will cite what happens to demon-possessed people as an illustration. Now, as you know, there are some people who are moved by evil spirits and when these spirits seize them they begin to say things which they do not know and do not want to say, and the reason is that the evil spirits seize their mouth and make them say what the spirits want them to say. So, on the contrary, when the Spirit of God, who is holy and good,
comes upon a believer a similar thing occurs, for He seizes the mouth of the believer and makes him speak in other tongues (and even prophesy, if God wills). Therefore, in the light of what I have just told you, it is evident that if one puts together some words which look like foreign words, for he thinks that this is the way the Holy Spirit enables believers to speak in other tongues, he deceives himself, for those words are only a figment of his imagination, and not words in a foreign language which the Spirit enables him to speak.

Perhaps someone, in reading these words of mine, comes to the incontrovertible conclusion that he is one of the victims of this deception. I want to say to this person: You do well to acknowledge this; therefore stop uttering those meaningless words you invented and wait for Jesus Christ to baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

**The gifts of the Holy Spirit**

**Introduction**

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

As you can see, Paul did not want the believers who were in Corinth to be ignorant of the spiritual gifts. Which ignorance did he refer to? The ignorance of the existence of the spiritual gifts or the ignorance of their use, employment and control? Now, since the Corinthians did not lack any spiritual gift, as Paul said to them at the beginning of his first epistle he wrote to them (1 Corinthians 1:7), and among the Church of Corinth there were believers who did speak with other tongues and prophesied (that is what we learn from other words of Paul, such as these: “Let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret” 1 Corinthians 14:13 – NKJV, and: “For you can all prophesy one by one ….” 1 Corinthians 14:31 – NKJV), the answer is this: Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant of the existence of the spiritual gifts. And that is confirmed by what Paul wrote in the rest of the twelfth chapter of this epistle and in the fourteenth chapter of it. But when and how did the Corinthians learn of the existence of the spiritual gifts? Well, according to the Scripture, they learned of the existence of the spiritual gifts through Paul when the apostle preached the Gospel to them, for it was Paul who had imparted the spiritual gifts to the saints of Corinth; so they had received the spiritual gifts through Paul’s ministry. Which shows very clearly that Paul did not want believers to be ignorant of the existence of the spiritual gifts, and not only of their use and employment.

I also – like Paul – do not want believers to be ignorant of the spiritual gifts, both of their existence and their proper use in the body of Christ. So this is why I teach about the gifts of the Spirit. 1) First of all, so that those believers who have never heard that there are spiritual gifts (in the days of Paul there were some believers who for a certain period of time had not even heard
that there was the Holy Spirit – Acts 19:1-7, so we should not be surprised if some believers are ignorant of the existence of the spiritual gifts might learn of their existence (as well as of their proper use), because the gifts of the Spirit are for the Church, for the edification of the Church and not for the destruction of the Church. Paul says this very clearly: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7); the NIV reads: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good”. Please, note these words “to profit withal” or “for the common good,” for they nullify all those arguments according to which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer necessary. For if the manifestation of the Spirit was useful to the Church at that time, it must be useful to the Church today also; if the Spirit edified the Church through His gifts at that time, for sure He will edify the Church through those same gifts today. If at that time the Spirit desired to edify the Church of God through His gifts, for sure today He desires to do the same thing. Is there anyone who can demonstrate that the mind of the Spirit is no longer the same? No, there is nobody who can demonstrate that the mind and the work of the Holy Spirit have changed, and there is nobody who is able to change His mind and His work. Today the Spirit distributes His gifts as He wills, and nobody can keep Him from distributing them. 2) Secondly, so that those believers who already know of the existence of the spiritual gifts but hold mistaken views concerning some of them (that is, concerning the function and the use of some of them) might be corrected.

Now, as we have read, there is one Spirit yet there are diversities of gifts. In other words, the Holy Spirit gives different manifestations to the members of the Church of God. The reason is that in the Church there are various needs; just as in the human body there are different members with different functions which meet different needs (the eye allows us to see, the ear allows us to hear, the feet allow us to walk, the mouth allows us to eat, the stomach and the liver allow us to digest what we have eaten, etc.), so in the Church of God there are different gifts which meet different needs. The Spirit does not give the same manifestation to everybody, but He gives everyone the spiritual manifestation which is according to the will of God. However, the will of God does not exclude the will of the believer, that is to say, even though the Spirit distributes His gifts as He wills, the believer must earnestly desire spiritual gifts, for Paul told the Church of Corinth to covet them, as it is written: “But covet earnestly the best gifts ….” (1 Corinthians 12:31) and again: “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). Therefore things are very clear, spiritual gifts must be coveted by all of us. All believers must covet them, whoever doesn’t covet them doesn’t want the Church to be edified through the manifestation of the Spirit, he doesn’t want the Church to be edified through the gifts as it was edified in the days of the apostles.

Now let us look closely at the gifts Paul speaks about, in order to understand why they are given for the edification of the Church, and in order to understand their utility.

The word of wisdom

The word of wisdom is the revelation of a future event. Therefore it is the prediction of an event, such as a war, a famine, a flood, a marriage, an arrest, the coming of someone, the birth of someone, the death of someone, a judgement of God upon someone, a blessing of God for somebody, the salvation of somebody, the healing of somebody, etc. However, the word of wisdom is expressed not only in foretelling future events, but also in the giving of those divine commands and instructions which make for the development of those future events. The word of wisdom can be received through a vision, or a dream, or through an audible voice. Here are a few biblical examples of the word of wisdom.
Old Testament

Through a word of wisdom Noah knew that God would send the flood on the earth and that he had to build an ark, as it is written: “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them” (Genesis 6:13-21). As you can see, Noah received not only the prediction of the flood, but also some important commands which he had to put in practice so that the plan of God might be fulfilled. Noah built the ark, the flood came upon the earth, and all the human beings and the animals were destroyed except Noah and seven others, and all the animals which were in the ark.

It was through a word of wisdom that the prophet Samuel knew that the following day God would send him a man from the land of Benjamin, who was the man appointed by God to reign over Israel. Here is what we read in the Bible: “Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me” (1 Samuel 9:15-16). That word was fulfilled on the following day, as God had said to Samuel. God sent Saul to Samuel and “when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people” (1 Samuel 9:17). It was through a word of wisdom, which God gave to the prophet Samuel, that Saul knew what would happen to him after he would leave Samuel. Here is what Samuel said to Saul: “Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance? When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, What shall I do for my son? Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man” (1 Samuel 10:2-6). All those signs were fulfilled on that day, as the Lord had said through Samuel.

It was through a word of wisdom, which God gave to the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, that Jeroboam knew that he would become king of Israel, as it is written: “And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: And
Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever" (1 Kings 11:29-39). And Jeroboam some time later became king of Israel, as the Lord had said.

New Testament

At Antioch, one prophet named Agabus, “stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world” (Acts 11:28 - NIV), which came to pass in the days of Claudius.

After some years, Agabus, while the apostle Paul was at the house of Philip, came and predicted that Paul would be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles, as it is written: “And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11). This prediction also was fulfilled.

It was through a word of wisdom that the evangelist Philip knew that he had to go toward the south along the road which went down from Jerusalem to Gaza, and it was through a word of wisdom that when he saw the Eunuch sitting in his chariot he knew that he had to go near and overtake that chariot, as it is written: “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth’. So the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from begin baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:26-38 - NKJV).
The word of wisdom is as important as it was in the days of the prophets and of the apostles. Through it we can know things that no human being knows, for they are hidden in God. Is it not wonderful? I can tell you by experience that when God reveals to you a portion of His wisdom, by revealing to you something that will happen in the future, or by commanding you to do certain things so that His plan may be fulfilled, you feel happy, strengthened and also comforted, and compelled to praise His great name. Earnestly desire this manifestation of the Spirit, so that men may acknowledge that our God still predicts future events, as He did in ancient times, and at the appointed time He brings to pass His predictions. Let everyone acknowledge the truthfulness of this Scripture: “Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.: Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:8-11)

The word of knowledge

The word of knowledge is the revelation of the existence, condition or whereabouts of some person or object or place, of the location or occasion of some event. It is the revelation of past happenings or of things existing or events taking place in the present. For instance, it may be the revelation of a plot against someone, a sin committed by someone secretly, the nature of a man’s thoughts or the condition of his heart, the place where something or someone is hidden, the place where a lost object is, etc. The word of knowledge also can be received through a vision, or a dream, or through an audible voice. Here are some biblical examples of the word of knowledge.

Old Testament

It was through a word of knowledge that the prophet Elisha knew the secret encampment selected by the king of Syria as the base of his military operations against Israel. Here is what we read in the Scripture: “Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2 Kings 6:8-12).

It was through a word of knowledge that the Israelites knew where Saul was hidden. Here is the biblical account of that event: “And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh; And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come
thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king [Long live the king!]” (1 Samuel 10:17-24).

It was through a word of knowledge that the prophet Elisha knew that his servant Gehazi had taken something from Naaman. Elisha had refused to accept from the hands of Naaman what he had brought, who had been healed of leprosy by Elisha. However, Gehazi coveted what Naaman brought and took something from Naaman secretly, but God exposed the treachery and punished Gehazi for his sin. Here is the biblical account of that event: “But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow” (2 Kings 5:20-27).

New Testament

Jesus, while He was talking with the Samaritan woman, told her that she had had five husbands and the man living with her at that time was not her husband. Here is what the apostle John wrote: “Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (John 4:16-19). That woman realized through that word of knowledge that the one who was speaking to her was a prophet. In addition to this, she believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, for the apostle wrote that when she went back to the town she said to the people: “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29).

It was through a word of knowledge that the apostle Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira his wife had lied to the apostles concerning the price of the land they had sold. It is written in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she
said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to
tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the
door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the
ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by
her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these
things" (Acts 5:1-11).

It was through a word of knowledge that Ananias, a disciple who lived in Damascus, knew that
Saul of Tarsus was in the house of a man named Judas on Straight Street and that he was
praying and had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands upon
him. Here is what Luke wrote: “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias;
and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord
said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of
Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth. And hath seen in a vision a man
named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then
Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy
saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy
name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my
name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great
things he must suffer for my name’s sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the
house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared
unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be
filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he
received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:10-18)

As you can see, the word of knowledge is a useful gift, for through it the Spirit reveals also
certain sins which have been committed secretly by some people. So we need this kind of
manifestation, that people may acknowledge that our God is holy, that His eyes are everywhere,
and that man cannot mock Him, and thus great fear may seize them. Very often believers
behave in their private life as if God did not exist and then they come to the place of worship as if
nothing had happened. Very often we see the places of worship full of hypocrites whose secret
sins need to be revealed publicly so that everybody may realize that God cannot be mocked.
Finally, note this. Even though the word of knowledge is distinct from the word of wisdom, they
are closely related, and often they are intergraded in their manifestation. For instance, it was
through a word of knowledge that John on the isle of Patmos knew the condition of the seven
churches; and by the word of wisdom he was able to give them the mind, will and commands of
God.

Faith

The gift of faith is not the faith which comes by hearing the Word of God and by which people
are saved and receive the Holy Spirit as well as the gifts of the Spirit (we might call this kind of
faith ‘general faith’), but a special faith granted by the Holy Spirit to some believers on certain
circumstances that they might work miracles, or rather receive miracles in their life. Those who
possess faith the gift of the Spirit believe God in such a way that God honours their word as His
own and miraculously brings it to pass. The gift of faith may often operate in conjunction with
other gifts of the Spirit. Let us see now some biblical examples of the manifestation of the gift of
faith.

Through this gift the prophet Elisha made the iron ax head float, as it is written: “And the sons of
the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for
us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make
us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I
pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And
when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it" (2 Kings 6:1-7).

Through this gift Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego quenched the violence of fire, for it is written: “Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abedneg, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four
men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon” (Daniel 3:1-30).

Through this gift Jesus fed several thousand people with just a few loaves and fish (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-44; John 6:1-15, and Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9), He walked on the water of the sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25; Mark 6:48), and He withered a fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19).

As you can see, this gift is very useful, for through its manifestation both believers and unbelievers can see that the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Nothing is impossible with God: He indeed does things that are impossible with men.

The gifts of healings

The gifts of healings (NKJV) are gifts which enable the believer who has received them to heal the sick. The power of the Lord is present for him to heal the sick, just as it was for Jesus (Luke 5:17).

Jesus gave His twelve disciples power to heal the sick, as it is written: “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matthew 10:1; cf. Luke 9:1-2), and they healed the sick while Jesus was still with them, as it is written: “And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where” (Luke 9:6). As I have said, all these healings were performed by His disciples while Jesus was still with them; however, the twelve (remember that after His ascension into heaven Matthias took the office of Judas Iscariot) healed the sick even after Jesus was taken up into heaven. For it is written in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people….. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:12,16). As you can see, the twelve apostles had gifts of healings.

The apostle Paul also had gifts of healings, for it is written: “And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island [Malta], came, and were healed” (Acts 28:8-9).

Another servant of the Lord who had gifts of healings was the evangelist Philip, for the Scripture says about him: “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsy, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8).
Now let me show you from the Bible how the sick can be healed.

A sick person can be healed through the laying on of the hands of a believer who has these gifts, who, after he has prayed for the sick, places his hands on the sick person in the name of Jesus, and heals him. The practice of laying hands on the sick was a common practice in the early Church; for instance, the apostle Paul, after he prayed for the father of Publius (who was sick of a fever and dysentery), “placed his hands on him, and healed him” (Acts 28:8), and James commanded the elders of the Church to pray over the sick (which implies that they had to lay their hands on the sick) and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord, saying that the prayer of faith would save the sick and the Lord would raise them up (James 5:14-15). He who has gifts of healings can lay his hands on the sick even without saying a specific prayer for the sick, but by saying to the sick just these words: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ be healed!’ This practice also is biblical, for Jesus said about those who believe on Him: “In my name …. they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). As for anointing the sick with oil in order to heal them, it must be said that the apostles anointed the sick while Jesus was still with them, as it is written that they “anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:13). So it is lawful for those who have gifts of healings to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord. Healing can take place even without the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil, but only by a command given by the servant of God who possesses gifts of healings, as in the case of that man lame from his mother’s womb to whom Peter commanded to rise up and walk (Acts 3:6), and in the case of that man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed, to whom Peter said, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed” (Acts 9:34 – NKJV), as well as in the case of that man who was lame from his mother’s womb and who heard Paul speaking, to whom Paul said: “Stand upright on thy feet” (Acts 14:10). Healing may even be obtained through some handkerchiefs and aprons that have touched a man of God who possesses gifts of healings and the gift of working miracles, as it happened to many sick in the province of Asia while Paul was there, as it is written: “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11-12). However, I would like to point out that Paul did not use to pray over handkerchiefs and aprons, nor did he urge people to put handkerchiefs and aprons on his own body in order to bring them to the sick. I say this for I know that there are certain preachers who do these things. Finally, I say that someone can be healed even through the shadow of a man of God, just as it happened in Jerusalem in the days of the apostles, as it is written: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (Acts 5:14-15). However, I would like to point out that, as in the case of Paul in Asia, Peter did not urge people to bring the sick into the streets and to lay them on beds and couches that at least his shadow might overshadow them. -

I said before that those who have received gifts of healings heal the sick, but it must be said that those who possess the gifts of healings can’t heal every sick person, because a sick person can be healed only if he has faith. Is it not written that on one occasion Jesus asked two blind men, who pleaded with Him to have mercy on them, if they believed that He was able to give sight to them (Matthew 9:28)? Therefore, if a sick person does not believe that Jesus can heal him, he will not be healed. That is confirmed by the fact that even Jesus, who had the gifts of healings, did not do many powerful works in Nazareth because of their unbelief, as it is written: “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). Another thing that must be said is that a sick person will be healed if his healing is according to the will of God for him. With regard to this, I want to point out that according to the first epistle of Paul to Timothy, Timothy had frequent infirmities (1 Timothy 5:23), and that Paul wrote to Timothy in his second epistle that he had left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). These passages concerning the illnesses of Timothy and Trophimus teach us that even those who possess gifts of healings
must submit to the will of God. It is true that the Scripture does not tell us whether afterward they were healed or not by Paul, however the Scripture makes it very clear that at that time Paul could not heal them for God did not want to heal them (we take for granted that Timothy and Trophimus wanted to be healed and believed that God could heal them). If Paul healed them some time later, that means that the time appointed by God for their healing had not yet come. Nevertheless, I say it again, the Scripture does not tell us if afterward they were healed or not. So a sick person may remain sick for a certain period of time till the time for his healing has come. However, according to the Scripture, God may have decided not to heal a believer who is sick because He has decided to let him die and bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom. In this case, therefore, the disease will lead the believer to death, as in the case of the prophet Elisha, about whom the Scripture says that he “had become sick with the illness of which he would die” (2 Kings 13:14 - NKJV).

Another important thing to be said about healing is this: even if a believer does not possess gifts of healings, he must pray for the brothers who are sick so that they might be healed by God, for James says: “Pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16). Please note that to pray for the sick is a command for all of us and not something which is optional.

Healing takes place by the power of God, through the faith of the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus. To explain this concept there are no better words than these, which Peter spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem after he healed the lame person at the temple’s door called ‘Beautiful’: “And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:16). These words can be spoken by anyone who has gifts of healings after he has healed a sick person.

Healing is one of the signs which accompany the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for Jesus said that among the signs that will accompany those who believe is also this: “In my name ..... they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). Being a sign, it confirms the Gospel of the grace of God (Mark 16:20). In other words, through the healing of the sick by the name of Jesus Christ, God shows that the Word which is preached is true, is a trustworthy word which deserves full acceptance. Therefore, when they see sick people healed in the name of Jesus Christ, unbelieving people are led to believe in the Lord Jesus, and that is what happened in ancient times (Acts 9:35) and happens today. Of course, not all unbelievers turn to the Lord when they see the sick healed by the name of Jesus but only a part of them (just as in the days of Jesus and in the days of the apostles not all those who saw the sick healed by the power of God turned to the Lord). However, healings are useful also because through them many works of the devil are destroyed by the power of God and this makes believers rejoice in the Lord, praise His holy name and fear Him. Healings wrought by the power of God in the name of Jesus Christ are a manifestation of His great power, but also of His great love and compassion toward men. Think about this for a moment: God in His goodness wants not only to save people from sin but also to heal their diseases! He wants to meet also the physical needs of people, both believers and unbelievers. God is really good!

Therefore, let us earnestly desire the gifts of healings, and let those who receive them use them to serve others (thus without charging for healing) and let them be humble and pure. May the name of our great God be glorified through the healings worked in the name of Christ, and may the works of the devil be destroyed. Let everybody acknowledge that in the midst of the Church there is a God who heals all diseases, that He can do and does what no doctor is able to do. To Him be the glory in Christ Jesus. Amen.
The working of miracles

The gift of working miracles is different from the gifts of healings, because the gifts of healings concern the healing of diseases while the gift of working miracles concerns the working of signs and wonders. This gift is the power granted by the Holy Spirit to work signs and wonders by God’s command. Moses had this gift, and the two witnesses, who will appear before the coming of the Lord, will receive it. So let us look closely at what the Scripture says about them.

As for Moses, when God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush and told him to go down to Egypt to set free His people from the hand of Pharaoh, God gave him the power to work some signs and wonders before the elders of Israel so that the Israelites might believe that the God of their fathers had appeared to Moses. Here is what the Scripture says: “And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land” (Exodus 4:1-9). God gave Moses also the power to work signs and wonders before Pharaoh and against the Egyptians, for He said to him: “When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go” (Exodus 4:21). And that is what happened afterward, for Moses and his brother Aaron went to the elders of the people of Israel, and Aaron worked the signs God had commanded Moses to do, and the people believed them (Exodus 4:29-31), and then they went to Pharaoh to command him to let the people of Israel go and since he refused to obey, God worked through Moses and Aaron many signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all the Egyptians, as it is written: “He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings. He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillers, and that without number, And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength” (Psalms 105:26-36). Perhaps you will say to me: ‘The word ‘miracles’ does not occur in the above mentioned Bible verses!’ That’s true, however it is also true that in another place the Scripture calls the signs and wonders performed by Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt “miracles” (Numbers 14:22).

As for the two witnesses who will appear before the coming of the Lord, they will possess great power, for we read in the book of Revelation: “These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will” (Revelation 11:6).
As you can see, the authority that Moses received and the authority that the two witnesses will receive from God at the appointed time is an authority which has nothing to do with the authority to heal diseases, for it is the authority to work signs and wonders, that is, miracles. Those who have received the gift of working miracles have power to raise the dead and to cast out demons, for there is no doubt that when a believer raises a dead person he performs a miracle and not a healing, and that casting out demons does not mean healing the sick, for when Jesus spoke about the signs that will accompany those who believe He mentioned these signs separately (Mark 16:17-18). To cast out demons means to expel demons out of demon-possessed people, and very often these people are healthy and don't need healing, that's why we put deliverances from demons among the miracles.

Therefore when we read in the Acts of the apostles that Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in Iconium “speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3 - NIV), and that “Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:8 – NIV), and also that “the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people” (Acts 5:12 - NIV), we think that among all those signs and wonders there were surely signs and wonders that had nothing to do with the healing of diseases, such as the raising of the dead and the deliverance from demons (or the expulsion of demons). As for the apostles, we know that they had the authority to raise the dead and to cast out demons, for we know that after the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter raised a dead woman (Acts 9:36-43) and Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl at Philippi (Acts 16:16-18).

Our desire and our prayer to God is that God may confirm the Word of His Grace by enabling His servants to heal the sick and to do signs and wonders. Don’t be surprised, for we have the same desire that the early disciples had and our prayer is the same prayer that the early disciples made to God. Listen to what Luke says in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David [the NIV reads: “by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David] hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:23-31).

Discerning of spirits

The Spirit of God, through this gift, enables some believers to discern the presence of evil spirits (demons) into the body of some persons or near them, or enables them to see evil spirits doing their evil works or to discern their evil works. When the Holy Spirit allows to see or to discern the evil spirits which are tormenting the demon possessed, His purpose is to enable believers to cast demons out of the demon possessed and thus to set them free in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, because evil spirits can be cast out of these people only through the name of Jesus Christ, that is to say, by commanding them in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of the demon possessed.
This gift is called ‘discerning of spirits’ because there are different kinds of evils spirits, which perform different evil works, and thus it is necessary to discern them. As in the kingdom of God there are different kinds of good spirits (cherubim, seraphim, an archangel, and angels) which have different jobs, so is in the kingdom of the prince of the power of the air (that is, the devil), for in it there are various kinds of evils spirits.

For instance, there are evil spirits which cause dumbness and deafness like that evil spirit which Jesus cast out of a boy, as it is written in the Gospel according to Mark: “And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose” (Mark 9:14-27). In the Gospel according to Matthew we find another case of a person who was dumb because of a dumb spirit and was able to speak only after Jesus cast out the demon he had, for it is written: “As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil [demon]. And when the devil [demon] was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel” (Matthew 9:32-33). Therefore some of those who are dumb and deaf have a demon, which causes dumbness and deafness; so in these cases, in order to see these persons healed of their dumbness and deafness, this kind of demon must first be discerned and then cast out. Pay attention to this: I have not said that all those who are dumb and deaf have a dumb and deaf demon which causes their sickness, but that some of them have a dumb and deaf demon, for the fact that a person is deaf and dumb does not necessarily mean that he has a dumb and deaf spirit, it can be so, but this is not always the case. It is erroneous – according to the Scripture - to state that every deaf or dumb person is demon-possessed, for just as in the days of Jesus there were many dumb and deaf people who were not demon-possessed at all but simply sick - that’s why Jesus did not cast any demon out of them, but He just healed them (Mark 7:32-37) – so today there are many dumb and deaf people who do not need to be delivered from demons, but simply healed of their sickness.

There are evil spirits which are called ‘seducing spirits’ because their job is to deceive people into accepting all kinds of false doctrines. Paul mentions them when he says to Timothy: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:1-5). These evil spirits help the false prophets and false christs spread their damnable heresies among the people of this world, as well as the false ministers of the Gospel who are among the Church of the living God spread doctrines of demons, which unfortunately many believers have accepted. I
remind you that the father of lies is Satan (the devil), so every false doctrine does not come from God, but from Satan. In order not to be deceived by these spirits it is necessary to watch and pray, and to search the Scriptures continually to see if what is taught is true.

There are evil spirits which perform signs and wonders. The apostle John saw some of them in a vision, for he says in the Book of Revelation: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils [demons], working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:13-14). These spirits enable the false prophets and the false christs to work signs and wonders in order to seduce people. Many Indian gurus, and the witches and the wizards have these unclean spirits, which enable them to perform false miracles, and as you know these servants of the devil have many followers. However, bear in mind that these evil spirits work false miracles even among believers through false ministers of the Gospel, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Beware of them too.

There are evil spirits called spirits of divination, by which some people predict (or foretell) the future, for in the Scripture we read that while Paul and his fellow workers were at Philippi they met a slave girl with a spirit of divination and Paul one day discerned that evil spirit and cast it out. Here is the biblical account of that deliverance: “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:16-18). Many people today have this kind of evil spirit and they need to be delivered from it.

Evil spirits look like monkeys, frogs, crocodiles, snakes, goats, pigs, etc. As we saw before, the spirits which John saw looked like frogs. Other evil spirits look like ordinary persons, others are half human and half animal, and others look like unknown creatures.

There are evil spirits which are stronger than others, for Jesus said that the spirits which cause dumbness and deafness can be cast out only by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29); and there are evil spirits which are more wicked than others (Matthew 12:43-45). And there are evil spirits which rule over large areas of the earth as lords or leaders and governors in the evil spirit world; in the book of the prophet Daniel we read that the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted the messenger of the Lord sent by God to Daniel (Daniel 10:1-20) 21 days, that prince was an evil spirit.

In conclusion, I want to say this: Jesus Christ overcame Satan and all the evil spirits; for the Scripture says that, having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15). When demons are rebuked and cast out in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they obey, and come out of the demon-possessed. Therefore we must not be afraid of the evil spirits: remember that the Scripture says that we have overcome the evil by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11), and that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), and again that “when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight” (Isaiah 59:19 - NIV). Glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, now and forevermore. Amen.

Last but not least, remember that one day Satan and all the evil spirits will be cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, where they will be tormented forever and forever (Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41).
Prophecy, divers (different) kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues

Here is a brief exposition of what the Scripture teaches about these gifts of the Spirit. The gift of prophecy is a gift through which the Spirit exhorts, edifies, and comforts the Church, and sometimes He can speak through it even to unbelievers. There is no prediction of future events in prophecy. Believers must covet to prophesy. Prophecies must not be despised (1 Thessalonians 5:20). However, prophecies must be carefully examined in the light of the Scripture, and if a prophecy is doctrinally wrong, for it is inconsistent with the Holy Scripture, it must be rejected immediately. The gift of divers kinds of tongues is a gift through which a believer is enabled by the Spirit to speak in more than one tongue. It is a gift which is not given to everybody, that's why Paul says that not all believers speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30). He who speaks in tongues always speaks to God, and what he says can be a prayer, a song or a thanksgiving (and not a message to the Church). However, if what he says in other tongues is not interpreted the church will not be edified, so he must pray that he may interpret as well. Only when tongues are interpreted the listeners can say 'Amen,' for they have understood the meaning of the words and they can be edified. That's why the gift of interpretation of tongues is important. When the Church comes together in one place, tongues must not be forbidden; however, it is necessary to observe the commandments of the Lord (given by the apostle Paul) concerning tongues in order not to create confusion. Therefore, if anyone speaks in a tongue, two or at the most three, should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, they should keep silence in the church and speak to themselves and to God. Speaking in tongues all together should be avoided; otherwise, if an unbeliever comes in, he will say that we are out of our mind.

Now, after this brief exposition, we are going to examine the gift of prophecy and the gift of divers kinds of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues in the light of what Paul says in the fourteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Paul says: "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1). Why does Paul urge the saints to eagerly desire especially the gift of prophecy? Why this gift and not the gift of divers kinds of tongues, for instance? The answer is given by Paul immediately after, for he says: “For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:2-5 – Please note this: the word unknown, which occurs six times in this chapter in the King James Version, is in italics, signifying that the original Greek manuscripts did not contain this or any such word). This is therefore the reason why prophecy is to be preferred to speaking in tongues (that is, the gift of divers kinds of tongues): because, while he who speaks in other tongues speaks to God, for nobody understands him and he utters mysteries by the Spirit, and in order that the Church may understand what he has said and thus may be edified, it is necessary for someone (who has the gift of interpretation) to interpret what he has spoken in other tongues; he who prophesieth speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men, and since the words spoken through the gift of prophecy are spoken in the language that everybody in the Church can understand, they do not need to be interpreted and they edify the church. Now I am going to quote some prophecies uttered by the prophet Isaiah, so that you may understand what Paul means when he states that “he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort".

Words of edification: “Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and rie in their place? For his God doth
instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working” (Isaiah 28:23-29).

Words of exhortation: “Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. ... Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. .... Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 46:8; 8:13; 1:16-17).

Words of comfort: “I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;.... Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. ..... But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 51:12; 7-8; 43:1-2).

Concerning the gift of prophecy, two important things must be said. The first thing is that a prophecy is not the revelation of a future event (as some think) because – as we have already seen – the revelation of a future event is given through the gift of word of wisdom. If you read carefully the above mentioned words of Isaiah, you will note that there is no revelation of specific future events in them. That there is a difference between prophecy and revelation is confirmed by the fact that Paul mentions them separately, for he says: “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?” (1 Corinthians 14:6). The second thing to be said is this. The gift of prophecy alone does not make anyone a prophet, because in order to be recognized as a prophet a believer must have also some revelation gifts (which are these: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits). The examples of the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others show this clearly, for besides the gift of prophecy, those prophets had revelation gifts. However, let’s come back to tongues.

As we saw before, Paul says that he would like everyone of us to speak in tongues, but he would rather have us prophesy, because he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues (for the reason he said before). However, if he who speaks in tongues does interpret as well, then this superiority vanishes, that is to say, he who prophesies is not greater than he who speaks in tongues, for Paul says: “Except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” - the NIV reads: “Unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” – 1 Corinthians 14:5. Why does Paul say ‘except he interpret”? Because if he who speaks in other tongues does interpret what is spoken, the church will understand what the Spirit has said in other tongues through him to God. Let me give you an explicative example: let us suppose that while the Church is gathered a brother prays to God in other tongues asking Him to deliver a certain brother named John (who is in Ivory Coast and whom the Church does not know) from the hands of some wicked men who are about to kill him because of his faith, and that after he has prayed he interprets that prayer. What will happen in the assembly? For sure, the believers who are gathered together will be able to say ‘Amen’ to that prayer, because they have understood it. And obviously all the believers who are gathered will be greatly edified since they will know that the Spirit has interceded (through the mouth of a believer who is among them) for a child of God unknown to all of them who lives in another nation. If the words spoken in tongues are the words of a song, then the members of the Church by hearing the interpretation will be edified for they
will understand that spiritual song. As far as this subject is concerned, I know that many pastors affirm – on the basis of the above mentioned words of Paul (1 Corinthians 14:5) - that tongues plus interpretation is equal to prophecy, because the Church receives edification, thus according to them the interpretation is a message directed toward the Church, or a ‘message in tongues.’ But they are mistaken for lack of knowledge and because they don’t divide the word of truth rightly. They are wrong because we are edified not only by hearing a message of exhortation, of comfort, and of edification addressed to men, but also by hearing a prayer or a song which is uttered in another tongue and then interpreted. There is no doubt about it. Please answer this question of mine: ‘If we feel edified when we hear some brothers praying or singing in Italian, because we feel that their prayer or their song is prompted by the Spirit of God, why shouldn’t we feel edified when we hear a prayer or a song uttered by the Holy Spirit in another tongue through them and then interpreted? Furthermore, if those words of Paul had that meaning, Paul would have contradicted himself because at the beginning of the fourteenth chapter he said that he who speaks in a tongue speaks to God and not to men (1 Corinthians 14:1). Therefore, speaking in tongues is always directed toward God, whether it is interpreted or not. It follows then that according to the Scripture there are no messages in tongues, for he who speaks in tongues does not speak to men but to God, and since the speaking in tongues is addressed to God and not to men, also the interpretation of it is addressed to God and not to men.

Now Paul, after saying “unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” (NIV), says these words: “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:6-15). As you can see, according to these words of Paul, speaking in tongues in the assembly, if it is not accompanied by the interpretation, will be useless to the others. In other words, speaking in other tongues without interpretation is like a trumpet which gives an uncertain sound, it is like someone who speaks in a foreign language and we don’t understand what he says. Of course, he who speaks in other tongues is edified (however, he is edified not because he understands what he says in the Spirit, but because he speaks in the Spirit), but the Church is not edified since it does not understand what he says. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaks in a tongue to a barbarian, and he that speaks shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Therefore let him that speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:6-15). As you can see, according to these words of Paul, speaking in tongues in the assembly, if it is not accompanied by the interpretation, will be useless to the others. In other words, speaking in other tongues without interpretation is like a trumpet which gives an uncertain sound, it is like someone who speaks in a foreign language and we don’t understand what he says. Of course, he who speaks in other tongues is edified (however, he is edified not because he understands what he says in the Spirit, but because he speaks in the Spirit), but the Church is not edified since it does not understand what he says. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaks in a tongue to a barbarian, and he that speaks shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

And immediately after, Paul says: “Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:16-19). In other words, Paul says: ‘On the contrary, if you
don’t do what I tell you to do, that is, if you pray or sing in an another tongue without interpreting the prayer or the song, how can he who occupies the place of the uninformed say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving? He can’t. Of course, you give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you, but in the church (please note that Paul says ‘in the church’ and not ‘when I am alone,’ for it is evident he is speaking of the case in which the believer is together with other believers and not alone, because when he is alone the one who hears his words is God) I would rather speak five intelligible words than ten thousand words in another tongue. And then Paul says: “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Corinthians 14:20). In other words, in malice be infants, but in understanding don’t be infants but adults.

At this point, Paul quotes these words spoken by Isaiah: “With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:21), and says: “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Corinthians 14:22-25). So, according to what God said through Isaiah, tongues are a sign for unbelievers and not for believers; while prophecy is a sign for believers. Now I want to say this. According to some believers, these words of Isaiah confirm that speaking in tongues is a message to men. But that is not true; otherwise Paul, when he says that he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God, would contradict himself. Know this, that those words of Isaiah are quoted by Paul in order to confirm that tongues are a sign for the Jews who don’t believe. In other words, God said through Isaiah that He would speak to Israel through the sign of tongues, that is, He would call their attention through that sign. The expression “with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people” means that God, through this supernatural manifestation, would show His people (whom He foreknew) that He was among the Gentiles. So the Jews would be able to recognize that God was among those who spoke in other tongues even though they belonged to other nations. Therefore God did not mean that those who would speak in other tongues by the Spirit would speak words to (directed toward) the Jews (for instance, words like ‘repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ’), but that He would use that sign to call their attention to the Gospel. I agree with brother R. L. Brandt when, in expounding 1 Corinthians 14:21, he says: ‘God would speak to Israel, not necessarily in a direct message to them, but by permitting an easily recognizable supernatural manifestation, through which, if they would, they could discern divine reality’ (R. L. Brandt, *Tongues the greatest gift?*, Bridge Publishing, Inc., South Plainfield, New Jersey, USA, 1981, p. 57-58). In the book of the Acts of the apostles we find the biblical record of the fulfilment of the prediction concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which shows that God spoke through the sign of tongues (that is, through this supernatural manifestation) to the Jews. Here is what is written: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and
strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:1-21). As you can see, the Jews, who came together after they heard the sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, were amazed when they heard the followers of Jesus speaking in their own native language and wondered what that might mean. However, bear in mind that the disciples of Jesus were not addressing the Jews who came together, for they were addressing God as they spoke of the wonderful works of God. Nevertheless, God spoke to them through that miraculous phenomenon or sign. For the signs given by God speak; that’s what we must always bear in mind. Listen to what God said to Moses, when He gave Moses the power to do certain signs and wonders before the people of Israel so that they might believe that God had really appeared to him: “And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land” (Exodus 4:9). Please notice the following expression “if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign,” for it confirms that the signs of God ‘have a voice.’ So tongues also are a sign of God for unbelievers. However, prophecy is a sign for those who believe; that’s why Paul says that if the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and an unbeliever comes in, he will say that we are out of our mind, whereas if an unbeliever comes in and everyone is prophesying he will be judged by all and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare and he will fall down and worship God exclaiming ‘God is really among you!’. What then shall we do? Here is the answer of Paul: “When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). As for tongues, therefore, if anyone speaks in a tongue, two or at the most three should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. However, if there is no interpreter, those who speak in tongues should speak in tongues in a very low voice and not in a loud voice. The prophets, who have the gift of prophecy, should speak; but only two or three prophets at the most, and the others should examine carefully their prophecies. However, if a revelation is given to one of the prophets who is sitting down, then the first speaker should stop. The conclusion of the speech of Paul is this: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy,
and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:37-40). As you can see, the words of Paul are the commandments of God. Therefore, believers must desire earnestly to prophesy, speaking in tongues must not be forbidden, but all things must be done decently and in order.

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

In the Gospel according to Matthew we read: “Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil [demon], blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils [demons], but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils [demons]. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils [demons], by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils [demons] by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matthew 12:22-32), and in the Gospel according to Mark we read: “And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils [demons] casteth he out devils [demons]. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:22-30).

As you can see, Jesus rebuked sharply those who said that He had the prince of demons and that by his help He cast out demons, because by saying those words they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit of God, for Jesus cast out demons by the help of the Holy Spirit and not by the help of Satan. In other words, because they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to Satan, blaspheming thus against the Spirit. They asserted that He was possessed by Beelzebub, not filled with the Holy Spirit. They attributed the power to drive out demons, not to the Holy Spirit of God, but to the prince of demons. And because of the seriousness of their offense Jesus told them that they would never be forgiven, for they were guilty of an eternal sin. Now we know that Jesus Christ still baptizes His disciples with the Holy Spirit, and when they are baptized they are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance, just as on the day of Pentecost (in Jerusalem, about two thousand years ago) about one hundred and twenty disciples began to speak in other tongues after they were filled with the Holy Spirit. We know also that the Holy Spirit still distributes His gifts to believers according to the will of God. So there are still Christians who speak with different kinds of tongues to God by the Spirit, who interpret those tongues by the supernatural help of the Spirit of God, who prophesy by the Spirit, who receive a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge by
the same Spirit, who perform miracles and healings by the Holy Spirit, who discern evil spirits (demons) and cast them out of the demon possessed in the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (demons come out of these people by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is much more powerful than Satan and all his demons), and those who are enabled by the same Spirit to perform signs and wonders through the gift of faith. All these things are wrought by the Holy Spirit, for the edification of the saints, and these things lead us to glorify the glorious and powerful name of Jesus Christ. So we praise and glorify the name of Jesus Christ because in His name the works of the devil are destroyed, his schemes brought to light and exposed, the saints are comforted and encouraged in their faith, and many unbelievers repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, because many people across the world believe in Jesus when they see the supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit. However, there are many people who affirm that those Christians who speak in other tongues, cast out demons, heal the sick, perform miracles, prophesy, have visions and revelations and so on, are of the devil because they have evil spirits or are demon-possessed. Therefore, these people say against these Christians the same things that those scribes and Pharisees said against Jesus while He was still on the earth. And unfortunately, among these ignorant people there are many who claim that they have believed in God and in His Son. They belong to many and various Protestant Churches. These people are greatly mistaken because they don’t know the Scriptures nor the power of God. I exhort you, brethren, to beware of them, because they deny the power of our immutable God, and speak against the Holy Spirit. And if you, who are reading these words, are tempted to say that those Christians who have these spiritual manifestations in their life have evil spirits or are demon-possessed, I exhort you to resist the devil and not to say these evil things, lest you blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. Know this, that they are full of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is working through them. I exhort you to seek the face of the Lord, and to desire earnestly the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. You will be blessed, and you will not regret your decision. You will finally know the power of God and you will be thanking the Lord until the end of your life for making known to you His power.

I want to tell you one more thing. According to the Scriptures, if a believer denies the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, if he denies that He died on the cross for our sins and rose again for our justification, he tramples the Son of God underfoot, counts the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and insults the Spirit of grace. Such a man commits the “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16) and therefore at his death he will go to perdition (hell) together with the wicked and on the day of judgement he will be cast into the lake of fire. For it is clearly written: “For if we sin wilfully [that is, if we commit the sin unto death] after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31). Therefore, to insult the Spirit of grace is to sin unto death. Flee from the sin unto death, for it is the most serious sin a believer may commit, since it is impossible for those who commit this sin to be brought back to repentance, for they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6). In other words, flee from the sin unto death, for a believer can repent of all sins he may commit except the sin unto death, for this is the unforgivable sin.
THE TRINITY

As I said before, according to the Scripture, the Godhead consists of Three Divine Persons, that is, God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. So God is one, but He exists in Three Persons. This doctrine is commonly called the doctrine of the Trinity: it is a very important doctrine, which was attacked in the past and is still attacked by many people across the world, and it is one of the doctrinal basis of our faith.

Before I show you the Trinity from the Scriptures, I want to say something about the word ‘Trinity,’ which does not occur in the Holy Scriptures. The word ‘Trinity’ comes from the Latin word Trinitas, which means ‘triad’ or ‘state of being three-fold’, which was coined by Tertullian of Carthage (one of the so called Church Fathers), toward the end of the second century after Christ, to explain the scriptural concept that the Godhead consists of Three Divine Persons, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore the fact that the word ‘Trinity’ does not occur in the Scriptures is relative because, as we have already seen and as we are going to see better in a few moments, the concept of a Triune God is abundantly present within the Scriptures. Just as the expression ‘the immortality of the soul’ does not occur in the Bible, yet in the Bible is present the concept of the immortality of the human soul, so even though the word ‘trinity’ does not occur in the Bible, in it is present the concept of the Trinity.

Verses of the Scripture supporting the concept of the Trinity

- Matthew wrote: “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:13-17). In this event, which occurred at the Jordan river, we see the Father who spoke from heaven, the Son who was on earth who was baptized by John, and the Holy Spirit who descended like a dove and alighted upon Him. This was a clear manifestation of the Trinity, all of the Three Persons of the Godhead being referred to.

- Jesus said to His disciples: “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:15-17). Jesus, while He was still on earth with His disciples, was the Comforter, whom God had sent to comfort those who mourned, but since He had to go back to the Father, who had sent Him, He prayed the Father that He might give them another Comforter, that is, the Holy Spirit, who would be with them forever. And at the appointed time His prayer was heard, for the Father, in answer to the prayer of His Son, sent the Spirit of truth to meet the needs which arose after the departure of His Son. The concept of the Trinity is present in the words of Jesus.

- Jesus, before He was taken up into heaven, said to His disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost…” (Matthew 28:19). Water baptism, which I remind you does not purge a man from his sins because it is just ‘an appeal to God for a good conscience’, must be administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus would never have commanded
to do such a thing if He and the Father and the Holy Spirit were not one, that is to say, a Trinity in Unity.

- Paul says to the Romans: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11). In these words we find God the Father who raised up Jesus; the Son who was raised up by Him; and the Holy Spirit whom He sent forth into our hearts and by whom He will quicken our mortal bodies. Here also the concept of the Trinity is expressed very clearly.

- Paul, at the end of one of his epistles to the Corinthians, wrote: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14). As you can see, here also the Three Persons are mentioned separately; however, notwithstanding this, they are one.

- Paul said to the Ephesians: “There is …. One Spirit …. One Lord, …. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4,5,6). Also from these words we learn that the Three Persons of whom the Godhead consists, are distinct from one another yet in perfect unity with one another.

- Paul said to the Corinthians: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Please note that Paul first of all mentions the Spirit, secondly the Lord Jesus Christ and then God. Also these words make it clear that the Three Divine Persons, even though they are distinct from one another, are one God.

- The Scripture condemns the three blasphemies against the Three Persons of the Godhead. Those who blaspheme the name of God commit a sin (for it is written: “Do not blaspheme God” Exodus 22:28 – NIV), as well as those who blaspheme against the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit. However, while those who blaspheme against God and the Son of Man can be forgiven, those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit cannot obtain the remission of their sin for Jesus said: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith ever they shall blasphem: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation” (Mark 3:28-29 – The NIV reads in verse 29: “But whoever blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin”). These words of Jesus make it clear that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person distinct from the Son of God and from the Father. That’s why when we speak about the Son we don’t refer to the Holy Spirit and vice versa, and that’s why when we speak about the Father we don’t refer to the Son nor to the Holy Spirit, because the Three are distinct from one another. In order that you might understand this concept, I tell you this: we can’t affirm that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins because this is not true, for the Scripture says that it was Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross and not the Father. Neither can we affirm that the Holy Spirit died for our sins because this is not true either. Nor can we affirm that the Holy Spirit baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit, because the Scripture states that it is Christ who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. However, even though we must mention separately the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and their characteristics, we know that the Three are one. Brothers in the Lord, that’s a mystery, that’s why our words cannot explain it fully. As for the Trinity, which is not fully understandable, some say, ‘God cannot be honoured through a concept that nobody fully understands.’ Christians must know the God whom they worship. There is no room for mysteries concerning God!’ These are vain words spoken by people who willfully forget or do not know that Zophar the Naamathite said: “Can you search out the deep
things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven – what
can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7-9 - NKJV). Know this, it is not true that there is no room for
mysteries, because there are many mysteries concerning God, His nature and His way of
working things. However, although there are divine mysteries which have not been revealed to
us or we cannot fully comprehend, we are fully persuaded that we have known God, for John
says: “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father” (1 John 2:13) and
also: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of
God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7). However, it is evident that this does not mean that to us all
is clear and there are no more mysteries concerning God, because it is also written: “For we
know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9) and also: “For now we see through a glass, darkly” (1
Corinthians 13:12). But one day we will know just as we also are known.
To God be the glory forever. Amen.

The perfect unity existing between the Son and the Father

In the days of His flesh Jesus spoke in various ways about the perfect unity which existed
between Him and the Father. Let’s see what He said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30); “It
is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of
myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me” (John 8:17-18); “Believe me that I
am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John
14:11); “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the
Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father
loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater
works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth
them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath
committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour
the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John
5:19-23); “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in
himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man”
(John 5:26-27); “He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he
that seeth me seeth him that sent me” (John 12:44-45); “If ye had known me, ye should have
known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (John 14:7); “All
things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither
knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him”
(Matthew 11:27); “All things that the Father hath are mine” (John 16:15); “And the glory which
thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and
thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast
sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:22-23).
Now in order to explain to you this perfect union and collaboration which existed and which still
exists between the Son and the Father, I will compare some verses of the Scripture with some
others.

● One day Jesus spoke to the Jews about His resurrection in this way: “Destroy this temple, and
in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19); so according to these words of Jesus, He Himself
would raise His body up. Peter said to the Jews: “And [ye] killed the Prince of life, whom God
hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15); so according to Peter it was
God who raised Jesus from the dead.

● Jesus, in speaking to His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit, said: “But the Comforter,
which [who] is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all
things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26), and also: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which [who] proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26). Therefore, according to Jesus, the Holy Spirit would be sent by the Father and also by the Son (however, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, as Jesus Himself said).

- Jesus, in speaking about His sheep, said: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28), and in the prayer He addressed to God on the night He was betrayed He said: “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:1-2). Therefore, the One who gives eternal life is Jesus. However, Paul says to the Romans: “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23), and the apostle John says: “God hath given to us eternal life” (1 John 5:11). Therefore it is God who gives eternal life. So we can affirm that eternal life is given by the Father and also by the Son.

- Jesus said: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). Please note that Jesus said that He himself will raise the believers from the dead. However, it is also written that God will raise us from the dead, for Paul said to the Corinthians: “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Corinthians 6:14).

- Paul says to the Romans: “Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:6). Therefore the One who called us is Christ. However, Paul himself in the same epistle says that those whom God foreknew “he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified ….” (Romans 8:29-30). Therefore we have been called by God and by Jesus Christ.

- Paul says to Timothy: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Timothy 1:12). That means that Paul was counted faithful by Jesus Christ who put him into the ministry of the Word. However, the same apostle says to the Thessalonians: “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Therefore Paul was put into the ministry by God as well as by Jesus Christ.

- Paul said to the elders of Ephesus: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Therefore it was Christ who gave the ministry to Paul. The apostle confirmed this to Timothy when he said: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Timothy 1:12). However, Paul says to the Colossians that it was God who gave him the ministry: “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God” (Colossians 1:25 – The NIV reads: “I have become its [of the Church] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness”).

**The Three work together in perfect accord**

The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in perfect accord.
• **Man was created by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**

In the book of Genesis, in regard to the creation of man, we read: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ….” (Genesis 1:26). As you can see, God, when He spoke, used the plural pronoun ‘us.’ Who did He speak to? Perhaps to angels? Not at all, for angels are creatures. He spoke to the Word and the Everlasting Spirit who were with Him.

• **We were made in the womb of our mother by God and the Word and the Holy Spirit**

David said to God: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13 - NIV). Elihu said to Job: “The Spirit of God hath made me” (Job 33:4). And John says about the Word of God: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).

• **The apostle Paul was sent to preach by God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**

The apostle Paul says to Titus: “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (Titus 1:1-3), so he makes it clear that he was sent to preach by God the Father. However, the same apostle says to the Corinthians: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17), so according to these words Paul was sent to preach by the Son of God also. And according to these words of Luke: “So they [Barnabas and Saul], being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:4), he was sent by the Holy Spirit. So the Three, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, with one accord sent Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

• **As for our salvation, we have to say that the Three, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, worked together in perfect accord**

The Father sent the Holy Spirit, as it is written: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name ...” (John 14:26), who has convicted us of sin, of righteousness and of judgement, as it is written: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8); then He drew us to the Son, for Jesus said: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44) and also: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (John 6:37); and the Son set us free from our sins, as it is written: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1)

• **The process of transformation into the image of the Son of God, which one day began in us and which is still going on, is accomplished by all the Persons of the Godhead**

Here are the Bible verses which confirm what I have just said. Paul says to the Philippians: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). He says to the Corinthians: “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you” (2 Corinthians 13:3) and also: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).
The work of sanctification is accomplished by God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The following verses of the Scripture confirm this. Paul says to the Thessalonians: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The writer to the Hebrews says: “For both he [Christ] that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). And Peter says in his first epistle that we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2).

As for the guidance, we have to say that we are guided by God and His Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The following verses of the Scripture confirm this. In the Psalms it is written: “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death” (Psalm 48:14). In the Gospel according to Matthew, it is written that Jesus said: “And do not be called teachers; for One is your teacher, the Christ” (Matthew 23:10 – The IBRV reads ‘guide,’ that is, ‘guides’ instead of ‘teachers,’ and ‘Guida’ that is, ‘Guide’ instead of ‘Teacher’, anyway our Teacher is our Guide). In the Gospel according to John, it is written: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

We believers acknowledge that we know in part, we acknowledge that the knowledge of this mystery is too lofty for us to attain; the Scripture declares to each of us: “‘Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7-9 – NKJV). At the moment, we can only examine the verses of the Scripture which refer to the Trinity, but we cannot offer a complete explanation as to how the Three are one. However, know this, we do not believe that there are three gods, because we are not polytheists as many people are, but we believe there is only one God, in Him we trust, Him we know, Him we love, Him we serve, He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; there is also one Lord, who is the Son of God; and there is one Spirit, who is the everlasting Spirit of our God, who dwells in our hearts, by whom we cry: Abba! Father! These Three Persons are one God from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

The Three are One and dwell in us

Now let’s see some verses of the Scripture which show us that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit dwell in us.

The Word teaches that God the Father dwells in us

Jesus said: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). John says: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15). And Paul says: “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

The Word teaches that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dwells in us
Jesus said: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). Paul says to the Ephesians: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:14-17). The same apostle says to the Colossians: “To whom [the saints] God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). He says to the Galatians: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20), and to the Romans: “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:10), and to the Corinthians: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

The Word teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in us (bear in mind that He is called also the Spirit of God and Spirit of His Son)

Jesus said: “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17). Paul says to the Romans: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). He says to the Corinthians: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19), to the Galatians: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6), and to Timothy: “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Timothy 1:14). James says: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yeams jealously?’” (James 4:5 - NKJV).

Brothers, as you can see, these verses of the Scriptures show clearly that God and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit dwell in us. How can we understand all this? We can’t, at the moment we can only accept this by faith. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His works!

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you, brothers, to hold fast the doctrine of the Trinity, because all those who forsake it fall into serious doctrinal errors which are the consequence of the denial of the Trinitarian concept of God. Know this, departure from the doctrine of the Trinity has been and is one of the major sources of heresy in the Church. Therefore, I exhort you to beware of those who, even though they claim to be Christians, deny in one way or another the Trinity, such as the ‘Jesus Only’ (Pentecostals Oneness), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, the members of the Church of the Kingdom of God (the followers of A. Freytag), and the followers of Moon. Put inside your hearts all the verses of the Scripture which support the concept of the Trinity, and all those which attest to the divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, so that you may have all of them ready on your lips when you are asked questions about the Trinity and you have to refute those who oppose the truth.
The contents of the Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. It is composed of sixty six books; thirty nine books belong to the Old Testament and twenty seven belong to the New Testament. Here are the names of these books.

Old Testament Books

New Testament Books
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation

Here is a very brief summary of the contents of the Bible.

The book of Genesis contains the account of the creation of all things; the story of the fall of the first man named Adam; the account of the first murder (Cain, son of Adam, killed his brother Abel); the story of Noah, who was saved from the flood together with seven others in the ark which God commanded him to build; the story of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob (who are the forefathers of the nation of Israel, that is, of the Jews, to whom God promised He would give the land of Canaan to their offspring); and the story of one of the sons of Jacob called Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers and sent to Egypt, where by God's grace he became the governor of Egypt, and who, after he was made known to his brothers, sent for his father Jacob (to whom God gave the name 'Israel') and his whole family, who thus went down to Egypt.

The book of Exodus contains the account of the growth of the Israelites, their enslavement in Egypt, and their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage (which lasted four hundred years); the account of their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai; the formation of the covenant between God and the people at Mount Sinai, and the giving of moral and ceremonial laws on which the covenant was based, detailed instructions for the construction of a tabernacle, priestly robes, and other ritual objects; the designation of Aaron as high priest and of his sons as priests; the first national apostasy in worshiping the golden calf, and the construction and dedication of the tabernacle.

The book of Leviticus contains laws on various types of sacrifice; rules for the priests; laws on purity and impurity, including the dietary law, regulations on the feasts of God (the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles), on the jubilee year and on vows, as well as ritual and ethical codes not contained in Exodus. The only narrative incidents of the book are these: the ordination of Aaron and his sons; the first offerings of Aaron; the destruction of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu for they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, and the stoning of a blasphemer.
The book of **Numbers** contains the following things: the account of the census of the people of Israel (the census of the Levites was taken separately) taken at God’s command; the commandments concerning the vow of separation to the Lord as a Nazirite; the priestly blessing; the offerings at the dedication of the tabernacle; the setting apart of the Levites; the Passover celebrated by the Israelites in the desert of Sinai; the construction of two silver trumpets for communication signals; the departure from Mount Sinai; the judgement of God upon the Israelites for they had complained about their hardships; the account of how God provided meat for the Israelites; the murmurings of Aaron and Miriam against Moses for he had married a Cushite woman and the divine judgement upon Miriam; the exploration of the land of Canaan and the rebellion of the Israelites against God and the judgement of God upon the rebels (they did not believe in God when God commanded them to enter the land of Canaan and take hold of it, and so God swore that they would wander in the desert for forty years, only their children would enter into the land); laws concerning the offerings for unintentional sins; the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses and Aaron and the account of how God caused the earth to open its mouth and to swallow them; the budding of Aaron’s staff; duties of priests and Levites; the offerings for the priests and Levites; the account of how God brought water out of a rock for the Israelites; the rebellion of Moses and Aaron at the waters of Meribah and the judgement of God against them (He forbade them to enter the land of Canaan); the murmuring of the Israelites against God and Moses during their journey from Mount Hor to Moab and the judgement of God upon them (He sent venomous snakes among them which bit the people and many died); the conquest of the Amorite’s land and of the land of king Bashan; the story of Balaam the prophet (he was summoned by Balak king of Moab to curse Israel, but Balaam blessed the Israelites three times, so Balak drove him away, but afterward Balaam taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality, and for his sin he was put to death by the Israelites at God’s command); the second census; laws of inheritance; the consecration of Joshua as successor of Moses; calendar of worship; laws concerning vows of women; the destruction of the Midianites; the allotment of TransJordan; plans to conquer the Canaanites and divide the land; Levite cities and cities of Refuge.

The book of **Deuteronomy** contains a series of three discourses by Moses. The first discourse summarizes the events between the encounter with God at Sinai and the encampment in Moab, followed by an urgent appeal for faithfulness to God. The second discourse recounts the giving of the Ten Words (Commandments) at Sinai. This is followed by an explanation of the first commandment centered around the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Heb: "hear"), and an extended appeal to remain faithful to God in spite of the temptations that will come in the new land. Specific instruction in communal life begins in chapter 12, concluding with a covenant ceremony and homily focusing on their responsibilities to God and each other. The third discourse encapsulates the first two, with a historical review, covenant renewal, admonitions to faithfulness, and warnings of the consequences of disobedience. The conclusion includes instructions concerning Moses’ successor, final instructions and liturgies, the Song and Blessing of Moses, and his death.

The book of **Joshua** contains the story of the conquest and partition of the land of Canaan.

The book of the **Judges** contains the stories of the judges, whom God chose and sent to deliver the Israelites from the hands of their enemies.

The book of **Ruth** contains the story of a Moabite woman called Ruth, who became the wife of Boaz (who was a descendant of Judah) and gave birth to a son called Obed, who was the father of Jesse the father of David.

**The first and second book of Samuel** contain the story of the prophet Samuel, the story of king Saul and king David, his successor.

**The first book of Kings** contains the story of king Solomon, then the story of the division of the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms (that division was God’s punishment on Solomon for his
rebellion against God), that is, the kingdom of the north (Israel) and the kingdom of the south (Judah). Then in it we find the stories of several kings of Israel and of Judah.

The second book of Kings contains the stories of all the other kings of Judah and of Israel. This book describes the downfall of the Kingdom of Israel (606 before Christ) and of the Kingdom of Judah (586 before Christ). Their downfall was God’s punishment on them for their sins and the continued ignoring of His messengers (prophets). The Kingdom of Israel was punished through the Assyrian army, which deported many Israelites to Assyria. Whereas the Kingdom of Judah was punished through the Babylonian army, which destroyed Jerusalem, the walls of the holy city, the temple which had been built by Solomon, and deported many Jews to Babylon.

The first and the second book of Chronicles contain many genealogies, a part of the story of David, and the whole story of king Solomon, and the stories of all the kings of Judah. The book of Ezra contains the account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity (which occurred after seventy years), and of the rebuilding of the altar and temple. In the book of Nehemiah we find the account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem made under the leadership of Nehemiah.

In the book of Esther we find the story of the deliverance of the Jews from a massacre plotted against all the Jews who lived in the Kingdom ruled by king Xerxes (whose wife was Esther, a Jewish woman). That massacre had been plotted by Haman who was the highest royal official. The book of Job is the story of the sufferings of a man named Job, who was very rich yet righteous, who was tested by God through severe trials. For God took away everything Job had, and allowed Satan to afflict Job with painful sores. However, Job stood the test and after many sufferings God made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 Psalms (prayers, songs and poems) written by various authors (David, Solomon, and others).

The book of Proverbs contains many wise proverbs and sayings uttered mostly by king Solomon.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a poem which emphasizes the vanity of earthly things. All is vanity and grasping for the wind. We must fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.

The Song of Solomon or Song of Songs is a loving dialogue between a bridegroom and his bride. It is an allegory relating to the Church, symbolizing the mutual love of Christ and the Church.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are the books of the prophets, which contain many sharp words of God spoken through the prophets against the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah because of their rebellion against Him. God rebuked them sharply through the prophets and exhorted them to repent of their iniquities and to return to Him, but they refused to hear Him, so God foretold them His punishments on them. They contain also the predictions of the punishments of God on many foreign nations (Moab, Edom, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and others), as well as words of comfort and encouragement for the downcast. But these books contain also the predictions concerning the Messiah (the Anointed One), who would save His people from their sins. The book of Daniel and the book of Jonah are a bit different from the others; for Daniel is the story of the prophet Daniel while he was in Babylon (among other things we find in it the account of several deliverances which were experienced by Daniel, and several visions he had concerning the rise and fall of several kingdoms); and Jonah is the story of the prophet Jonah, sent by God to Nineveh to preach against the inhabitants of that great city, who believed God and turned from their evil ways, and thus God had compassion on them and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened. The book of Lamentations is series of dirges by Jeremiah, bewailing the afflictions of Israel (particularly of Jerusalem).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are called ‘the Gospels,’ contain the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah: His birth (the Gospel according to Mark and that according to
John, unlike the other two Gospels, do not contain any reference to His birth), His life, His ministry, His teachings, His miracles and healings, and His signs and wonders, His sufferings, His death and His resurrection, His appearances, and His ascension to heaven (the Gospel according to Matthew and that according to John, unlike the other two Gospels, do not end with the account of the ascension of Jesus into heaven). Matthew emphasizes the Messiahshep of Jesus, showing from the Scriptures how the predictions concerning the Messiah, made by the prophets of old, were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Mark emphasizes the supernatural power of Christ over nature, disease and demons. Luke is the most complete biography of Jesus; it portrays Him as the Son of Man, full of compassion for the sinful and the poor. John emphasizes the Sonship of Jesus, and therefore His Deity: it contains His teaching on the new birth, on salvation, on the relationship between Him and His Father, on His mission, and on the Holy Spirit. Matthew, Mark and Luke and called Synoptic Gospels for they describe many events from a similar point of view.

The book of the Acts of the apostles contains an account of the ascension of Jesus to heaven, and the history of the early Church from the ascension of Jesus till about 60 after Christ. In it we find many stories of conversions (among which that of Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle of the Gentiles), several accounts of baptisms with the Holy Spirit, and the accounts of some of the miracles and healings worked by the apostles and by other servants of God, the accounts of several deliverances, of some persecutions against the saints, of several missionary journeys made by Paul and his fellow workers, and other things.

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, are epistles written by the apostle Paul. They contain many important teachings (on justification by faith, on the purpose of God according to election, on the atoning death of Christ, on the mystery of Christ, on the Church, on water baptism and the Lord’s Supper, on marriage, on the gifts of the Spirit, on the resurrection of the dead, on the coming again of Jesus, etc.), exhortations (to live a holy and godly life, to pray without ceasing, to practice hospitality, to stand firm in the faith, to fight the good fight, etc.) and warnings (against false doctrines, false ministers of Christ, and the sinful lusts of the flesh) for the Church. 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus are called ‘pastoral epistles’: in them Paul gives instructions to Timothy and Titus concerning their conduct and ministerial work. Philemon is a letter written to Philemon, beseeching him to receive and forgive Onesimus, a runaway slave.

Hebrews is an epistle written (some say by Paul, however I don’t think Paul is the author of it) to the Jews who had turned to the Lord, through which the author warns them not to draw back; in this epistle the author explains why Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses and Aaron, and why the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant.

James is an epistle written by James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: the author urges them to persevere under trial, to put into practice the Word of God, not to show favouritism, to keep a tight rein on their tongue, to submit themselves to God, and to pray in faith.

1 Peter and 2 Peter are epistles written by the apostle Peter; in the first epistle he urges the saints to be patient in affliction, to be holy, to submit to rulers and masters, and he exhorts wives to be submissive to their husbands and to dress modestly: in the second epistle he urges the saints to make their calling and election sure, to beware of false teachers, and to live holy and godly lives while they wait for the blessed hope.

1 John, 2 John and 3 John, are epistles written by the apostle John; in the first epistle he exhorts the saints to walk in the light, to beware of antichrists, to test the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world, to have faith in the Son of God; in the second epistle he urges the chosen lady to walk in love, and to beware of deceivers; in the third epistle he urges a certain Gaius to imitate what is good.
Jude is an epistle written by Jude, brother of James, who urges the saints to contend for the faith. He warns them against some godless men, who have secretly slipped in among them, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation is a book written by the apostle John near the end of the first century after Christ while he was on the isle of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He wrote what he saw and heard in a heavenly vision, and sent the book to the seven Churches of Asia. Many future events still to be fulfilled (such as the coming of the lawless one, the return of Christ, the Millennial reign on the earth, the day of judgement, and the descent of the New Jerusalem on the new earth) are recorded in this book.

The Old Testament was written over a period of time of approximately 1400 years (from around 1400 before Christ to the end of the first century before Christ), while the New Testament books were written at various times during the first century after Christ.

The inspiration of the Bible

All the books of the Bible are inspired by God (when I say that the books of the Bible are inspired, I don't refer to the translations or copies but to the original books), as it is written: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16. Literally 'is God-breathed' or 'is divinely breathed' because this is the meaning of the Greek word theopneustos used by Paul), and also: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Someone may say: 'But these words of Paul and Peter refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament!' Yes, that's true, for Paul, before saying to Timothy those words, said to him: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15). However, that does not mean that the Writings of Paul are not inspired by God and thus they should not be called or considered Holy Scriptures. For the apostle Peter, at the end of his second epistle, in speaking about the epistles of Paul, which contain some things which are hard to understand, says that ignorant and unstable people twist them "as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16 - NIV), that is, the Scriptures of the Old Testament that they had. As you can see, Peter calls the Writings of Paul "Scriptures", and Paul was a contemporary of Peter. Anyway, even inside the epistles of Paul there are some expressions which attest to the divine origin of his words. For instance, Paul says to the Thessalonians that they had received the message preached by him, Silvanus and Timothy, not as the word of men, but “as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13), and he says to them also: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Furthermore, Paul says to the Corinthians: “The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37), and also: “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17). As for those words of Peter (those referring to the inspiration of the Scripture, which I mentioned before), it must be said that they also refer to the Writings of the Old Testament, but even in his case it must be said that his Writings are inspired by God and thus are Word of God, for at the end of his first epistle he said that what He wrote to them was “the true grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12) and urged the saints to stand fast in it. Therefore the Writings of Paul and Peter, as well as those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, and Jude, and the epistle to the Hebrews, are the Word of God. The
inspiration of all these Writings (that is, those which belong to the Old and New Testaments) is attested to us by the Holy Spirit, whom God has sent into our hearts. For when we read or hear them or meditate on them we feel inside us the approval of the Holy Spirit, who makes us feel peace and joy. Why do we feel peace and joy when we read or hear or meditate on these Writings? Because the Words of God comfort, edify and make glad our inward man. Also when we keep them we feel comforted and happy; we feel indeed a great joy and a great peace when we keep the commandments of God. Therefore there is no other book like the Bible, for it is composed of writings inspired by God.

The Bible was written over a period of time of approximately 1500 years, because the law (which consists of the first five books of the Bible) was written by Moses around 1400 before Christ and the book of Revelation was written by John around the end of the first century after Christ. Notwithstanding this, the Bible is an extremely cohesive and unified book, and there are no contradictions in it (however, there are some seeming contradictions in it), which facts confirm its inspiration.

The authors of the books of the Bible did hold different social status, for instance Solomon was a king, Amos was a shepherd, Luke was a physician, and so on, yet all of them were moved by the Holy Spirit to write. In other words, they wrote not by their own will but by the will of God. We can affirm that all those who wrote the books of the Bible were specially chosen by God, and perfectly guided by the Spirit to put on paper the very words of God, and to do so without any error. The apostle Peter attests this when he says in his second epistle: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:19-21). As I said before, even though these words of Peter refer to the Writings of the Old Testament, they can apply also to the Writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Jude and Peter himself, for their writings also were inspired by God.

What do I mean when I say that all the sixty six books of the Bible are inspired? I will answer this question through the Holy Scriptures. My speech will begin from the assumption that when the writer of one of the inspired books wrote he was moved by the Holy Spirit, that is to say, he was moved just as the prophets and the apostles were moved by the Holy Spirit when they spoke from God. See to it that you do not misunderstand me; I am not saying that the prophets or the apostles were perfect and infallible, for the Scriptures themselves do not allow us to say or to think such a thing, for they also committed some mistakes, they also had to beg God's forgiveness for their sins, they also needed God to work in them what was well pleasing in His sight. Moses, the writer of the law, disobeyed God at the waters of Meribah and because of his rebellion God did not allow him (as well as his brother Aaron) to enter into the promised land; David, the author of many Psalms, once was guilty of murder and adultery and for those sins he was punished by God; Solomon, who wrote many proverbs and the Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, turned from God in his old age and went after other gods; the apostle Peter at Antioch forced Gentiles to follow Jewish customs and because of this he was severely rebuked by the apostle Paul in the presence of all; Paul once, while he was before the Sanhedrin, insulted the High Priest Ananias without knowing that he was the High Priest and for that act he was rebuked by those who stood by and he acknowledged that he had made a mistake. Therefore the prophets and the apostles were not infallible in their acts and in their words; had they been infallible, they would not have made those mistakes. However this cannot be said about all their acts and words; because those men often acted and spoke by the Holy Spirit, thus those acts done in those peculiar circumstances, as well as those words uttered in those circumstances, did not contain any error of any kind. Let me give you two biblical examples of men who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Spirit: Moses and Paul.

Let's begin with Moses. After he was on Mount Sinai and God spoke to him, Moses went back to the camp with his face that was radiant (however, he was not aware that his face was radiant)
and the Israelites were afraid to come near him. “And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai” (Exodus 34:31-32). Of course, it was by the help of the Holy Spirit that Moses told the Israelites all the words that God had said to him on Mount Sinai, thus it was the Holy Spirit who reminded him of all the words God had told him and it was the Holy Spirit who spoke through Moses. Therefore those words of Moses could not contain any error of any kind. Many times Moses spoke from God to the people or to Aaron; thus we have to say that Moses in all those circumstances did not make mistakes because he spoke from God. I say it again, the reason was because he spoke as He was moved and helped by the Holy Spirit. Let’s look now at his writings. How did Moses write? He wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit thus when he wrote he did not make any mistakes, for while he was writing the Holy Spirit helped him and guided him preventing him from making mistakes. That is what happened when he had to write down facts which he had eyewitnessed or words he had heard with his own ears (such as the division of the Red sea and the other wonders God wrought in the desert, the words God spoke to him on various occasions, the song the Israelites sang after God hurled the Egyptians into the sea, and the murmurings of the Israelites in the desert), and that is what happened also when he had to write down events which he had not eyewitnessed or words which he had not heard with his own ears (such as the creation of the heavens and of the earth and all the things in them, and the words God spoke to create the light, the sun and the moon, and man). We can’t fully explain this way of writing, for it is a work accomplished by God through a human being and it transcends our understanding. However, since on the earth a supernatural writing phenomenon occurs among the ministers of the devil, who – as you know - tries always to imitate the ways of God, which is called automatic writing and by which some mediums write lies either from dictation of an evil spirit or as they are moved by an evil spirit that takes possession of them (thus they become a sort of passive instruments in the hands of evil spirits), we can say that the Holy Spirit of the Lord, who was upon Moses, took possession of him (this expression must not surprise you because in one place in the Bible it is written that “the Spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiez’rites were called out to follow him” Judges 6:34 - Darby Bible. The IBRV reads: “Ma lo spirito dell’Eterno s’impossessò di Gedeone, il quale sonò la tromba, e gli Abiezeriti furono convocati per seguirlo” which has the same meaning) and guided him to write, so the Holy Spirit used Moses as an instrument to write all the things He wanted and He prevented him from making linguistic mistakes and mistakes of memory. – Please note that I have mentioned the diabolical phenomenon called ‘automatic writing’ which occurs in the occult just to explain the mechanism by which divine inspiration took place, for I firmly believe that automatic writing is an imitation of the God-inspired process of the writing of the Holy Writings, and thus by observing what happens to the mediums when they practice automatic writing we may infer what happened to Moses when he wrote by (or under the direct) inspiration of God - Were all his writings perfect then? Yes, they were perfect. And this is confirmed by the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, who came down from heaven, quoted the law written by Moses when He had to answer the tempter in the desert: three times He quoted to Satan some words written in the law of Moses (thus some words which had been manually written by Moses). Jesus quoted the Law of Moses also when He spoke to the Jews. Jesus made it clear that to Him the law was free of error of any kind, for one day He said: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). – The ‘jot’ or ‘iota’ is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew yod, which is the smallest letter of the alphabet, while the ‘tittle’ is the projection of a stroke of the pen that distinguishes one letter from another. - Do you think that Jesus would have said such words about a book (or rather a scroll) written by human hands if He had not considered it free from error? I don’t think so. How would He have been able to declare such words if He did not believe the writings of Moses were without error? Therefore, the above mentioned words of Jesus confirm that all the things Moses wrote are completely free
of error of any kind, they are the Word of God, they are very pure. Also on some other occasions, Jesus made it clear that to Him the writings of Moses were the Word of God and thus free from imperfections. For instance, one day a teacher of the law tested Jesus, saying: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus said unto him “What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:26-28). Please note that Jesus asked that man what was written in the law and that after the answer of that lawyer Jesus told him to do what he had just said. This also proves that Jesus considered the law of Moses the word of God and not the word of a man. Christ showed that He accepted the infallibility of the law of Moses by mentioning also various events from the law, such as the murder of Abel (Matthew 23:35), the flood at the time of Noah (Matthew 24:38-39), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:28-29), the conversation of Moses with God at the burning bush (Matthew 22:31-32), and the feeding of the Israelites by manna from heaven (John 6:49). Jesus quoted also the words of the Psalms and of the Prophets, for to Him these writings also were the Word of God. Therefore, in conclusion, if Jesus, the One who knew no sin, quoted the law written by Moses (a man who, unlike Jesus, committed some sins) as authoritative, that means that He considered the law a book inspired by God and thus free from errors. To us also the law is holy and thus it is free from errors, and we can or rather we must use it in order to refute the heresies. Till the end of our life we will say like Jesus: “It is written...” and also: “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” because the words of Moses are the Word of God. The fact that the law was written by a man like us, who had his own defects before God, does not lead us to have doubts about its inspiration (or divine origin) because the words of Moses are the Word of God. Jesus had no doubts about its inspiration, Paul had no doubts about it, the other apostles had no doubts about it. So all arguments whose purpose is to cast a shadow on the divine origin of the law of Moses, as well as on the divine origin of the other writings inspired by God, are not from God. We reject them and we urge the saints to do the same.

Let’s see now the apostle Paul, who is the apostle who wrote more epistles than the other apostles. First of all I want to say that when Paul spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, it was not him who spoke but the Spirit of God, thus his words were free from errors; this happened when he preached to the unbelievers (as he did in the Areopagus at Athens), as well as when he delivered to the saints a teaching taken from the Scriptures, and when he exhorted the saints to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Lord. Also when he reminded his listeners of some facts which had happened to him, as in the case of his speech delivered to the elders of the Church of Ephesus or in the case of the testimony of his conversion he gave before the Jews at Jerusalem (after he was arrested) or at Caesarea before king Agrippa, it was not him who spoke but the Holy Spirit who spoke in him, so his words were free from errors on those occasions. Therefore we can affirm that when the Holy Spirit spoke through him, his words were free of error of any kind, as in the case of Moses. Let’s now talk about the inspiration of his epistles. Can we put the inspiration of his epistles and the inspiration of the law of Moses on the same level? Of course, we can, for the Spirit who moved Moses to write the law was the same Spirit who moved Paul to write his epistles. As we saw before, Peter in his second epistle calls the epistles of Paul ‘Scriptures’ as it is written: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, there are no errors in his epistles. What then shall we say about the affirmations of some people, according to which Paul in his writings changed his beliefs regarding the return of the Lord? They are false. Let’s see the reason. The apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians says: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor
by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). According to the quarrellers, these words of Paul correct these other words of Paul written to the Thessalonians in his previous epistle: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). For in his first epistle he taught that the return of the Lord was imminent, while in his second epistle he denied the imminence of the return of the Lord. But that’s untrue, because Paul, just before saying these words I have just quoted, says to the saints of Thessalonica: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord…” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Therefore if Paul in his second epistle had changed his previous position on the return of the Lord, that would mean that eventually the Word of the Lord had changed! Listen, the words of Paul concerning the return of Christ were not a personal opinion he had on the return of Christ, just like any personal opinion which a Christian can have about a food or a day, but the Word of God. Therefore when in his first epistle to the Thessalonians he says: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds” he did not mean that the day of the Lord was imminent, because he wrote those words at God’s command. Paul, even when he wrote those words (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), knew very well that the day of the Lord will not come until the falling away occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, for when afterward he warned the Thessalonians not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled as though the day of the Lord was imminent and he tells them what will happen before that day, he says to them: “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:5). Please note that Paul had already told those things to the Thessalonians when he had been with them. Therefore, the apostle Paul never thought that the day of the Lord was imminent, for he always taught the believers that the day of the Lord will come after the falling away occurs and the man of sin is revealed. (A similar thing must be said also about the apostle John, for he also never thought that the day of the Lord was imminent, even though in his first epistle he wrote that it was the last hour).

Therefore, we believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures in the original languages, and in their consequent inerrancy and infallibility. When we speak about plenary inspiration we mean that the Bible as a whole is inspired (in other words, all of Scripture is inspired — not merely some parts), while when we speak about verbal inspiration we mean that every word of the Bible is inspired. So inspiration extends to the words of the Bible, not only to the ideas. God, by His Spirit, has guaranteed the authenticity and reliability of the very words that were written. However, it must be said that He did not deprive the writers of their individuality, for their full personalities entered into their writing (for instance, their individual writing styles are evident).

The Bible has been attacked by many people over the centuries, many have mocked at it, others have questioned it especially because of some stories recorded in it which seem to be unbelievable, yet the Bible has always proved to be true in all the things which it affirms. Nobody has ever been able to demonstrate that the Bible is full of fables and lies. Even many archaeologists and many scientists have acknowledged that the Bible is true. W. F. Albright, who is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists, has stated: ‘There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition’. Nelson Glueck, famed Jewish archaeologist, has said: 'It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference'. Of course, we do not prove the inspiration of the Bible by archaeology, but it is gratifying to know that even archaeological discoveries have confirmed many events and stories recorded in the Bible.
Many times people have asked me: ‘How can you be sure about the divine inspiration of the Bible? How can you be sure that the story of Jesus and His message are true? On the other hand, you did not see Him, nor did you hear Him!’ Well, my answer has always been this: ‘Even though I have not seen Jesus with my eyes and heard Him with my ears, I believe that all the things the Bible says about Him are true because by faith in Him I have obtained the remission of sins, salvation from sin, peace and joy in my heart, and eternal life, which I did not have before.’ What do I mean by that? I mean that if the Bible says that whosoever believes in Jesus the Son of God, that is, in His death and in His resurrection, obtains remission of sins, is saved from sin, and receives eternal life, evidently if it tells the truth you will obtain by faith all these things and you will experience them in your life, but if it tells lies you will not be able to receive all these things. Don’t you think so? And since in the very moment I believed in Jesus I experienced the remission of all my sins, the deliverance from the bondage of sin, and I felt I had eternal life, the Bible can be nothing but the truth and the Word of God. Furthermore, the divine origin of the Bible is proved by the fact that the predictions concerning the Messiah, which were made centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ and which were recorded in the books of the Old Testament, were literally fulfilled in the fulness of the time. And not only the predictions concerning the Messiah were fulfilled, but also many other predictions (such as the flood, the birth of Isaac, the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, the division of the Kingdom of Israel, the punishments of God on the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah, the Babylonian captivity, the return of the Exiles from Babylon, and the rise of the Persian Empire), which were made under the Old Testament and written in the books of the Old Testament, were fulfilled at God’s appointed time. Had they been false predictions, they would never have been fulfilled. But since it was God who made those predictions through the mouth of His prophets, at the appointed time He brought them to pass. And we have confidence that also the events predicted by Jesus and the apostles, which are recorded in the New Testament, will be fulfilled at God’s appointed time, for these predictions also are of divine origin, and thus God will bring them to pass. Last but not least, we believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible for we have the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that is to say, for the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets and the apostles to write bears witness to us that the words we read in the Bible were inspired by Him. So, in conclusion, what the Scripture says about itself is true, the Scripture is indeed inspired by God who cannot lie. Blessed be His Holy Name now and forevermore. Amen.

False views on inspiration

**Natural inspiration.** According to this view, the Bible is inspired literature in the same way the works of Shakespeare, or of some other famous poet, are ‘inspired’. Therefore, the Bible is like any ordinary book written by man. This view is held by the modernists. This view is wrong because – as I have already proved it – inspiration, in the biblical sense, means that God so superintended the writers of the Bible books that they wrote what He wanted them to write and were kept from error in so doing.

**Partial inspiration.** According to this other view, the Bible is inspired only when it touches on matters of faith and salvation, but in matters involving science, history or geography, it can make mistakes, therefore it is not totally trustworthy. This view is held by moderate liberals and neo-evangelicals. This view also is wrong, for the Bible itself states that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16 – NKJV), therefore all parts of the Scriptures are trustworthy, not merely some parts. To state that only some parts of the Bible are trustworthy is tantamount to stating that the Almighty God, who created heaven and earth and all things in them, was not able to keep the writers of the Scripture from making mistakes as they wrote His Word!! Furthermore, if the Bible’s references to history or geography are not trustworthy, on what basis can we be sure that those portions dealing with salvation are trustworthy? There is no doubt that this view on the inspiration of the Bible is held by people who have been deceived by the devil,
for one of the schemes of the devil against the Church is to induce Christians to doubt the plenary inspiration of the Scripture. Brothers, let no one deceive you with empty words. Jesus Christ as well as His apostles believed in the literal trustworthiness of the Old Testament record, whether those records dealt with doctrinal matters, matters of science, or anything else.

**The final and absolute authority**

Since we accept the Bible as the Inspired Word of the Almighty God, which does not contain any errors, we accept the Bible as the final and absolute authority in faith, conduct and morals. Therefore all teachings, all revelations, and all prophecies, must be examined carefully in the light of the Holy Scriptures to see if they are sound (in this case they must be accepted) or wrong (in this case they must be rejected), and any earthly authority that expressly commands us to break the Word of God must not be obeyed, for we ought to obey God rather than men.

**The completeness of the Bible**

The Bible contains all the things a man needs to believe in order to be saved and all the things we believers need to know in order to please God with all our conduct, and all the predictions of future events that we need to know.

*In order to be saved.* First of all let’s take the writings of the New Testament. Paul says to the Romans what a man must do in order to be saved. Here are his words: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9). And in the New Testament there are many references to the Lordship of Christ and to His resurrection from the dead. Therefore, if a sinner opens a New Testament and reads the story of Jesus of Nazareth (written either by Matthew or Luke or Mark or John) and accepts it as it is written, he will be immediately saved by God. And let us suppose that he has only the writings of the Old Testament, can he be saved through them? Well, we say that even in this case he can be saved, for the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets speak about Jesus of Nazareth. For instance, in the Psalms and in the Prophets there are many references to the sufferings that the Christ endured for our sins, and in the sixteenth Psalm David speaks about the resurrection of the Christ; therefore if anyone believes that those words were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, of whom he has heard, he will be saved from his sins. Remember that the Eunuch, when Philip heard him speaking, was reading a passage of the book of the prophet Isaiah, and that Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and preached Jesus to him and the eunuch was saved. Here is what Luke says in the Acts: “And the [an] angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare
his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:26-39). The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (which speak about the life of Jesus of Nazareth, His death and His resurrection, and which affirm that the prophetic Scriptures were fulfilled in Him) at that time did not exist; however, Philip began with that passage of the Scripture and preached to that man the same Jesus we preach to men today, and that man was saved. The apostle Paul also, while he was in Rome, preached to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ reasoning with them from the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and some were convinced by what he said and were saved. Here is what Luke says in the Acts: “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken... “ (Acts 28:23-24). This shows that we can preach to the Jews the death and the resurrection of Christ and convince them that Jesus is the Christ only through the Scriptures of the Old Testament (obviously, in order to do this you need to know very well the Scriptures of the Old Testament and of the New Testament). Therefore, some Jews can be convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, who died for our sins and rose from the dead for our justification, by hearing someone speak accurately about Jesus only with the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets. This does not surprise us because we know that the Gospel of God was promised before by God in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; this is what Paul says to the Romans: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:1-3). That is confirmed by the fact that when Jesus appeared to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27) and when afterward He appeared to His disciples He said to them: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). Now I must say something about the mystery of Christ - which was kept secret since the world began but was revealed and made known to the saints of the Lord in the fullness of the time – that is, the fact that the Gentiles are heirs together with the Jews, and members together of one body, because Christ on the cross put to death the enmity which existed between men and God, and the enmity which existed between the Jews and the Gentiles, as Paul says to the Ephesians: “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesians 2:14-16). For this mystery is strictly linked to the message of salvation, because through the revelation of this mystery God has shown that He “wants all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4 - NIV), that is, He wants to save not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. It is evident that this mystery was kept secret till Jesus died on the cross and the Holy Spirit revealed it to the holy apostles and prophets. Of course, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament there were many verses that predicted in various ways that one day the Gentiles would become part of the people of God, thus God would not be ashamed to call them His
people, but those verses were covered with a veil, so they could not be understood. However, when the Lord opened the minds of His servants so that they might understand them, then things became clear in the eyes of the Jews and of the Gentiles: God had decided to call the Gentiles to become part of His people. And how was that prediction of God fulfilled? It was fulfilled through the death of Jesus Christ. For, as I said before, by His death on the cross He broke down the middle wall of partition, which consisted of the Law of Moses and which separated both the Jews and the Gentiles from God, and the Jews from the Gentiles. And God chose Paul of Tarsus to preach that mystery; Paul speaks about it in his epistles. Therefore his epistles are necessary in order to understand the glory of this mystery. So the plan of salvation which God had formed according to His good pleasure before the foundation of the world has been made known to all nations.

● **In order to please God.** Paul says to Timothy: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore through the Scripture we can be made perfect. Let us consider the Writings of the New Testament; in them there are commandments for husbands and wives, for children and parents, for servants and masters, for those who rule over the sheep of the Lord and the faithful; in them there are various references to prayer, fasting, worship, alms and all the other good works, miracles and healings, revelations, and many other things; they are indeed able to make us perfect and wise unto salvation in Christ. And we can say the same things about the Writings of the Old Testament, because in them there are many good precepts for all of us – whatever position we have in the body of Christ, whether we are males or females, parents or only sons – and by keeping them we honour God; in them there are many stories that exhort us to have faith in God to receive revelations, healings, gifts, etc., and which exhort us to be patient in order to obtain the fulfilment of the promises of God. Paul says to the Romans that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Obviously, it must be said that as far as various precepts are concerned – such as the precepts about foods, days, circumcision, etc. – in order not to be enslaved by the law of Moses all over again we needed the teachings of the apostles, which explain that those things are just a shadow of the things that were to come and thus they must not be observed any longer. And God, knowing this very well, in his time provided us with the teaching which has completed the old teaching.

● **Knowledge of future events.** With regard to the events which must take place before the coming of Christ, at His coming, and after His coming, the Bible contains so many references to them that we can say that we don’t need to know other things about the last events. We have come to this conclusion after we have read the words concerning the last events spoken by Jesus on the Mount of Olives before He was arrested, and on some other occasions; the words written by Paul, Peter and John, and the words spoken by the prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah, Malachi) centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if that’s how things are with regard to the Holy Writings, it is evident that there was a time when the Holy Writings were incomplete, for the Writings of the New Testament (which had to complete the Writings of the Old Testament) appeared only in the first century after Christ. Therefore, we can affirm that the Scriptures (I refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament) needed the Scriptures concerning the coming of Christ in order to become complete. So, after Jesus Christ appeared and did the work of His Father, by speaking the words of His Father and by dying on the cross for our sins and rising again the third day (and His life and His teachings and His predictions were wrote down), and His apostles wrote down by the will of God other useful teachings and predictions, then the Scripture became complete. The Bible is the final revelation of God to men. It does not need to be completed, because it is already complete. Woe
to those who add other writings to it; for Jesus Christ said to John on the Isle of Patmos: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18). Someone may say that these words apply only to the Book of Revelation, but that’s not true. For how could we affirm that it is lawful to add something to the Bible as a whole (that is to say, to the other books of the Bible), but not to the book of Revelation, just because those words of Jesus are written at the end of that particular book of the Bible? Is it not written: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it ....” (Deuteronomy 4:2)? Therefore, the commandment not to add anything, under pain of the punishment written in the book of Revelation, applies also to the Bible as a whole and not only to the book of Revelation. Furthermore, if anyone adds some words only to the Book of Revelation he will implicitly add them to the Bible because the book of Revelation is part of the Bible.

There is no other book on the face of the earth that can be regarded as Holy Scripture; all those who claim that they have some holy books (besides the Bible or in place of the Bible) and call them Holy Scriptures have been deceived by the old serpent and they deceive other people into believing a lie.

Some people (such as the Mormons) attack the completeness of the Bible by saying that in the past centuries many plain and precious parts were taken away from the Bible. But that’s not true, because the many copies of the Old Testament manuscripts which we now possess do vary in minor matters – such as the spelling of words, the omission of a phrase here and there – but there is no evidence whatsoever that any major sections of the Old Testament books have been lost. Therefore, we can say that nowadays we possess the same Old Testament books that were possessed by the Jews in the days of Jesus and the apostles, and that no major sections of them are missing. What I have just said is confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls which took place in 1947. The manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, generally dated from about 200 to 50 before Christ, include portions of every Old Testament book except Esther, and studies have revealed that these documents (older by a thousand years than previously discovered Old Testament manuscripts) are substantially identical to the text of the Old Testament which had been previously handed down and that we possess in our Bibles. As for the New Testament manuscripts (the oldest of which go back to the second century after Christ), the situation is substantially the same. The variations that are found in these manuscripts - which are copies of the originals or of copies made from the originals – are of a relatively minor nature.

Most of the manuscript variations concern matters of spelling, word order, tense, and the like; but there is no indication whatever that any large sections of material found in the originals have been lost. Furthermore, the fundamental doctrines of the Bible are not affected by these variations in any way.

What I have said in defence of the Old and New Testaments, as we possess them today, is confirmed by the Vulgate, the ancient Bible Version which dates back to the fourth century after Christ and which is the Bible translated into Latin by Jerome at Bethlehem (it is the Bible version that was adopted officially by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century after Christ and which was declared to be ‘authentical’ and the final authority in all theological disputes); it did not omit any portions of these manuscripts nor did it fail to reproduce any major sections of the Bible.

It is true that in the Vulgate we find some passages which were mistranslated by Jerome, yet in it ‘no plain and precious things’ of the Bible are missing, so it cannot be considered a Bible without some major sections or a ‘mutilated’ Bible which doesn’t contain all the things men need to know in order to be saved.
The comprehension of the Bible

Since the Bible is a book composed of writings inspired by the Holy Spirit of the Lord, in order to understand it a man needs the illuminating work of the Lord in his heart, for the Lord is the One who makes a man understand the Scriptures correctly. Now, through some passages of the Scriptures and some comments on them, I am going to demonstrate what I have just said.

Before His death, Jesus had said to His disciples: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:31-34). There are some other Bible verses which state that the disciples of Jesus understood neither the Scriptures that spoke about Jesus nor the words of Jesus that predicted His death and His resurrection, which are these: “These things understood not his disciples at the first …” (John 12:16); “But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not ….” (Luke 9:45); “But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:32). Please note that the disciples, even though they had believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God who had come forth from the Father, had not yet understood the things that Moses and the prophets had said about the Christ, that is, that He had to suffer and raise from the dead. But why had not those men (who had believed in Him) understood yet the things which had been written about Him? Because the meaning of those Scriptures was veiled from them, and thus they could not understand them. They understood them after Jesus rose again, for it was then that the Lord opened their minds so that they might comprehend them, as it is written: “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45); it was then that they “remembered that these things were written of him, and that they [the Jews] had done these things unto him” (John 12:16). What happened to the disciples of Jesus shows us that in order to comprehend the Scriptures which speak about Jesus Christ, it is not sufficient to read them or to hear them, because it is necessary for the Lord to open the minds of those who read them or hear them, so that they might understand them, just as He did toward His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection. Therefore, if it was the Lord Himself who made His disciples understand the Scriptures why should we think that nowadays He can’t make people understand the Scriptures without using any person? Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Have the ways of the Lord changed?

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about the Holy Spirit, whom He would send to them after His ascension to heaven, He said to them: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:12-13), and also: “But the Comforter, which [who] is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things…..” (John 14:26). Therefore, we learn from these words that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach us all things and to guide us into all truth. Someone may ask: ‘Didn’t Jesus speak those words only to His apostles?’ Yes, Jesus spoke those words to His apostles, however they are addressed to all the disciples of Christ. Obviously, in the Church God has appointed teachers, who have the gift of teaching and thus they are able to teach the doctrines of the Bible, however teachers are not able to make people comprehend the Scriptures, for that’s an ability possessed by the Spirit of God, who was sent from heaven and who dwells in every believer.
One day Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luke 10:21). We also acknowledge that God reveals the things concerning the Kingdom of God to those who change and become as little children, while He hides them from those who are very learned and think they are wise and intelligent. And we are, by the grace of God, among the little children to whom God has revealed His Son and the things pertaining to His kingdom, and we praise Him for this, yes, we praise Him because we acknowledge that we have come to the knowledge of the truth because God gave us that understanding which nobody else on the face of the earth could have given to us. We could have listened to the best orator, the most eloquent preacher of the Gospel and of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, but had it not been for the supernatural intervention of God we would never have understood what is so simple (but many have made it so difficult and complicated by empty words). What is so simple? The message of salvation and the way to be saved.

The apostle Paul said to Timothy: "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (2 Timothy 2:7). As you can see, Paul believed that the Lord Himself would make Timothy understand the things he had written to him; not a particular group of believers with the ability to interpret correctly the things he had written, but the Lord Himself.

The apostle Paul said to the Philippians: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Philippians 3:15). With these words Paul expressed his confidence that if the saints of Philippi did not understand some things he had written to them, the Lord would have made them understand those things by a revelation. As you can see, in these last two verses I have quoted the Scripture stresses the powerful illuminating work of God in the heart of believers.

John wrote: “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 John 2:27). Therefore, John believed that it was the anointing received from God that would teach the believers about all things, and not a particular group of bishops appointed by the Lord. The words of the apostle John confirm the words that Jesus said about the Holy Spirit when He promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples: “He shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). However, at this point a clarification is needed: the fact that the anointing we have received from the Holy One teaches us all things doesn’t mean that we don’t need the ministers of God, otherwise the Scripture would contradict itself because it states that in the Church God has appointed apostles; prophets; evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints and for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). I repeat this concept in these terms: John, by those words, did not mean that since the believers have received the anointing from the Holy One, they don’t need to be taught by anybody, because the believers in Jerusalem “continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42); Paul stayed in Corinth “for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (Acts 18:11 - NIV); and he said to Timothy: “These things command and teach” (1 Timothy 4:11), and to Titus: “These things speak ...” (Titus 2:15). John simply meant that we who know the truth don’t need the arbitrary and contradictory teachings about Jesus Christ which are spread by many impostors across the world, because the teachings about Jesus Christ that we have received from the Holy Spirit are true and sufficient to our salvation. We know all the things that can save our souls because the anointing of the Holy One teaches us everything and so we don’t need the diabolical and damnable teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, or the Mormon Church, or the Watchtower Society, or the Unification Church, or some other false church. Therefore, to sum up, although the anointing of the Holy One teaches all the believers, those who have received the gift of
teaching must teach the believers the things pertaining to the kingdom of God in order to strengthen them in their faith and to help them grow spiritually, and the believers must continue steadfastly in their doctrine because this is the will of God. Both those who teach and those who are taught must always bear in mind these words said by Paul to Timothy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16). Please note that salvation is promised to the minister who is an example to the believers and teach them the sound doctrine, and also to those who hear his teaching and put it into practice.

The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Today, by the grace of God, besides the writings of the Old Testament that speak about Jesus, we have also the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which speak very clearly about the birth of Jesus, His life, His teachings and powerful works, His death and His resurrection, however many of those who read and hear the Gospel written by those men, don’t understand it, and among them there are millions and millions of Roman Catholics across the world. They have the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the priests, and many theologians, but the Gospel is veiled to them. Why is it veiled? Because their minds have been blinded by the devil, their minds have been darkened, and thus they can’t see the light emanating from the Gospel of God. What man must do in order to be saved is written very clearly, yet what is written so clearly is pitch dark to them. Why? Because their leaders have darkened the Gospel through their tradition they handed down, so what is light to us is darkness to them; and how great is that darkness! As the Jews when they read the Old Testament have a veil which covers their hearts and prevents them from recognizing that the prophetic Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, so there is a great number of men who read or hear the Gospel but their minds are blinded. They are on the way of destruction and as long as they don’t repent and believe with their heart in what they read or hear they will not be able to understand the Gospel. As you can see, a man can understand the Gospel only through the illuminating work of God in his heart, thus we reject the doctrine which says that a particular group of people has the power to make people comprehend the words of the Gospel.

In conclusion, there are two kinds of people in this world: those who have understood the Scripture because they have humbled themselves before God and the Lord has opened their minds to understand it and they continue to understand it because the Spirit of God guides them into all truth; and those who live in darkness with their minds blinded by the devil because they refuse to humble themselves before God and prefer to hear the human precepts rather than the precepts of God so clearly written in the Bible.

Last but not least, in reading the Holy Scripture, each of us must divide the word of God rightly (2 Timothy 2:15), which means that we must interpret it correctly otherwise we will give space to false doctrines. I could give you many examples to show you that if we don’t do this, we will give space to false doctrines, but I will give you only one example. Jesus Christ one day stated that His Father was greater than He (John 14:28); now, it is evident that if those words are taken out of context and they are not compared with other words they might lead us to believe that Jesus was not God during the days of His flesh; whereas, if we compare them with other Bible passages we will realize that this is not the true meaning of those words of Jesus. Therefore, I exhort you to read carefully the Scriptures and when you find some difficult passages, I urge you to pray and to look for the right explanation of those passages in the Bible, for I am fully persuaded that the Scripture explains the Scripture. I tell you from personal experience that often a verse or a passage becomes clear when studied in the light of other Bible statements on the same subject, and that if we compare Scripture with Scripture, we are guarded against
becoming unbalanced in our views. As for some particular passages which seem not to have a Biblical explanation, I exhort you not to worry, because God has not promised to reveal us all secrets and mysteries during our earthly life, as it is written: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God…” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Remember that even Paul, who was a man full of divine wisdom who wrote most of the New Testament epistles said: “I know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). As for those biblical passages which seem to oppose science, I tell you these things: first, the Bible is always right, while scientific discoveries or thesis have many times proved to be nothing but lies, so beware of all those who affirm that the Bible opposes science, for when it seems so it is not the Bible which opposes science but rather science which opposes the Bible; second, even though the Bible does not describe things in precise scientific terms, it does not give misinformation: so when the Bible states that the sun rises (Ecclesiastes 1:5), it does not tell a lie, for actually that’s what every human being sees with his own eyes. Is it not true that we see the sun rise in the east? On the other hand, even the Naval Almanac uses the term ‘sunrise’, and nobody dares to charge the Almanac with error. Therefore, the Bible describes the rising of the sun not in scientific terms, but as it appears to be. Remember this: had God used advanced scientific terminology in the Bible, which He could have, people would have understood nothing. I say it again, beware of all those who state that the Bible opposes science, for the Bible cannot oppose the truth (thus, it cannot oppose true scientific discoveries, for true scientific discoveries confirm the truthfulness of the Bible), for it is truth (John 17:17). Since the One who inspired the writers of the Bible is the Creator of all things, who thus knows everything about the universe, and at the same time He is the God of truth, who loves truth but hates falsehood, even when His Word deals with matters of science it tells the truth, even though it does not use an advanced scientific terminology. Let God be true, but every man a liar. Let me say now some words about the method of interpretation which we should use in reading the Bible. The literal method of interpretation is the only consistent approach, in contrast to the allegorical method. By the literal method of interpretation, I mean understanding the words of the Scripture according to their ordinary, customary, apparent meaning as determined by grammar, context, and historic usage. Of course, this method does not exclude symbolism, but it means that we should only attribute a figurative or symbolic meaning when the context or wording itself indicates such. So we can attribute a symbolic or figurative meaning to recognizable figures of speech, parables, types, or symbols indicated as such in the Scripture, and some prophetic references. However, we should be always very prudent when we interpret allegorically those parts of the Scripture which can be interpreted in this way, lest we give allegorical interpretations which are inconsistent with the teaching of the Scripture. The history of the Church teaches us that over the centuries many false teachers and prophets have brought into the Church many false doctrines and damnable heresies using the allegorical method of interpretation. Furthermore, I tell you to beware of all those who take the Bible figuratively, thus they give allegorical meaning to everything or nearly everything that is written in it, for they are greatly mistaken: these people have adopted this method of interpretation for they want to evade the clear meaning of statements they do not want to accept, for they are rebellious people who want to live according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. They make the Bible say things which it doesn’t say: they will bear their sin.

**The utility of the Bible**

Paul said to Timothy that the Holy Scriptures were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15) and also: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16) and to the Romans he said: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our
learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).
The Holy Scriptures are useful for teaching. What do they teach us? They teach us many things. Here are some of the things the Bible teaches us: God is one, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, righteous, faithful, merciful, good, etc.; Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the Son of God who according to the words of the prophets of old was to come into the world to save the world, who in the fulness of the time was sent from the Father to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification, and after His resurrection He appeared to His disciples and ascended to heaven; the Holy Spirit is a divine person, who works powerfully in the Church transforming the saints into Christ’s image and distributing His gifts; men are sinners and need to be reconciled to God, and the only way to be reconciled to God is to repent and believe in His beloved Son; that every man possesses an immortal soul, which is conscious after death, and depending on his spiritual state at death, goes either to paradise or to hell; one day all the dead will rise again, the righteous will rise to live, while the wicked will rise to be condemned; Jesus Christ will come back from heaven and will establish the Millennial Reign on earth during which He will reign with His saints; we must say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.
Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures rebuke us when we sin; they correct us when we make mistakes; and they instruct us in righteousness so that we may be holy, right and wise in all our conduct. The Holy Scriptures comfort us when we are downcast and perplexed, and urges us to be patient till the coming of the Lord from heaven and to have faith in God in the midst of our distresses and afflictions for God is almighty and faithful. And last but not least, the Holy Scriptures help us refute all the false doctrines which are taught both in the Church and outside it; the Holy Scriptures are called “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17) and we use it to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).
The Holy Scriptures are indeed a fountain of wisdom and strength for all those who take delight in them. We can rely on them always, because they lead us in the paths of righteousness and peace.
Therefore, it is very important to know the Holy Scriptures, and we can know them only by reading and searching them. So I exhort all of you to read them, to search them, to meditate on them, and to let them dwell in you richly in all wisdom.
Trust in the Holy Scriptures and do what they say all the days of your life, you will be blessed and honoured by God; you will experience in your life the truthfulness and the faithfulness of the Word of God.

The transmission of the Bible

The Canon

The word ‘canon’ literally means ‘a straight rod’, or ‘a ruler’ and when it is applied to the Scriptures, it means the list of divinely inspired books which are the only basis for faith and practice in the life of the Church.
In the days of Jesus the canon of the Old Testament was already confirmed (Jesus referred to this collection of inspired writings as ‘the Scripture’ [John 10:35] or ‘the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms’ [Luke 24:44]), but not so for the New Testament, because the books which form the New Testament were written one at a time during the course of the first century. The canon of the New Testament was fixed in 397 after Christ by the Council of Cartage, which
identified the sacred books by name; they were 27 and the list was the same list we possess now. However, it must be said that that list was just an official statement of what the universal Church had already accepted as canonical Scripture. In other words, the Church just declared officially which books were inspired and which books were not inspired. It is important to realize that a book did not become inspired by being included in the canon. Inclusion in the Canon was merely recognition of the authority the book already possessed. On the other hand, it must be said that the Council of Carthage added the books of the Apocrypha (Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Book of Wisdom, Book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, and the Book of Baruch, and some additions to the book of Esther and to the book of Daniel) to the canon of the Old Testament, even though those writings (which were written in the intertestamental period) are not inspired. Therefore, that Council made a mistake in adding those books to the canon, which books are considered canonical by the Roman Catholic Church (which officially included them in the canon in the sixteenth century). However, the Christians of the first centuries after Christ did not regard the Apocrypha as inspired books for the following reasons: 1) They contain contradictions, false doctrines and fanciful stories; 2) Neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles mentioned them; 3) They were not, and still are not, in the Hebrew canon.

Since I have just mentioned the Hebrew Canon, let me say also that it consists of 24 books, but these books are the same as the 39 books we possess in the Old Testament of our Bible. Therefore the only difference is the way the Jews count the Old Testament books. Here is how they count them:


Transmission of the Old Testament

The original books of the Old Testament were written by various men, for instance the first five books of it (called Pentateuch) were written by the prophet Moses; many Psalms were written by David, the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were written by king Solomon, the book of Isaiah by the prophet Isaiah, and so on. All the writers of these books were Jews by birth, so they belonged to the people of Israel.

The Old Testament books were written at various times over a period of approximately 1400 years (from around the fourteenth century to the first century before Christ) and the language in which they were written was Hebrew (except a few passages which are in the book of Daniel and the book of Ezra, which were written in Aramaic). They were written on parchments. In the days of the apostles (the first century after Christ) there were copies of those inspired books; those copies were written on parchments and they were read in the synagogues of the Jews who lived in Israel and of the Jews scattered among the nations.

Those Jews who had the job of writing copies of those books were called scribes (in Hebrew ‘soferim’) and in writing the holy books they had to observe very strict rules. By the sixth century after Christ the scribes were succeeded by a group known as the Masoretes (from the Hebrew massorah which means ‘tradition’), who continued to preserve the Sacred Scriptures for another five hundred years in a form known as the Masoretic Text. Babylonian, Palestine, and Tiberias were the main centers of Masoretic activity; but by the tenth century the Tiberian Masoretes, led by the family of Ben Asher, gained the ascendancy. Through subsequent editions, the ben Asher text became in the twelfth century the only recognized form of the Hebrew Scriptures. The oldest dated manuscript of the Ben Asher Text is the Leningrad Manuscript B19a (1008 after Christ).
The third edition of *Biblia Hebraica*, published by Paul Kahle in 1937, was based on the manuscript of the Ben Asher Text. This is the Text on which is based the Hebrew Bible as well as the Old Testament of the NKJV, NASV and NIV. As for the Old Testament of the KJV, it is based on the Ben Chayyim Masoretic Text, which is the Masoretic Text used for the Hebrew Bibles for approximately 400 years prior to the 1937 edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*.

Today, among the Jews, there are still scribes who have the important job to copy the scroll of the Law. They observe strict rules (which are very old) when they write the books of Moses. I would like you to know some of these rules.

1. The Pentateuch must be written on the skin (parchment) of a clean animal. The parchment must be prepared specially for use as a scroll, with gallnut and lime and other chemicals that help to render it durable.
2. The ink must be black, durable, but not indelible. It is prepared according to a special recipe.
3. The number of lines on each column cannot be less than 48 nor more than 60. However, at the present day the forty-two-lined column is the generally accepted style of the scroll. Every line should be long enough to contain thirty letters.
4. The scribe must have before him a correct copy; he cannot write even a single word from memory; and he must pronounce every word before writing it. This is to prevent any duplications, or omissions of words.
5. Before writing the name of God, the scribe must say, ‘I am writing the name of God for the holiness of His name’. When the scribe has begun to write the name of God, he must not be interrupted until he has finished it.
6. Strict rules govern the forms of the letters, the spaces between the letters, the words, the lines, the portions, and the space between each of the Pentateutichal books.
7. If an error is found in the scroll, it must be corrected and re-examined by a competent person within thirty days; if 3 or 4 errors are found on one page the scroll must be discarded. A mistake in the writing of any of the names of God cannot be corrected since the name of God may not be erased, and the whole sheet must be replaced and the defective sheet discarded.

The scrupulous care which the Jewish scribes take in writing the five books of the law leads us to think that the copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness for about 2000 years. Obviously, the copyists who copied the books of the Law and the other books of the Old Testament made some mistakes, - only the authors of the original books did not make any mistakes because they were inspired by God – that’s why the old manuscripts of the Old Testament sometimes differ from one another; however, it must be said that the differences don’t affect the doctrines of the Bible. What I have stated is confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947, which are generally dated from about 200 to 50 before Christ. They include fragments, often minute, of every book in the Old Testament except Esther, one complete scroll of Isaiah and another of which approximately half has been lost, and a commentary on the first two chapters of Habakkuk containing most of their text. All these agree essentially with the ‘received text’ (the Masoretic Text) of the Old Testament except for orthographic variations or occasional variant readings hardly affecting the sense. Fragments, however, of Samuel and one of Jeremiah have a shortened form of the text like that of the Septuagint in these books. Since I have just mentioned the Septuagint, let me say something about it. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament made in Egypt in the third and second centuries before Christ. This Greek version of the Old Testament is called ‘Septuagint’ (from the Latin ‘septuaginta’ which means ‘seventy’) because it is said that was translated by seventy-two elders, six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Pentateuch is reasonably well translated, but the rest of the books, especially the poetical books, are often very poorly done and even contain sheer absurdities (taken from the Jewish Midrash). Errors apart, this translation is now literal, now paraphrastic and now interpretative. It contains the Apocrypha, which are not inspired. Furthermore, the underlying Hebrew text differed in many
places from the Masoretic text; so, for instance, the Septuagint represents a shortened form of the text of 1 and 2 Samuel and has the chapters of Jeremiah in an entirely different order. Yet, even though the Greek text itself is frequently corrupt, it is very often useful for recovering the original Hebrew text, if used with caution and skill. At first, the Jews welcomed this translation, however, two things rendered the Septuagint unwelcome in the long run to the Jews. Its divergence from the accepted text (afterward called the Masoretic text) was too evident; and it therefore could not serve as a basis for theological discussion or for homiletic interpretation. In addition to this, it had been adopted as Sacred Scriptures by the Christians, and this fact disturbed very much the Jews. Therefore, according to the Jews, a revision in the sense of the canonical Jewish text was necessary. This revision was made by a proselyte, Aquila, who lived during the reign of Hadrian (117-138). His translation is pedantic, and its Greek is uncouth. A second revision of the Septuagint was made toward the end of the second century by one Theodotion; his Greek gives a readable text. A third revision (perhaps dated to 170 after Christ) was made by Symmachus, a Samaritan convert to Judaism; its Greek is good.

Transmission of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament were written one at a time within the span of a century (the first century after Christ). They were written in Greek by various men whose names were these: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews is unknown; some say it was Paul who wrote it, some others say its author is Apollos, and others say Barnabas. As soon as each book of the New Testament appeared, it started to be read among the churches, and to be copied by believers. By the end of the first century all the Gospels and all the epistles and the book of Revelation were written (the first epistles of Paul, along with perhaps the epistle of James, were written between 48 and 60 after Christ, and the Gospels and other books between 60 and 100). Therefore, the period of transmission of the New Testament covers 1400 years from the time of composition (1st century) to the invention of the printing machine (15th century). The history is divided into three periods: (1) Papyrus period (1st-4th century), (2) Uncial period (4th-9th century), and (3) Minuscule period (9th – 15th century).

Papyrus period

At the time of the New Testament, and even long time before, papyrus was used for writing. It must be said, however, that at the time of the New Testament parchment also was used for writing, for Paul said to Timothy: “Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come – and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13 - NKJV). Papyrus was found in Egypt and it came from a large water plant by that name. The soft tissue-strips within the stem were used to make papyrus sheets. A papyrus sheet had two layers consisting of the horizontal and vertical strips. Writing was done on the smoother side where the grain was horizontal. The length of a papyrus scroll depended on the length of the book of the New Testament written on it. However, it was impossible on papyrus to have a complete scroll of the New Testament (it would have taken a 60 meters - about 200 feet - scroll to contain the entire New Testament). Besides scroll-type papyrus manuscripts, there are also codices which are book-type papyrus manuscripts. There are a total of about one hundred papyri.
Uncial period

Uncial manuscripts are Greek manuscripts written in capital (majuscule) letters on vellum or parchment. There are about 300 extant uncial manuscripts. The more well-known ones are these:

1. *Codex Sinaiticus*. It was discovered by Tischendorf in St Catherine’s monastery (which is at the foot of Mount Sinai) in 1844. There are 4 columns per page. Contains the complete New Testament (but it doesn’t contain passages such as Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11) and has much of the Old Testament in Greek. It also contains the Epistle of Bamabas and most of the Shepherd of Ermas (early Christian writings which were widely used in teaching). Dated to about 350 after Christ.

2. *Codex Alexandrinus*. It is stored in the British Museum and is dated to about 400-450 after Christ. It is the longest and best known uncial manuscript. It contains the whole New Testament except for most of Matthew (from 1:1 through 25:6) and some parts of John (from 6:50 through 8:52) and 2 Corinthians (from 4:13 through 12:6). At the end are added some early Christian writings which were commonly used in teaching: the first Epistle of Clement, and the second Epistle of Clement up to 12:4. There are two columns per page.

3. *Codex Vaticanus*. It is kept in the Vatican library. It was found in 1481 and is dated to about 350 after Christ. There are 3 columns per page. Contains both Old Testament and New Testament, and Apocrypha. But almost the whole of Genesis, many Psalms (105:27-137:6), some passages of the Gospels (such as Mark 16:9-20; Luke 22:43; 23:34; John 7:53-8:11), Hebrews 9:14 to the end, the Pastoral Epistles, the epistle to Philemon and the Book of Revelation are missing.

4. *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus*. ‘Rescriptus’ means ‘to write again’. It was a biblical manuscript which had been erased and Ephraem – one of the so called Church Fathers who lived during the 4th century – wrote a sermon on the recycled parchment. It contains parts of the New Testament except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John which are missing. It is dated to about 450 after Christ.

5. *Codex Bezae*. It is located in the Cambridge University Library. It is dated to the 6th century. It contains the Gospels and Acts in Greek and Latin, with some gaps from loss and mutilation of its pages. The Greek text is quite peculiar, with many interpolations found nowhere else, a few remarkable omissions and a capricious tendency to rephrase sentences.

Minuscule Period

The minuscules appeared a little later than the uncials. The letters are smaller, and in formal running hand.

The Greek Text of the New Testament

As far as the New Testament is concerned, it is a well known fact that there are many differences between the New Testament of the King James Version and the New Testament of the New International Version, which are two of the most popular Bible Translations in the English-speaking countries.
Obviously, the first difference that can be clearly seen is the language, for the English of the King James Version is an archaic English since the translation was made several centuries ago. But there are other differences, such as omissions of words and phrases, word order, and tense. I will dwell a little upon the reason of these last differences I have just mentioned.

They exist because the King James Version is based on the 'Received Text' while the New International Version is based on the 'Critical Text' (which are two different Greek Texts of the New Testament since they are based on different manuscripts). These things can be said also about the New Testament differences existing between the Italian Bible Diodati Version, which dates back to the seventeenth century like the King James Version, and the Riveduta Version.

The Received Text or Textus Receptus

As I said before, during the first century (after Christ) God inspired some men to write the books of the New Testament, and they wrote exactly what the Holy Spirit moved them to write. So those books were free from error of any kind. However, it came to pass, during the centuries that followed, that scribes and printers made both unintentional changes (from faulty eyesight or by careless inspection of the original, from likeness of pronunciation or by incorrect spelling, from errors of memory or anticipation, by incorporations of marginal notes wrongly taken as corrections) and intentional changes (to make the meaning more plain, to harmonize related passages, to remove difficulties, to emphasize or safeguard important teachings) in the Greek text as they copied it. As a result, the manuscript copies of the New Testament we possess nowadays differ among themselves in numerous details.

Many attempts have been made to sort through the manuscripts of the New Testament and weed out the errors and mistakes of copyists, in order to restore the text to its original apostolic form. Those who have made such attempts have differed one from another in the resources at their disposal, their own personal abilities as text editors, and the principles followed in trying to restore the original text of the New Testament.

The two most famous attempts at restoring the original text of the New Testament are the Textus Receptus or Received Text, dating from the Reformation and post-Reformation era, and the Greek Text of B.F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, called 'Critical Text', first published in 1881. These two texts were based on differing collections of manuscripts, following different textual principles, at different stages in the on-going process of the discovery and evaluation of surviving New Testament manuscripts, and, not surprisingly, with often differing results.

The 'Received Text' is not a single text. It is a tradition of printed texts published during the time of the Protestant Reformation, that is, the 1500’s and early 1600’s. It includes the editions of Erasmus (5 editions: 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, 1535) who was a Roman Catholic priest who opposed Luther and the Reformation; Robert Estienne - called also Stephens or Stephanus - (4 editions: 1546, 1549, 1550, 1551); Theodore de Beza (9 editions between 1565 and 1604); and the Elzevirs (3 editions: 1624, 1633, 1641). All these Greek texts show a close general uniformity because they are more or less reprints of the text(s) edited by Erasmus, with only minor variations. All these Received Text editions are based upon a small number of late medieval manuscripts. The King James Version (and the Italian Bible Diodati Version as well) is based upon the Received Text.

At this point, I need to speak about the Majority Text (also known as the Byzantine or Syriac text), which is derived from the plurality of all existing Greek manuscripts; since most of these manuscripts are late medieval manuscripts, there is family resemblance between the Received Text and the Majority Text. Therefore they are not the same thing. I say this because I know that the terms Textus Receptus and Majority Text are frequently used as though they were synonymous. Some scholars have estimated that the Majority Text differs from the Textus Receptus in over 1000 places. Therefore if we add this fact to the fact that the various editions of
the Received Text differ from one another, we must recognize that the matter is quite difficult and complicated, it is not so simple as many depict it.

The Critical Text

In 1881 was published the Greek New Testament edited by Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892), which is probably the most famous of the so-called critical texts. Their Greek New Testament deliberately and substantially departed from the textus receptus on the basis of manuscript evidence. Even though the Westcott-Hort text was the ‘standard’ critical text for a generation or two, it is no longer considered such by anyone, and has not been for many years. Today, the ‘standard’ text or texts are the Nestle or Nestle-Aland text (1st edition, 1898; 27th edition, 1993) and/or the various editions of The Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies. However, it must be said that the Westcott-Hort text is part of the heritage of both the Nestle texts and the UBS texts – which are called ‘new textus receptus’ - for they do not differ a whole lot from the text produced by Westcott-Hort in 1881; as a result many modern versions are still influenced one way or another, much or less, by the Westcott-Hort critical text. One of these Bible versions is the New International Version (in the preface of this Bible we read that ‘the Greek text used in translating the New Testament was an eclectic one ….’, but Kenneth Barker, General editor of the NIV, said that the eclectic text is the UBSGNT and NA).

Westcott and Hort compiled their text by employing the two oldest then-known manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, as their text base. For according to them, the concurrence of these two manuscripts are very strong, and cannot be far from the original text. These two manuscripts are called ‘the earliest and most reliable manuscripts’ or ‘the oldest and best manuscripts’ (even though some important passages are missing, such as John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20, and many mistakes are in them). Since their day, a good number of manuscripts as old and in some cases a century or more older than these two manuscripts have been discovered. With a general uniformity, these early manuscripts have supported the text type known as the Alexandrian text (because of its origin in Egypt) which the Westcott-Hort text presents. Of the early versions, the Westcott-Hort text has strong support in the various Coptic versions of the third and later centuries, plus frequent support in the Old Latin versions and the oldest forms of the Syriac, in particular the Sinaitic and Curetonian manuscripts whose text form dates to the second or third century. Jerome’s revision of the Old Latin, the Vulgate made about 400 after Christ, also gives frequent support to the Alexandrian text.

Which text shall we choose as superior?

To answer this question I quote some words written by Douglas Kutilek in one of his articles titled ‘Westcott & Hort vs. Textus receptus: Which is Superior?’, taken from http://www.bible-researcher.com/, because I agree with them.

‘What shall we say then? Which text shall we choose as superior? We shall choose neither the Westcott-Hort text (or its modern kinsmen) nor the textus receptus (or the majority text) as our standard text, our text of last appeal. All these printed texts are compiled or edited texts, formed on the basis of the informed (or not-so-well-informed) opinions of fallible editors. Neither Erasmus nor Westcott and Hort (nor, need we say, any other text editor or group of editors) is omniscient or perfect in reasoning and judgment. Therefore, we refuse to be enslaved to the textual criticism opinions of either Erasmus or Westcott and Hort or for that matter any other scholars, whether Nestle, Aland, Metzger, Burgon, Hodges and Farstad, or anyone else. Rather, it is better to evaluate all variants in the text of the Greek New Testament on a reading by
reading basis, that is, in those places where there are divergences in the manuscripts and between printed texts, the evidence for and against each reading should be thoroughly and carefully examined and weighed, and the arguments of the various schools of thought considered, and only then a judgment made. We do, or should do, this very thing in reading commentaries and theology books. We hear the evidence, consider the arguments, weigh the options, and then arrive at what we believe to be the honest truth. Can one be faulted for doing the same regarding the variants in the Greek New Testament? Our aim is to know precisely what the Apostles originally did write, this and nothing more, this and nothing else. And, frankly, just as there are times when we must honestly say, "I simply do not know for certain what this Bible verse or passage means," there will be (and are) places in the Greek New Testament where the evidence is not clear cut, and the arguments of the various schools of thought do not distinctly favor one reading over another. This means there will at times be a measure of uncertainty in defining precisely the exact wording of the Greek New Testament (just as there is in the interpretation of specific verses and passages), but this does not mean that there is uncertainty in the theology of the New Testament. Baptist theologian J. L. Dagg has well-stated the theological limits of the manuscript variations in the New Testament. Although the Scriptures were originally penned under the unerring guidance of the Holy Spirit, it does not follow, that a continued miracle has been wrought to preserve them from all error in transcribing. On the contrary, we know that manuscripts differ from each other; and where readings are various, but one of them can be correct. A miracle was needed in the original production of the Scriptures; and, accordingly, a miracle was wrought; but the preservation of the inspired word, in as much perfection as was necessary to answer the purpose for which it was given, did not require a miracle, and accordingly it was committed to the providence of God. Yet the providence which has preserved the divine oracles, has been special and remarkable....The consequence is, that, although the various readings found in the existing manuscripts, are numerous, we are able, in every case, to determine the correct reading, so far as is necessary for the establishment of our faith, or the direction of our practice in every important particular. So little, after all, do the copies differ from each other, that these minute differences, when viewed in contrast with their general agreement, render the fact of that agreement the more impressive, and may be said to serve, practically, rather to increase, than impair our confidence in their general correctness. Their utmost deviations do not change the direction of the line of truth; and if it seems in some points to widen the line a very little, the path that lies between their widest boundaries, is too narrow to permit us to stray. To this may be added the testimony of Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, the pre-eminent British authority on New Testament manuscripts at the turn of the twentieth century. In discussing the differences between the traditional and the Alexandrian text-types, in the light of God's providential preservation of His word, he writes, We may indeed believe that He would not allow His Word to be seriously corrupted, or any part of it essential to man's salvation to be lost or obscured; but the differences between the rival types of text is not one of doctrine. No fundamental point of doctrine rests upon a disputed reading; and the truths of Christianity are as certainly expressed in the text of Westcott and Hort as in that of Stephanus.

Notes

1. Even following rigidly the textual theory that "the majority rules" leaves a fair measure of doubt in a number of passages (especially in Revelation) where there is no numerical majority reading, the manuscripts exhibiting three or more variants, with none represented by 50% plus one (or more) of surviving witnesses. See the apparatus of Hodges & Farstad. And fleeing to the position, "I'll just stick to the textus receptus," doesn't settle the matter, since the various t.r. editions differ widely among themselves — the Complutensian text — the first printed Greek New Testament — differing from the first Elzevir edition in 2,777 places, by Scrivener's count (A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, first edition, p. 293), and in more than 2,300 from Stephanus' 1550 edition (p. 300); Stephanus' 1550 edition in turn differs from the
Elzevir 1633 edition (these two have long been considered the standard textus receptus editions) in 286 places (p. 304).


**The King James–New International Version controversy**

The King James Version was published in 1611 in England, under the reign of King James I. The work of translation began in 1607 and was completed in 1610. It was made by 54 scholars, of whom only 48 were recorded since some passed away before the completion of the project. The Old Testament was based on the same Masoretic text as the previous versions, while the New Testament was based on the received text. However, it must be said that the translators of the King James Version did not follow exclusively any single printed edition of the New Testament in Greek; the edition most closely followed by them was Beza’s edition of 1598, but they departed from this edition for the reading in some other published Greek text at least 170 times, and in at least 60 places, the King James version translators abandoned all then-existing printed editions of the Greek New Testament, choosing instead to follow precisely the reading in the Latin Vulgate Version. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the original KJV of 1611 contained the Apocrypha, which are not inspired books, and that the KJV of 1611 was revised several times; the last revision was made in 1769 (the KJV used today is the 1769 edition).

After the King James Version many other English Bibles have appeared. One of the most popular and used English Bibles today is the New International Version, which was published in 1978. It was made by over a hundred scholars. For the Old Testament the standard Hebrew Text, the Masoretic text as published in the latest editions of *Biblia Hebraica*, was used throughout. The translators consulted the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the more important early versions – the Septuagint, Symmachus and Theodotion; the Vulgate, The Syriach Peshitta, the Targums, and for the Psalms the *Juxta Hebraica* of Jerome. As far as the New Testament is concerned, as I said before, the Greek text used was an eclectic one, which is the UBSGNT and NA. Therefore, since the Greek Text of the New Testament on which the translators of the NIV based their translation is not the Received Text, there are many differences between the New Testament of the KJV and the one of the NIV.

Now, there are some supporters-defenders of the King James Version who criticize very harshly those who use the New International Version (as well as those who use other modern Bible versions) because - according to them – the readers of the NIV use a Bible which is not the Word of God since it is not based on the Received Text. To these King James Version supporters, the New International Version is a Bible that must be avoided, because it is not a true Bible, is a false Bible, and thus it is not the Word of God; the NIV is so much corrupt – because the Greek Text of the New Testament from which it has been translated into English is corrupt and thus a untrustworthy text - that those believers who read and study it are part of the apostate Church! Some call it even ‘A New Age Bible Version’ because according to them it upholds and confirms the doctrines of the New Age movement! In other words, the NIV is a Bible used by the devil to deceive believers into believing many heresies!! Therefore, the aim of these King James Version supporters is to turn as many believers as possible to the use of the King James Version, which is the ONLY Word of God!

I have examined carefully the position of ‘the King James only’ people and the position of those who use the New International Version (as well as the position of those who use other Bible Versions); I have studied the matters concerning this controversy, and these are the conclusions I have come to.
Omissions or additions?

Are we so sure that all the passages and words which are missing in the Critical Text were in the original text? I think that this is an important question that must be answered before going on. My answer is this: in my opinion, some of the passages and words which are not in the Critical Text but are in the Received Text actually were in the original documents, while there are some passages which are in the Received Text which were added to the original documents. However, there are other passages and words about which - I have to admit - I am not sure whether they were in the original documents or not.

The differences don’t affect the doctrines of Christianity

I am persuaded that all the differences existing in the New International Version, are not able to deceive those believers who read the NIV and to cause them to fall away, that is, to stray from the truth and deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because they don’t affect the doctrines of the Bible. The Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His blameless life, His atoning death and His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, and His return from heaven; the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit; salvation by grace only through faith in Jesus Christ, the purpose of God according to election, the possibility of falling away, repentance and faith, the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of life after death, of resurrection of the dead, of eternal judgement, and many other doctrines, are not set aside by the numerous differences. For all these doctrines are plainly taught by the New international Version and every believer who knows the Holy Scriptures and rightly divide them can prove these doctrines through the NIV. Therefore the Gospel of the grace of God can be preached using the New International Version as well, and not only using the King James Version, and people can be saved through that preaching. And the sound doctrine can be taught to the believers through the New International Version as well, and not only through the King James Version. So, if I had only the New International Version, I would preach and teach the same things I preach and teach using both the King James Version and the New King James Version (However, I urge those believers who use the NIV to consult the King James Version and the NKJV).

These things cannot be said about the Bible Versions of certain sects, such as the Bible of the Jehovah Witnesses, or the so called Inspired Version made by Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, which is used by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and some other Bibles, which contain many serious errors which affect many doctrines of Christianity; with regard to these Bibles, therefore, we must say that they have been twisted and manipulated by perverse people who deliberately decided to twist them in order to support and confirm their heresies. These kinds of Bibles are to be rejected.

But the NIV has been made by people who did not want to twist the Holy Scriptures to support heresies. The NIV has, of course, some defects, I recognize this, but it is trustworthy because it is doctrinally orthodox like the King James Version. The differences are due to the different Greek manuscripts on which the translators based their translation; however, both the Received Text (s) and the Critical Text (s) are doctrinally sound. Please, let us bear in mind that according to most Bible scholars the New Testament text is 99% pure whether we use the Received Text or the Critical text. Therefore, we can affirm that the great bulk of the New Testament has been transmitted to us almost without any variations, and so the sacred text is exact and valid and no article of faith and no moral precept in it has been distorted or lost. That's amazing to me. And we must thank and glorify God for this. Not only this, we should emphasize the very many points of agreement between the Two Greek Texts rather than emphasize the differences. We can and should, of course, speak about the various differences, but in speaking about them we must be wise and impartial.
Both the KJV and the NIV have defects

Both the KJV and the NIV are not perfect translations, here are some of their defects.

KING JAMES VERSION

● The following passages were mistranslated by the translators of the KJV.
1. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47); the correct translation is this: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (NKJV). Even though the Scripture teaches that salvation depends of the will of God, it must be said that this passage was mistranslated in the KJV.
2. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19); the correct translation is this: “Repent therefore, and turn to God, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”. Even though, according to the Scriptures, man is converted by the Lord, in this passage Peter exhorted the Jews to turn to God. Furthermore, sins are blotted out at once, they will not be blotted out when the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord. This mistranslated passage of the KJV is quoted by the Mormons to support their false doctrine about remission of sins, according to which repentance and faith in Jesus are not always followed immediately by forgiveness, for the forgiveness of certain sins will be received when Jesus comes back!!
3. “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40); the correct translation is this: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (NKJV). The Greek does not say that the fish in whose belly Jonah was for three days and three nights was a whale.
4. “For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26); the right translation is: “He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (NKJV). The end of the world has not yet come (for Peter says that “the end of all things is at hand” 1 Peter 4:7 – NKJV) while the end of the ages has already come.
5. “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38); the correct translation is this: “But my righteous one [or But the righteous] will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” (NIV). Both in the first part of the verse and in the second part, God is speaking about the righteous, that is, the man who has been justified by his faith in Jesus Christ.
6. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God …. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:16,26). The pronoun ‘Itself’, referring to the Holy Spirit, may induce the readers to believe that the Spirit is something (a force, an energy etc.) and not somebody (the third Divine Person of the Trinity), therefore ‘itself’ must be replaced by ‘Himself. Therefore the NKJV and the NIV are correct since they have “the Spirit himself”.
7. “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10); it is not true that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil because there are other roots of all kinds of evil, therefore the right translation is as follows: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ….” (NKJV and NIV).
8. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). According to this translation, we are looking for the appearing of both the Father and the Son, while the truth is that we are looking for the appearing of only one
person, that is, Jesus Christ the Son of the Father (furthermore, according to this translation Jesus Christ is our Saviour but not our great God, so it obscures the deity of Jesus Christ). The NKJV reads: “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”, and the NIV: “While we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. The same mistake is found in 2 Peter 1:1.

9. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)” – Hebrews 10:23. The right translation is this: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (NKJV).

10. In the following passages Romans 3:4,6,31; 6:2, 15, the expression “God forbid!” is a mistranslation since in the Greek there is not the word ‘God’. The correct meaning of that Greek expression used by Paul is ‘may it never be’ or ‘certainly not’ or ‘absolutely not’. The NKJV has corrected these mistakes, for in all these passages we read “Certainly not!”

11. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30; see also Acts 10:39). That’s not correct, because according to the original Greek language that passage must be translated: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (NKJV). This mistranslated passage in the KJV makes the Bible say that Jesus was killed first and then his dead body was hung on a cross, while Jesus, according to the Bible, was killed by crucifixion, that is to say, He was hung on a cross and while on the cross He died.

12. “For in many things we offend all” (James 3:2). The correct translation is “For we all stumble in many things” (NKJV).


14. The expression “the angel of the Lord” in Matthew 1:20; 28:2; Luke 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 23 is a mistranslation, for the correct translation is “an angel of the Lord” (NKJV).

15. In Matthew 10:8, Mark 16:17, Luke 8:2, 1 Corinthians 10:20, 1 Timothy 4:1 and other places, the KJV speaks of demons as “devils”. However, the underlying Greek word is not diabolos, the term for the devil (Satan), but daimonion which is rightly rendered as “demons” in the NKJV and NIV. I realize that ‘devils’ in the KJV means ‘demons’, however the Greek daimonion should be translated as ‘demons’, for this is the proper word.

16. The KJV translates both Hades and Gehenna, which are two different Greek words which refer to two different places of torment for the wicked, as ‘hell’ [for instance in Luke 16:23 (Hades) and Matthew 10:28 (Gehenna)]. This translation creates confusion, for Hades is the temporary place of torment for the departed wicked (prior to the resurrection of Christ, Hades consisted of two compartments: one – called “Abraham’s bosom” was a place of comfort and rest for the souls of the departed righteous, which has been vacant since Jesus led the righteous within it to heaven after His resurrection, the other was – and still is - a place of torment for the souls of the departed wicked), while Gehenna is the eternal place of torment (called also “the lake of fire” Revelation 20:15) into which the wicked will be cast after their resurrection in their resurrected bodies (thus with their body and soul) and where they will remain in torment for all eternity (it is presently uninhabited). There is no doubt that Hades can be translated as ‘hell’ (when Hades refers to the temporary place of torment where the souls of sinners go after death), just as Gehenna also can be translated as ‘hell’, if by the term ‘hell’ is meant the eternal place of torment for the wicked, but in order not to create confusion in the minds of the readers the best thing to do is to leave these two Greek words in their untranslated Greek form. Another solution is to leave Hades in its untranslated Greek form and to translate Gehenna as ‘everlasting fire’ or ‘hell’. For instance the NKJV in Luke 16:23 leaves Hades in its untranslated Greek form, and in Matthew 10:28 it translates Gehenna as ‘hell’. Still another solution is to translate Hades as ‘hell’ and Gehenna as ‘everlasting fire.’

● Since the King James Version was made several centuries ago, its English is archaic and there are certain words and expressions which are a big problem since through the years they
have become ambiguous or misleading, so that today we can't understand them without help. So I recommend the use of modern Bible Versions, such as the NKJV and the NIV, in order to understand those words and those expressions since in these modern Bible Versions those words and those expressions are updated.

- There are certain passages in the King James Version which seem to have been added to the original Greek documents.

**NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION**

- These passages were mistranslated.

  1. John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”. The correct translation is this: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (KJV).

  2. John 2:4: “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied”. Jesus, according to the original Greek, on that occasion did not call her mother ‘dear woman’ but simply “woman” (KJV).

  3. John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”. The correct translation is this: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (KJV).

  4. Acts 13:33: “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”. The correct translation is this: “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (KJV).

  5. Acts 19:2: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The correct translation is: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (KJV).

  6. Ephesians 1:13: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit”. According to this translation, we were included in Christ when we heard the Gospel, but that’s not true because we were included in Christ when we believed. In other words, we heard the Gospel first and then by faith in the Gospel we were included in Christ; there is a great difference between hearing the Gospel and believing the Gospel. The KJV reads: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise”, that’s the correct translation.

  7. Romans 1:17: “For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith”. The correct translation is this: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (NKJV).

  8. 1 Corinthians 13:7: “It [love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”. That’s not correct because the original Greek says: “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (KJV).

  9. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2: “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come”. The correct translation is this: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.”

  10. In the Old Testament the word Sheol is translated as ‘grave’ in Psalm 9:17 and Isaiah 14:9. Sheol in these two passages refers to the place of torment where the souls of the wicked go after death, and not to the grave. So the KJV and the NKJV are correct, for they both have ‘hell’. As for the New Testament, the word Hades (the Greek word equivalent to Sheol) is translated ‘the depths’ in Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15. In these two passages Hades refers to the place
of torment for the departed wicked, so if it is translated it should be translated as ‘hell’, as in the KJV.

- There are words and passages not included in it which were in the original documents.
- There are some passages that have been watered down because they were not translated literally as in the KJV and the NKJV.

The so called attacks on vital doctrines of the Christian faith are not systematic attacks

Now, the King James supporters claim that some ‘omissions’ of passages and some renderings of passages in the NIV attack some vital doctrines of the Christian faith. Bear in mind that the differences I’m about to mention depend on the Greek Text of the New Testament used by the translators of the NIV; they just translated what they found in that Text, which differs – as we have seen - from the Received Text used by the translators of the KJV.

First of all, let’s take the passage of 1 Timothy 3:16, which in the King James Version reads: “God was manifest in the flesh” while in the NIV: “He appeared in a body,” and which could be rendered: ‘He who was manifested in the flesh’ according to the ‘Critical Text’. Let us assume that the King James Version passage is correct and the passage in the NIV is wrong, do you think that this passage will make a believer reject the divinity of Jesus Christ just because in the NIV we read ‘He appeared in a body’? No, because there are many other passages in the NIV that plainly confirm the divinity of Jesus, such as John 1:1,14; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9. Therefore, even if this passage were wrong, the NIV would lead you to believe that Jesus is God. Furthermore, it is evident that the authors of the Greek Text on which the NIV is based did not want to attack the divinity of Jesus Christ because they did not alter all the passages in the whole Bible that confirm the divinity of Christ. If they had wished to attack the deity of Christ and nullify it, they would have had to twist or to remove many passages of the Scriptures. For instance, since the translators of the New World Translation of the Jehovah Witnesses had decided to nullify the deity of Jesus, they twisted almost all the passages which state one way or another that Jesus Christ is God. That was a systematic attack on the deity of Christ.

Furthermore, it is evident that since the ‘Critical Text’ has ‘He who was manifested in the flesh’ that means that the One who was manifested in the flesh had to be a superhuman being before, don’t you think so? Could he be an angel? Of course not, so He had to be God. Besides, remember that the Scripture says that the “Word was made flesh” (John 1:14) and the Word was God. One more thing, the fact that Jesus is called by Paul ‘He who was manifested in the flesh’ should not surprise us, for Paul calls Jesus “Him who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21 - NKJV), and John calls Jesus: “Him who is from the beginning” (1 John 2:14 - NKJV).

Second, let’s look at the so called attack on the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. In the KJV we read: “And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him” (Luke 2:33), while the NIV reads: “The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him”. Now, let us assume that the KJV is correct and the NIV wrong, how can we say that the authors of the Greek Text of the New Testament on which the NIV is based attacked the virgin birth of Jesus when the accounts of His birth according to Matthew and to Luke are substantially the same as those written in the Received Text? Don’t you think that if they had wished to attack the virgin birth of Jesus they would have had to twist many more passages? Anyway, I would like you to notice that if it is true that the NIV has ‘the child’s father’ it is true also that the KJV also calls Joseph ‘the father of Jesus’. Here are the words that Mary, the mother of Jesus, said to Jesus in the temple when He was about twelve years old: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing” (Luke 2:48). Please, could you explain to me why Mary called her husband ‘the father of Jesus’ even though she knew that Joseph had not begotten Jesus? I ask you another question: ‘Why does the Scripture call Joseph and Mary ‘the parents of Jesus’? What does the expression “his parents” (Luke 2:41) mean? It means that Joseph and Mary were the parents of Jesus, doesn’t it? Therefore, the fact that Joseph is called the father of Jesus doesn’t attack the virgin birth of Jesus. The reason why Joseph is called the
father of Jesus is found in this passage of the Gospel according to Luke: “And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli” (Luke 3:23).

Third, let’s examine the so called attack on the atonement. The supporters of the King James Version point out that in the NIV the following words “through his blood” (Colossians 1:14) are missing. Can you see an attack against the atonement made by Jesus Christ? As far as I am concerned, I don’t see it. The Critical Text on which is based the NIV is full of passages which confirm the atonement made by Jesus through His blood. I will quote just two of them. Paul says to the Ephesians: “In him we have redemption through his blood ....” (Ephesians 1:7 - NIV) and to the Colossians: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19-10 – NIV).

I think that I have proved that even if these passages in the NIV were altered (I am inclined to think that in the original they were like we read them in the Critical Text rather than in the Received Text), we could prove the deity of Christ and the virgin birth of Christ and the atonement made by Christ through His blood even through the NIV. And I could give you many more examples like these. You see, the Bible is not a book like all the other books, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the authors of the books of the Bible to write and the Holy Spirit is a wise Spirit. Every doctrine of the Christian faith is confirmed in different ways and in different places of the Bible. If a passage has been mistranslated or twisted, intentionally or unintentionally, or even omitted, there will be for sure some other passages that will confirm the doctrine which has been attacked. I want to make it clear that I don’t justify intentional mistakes, I just want to demonstrate how the doctrines of the Christian faith are not nullified by the Critical Text underlying the NIV.

Therefore, even though I consider the King James Version a good and accurate version in most places, I am persuaded that those believers who use the NIV have not strayed from the truth, and if they stand firm in the faith, pray, live a holy and godly life, have their delight in the Scriptures and divide rightly the Word of God, they don’t run the risk of straying from the truth.

Even by using the King James Version believers can accept false doctrines

The King James Version only people say that by using the NIV believers will accept strange doctrines, that’s why they don’t recommend this Bible Version. One of these KJV supporters has stated: ‘The whole result of a translation based upon the Oldest and Best Manuscripts, is deceit and departure from the faith ‘as it was once delivered to the saints. The inevitable result is apostasy’.

However, I would like to point out that the acceptance of strange doctrines does not depend on reading the NIV – which is a trustworthy Bible - for there are many believers who use the King James Version who believe strange doctrines, such as baptismal regeneration, the so called doctrine ‘once saved always saved’, the so called soul sleep, to mention only some of the false doctrines which are not taught by the Holy Scriptures. On the contrary, there are believers who use the New International Version who don’t accept these false teachings. What do I mean by that? I mean that you could have the best Bible Translation in your hands, but if you don’t divide the word of truth rightly you will accept strange doctrines. Remember that in the days of the apostles, even though there were the original autographs of their epistles and trustworthy copies of them, among some churches there were some who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and some others who said that the resurrection was already past. And what shall we say about the fact that there were some others who had fallen from grace for they were trying to be justified by the law of Moses, and many who lived a sinful life, even though they had in their church the original epistles of the apostles? Is this not the evidence that even if we had the original epistles written by the hands of the apostles, we could forsake the Lord and go into perdition? Do you understand what I mean? Therefore, no matter whether you use the King
James Version or not, if you don’t watch and pray, you will begin to live a sinful life and give heed to false teachings. And is this not what many of the King James Version movement do? They praise the KJV and criticize those who use the NIV and in the meantime they live a life which is not worthy of the Gospel and believe strange doctrines, which are not taught by the Holy Scriptures, because they don’t watch and pray. They are like the Pharisees, who had the writings of Moses and the prophets (and I challenge you to demonstrate that they did not have a reliable version of the Old Testament!), but they lived a sinful life (not a holy life as commanded by the law) and therefore they were rebuked by Jesus. They are like the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, even though in the book of the prophet Daniel as well as in the book of the prophet Isaiah it was written that one day God will raise the dead. These people have forgotten that we Christians must defend the sound doctrine and not a particular Bible Version or Translation, that we must fight against the devil and not against those who don’t use the same Bible Version we use. We must hold to the sound doctrines which are taught by the Bible (and I can assure you that they are taught also by the NIV), and we must defend them from the attack of the enemies of the cross.

The most important thing is to keep the Word of God; on the contrary, some of you who defend the King James Version and say that it is the ONLY word of God don’t keep the Word of God because you live a sinful life; holiness is unknown to you. Therefore, just as Paul rebuked some believing Jews saying to them: “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” (Romans 2:23 – NKJV), so I rebuke you saying: ‘You who make your boast in the Word of God, which according to you is the King James Version alone, you dishonor God through breaking the Word of God?’ You speak evil of those believers who use the NIV, is this the way to conduct as children of God? Did not Jesus command us to love one another? Listen, the sectarianism you show is a shame, and a scandal. Repent, and become humble.’

Even Bibles which are based on the Received Text differ from one another

Many believers when they hear about the received text think that there is only one Received Text, but that’s not true, because as we saw before, there are various editions of the received text which differ from one another. Therefore, for example, if the translators of a Bible base their translation of the New Testament exclusively on the Received Text of Stephen (1550 edition) while the translators of another Bible base their translation exclusively on the Received Text of Elzevir (1633 edition) their New Testaments will have many differences, because Stephen’s 1550 edition differs from the Elzevir 1633 edition in 286 places!! At this point, since there are these differences between the various editions of the Received Text, which is the preserved and infallible Text? The Text on which we can rely 100%? My answer is this: I don’t know, rather I think that no one of them is the infallible text. But there is another question to be answered. How can the term Received Text be referred to the pure Greek Text of the New Testament handed down? My answer is as follows: we can’t apply the word Received Text to the pure Greek New Testament because even the various editions of the Received Text differ from one another. Now, as I said before, the KJV translators did not follow only one edition of the Textus Receptus but various editions of the Received Text and in some places they followed even the Vulgate, therefore the underlying Greek text of the King James Bible is a Received Text which doesn’t conform exactly to any of the historic texts dating from the Reformation period and known collectively as the Textus Receptus. Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649) also, who translated the New Testament in Italian from the Received Text, did not follow exclusively one particular edition of the Textus Receptus. Now I will show you some of the differences existing between the New Testament of the King James Version and the New Testament of the Italian Bible Diodati Version (which was first published in 1607).

The KJV has: “And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished ….” (Luke 2:22), while the Diodati has: “E quando I giorni della loro purificazione furono compiuti secondo la legge di Mosè…” (And when the days of their purification according
to the law of Moses were accomplished). Diodati followed the Stephen’s edition 1550, while the KJV translators the Beza’s edition of 1598 which has ‘her’ instead of ‘their’.
The KJV has: “Who by the mouth of thy servant David has said” (Acts 4:25) while the Diodati has: “Che hai, per lo Spirito Santo, detto per la bocca di Davide, tuo servitore” (Who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant David). All of Beza’s editions (except 1565) have the words ‘The Holy Spirit’, while the KJV translators followed Stephen’s 1550 edition in omitting these words.
The KJV has: “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (2 Corinthians 1:6) while the Diodati has: “Ora, sia che siamo afflitti, ciò è per la vostra consolazione e salute; sia che altresì siamo consolati, ciò è per la vostra consolazione, la quale opera efficacemente nel vostro sostenere le medesime sofferenze, le quali ancora noi patiamo” (And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation – and salvation is missing). Diodati followed Beza’s edition 1598 which omits ‘and salvation’.
The KJV has: “And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon” (Matthew 21:7), while the Diodati has: “E menarono l’asina, ed il puledro; e misero sopra quelli le lor veste, e Gesù montò sopra il puledro” (And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and Jesus sat on the colt). Diodati followed the reading of Stephen’s 1550 TR reading ‘he sat’, and rejected the reading of Beza’s 1589 and 1598 editions ‘they set’.
The KJV has: “This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground” (John 8:6), while the Diodati has: “Or dicevano questo, tentandolo, per poterlo accusare. Ma Gesù chinatosi in giù, scriveva col dito in terra” (This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground). Diodati followed the Beza’s 1589 and 1598 editions, and Stephen’s of 1550, which omit the words ‘as though he heard them not’, while the KJV translators followed the Complutensian, and Stephen’s 1546 and 1549. The words ‘as though he heard them not’ were not placed in italics until 1769.
The KJV has: “After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:7), while the Diodati has: “Vennero in Misia, e tentavano d’andare in Bitinia, ma lo Spirito di Gesù nol permise loro” (After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not). Diodati followed the Beza’s editions (except 1565) which add ‘of Jesus’ after ‘the Spirit’, while the KJV followed Erasmus, the Complutensian, and Stephen in the omission.
The KJV has: “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus” (Revelation 16:5), while the Diodati has: “Ed io udii l’angelo delle acque, che diceva: Tu sei giusto, o Signore, che sei, che eri, che sei il Santo, d’aver fatti questi giudizi (And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, who art the Holy One, because thou hast judged thus). Diodati followed Stephen who has ‘the Holy One’, while the KJV followed Beza’s last three editions which have ‘and shalt be’.
The reason why I have made this comparison is to show how even those who translated the New Testament from the Received Text (in the same period of time) followed different readings in some places, and as a result the translations are not the same, they are similar but not identical. Therefore, since the KJV supporters claim that the King James Version contains the preserved text of the New Testament, and the New Testament of this Italian Bible does not agree totally with the King James Version, the conclusion to which they should come is that even such a New Testament, translated from the Received Text, is not the preserved Text of the New Testament and as a result it is not the Word of God!! At this point I ask: why should I prefer the King James Version to the Diodati? Why shouldn’t I prefer the Received Text underlying the Diodati to the Received Text underlying the King James Version? Who is able to show me that
the KJV translators were correct in all their decisions while Giovanni Diodati did some mistakes?
I tell you the truth, if I were a fanatic and blind supporter of the Diodati Version, saying that the Diodati is the best Bible in the world and the only word of God, I would reject the King James Version because of the above mentioned differences; but thank God I am not blind nor devoid of understanding, for God has given me His wisdom; therefore I accept the Diodati Version as the Word of God, just as I accept the KJV, even though it differs from the KJV in some places.
I think this is the conclusion each believer should come to with regard to the NIV also, even though its New Testament is not based on the Received Text and consequently contains many more differences (because the differences existing between the Received Text editions and the Critical Text are many more than the differences existing between the various editions of the Received Text). I believe this is the right conclusion.

Which Bible Version should we use then?

At this point, someone may ask: ‘Which Bible Version should I use then?’ Well, in my opinion, the New King James Version is a good modern-language update of the KJV. So you may use it. However, I want to make it clear that I don’t regard it as a perfect translation, for it also has its own defects.
The following passages in the NKJV contain mistranslated words or phrases.
1. Matthew 7:14: “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”. The way which leads to life is not difficult but narrow, as we read in the KJV: “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”
2. Matthew 11:3 (Luke 7:19): “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”. The disciples of John did not ask Jesus if He was the Coming One, but if He was “He that should come” (KJV)
3. Matthew 21:32: “For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him”. Jesus did not say to the chief priests and the elders of the people: ‘You did not afterward relent …’ but “ye repented not afterward …” (KJV).
4. Matthew 27:3: “Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders”. Matthew did not write that Judas was remorseful, but that he “repented himself” (KJV).
John 14:16: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever”. The Greek word parakletos, translated as ‘Helper,’ means ‘Comforter’ or ‘Intercessor’, so the KJV is correct.
5. Acts 11:17: “If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” Peter did not say that, for God gave the gift of the Spirit to the apostles as well as to the other disciples of the Lord on the day of Pentecost, that is to say, after they had believed. The correct translation is this: “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (KJV)
6. Acts 17:29: “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising’. The KJV reads “the Godhead” instead of ‘the Divine Nature’, for that is the meaning of the Greek word theios used by Paul. Theios can translated also as ‘the Divine’ or ‘the Divinity’, but not as ‘the Divine Nature’.
7. Acts 19:2: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The baptism with the Holy Spirit is received after one has believed in the Lord, that’s why Paul could not have asked that question to those disciples in Ephesus. The underlying Greek of this passage supports the translation in the KJV which reads: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”. 
8. Romans 11:29: “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”. The correct translation is this: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance”.

9. 1 Corinthians 6:9: “homosexuals’ should be replaced with “effeminate” (KJV).

10. 2 Thessalonians 2:2: “... as though the day of Christ had come”. Paul told the Thessalonians another thing, that is, “.....as that the day of Christ is at hand”.

11. Hebrews 10:38: “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him”. The correct translation is this: “But my righteous one [or But the righteous] will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” (NIV). The one who may draw back is the just.
ANGELOLOGY

The nature of angels

Angels (the word angel derives from the Greek word angelos which literally means ‘messenger’) are created beings, as it is written: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Colossians 1:16). We don’t know exactly when angels were created by God. We know, however, for sure that when God created the earth they already existed, for the Scripture says that when God laid the foundations of the earth all the angels “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Since they are created beings, they are not worthy to be worshiped. The worship of angels is forbidden by the Scriptures, for when John fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had showed him many heavenly things and many things still to come, the angel admonished him saying: “See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Revelation 22:9). Don’t let anyone who delights in the worship of angels cheat you of your reward (Colossians 2:18). Therefore, beware of the Roman Catholics, because they worship angels; they are of those who changed the truth of God into a lie and “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 1:25 – NKJV). And beware also of those who, even though they don’t worship angels, teach that Christians have the authority to command angels, for this is inconsistent with the Scripture, which teaches that only God does have the authority to command them. Pray to God and have faith in Him alone, and He will dispatch His angels to minister to you as He wills, but do not command the angels of God to meet your needs, for this is contrary to the will of God for you.

Angels are spirits, for they are called “spirits” (Hebrews 1:14), that is to say, they do not have a body of flesh and bones as we human beings have. However, they have the power to manifest themselves in human form in order to be seen by people. Those two angels who were sent by God to Sodom looked like human beings, for Lot gave them some food to eat (Genesis 19:1,3) and the people of Sodom called them “men” (Genesis 19:5). The angels of God may still take bodily form as in the days of old; as for this eventuality, it must be said that the Scripture states that some people, by entertaining strangers, “have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2 - NKJV). Furthermore, it must be said that in Biblical times every time the angels of God appeared to people they appeared as men. Since the angels are spirits, they can appear and disappear, and they can travel at great speed. In the Bible are recorded various visions and dreams in which angels appeared. For instance, Jacob saw in a dream the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder whose top reached to heaven (Genesis 28:12); an angel of the Lord appeared in dream to Joseph to tell him to take the young Child Jesus and His mother and flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13); two angels of God appeared in a vision to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:12); and an angel of God appeared to Cornelius in a vision to tell him to send some men to Joppa and call for Peter (Acts 10:3-6). Since angels were created by a command of God, they are not the spirits of the departed righteous, nor are they glorified human beings.

Angels are immortal, for one day Jesus, in speaking to the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead, said that those who “shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36).
Angels are very numerous, “thousand thousands …. and ten thousand times ten thousand”, says Daniel (Daniel 7:10). John says that he heard the voice of many angels round about the throne of God “and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says that we have come “to an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22).

According to the Scripture, the chief angel is Michael, called “the archangel” (Jude 9). Michael means ‘who is like unto God?’ and archangel means ‘chief angel’. Michael opposed Satan in a dispute concerning the body of Moses (Jude 9). One day Michael and his angels will fight against the devil and his angels, as it is written: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12:7-9). Michael is also the great prince who protects the people of Israel, for in a vision a messenger of God said to the prophet Daniel: “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1). Michael upheld the messenger of God who appeared to Daniel against the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece (Daniel 10:21), which were evil spirits ruling over the kingdom of Persia and the kingdom of Greece. It is erroneous to teach that the Son of God, prior to His incarnation, was Michael the archangel, for Michael is a created being while the Son of God is God; so beware of those who teach this false doctrine concerning Jesus.

Cherubim and Seraphim

The first reference to the cherubim in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:24: “So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (NKJV). God dwells between the cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4; Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16). The prophet Ezekiel saw them in a heavenly vision; here are his words: “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him. And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and
returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake” (Ezekiel 1:1-28; cf. Ezekiel 10:1-22). Two cherubim of gold were placed upon the ark in the Holiest of all in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:17-22; Hebrews 9:5). The veil of the Tabernacle (which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place) was woven with an artistic design of cherubim (Exodus 26:31). Please note that in Hebrew the plural of cherub is cherubim, although the King James Version uses the word cherubims. The seraphim (from the Hebrew word saraph which means ‘to be on fire’) are mentioned by the prophet Isaiah in his book. Here are his words: “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:1-4). As for the seraphim also, it must be said that the plural of seraph is seraphim, even though the KJV uses the word seraphims.

The Angel of the Lord

In the Old Testament there are many references to “the angel of the Lord” (here are some of them: Genesis 16:7; 22:11; Exodus 3:2; Judges 13:3), who is called also “the angel of his presence” (Isaiah 63:9). Who was that angel? He was a special heavenly being, for God said to the Israelites: “My name is in Him” (Exodus 23:21), and when one day that angel was asked by Manoah, the father of Samson, what was his name, he answered: “Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?” (Judges 13:18 - NKJV). That angel, therefore, was God, or rather the
Son of God (who was God) in His pre-existent state. So, that angel was not a creature, but the Second Person of the Trinity, who manifested Himself in angelic form.

Please note this: the expression “the angel of the Lord” in Matthew 1:20; 28:2; Luke 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; and 12:7,23 in the KJV is a mistranslation, for the correct translation is “an angel of the Lord” (NKJV).

The character of angels

Angels are holy, for they are called “holy angels” (Matthew 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Revelation 14:10); however, the Scripture says that God “charges His angels with error” (Job 4:18 - NKJV).

Angels are obedient, as it is written: “Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Psalm 103:20). They are called “elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21) to distinguish them from the angels who rebelled against God.

Angels are wise and intelligent; however their intelligence and knowledge are limited. For it is written that they don’t know the day or the hour of the return of Christ from heaven (Mark 13:32) and that they desire to look into the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (1 Peter 1:12).

Angels are powerful, for it is written: “They excel in strength” (Psalm 103:20). However, their power is limited, for only God possesses the attribute of omnipotence. They are “greater in power and might” (2 Peter 2:11) than the dignitaries (Satan and the demons), yet they don’t bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord (2 Peter 2:11; Jude 9). This shows that they are also humble.

Angels worship God, as it is written: “The host of heaven worships You” (Nehemiah 9:6 – NKJV), and the Son of God who is at the right hand of God the Father (Revelation 5:11-12), for God has commanded His angels to worship His Son, as it is written: “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6).

Angels take pleasure in the works of God and in His grace, for – as we saw before - when God laid the foundations of the earth they all “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7), and when one sinner repents of his sins and believes the Gospel, they rejoice over him, as Jesus said: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

The work of angels

In the epistle to the Hebrews it is written about the angels of God: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14 - NIV). Therefore, these heavenly beings are sent by God to serve His children. Let us look at some of these services.

The angels of God are sent by God to His children to foretell them some events (the birth of someone, the death of someone, a war, a famine, etc.). For example, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to Zechariah to foretell him the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-20); and in the six month that same angel was sent to Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, to foretell her the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). God sent an angel to John to show him many things that are still to come (Read the Book of Revelation). Sometimes God sends His angels to give His servants some special orders, as in the case of the evangelist Philip, as it is written: “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying: Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is desert” (Acts 8:26 - NKJV), or – as we saw before – in the case of Joseph, whom an angel of God commanded to take the young Child Jesus and His mother and to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13).
Some other times, God sends His angels to comfort and strengthen, as in the case of His Son, while He was in the Gethsemane, as it is written: “And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43), or in the case of the apostle Paul, while he was on the ship, as it is written: “But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said: Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying: Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you” (Acts 27:21-24 - NKJV).

God sends His angels to protect His children and deliver them from peril and evil, as it is written: “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psalm 34:7 – The IBDV reads ‘gli angeli del Signore, that is, ‘the angels of the Lord”), and again: “Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalm 91:9-11). In the book of Acts we have two examples of how God delivered some of His children through His angels. The first is that of the apostles of the Lord, as it is written: “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught” (Acts 5:17-21); the second is that of Peter, as it is written: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter [Passover] to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:1-11). Of course, the angels of God protect and deliver God’s servants from their enemies when it is in His providence to do so, for we have some examples in the Bible which show us that sometimes God allows His servants to be killed by their enemies, as in the case of some believers of the Church in Smyrna, who were put in prison for Christ’s sake and put to death after 10 days (Revelation 2:10), and of James the brother of John, who was killed by Herod with the sword (Acts 12:2). On certain occasions, such as during a famine, or in the midst of a particular distress, God sends His angels to bring food, water, money, etc. to His children. God, for example, sent an angel to bring bread and water to the prophet Elijah while he was in the desert (1 Kings 19:1-8). God sent his angels to minister unto Jesus in the desert, after He was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:11). I know many testimonies which confirm that angels are sent by God to deliver His children from death, and to meet their material needs.
The angels of God will accompany Jesus Christ when He comes in glory, (Matthew 25:31), and He will send them with a great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:31).

The angels of God are sent also to lead unbelievers to salvation, which is in Jesus Christ. In the Scripture we find the example of Cornelius, to whom God sent an angel to tell him to send men to Joppa and call for Simon Peter, who, when he had come into Cornelius' house, told him words by which Cornelius and all his household were saved (Acts 10:1-6; 11:13-14). And last but not least, the angels of God are sent by God to execute His judgements on the wicked. For instance, we read the following story in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the [an] angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:20-23). According to the Scripture, at the end of the world the Lord will send forth His angels and they will weed out of His kingdom all workers of iniquity and will throw them into the eternal fire: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41-42). Before the return of the Lord from heaven God will use some of His angels to execute His judgements on the world (Revelation 15:1-8; 16:1-21).
DEMONOLOGY

Satan

The origin of Satan

Satan is an evil and powerful spiritual being. The word Satan comes from the Hebrew satan which means ‘adversary’. Satan is “the enemy” (Luke 10:19) of God and of all the sons of God (1 Peter 5:8). He has a kingdom (Matthew 12:26); all those who are under his power are part of his kingdom, and are called “the children of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:38) and “the children of the kingdom” (Matthew 8:12). The kingdom of Satan is not divided against itself, that’s why Satan cannot cast out Satan (Matthew 12:25-27).

As far as his origin is concerned, the Scriptures teach us that originally he was a holy heavenly being, but because of pride he became corrupt and was expelled from the paradise of God. Here is what the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Ezekiel say about his fall: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [literally ‘Day Star’], son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit” (Isaiah 14:12-15); “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more’ (Ezekiel 28:12-19). I would like to point out that even though the above mentioned words of Isaiah refer to the king of Babylon and the words of Ezekiel to the king of Tyrus, there are good reasons to suppose that they can be applied to the origin of Satan.

The character and works of Satan

Satan is very wicked and thus his works are wicked. Let’s examine his character and his evil works in the light of the Holy Scriptures.
Deceiver

Satan is “that old serpent”, he who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9), because he deceives people all over the world into believing all kinds of lies. “He is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44 – NIV), there is no truth in him. The first person whom Satan deceived by his craftiness was Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3), the wife of Adam. For Satan, through the serpent, induced Eve to doubt God’s word (God had said to Adam: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” – Genesis 2:16-17) and to accept his lie, according to which by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Eve and Adam would not die. Eve believed Satan, and she took the fruit and ate it and gave it to his husband who ate it as well. However, on that very day both Eve and Adam died spiritually. It happened just what God had said to Adam would happen if they would eat that particular fruit (Genesis 2:15-16; 3:1-7). Of course, that fruit prohibited by God was a good fruit in itself, yet it had been prohibited by God. Therefore, while the words of Satan proved to be false, the words of God proved to be true. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen. Satan has continued his diabolical work through man’s history, and is actively prosecuting it to this day. He deceives people into believing that God does not exist, that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, that He is not the Saviour of the world, that He did not die for our sins and did not rise again for our justification, that Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, that man is God, that all things are God, that sin is a beautiful thing, that the living can consult the dead and speak with them, that the occult powers are good powers, that there will be no day of judgement, that salvation is by works, that after death all is finished, that after death the soul of a man enters the body of another human being or the body of an animal (reincarnation), that the devil does not exist (or that he is only the personification of the evil in the world), that there is no hell, that you can find happiness in the worldly amusements and in the fleshly pleasures, etc. etc. These doctrines are just some of his lies, and we know that those who believe the lies of Satan are more numerous than those who believe the truth which is in Christ Jesus.

Why does Satan want people to believe lies? Because he hates people and wants them to go to perdition. God desires men to be saved from the everlasting fire, while Satan wants them to go into the everlasting fire. This is confirmed by what Jesus said in the parable of the sower concerning those who are by the way side: "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Think of this! Satan takes away the Word of God from the heart of some people because he wants to keep them from believing and being saved.

Obviously, Satan desires to deceive even the children of God. This he tries to do using false ministers of the Gospel, who transform themselves into ministers of Christ and are called by Paul ‘ministers of Satan’ (2 Corinthians 11:15). They act like their master, who “transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14 - NKJV). Their light seems to be true, but it is a false light. Their doctrines appear sound to many, but they are pernicious. Therefore we must beware of Satan’s ministers.

Sometimes Satan confirms his lies through signs and wonders, therefore, in these cases, the signs and wonders are performed through occult powers. There are many false prophets who work these signs and wonders, both in the Eastern countries and the Western countries. Didn’t Jesus say: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24)? They are dressed in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves ready to devour the children of God. Furthermore, remember that both the man of sin (or the antichrist) and the false prophet, who will appear before the coming of Christ, will perform great signs and wonders, as it is written: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all
deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of
the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10); "And he [the false prophet] doeth
great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,
And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power
to do in the sight of the beast [the antichrist]; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they
should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live" (Revelation

He who blinds the minds

We have seen that Satan deceives people into believing all kinds of lies, and he takes away the
saving Word of God out of the hearts of many of those where it has been sown, in order to keep
them from believing and being saved, so that after death they might go to hell and in that day
they might be thrown into the everlasting fire. However, he does another thing to keep people
from believing and being saved: he blinds their minds. Here is what Paul says to the Corinthians:
“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded
the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the
image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). This is why many people all over
the world don’t accept the Gospel of the grace of God, because their minds have been darkened
by the wicked one. On the other hand, however, the Lord opens the minds of some of those
where the Word has been sown, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ might shine on
them. To Him be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

Tempter

Satan is the tempter (Matthew 4:3). He tempted Jesus, the Son of God, to sin, but he did not
manage to make him sin (Matthew 4:11). He tempts us also to break the commandments of
God; however, if we submit ourselves to God and resist him, he will flee from us (James 4:7).
We can resist efficaciously the devil only by putting on the whole armour of God, about which the
apostle Paul speaks to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-17).
The devil works what he wishes in those people who don’t submit themselves to God and don’t
resist him, inducing them to commit all kinds of sins. That’s why he is called “the prince of the
power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2).
Therefore, the reason why men are slaves of all kinds of vices and sins is that there is a wicked
spirit called Satan, and men are under his power; he controls them, he rules over them, so they
are given to all kinds of sins. John says that “he that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil
sinneth from the beginning” (1 John 3:8), and also that “the whole world lies under the sway of
the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). That is true indeed!

Slanderer or accuser

Satan is the Devil, that is, the accuser of the children of God, for he accuses them before God
day and night (Revelation 12:9). The word ‘devil’ derives from the Greek diabolos which means
‘slanderer’ or ‘accuser’. The Scripture confirms clearly that Satan is a slanderer; here is what the
prophet Zechariah saw and heard in a vision: “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest
standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him [the
NIV reads ‘to accuse him’]. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan;
even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the
fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by’ (Zechariah 3:1-5).

We who are the children of God, however, have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1), who defends us against the accusations of the devil confessing before God the Father that we are clothed with the righteousness of God, which is through faith in Christ, and His blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). That's why we are not afraid of his accusations.

**Murderer**

Satan is a murderer (John 8:44). He is able to kill people and this is what he does personally or through his evil servants (persons who practice occult arts or persons not involved in occultism whom he induces to kill other persons) all over the world. Some brothers and sisters who were wizards and witches before their conversion to Christ, have told us that sometimes they killed people through their evil powers, and that they tried to kill even some Christians but they could not kill them because they were protected by God.

It was Satan who induced Cain to kill his brother Abel, for the apostle John says: “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother” (1 John 3:11-12 - NKJV). While Jesus was on earth He rebuked the Jews who wanted to kill Him; He told them that their father was the devil and thus they wanted to do the deeds of their father, who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:41,44).

Satan is our adversary and as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore, don’t give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27), otherwise he will destroy you. Remember that he hates you, he wants to hurt you, therefore resist him, steadfast in the faith.

**Other works of Satan**

Let us see some other works of Satan.

*Satan moves people to rebel against God*: he stood up against Israel and moved king David to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1), and since David, by numbering Israel, sinned against God, God punished Israel.

*Satan afflicts people with sickness*: he struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 1:1-22; 2:1-7), and he kept bound for eighteen long years that woman who had a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:11).

*Satan puts wicked purposes into the hearts of men and may personally enter into them*: he put it into the heart of Judas, who was numbered among the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, to betray Jesus (John 13:2), and he entered Judas Iscariot, who went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Jesus to them (Luke 22:3-4). And he filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for himself, and for that sin Ananias was put to death by God (Acts 5:1-10).

*Satan hinders Christ’s servants in the carrying out of their desires*: he hindered Paul and his fellow-workers from going to visit the saints of Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:18).
Satan casts Christ’s servants into prison: Jesus said to the angel of the Church of Smyrna: “The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days” (Revelation 2:10 – NKJV).

Satan sows his children among the children of God: Jesus, in explaining the parable of the tares of the field to His disciples, said: “The tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil ….” (Matthew 13:38-39 – NKJV).

Satan lays snares for believers: in the days of the apostles, Satan took Hymenaeus and Philetus captive to do his will, for they strayed concerning the truth saying that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18, 24-26). So, let us pray God that He might deliver us from the evil one, as Jesus commanded us to do (Matthew 6:13).

Satan wants to be worshiped

The Scripture teaches us that only God is worthy to be worshiped. The devil knows this; however, since he is wicked and presumptuous, he also wants to be worshiped by human beings. The fact that he tempted Jesus to worship him (Matthew 4:8-10) shows very clearly that Satan desires to be worshiped. And he has deceived many people all over the world into worshiping him, who are called Satanists. During their services dedicated to the devil they perform many diabolical acts – sometimes they even offer human sacrifices to their master – and Satan himself appears to them and speak to them.

Satan’s limitations

The Scripture teaches that even though Satan is free to act all over the world, and he commits and causes people to commit a great many evil works, he has some limitations. First of all, he is not omnipotent, therefore he can’t do all things, his power is limited because he is a created being. Second, he is not omniscient, therefore his knowledge also is limited; third, he is not omnipresent, therefore he can’t be everywhere at the same time. Last but not least, he does only those things which God allows him to do. The story of Job shows this very clearly, for he could not touch Job without God’s permission. Bear always in mind these things.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, destroyed Satan

The Scripture states that Satan is judged (John 16:11), and that he was destroyed by Jesus Christ, as it is written: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Therefore, Jesus triumphed over Satan through His death, that is to say, through His precious blood He shed for our sins. And thus Jesus Christ is able to deliver those who are under the power of Satan. In other words, He can turn the earthly subjects of Satan’s kingdom “from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). We are of those whom the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed from the hand of Satan, and we rejoice at His great victory over Satan and all his wicked hosts. Blessed be the name of Jesus Christ now and forevermore. Amen.
The destiny of Satan

During the period of time which will precede the coming of the Lord, and during which God will strike the wicked people with many plagues, Michael the archangel and his angels will fight against Satan and his angels and Satan and his angels will fight back, but Satan and his angels will not prevail and they will be cast out of heaven and hurled to the earth, as it is written: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7-9).

Afterwards, when Jesus Christ returns from heaven, Satan will be bound for a thousand years and cast into the bottomless pit, so that he will not be able to deceive the nations any more till the thousand years are finished, and after that period of time he will be released for a little while, he will deceive the nations who are on the earth, but he will be cast into the everlasting fire, which was “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Here is what the Scripture says: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:1-10). As you can see, one day Satan will be punished for all his wicked works; God will not annihilate Satan – as some believe -, but He will condemn him to an everlasting torment into the everlasting fire.

Paul, concerning the punishment which God will inflict on Satan, says to the Romans: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20).

The fallen angels

When Satan rebelled against God many angels followed him in his rebellion; we don't know their number but we know that they are many. The angels of Satan are free to act all over the world. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that an angel of Satan was given to him to torment him, in order to keep him from becoming conceited because of the surpassingly great revelations from the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:7 – Both the IBRV and the IBDV read ‘un angelo di Satana’ that is, ‘an angel of Satan,’ while the KJV, NKJV and NIV read ‘a messenger of Satan’). As we saw before, before the return of Christ, Michael and his angels will fight against Satan and his angels, but Satan and
his angels will not prevail and they will be hurled to the earth (Revelation 12:7-9). The everlasting fire was prepared by God for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41), therefore the angels of Satan were appointed to be thrown into the everlasting fire, where they will be tormented forever and ever.

Besides these angels, there are other wicked angels who - unlike the above mentioned angels - are not free to act in this world, because they are in a prison called Tartarus (Greek word which indicates the deepest abyss of Hades). God cast them down to this place, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgement, because they did not keep their first estate but left their own habitation and gave themselves over to fornication (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6-7). As to these angels, in the book of Genesis it is written that they saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose (Genesis 6:1-4). According to the Word of God, we will judge the fallen angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Demons

Demons are evil spirits or unclean spirits which are under the leadership of Satan, who is called “the prince of demons” (Matthew 12:24 – NIV). Demons are his obedient subjects, who do his will. Satan carries on his wicked work with them.

As far as their origin is concerned, the Scripture doesn’t say how they came into being. Demons believe that there is one God, and tremble (James 2:19).

Please note the following thing: in the New Testament the KJV speaks of demons as “devils”. However, the underlying Greek word is not diabolos, the term for the devil (Satan), but daimonion which is rightly rendered as “demons” in the NKJV and NIV.

The demons in the days of Jesus

In the days of Jesus there were many people possessed by demons in Israel. And Jesus cast out many demons.

In the Gospels there are many passages which confirm this. Here are just a few of them: “At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed …. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him” (Mark 1:32,34 - NKJV); “And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (Mark 1:39 - NKJV). Jesus cast out demons by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28), but the scribes and the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, that is, the prince of demons (Matthew 12:24). So Jesus rebuked them, saying: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils [demons], by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils [demons] by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known
by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the
abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart
bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I
say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the
day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be
condemned” (Matthew 12:25-37). As you can see, Satan cannot cast out Satan, so anyone who
is under the power of Satan cannot cast out demons. That is confirmed by the following incident
which occurred in the province of Asia while Paul was there: “Some Jews who went around
driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-
possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to
come out.’ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit answered
them, ‘Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?’ Then the man who had the evil
spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out
of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in
Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor”

Jesus gave His apostles power over demons to cast them out (Matthew 10:1) and commanded
them to cast out demons (Matthew 10:8), and His apostles cast out many demons (Mark 6:13) in
obedience to His command.

The different kinds of demons

As in the kingdom of God there are different kinds of good spirits (cherubim, seraphim, an
archangel, and angels) which have different jobs, so is in the kingdom of the prince of the power
of the air (that is, the devil), for in it there are various kinds of evils spirits (demons).

There are evil spirits which cause dumbness and deafness like that evil spirit which Jesus cast
out of a boy, as it is written in the Gospel according to Mark: “And when he came to his disciples,
he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all
the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he
asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said,
Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh
him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake
to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith,
O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto
me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and
he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since
this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into
the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.
Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And
straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine
unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit,
saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more
into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead;
insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he
arose” (Mark 9:14-27). In the Gospel according to Matthew we find another case of a person
who was dumb because of a dumb spirit and was able to speak only after Jesus cast out the
demon he had, for it is written: “As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man
possessed with a devil [demon]. And when the devil [demon] was cast out, the dumb spake: and
the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel” (Matthew 9:32-33). Therefore
some of those who are dumb and deaf have a demon, which causes dumbness and deafness;
so in these cases, in order to see these persons healed of their dumbness and deafness, this
kind of demon must first be discerned and then cast out. Pay attention to this: I have not said that all those who are dumb and deaf have a dumb and deaf demon which causes their sickness, but that some of them have a dumb and deaf demon, for the fact that a person is deaf and dumb does not necessarily mean that he has a dumb and deaf spirit, it can be so, but this is not always the case. It is erroneous – according to the Scripture - to state that every deaf or dumb person is demon-possessed, for just as in the days of Jesus there were many dumb and deaf people who were not demon-possessed at all but simply sick - that’s why Jesus did not cast any demon out of them, but He just healed them (Mark 7:32-37) – so today there are many dumb and deaf people who do not need to be delivered from demons, but simply healed of their sickness.

There are evil spirits which are called ‘seducing spirits’ because their job is to deceive people into accepting all kinds of false doctrines. Paul mentions them when he says to Timothy: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:1-5). These evil spirits help the false prophets and false christs spread their damnable heresies among the people of this world, as well as the false ministers of the Gospel who are among the Church of the living God spread doctrines of demons, which unfortunately many believers have accepted. I remind you that the father of lies is Satan (the devil), so every false doctrine does not come from God, but from Satan. In order not to be deceived by these spirits it is necessary to watch and pray, and to search the Scriptures continually to see if what is taught is true.

There are evil spirits which perform signs and wonders. The apostle John saw some of them in a vision, for he says in the Book of Revelation: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils [demons], working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:13-14). These spirits enable the false prophets and the false christs to work signs and wonders in order to seduce people. Many Indian gurus, and the witches and the wizards have these unclean spirits, which enable them to perform signs and wonders, and as you know these servants of the devil have many followers. However, bear in mind that these evil spirits work signs and wonders even among believers through false ministers of the Gospel, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Beware of them too.

There are evil spirits called spirits of divination, by which some people predict (or foretell) the future, for in the Scripture we read that while Paul and his fellow workers were at Philippi they met a slave girl with a spirit of divination and Paul one day discerned that evil spirit and cast it out. Here is the biblical account of that deliverance: “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:16-18). Many people today have this kind of evil spirit and they need to be delivered from it.

There are evil spirits which induce people to kill other people; for instance, one day one of these demons came upon king Saul, while David was playing the harp, and Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall (1 Samuel 19:9-10)

There are evil spirits which rule over large areas of the earth as lords or leaders and governors in the evil spirit world; in the book of the prophet Daniel we read that the prince of the Persian
kingdom resisted the messenger of the Lord sent by God to Daniel (Daniel 10:1-20) 21 days, that prince was an evil spirit.
There are evil spirits which are stronger than others, for Jesus said that the spirits which cause dumbness and deafness can be cast out only by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29); and there are evil spirits which are more wicked than others (Matthew 12:43-45).

The places where demons live

Demons principally live in the air above the earth, since their prince, that is, Satan, is "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). It’s in the air that is above the earth that we find the four categories of demons, which are the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).
Some demons live under the earth, and even under the sea; there are several testimonies of former wizards which confirm this.
Some demons live in the bodies of some human beings, in this case we speak about demon possession. Since, according to the Scripture, demons can enter animals as well (Mark 5:11-13), we say that some demons live in certain animals.
Some demons live in arid places, for Jesus said that when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places seeking rest (Matthew 12:43).
Some demons live in buildings, both private and public buildings. Some houses where some crimes have been committed are inhabited by certain demons. The pagan temples are inhabited by demons.
Demons live in cities; some cities of certain countries are particularly full of demons.
Demons live in certain mountains, rocks and trees, which are inhabited by evil spirits; the heathen know very well these places for they go there to worship these demons.

Demons and idolatry

Idolatry is one of the works of the devil. That’s why Paul warns us not to become idolaters. Here are his eloquent words: “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” (1 Corinthians 10:19-22 - NKJV).
From the words of Paul we learn that even though both the idol and what is offered to the idol are nothing, all the sacrifices that the Gentiles sacrifice to the idols are sacrificed to demons and not to God. In other words, behind all the idols there are demons. That every time someone sacrifices something to an idol he sacrifices it to demons, is confirmed by these passages of the Scripture concerning the Israelites: “They served their idols, Which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood” (Psalm 106:36-39 – NKJV).
Therefore, since these sacrifices sacrificed by the pagans are polluted by idols, we must abstain from them lest we have fellowship with demons and thus provoke the Lord to jealousy, because He is a jealous God. That’s why when the apostles and the elders gathered together in Jerusalem they decided in the Lord to command the brethren who were of the Gentiles to abstain from things polluted by idols or offered to idols (Acts 15:20,29). Their command is still mandatory, therefore I exhort you to abstain from all those things which the pagans offer to their idols.
The form of demons

Even though demons are spiritual beings or entities, they have a form (or a shape). Some of them look like animals. As we saw before, the spirits that John saw looked like frogs (Revelation 16:13). But there are others which look like monkeys, crocodiles, snakes, goats, pigs, etc. Other evil spirits look like ordinary persons, others are half human and half animal, and others look like unknown creatures. The Holy Spirit sometimes allows believers to discern the demons, so that they might be warned against their schemes and they might cast them out. This manifestation of the Spirit of God is called “discerning of spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10).

Demons can be cast out in the name of Jesus Christ

Demons are at work all over the world. In some countries their work is more evident than in others, but certainly they do evil works everywhere. According to some of the above mentioned passages of the Holy Scripture, one of the ways the demons manifest themselves is through the human beings. They enter the bodies of human beings and begin to work evil things. This is called demon-possession and when a person has one or more than one spirit (a person can be possessed even by thousands of demons) we say that he is demon-possessed. When demons enter a person, that person loses the control of his body and begins to do and say strange things; in other words his behaviour becomes completely different. Let’s see some of the things such a person can say and do while he is under the power of demons. He can undress himself before other people, he can cry out with a loud voice blaspheming and insulting people (very often he speaks in a voice entirely different from his normal one), he can go to live in the tombs, he can cut himself with stones or knives, he can display a superhuman strength, he can disappear from sight and appear again some time later, he can be thrown to the ground by the demons and begin to foam at the mouth, to gnash his teeth and become rigid. Demons can induce him to kill other people, to slaughter children in order to sacrifice them to Satan, and he may perform various lying wonders or display occult powers (such as telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience). Many people who are regarded as ‘crazy’ actually are demon-possessed. At this point let me tell you that a person who is born again and walks in the Spirit cannot be possessed by demons, for the Scripture states that the One who dwells in him is greater than any demon who might attack him and that “when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will put him to flight” (Isaiah 59:19 - NIV).

Can we deliver the demon-possessed from the power of demons, as the apostles did in the first century after Christ? Yes, we can. How? By invoking the name of Jesus Christ over those who are possessed by demons, rebuking the demons and commanding them in the name of JESUS CHRIST to come out of the body where they are. Demons know that they must obey when they are rebuked in the name of Jesus Christ and so they know that they must leave the body where they dwell. It doesn’t matter how many demons are in that person, or how much strong they are, they must obey and will obey. Jesus Christ said about those who believe in Him: “In My name they will cast out demons” (Mark 16:17 - NKJV). Let us, therefore, have faith in the name of Jesus Christ, and let us invoke His glorious and powerful name, which scares Satan and all his evil spirits, over the demon-possessed, and we will see the captives delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit, yes, for – as I said before - demons are cast out by the Holy Spirit.

As we saw before, Jesus rebuked severely those who accused Him of casting out demons by Satan, for they attributed the work of the Spirit to the devil. Among other things, He said to them: “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be
forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matthew 12:31-32). Therefore, I warn all those Christians who have been deceived into believing that the days of miracles ended with the death of the apostles not to speak against the Holy Spirit, when they see or hear that some Christians invoke the name of Jesus Christ over the demon-possessed. ‘Be careful not to say, ‘They cast out demons by Satan,’ lest you blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.’

The destiny of demons

One day all demons will be thrown into the everlasting fire, where they will be tormented for ever along with their prince (that is, Satan) and all the disobedient angels. They know that this is the destiny awaiting them, for on one occasion some of them asked Jesus: “Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:29 – NKJV). Therefore, there is an appointed time when they will be tormented.

Conclusion

We are not afraid of Satan and the demons because we believe in Him who is greater than Satan and all his evil spirits (1 John 4:4); we believe in Him who has disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15); we believe in Him who is the Head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10), we believe in Him who rose from the dead and went into heaven at the right hand of God, and to whom angels and authorities and powers have been made subject (1 Peter 3:22). His name is JESUS CHRIST, glory to His name now and forevermore. Amen.

We are not afraid of Satan and the demons because we have overcome the devil (1 John 2:14) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11). God always leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14). He has given us authority to overcome all the power of the devil and nothing will by any means hurt us (Luke 10:19). He has provided us with the spiritual weapons by which we are able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11-20). He has made a hedge around us as He made around Job (Job 1:10). He preserves us from all evil (Psalm 121:7), and He delivers us from the evil one. Glory to God forever and ever. Amen.

Bear in mind, however, that the fact that we have overcome the devil does not entitle us to make fun of him or to call him names, for he is a prince and we must treat him with respect. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ did not ridicule Satan, nor did He call him names, and that Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ (Jude 9). According to Peter and Jude, false teachers speak evil of Satan and his ministers (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8), so beware of them lest you be led away with their error.
**REDEMPTION**

**The sinful condition of men and the end awaiting them**

The Scripture says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), therefore all men are slaves of sin because he who commits sin is a slave of it (John 8:34). And since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), men are dead in their trespasses and sins, I mean spiritually dead. Men walk according to the course of this evil world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan), they gratify the cravings of their sinful nature following its desires and thoughts (Ephesians 2:1-3). They walk after the flesh, they are carnally minded, and for this reason they cannot please God, who is holy (Romans 8:5-8). They are called children of disobedience for they refuse to obey to God; and also children of wrath because the fierce anger of God is upon them for God hates all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5). Being slaves of sin, men are totally depraved, in their flesh there is no good, they are unable to do good works. God is disgusted with their conduct, as He was disgusted with men’s conduct in the days of Noah, as it is written: “God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Genesis 6:12). His fury has come up in His face, and at the appointed time He will pour forth His fury upon this wicked world. On that day He will have no mercy on the wicked, He will break their teeth, upon the wicked He will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this will be the portion of their cup (Psalms 11:6). Their iniquity in this moment is flattering their hearts, but in that day God will punish them for all their sins. An afterlife full of torments is awaiting sinners, because this is God’s immediate punishment on them after death. In other words, after death sinners will be cast into hell (Hades), as it is written: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17). Hell is an awful place of torment located in the heart of the earth, without any order, a place of darkness where there is a fire not blown, and where – as Jesus said – there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The story about the rich man and Lazarus, told by Jesus Christ, teaches us clearly that sinners go immediately to hell when they die and that in this place they are tormented with fire. Here is this important story: “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell [Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31). Then on the day of judgement, all sinners will rise again and stand before God to be judged according to their works and condemned to an endless shame and torment into the lake which
burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. This is what we read in the book of Revelation: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [Hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15), “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8), “and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

How sin entered the world

I have just described the spiritual condition of men and their destiny after death. But why is man in this spiritual condition? Man is inclined to do evil things, and is slave of sin because the first man, that is, Adam, sinned and by his disobedience all men were made sinners (Romans 5:19). The Scripture tells us how the first man sinned, so let us look closely at what it says.

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. ….. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. ..... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?
And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 2:7-9; 15-17; 21-25; 3:1-24).

Therefore, to sum up, God created man pure and innocent, He put him into the Garden of Eden, and He commanded him not to eat a particular fruit. Then He made a woman for him, but the serpent deceived the woman into eating the prohibited fruit and she gave it to her husband, who ate it. On that day they died spiritually, and their fellowship with God, their Creator, was broken, for they began to be afraid of God (because of their sense of guilt). God pronounced His judgements both on Adam and Eve, and because of man's sin even the earth was punished, for it was cursed by God. So, through the sin of Adam sin passed upon all men. That's why man is disobedient from his childhood and he takes pleasure in sin.

**The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ**

As we have seen, when Adam and Eve had sinned their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (Genesis 3:7). However, after God pronounced His judgements on them, He made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). Therefore, since those garments were made of skin, God had to kill some animals (or just one animal). It was a manifestation of love towards Adam and Eve. The killing of those animals foreshadowed the redemption of man from sin, which God foreordained before the foundation of the world and manifested at the end of the ages. For God, through that act, showed that just as in order to clothe Adam and Eve with those garments (to cover their nakedness) it was necessary that some innocent blood should be shed for them, so in order that we might be clothed with the righteousness of God it was necessary that Jesus Christ should shed His precious blood for us, because according to the Scripture without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Therefore, in the first chapters of the Bible we find a shadow of the redemption which God provided for mankind in the fulness of the time, that is, the atoning sacrifice of the blameless Lamb of God, through which we were clothed with the righteousness of God. This is the doctrine I am going to speak about: the redemption of man from sin.

God knew that Adam would sin and through him sin would pass upon all men; that's why He had purposed to send His Son into the world to make atonement for our sins. But how would His Son
make atonement for our sins? Through His sacrifice, that is, by offering Himself for our sins. As I said before, His sacrifice was foreshadowed by the killing of animals which took place in the Garden of Eden after the first man had sinned, but His sacrifice was foreshadowed above all by the sacrifices which God - when He gave the law to the people of Israel - commanded the Israelites to offer for their sins. Here is what we read in the book of Leviticus about the sin offering which had to be offered if the anointed priest or the whole Israelite community or a leader or a member of the community sinned unintentionally: “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation: and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take off from it all the fat of the bullock for the sin offering; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, And the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away, As it was taken off from the bullock of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of the burnt offering. And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt. And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall bring of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD, even before the vail. And he shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar which is before the LORD, that is in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall pour out all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take all his fat from him, and burn it upon the altar. And he shall do with the bullock as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them. And he shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn him as he burned the first bullock: it is a sin offering for the congregation. When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering. And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him. And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth
somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty; Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slay the sin offering in the place of the burnt offering. And the priest shall take of the blood thereof with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar. And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat is taken away from off the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour unto the LORD; and the priest shall make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. And if he bring a lamb for a sin offering, he shall bring it a female without blemish. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slay it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar: And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat of the lamb is taken away from the sacrifice of the peace offerings; and the priest shall burn them upon the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 4:1-35). As you can see, according to the law, when anyone sinned unintentionally he had to offer a sin offering for the sin he had committed. Therefore the priests offered sin offerings every day. However, once a year (that day was called ‘the Day of Atonement’) the High Priest had to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. Here is what God said to Moses: “Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD’s lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put
it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there: And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people. And the fat of the sin offering shall he burn upon the altar. And he that let go the goat for the scapegoat shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp. And the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung. And he that bumeth them shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp. And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever. And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest's office in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments: And he shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and he shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year" (Leviticus 16:2-34). As you can see, it was the blood that made atonement for the sins, that's why God forbade the Israelites to eat blood (Leviticus 17:10-12). In the above mentioned passages quoted from the law we find the principle that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

However, those atoning sacrifices ordained by God could not take away sins because they were imperfect, they were just a shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, therefore they could not make the worshippers perfect in regard to the conscience (Hebrews 9:9). So, when the fullness of the time came, God sent into the world His blameless Lamb, that is, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. He was born without sin, because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of his mother, He lived a sinless life, He did only good to the people, yet He was hated and condemned to death by the Jews, who handed Him over to the Gentiles who crucified Him. That’s the way Jesus was put to death, but through the shedding of His precious blood He blotted out all our sins and reconciled us to God. That’s why John the Baptist called Jesus “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29 - NKJV). He who knew no sin bore all our sins, the Just suffered for the unjust, to forgive all our sins and make us perfect in regard to the conscience and save us from the fire of Hades first, and then from the lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sake, that is to say, to redeem us from our sins and make us righteous before God. For, since His blood takes away sins from the conscience of man, it is evident that the man whose sins are taken away is declared righteous before God; he is regarded as if he’d never sinned. So, in conclusion, I say together with Paul: "As through one man’s offense judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting
in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19 – NKJV).

But what must a man do in order to be saved, to be made righteous, and to escape the punishment God will inflict on sinners after death?

**Repentance and faith**

God’s salvation can be experienced by a man through repentance and faith in the Gospel, that’s why Jesus said to the Jews: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15), and Paul testified to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

To repent means to be sorry and grieved for one’s sins; therefore when a man repents of his sins he recognizes that he is a sinner in the sight of God and he is sorry for the sins he has committed because he recognizes that he has broken the commandments of God, who is Holy and Right. Besides this, he decides not to sin any longer and to bear fruits worthy of repentance. In other words, he decides to turn to the Lord from his evil ways to live a holy and right life. In the Gospel according to Matthew there is this parable, which Jesus spoke to the chief priests and the elders of Israel, which shows what happens when someone repents: “A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not” (Matthew 21:28-30). As you can see, at first the first son refused to obey his father, but afterwards he repented and decided to go to work in his father’s vineyard. That son recognized he had given a wrong answer to his father, and decided to obey his father. Therefore, a man must recognize that he has disobeyed God by breaking His commandments, and must decide to forsake his rebellious conduct and begin a new life. That’s what I preach to people.

However, repentance is not enough, because a man must also believe in the Gospel, that is to say, he must believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again the third day for our justification. For the Scripture says that to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:5). Those who believe, therefore, receive remission of sins and are reconciled to God by their faith in the name of Jesus (Acts 10:43). Besides this, they are delivered from the bondage of sin (Romans 6:5-7,22), and they receive eternal life (John 3:16,36; 6:47), so they are no longer afraid of death because they are sure that after death they will go to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

When a sinner has repented of his sins, forsaken them and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we affirm that he has turned to the Lord from his evil ways to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). He is no longer the same person, his life has changed, he has a new mind, a new heart, new desires and purposes. In other words, he is born again.

In conclusion, I want to say that both repentance and faith are granted by God, for it is written with regard to repentance: “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18 – NKJV) and: “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31 - NKJV); while with regard to faith it is written that “it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Shall we say then that a man’s conversion is determined by God? Yes, because Peter said to the Jews: “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). That does not mean that man does not possess a will, but rather that God uses the will of man to fulfil what He purposed before the foundation of the world. Obviously, when a person turns to the Lord he does not know that God predestined him to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; this is unknown to him. But we will come back to this subject later.
Salvation from sin

It is obtained by faith

The Holy Scripture states that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), thus all are slaves of the sins they commit, as it is written: “Whosoever committeh sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). However, the Scripture affirms also that a sinner can be set free from the bondage of sin. How? Through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is it necessary for him, after he has repented of his sins, to believe in Jesus Christ? Because Jesus Christ is the One who was sent by God to save men from their sins. For the angel who appeared to Joseph, before Mary gave birth to Jesus, said to him: “He shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), and Jesus Himself said that He came to save the world: “For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47).

But what did Jesus do in order to save the world? He offered His flesh and His blood. Let me explain to you this fundamental concept. Sin entered the world through one man, called Adam, and it passed upon all men, thus all have sinned (Romans 5:12). But what gives strength to sin? The law, because, as Paul says, “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Paul explains this concept when he says: “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me” (Romans 7:11 - NKJV). In other words, sin brings death into man by the law. Of course, the law is good and holy, yet sin uses the law to work death in man. As a killer uses a piece of wood (which was created by God) in order to kill another man, but it is not the piece of wood (which was created by God and which is good in itself) that kills that man, but the killer uses that piece of wood to accomplish his evil plan, so sin uses the law, given by God to Israel and thus is a good law, in order to kill people spiritually. Therefore it was necessary that sin should be destroyed, that is to say, that sin should be deprived of its power over man. And this is what Jesus did by His sacrifice, He put away sin (Hebrews 9:26): He was able to do this for He bore our sins, dying on the cross for us (Isaiah 53:6,11,12). That’s why whoever believes in Him is set free from sin, for Jesus Christ on the cross crucified the old man of those who believe (Romans 6:6-7). Therefore, every believer died with Christ unto sin, and thus the law no longer has dominion over him, for the law has dominion over a man only as long as he lives; after his death the law cannot have any dominion over him. And every believer has become dead to the law through the body of Christ, he has become dead to what he was held by, that he might belong to Him who was raised from the dead (Romans 7:1-6).

As I have already said, the deliverance from the bondage of sin is received through faith in Christ, therefore not by good works, whether they are done before or after a man’s conversion, nor by water baptism which follows faith, but only through faith. That’s why salvation is by grace, because in order to obtain it a man needs only to believe in the One who sets man free from sin, that is, Jesus. And since salvation is received by the grace of God and not by our merits, anyone who has received it has nothing to boast about before God. He can glory in the Lord, that is, he can take pride in having received this great salvation from the hand of God solely by His great mercy. However, many people have set aside the grace of God by saying that salvation depends on the merits of man, on his sufferings and many other things (among these people are the Roman Catholics, the so called Jehovah Witnesses, and the Mormons). Therefore, in this Bible study, I want to reaffirm with all boldness and strength that salvation can be obtained by a man only through faith. Here are some passages of the Scriptures which attest in an unequivocal way that we are saved only through faith.
• When the keeper of the prison in Philippi asked Paul and Silas: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), they answered him: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

Notice how the apostles answered that frightened prison keeper: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” immediately and with one accord, because this shows that the message of salvation they preached to men was based on the faith in Christ and not on men’s merits. The apostles could answer that question at once and correctly (for they told him that he had to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved) because they had shod their feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). That was the Good News that men heard from the mouth of the apostles and that is the Good News that men ought to hear today from us.

• Paul said to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

This passage means that it is the message of the Good News that delivers all those who believe in it from sins. And we are witness of the salvation worked by the Gospel in those who were once slaves of all kinds of sins: men who were formerly fornicators, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, covetous men, sorcerers, liars, have been set free from the sin which they served through faith in the Gospel.

• Paul says to the Ephesians: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We who have believed in the Gospel of our salvation have been set free from our sins through faith in the Gospel. We can’t say that we have been saved from our sins because we gave alms, we visited the sick, the widows and the orphans, or because we gave food, drink and some clothes to those who needed these things, because we all have obtained this great salvation not through good works, but through faith alone; I say it again, ‘through faith alone’; faith in what? Faith in the Gospel of the grace of God. If a man could be saved through his good works, Christ would have died in vain, and therefore it would be useless to preach the Gospel to all those who think that they can be saved by doing good to themselves and to their neighbour. But besides this, it must be said that if a man could be saved through some good works he would have something to boast about before God because he could say that he deserved to be saved. In other words, he could say that salvation was the fruit of his labors and he would never say that salvation is the fruit of the labor of Jesus Christ’s soul. He could say that he suffered many things in order to be saved, and he wouldn’t say that it was Jesus Christ, the Righteous, who suffered for us who were unjust in order to set us free from the bondage of sin. However, as Paul said to the Romans “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Romans 3:27), because we know that a man is saved through his faith in Jesus Christ. This is the reason why we have nothing to boast about, because we have been saved by the law of faith and thus by grace. Yes, by the grace of God, because it is through faith alone that we have been saved.

• Paul says to the Thessalonians: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

The apostles gave thanks to God because God was pleased to save the believers of Thessalonica according to His eternal purpose. But how did God save them? Did He save them through good works? No, but He saved them through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth. Once again the Scripture confirms that salvation is obtained through faith in the truth and not by good works. Where are the merits of man then? They are excluded by the law of faith.
Paul says to the Corinthians: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved ….” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2 – NKJV), then he tells them the Gospel which he preached to them, and afterward he says to them: “So we preach, and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11 – NKJV).

From these words of Paul we learn that the Corinthians were saved through their faith in the Gospel and not by good works they had done. Some of them had been adulterers, fornicators, idolaters, effeminate men, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, extortioners, drunkards and revilers (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), but they were saved from their sins through their faith in the Gospel, apart from the deeds of the law. This is the reason why the message of Christ is called the Gospel of peace, because in order to have peace with God, that is to say, in order to be reconciled to God, sinners don’t have to do meritorious deeds, but they must believe on the name of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, how could the message of Christ be called Good News if the Bible stated that in order to be saved a man has to do good works? Wouldn’t such a statement contradict the essence of the Gospel? Of course, it would contradict it; for it would mean that Jesus came to save us freely, demanding only repentance and faith in Him from us, but we must work with Him (that is to say, we must do good deeds) in order to be saved from our sins! What a contradiction!!

Paul says in the epistle to Titus: “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:3-5).

From these words of Paul we learn two things: the first is that we have been saved and therefore we can say that we are saved, without running the risk of being presumptuous; the second thing is that we have obtained this salvation not by good works we have done but by the mercy of God, who has begotten us again to a new life through the Word of God planted in us (the washing of regeneration) and through the renewing which the Holy Spirit has worked in us.

Paul says to Timothy that God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Once again Paul says that God has saved us by grace and not because we have done some good works; but He says also that God gave us His grace before the world began, that is, before the foundation of the world. If this passage is not sufficient to make you understand that our salvation did not depend on some good works we have done, but on the mercy of God who was pleased to save us who did not deserve to receive anything from Him, I quote the following words which Paul wrote about Esau and Jacob to the Romans: “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her [Rebecca], The elder shall serve the younger” (Romans 9:11-12) and also these other words of Paul: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Romans 9:16). These words destroy all those arguments which induce people to rely on good works in order to be saved.

The apostle Peter said in the presence of the other apostles and the elders in Jerusalem: “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they [the Gentiles] are” (Acts 15:11 – NIV).

Now, Peter said that they who were Jews by birth were saved by grace just as the Gentiles were, even though the Jews were circumcised in the flesh and they had the law of Moses.
containing the commandments of God. But why didn't Peter say that they who were Jews had been saved by the deeds of the law, while the Gentiles, who had not the law, had been saved by grace? Because they (who were Jews by birth) also had to believe in order to be saved (therefore they had not obtained God's salvation through the law). The words of Peter make it clear that in order to be saved a man must believe, because God's salvation is given both to the Jews and the Gentiles freely. We conclude, therefore, that God will save the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Other passages of the Scriptures which confirm that we are saved by faith alone and not by good deeds

- Paul says to the Romans: “But what saith it [the righteousness which is of faith]? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:8-13)

As you can see, in order to be saved a man doesn’t have to do good works but he has to confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in his heart that God raised Him from the dead. Isn’t simple and clear the way of salvation which is written in the Scripture? Of course, it is.

Brothers, I exhort you to hold on to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and not to forsake it, otherwise you will set aside the sacrifice of Christ, you will declare that Christ died in vain and so you will fall from grace. Talk with one another about it so that you might be strengthened, and proclaim it to the sinners so that they also might repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, that's why in order to believe in Christ for their salvation sinners need to hear of Christ, of his atoning sacrifice. Let the cross, the cross of Christ, be preached with all boldness because the message of the cross is able to save man from sin. There is no other message that can save man, and you know it very well because it was through the message of the cross that you were saved by the grace of God.

Now we are slaves of righteousness

As we have just seen, the Scripture clearly states that we have not been saved by works of righteousness which we have done, but we have been saved through faith in Christ and thus by the grace of God. However, the Scripture states also that, having been set free from sin, we became slaves of righteousness and therefore we must do good works. This part of the counsel of God was proclaimed by Jesus Christ, who said to His disciples that He had chosen them so that they should do good works. Here are His words: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John 15:16). Afterwards, Paul confirmed it by saying to the Ephesians that we "are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10), and to Titus that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

But why should we be zealous for good works? Because Jesus said: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8), and: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in
heaven” (Matthew 5:16); these words of Jesus mean that by doing good works we cause the name of God to be glorified. So let us do good works, so that the name of our God may be glorified. Furthermore, you must bear in mind that by doing good works we lay up treasure for ourselves in heaven, which is the reward that on that day the Lord will give to us (and this is a stimulus to do good works). For when Jesus told the young ruler to sell what he had and give to the poor He said to him: “And you will have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21 – NKJV), and Paul told Timothy to command those who are rich in this present age “to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age” (1 Timothy 6:18-19 – NIV).

I conclude by saying this: we believers know that by our faith we have been saved from sin and from this evil age, however we know also that now we are slaves of righteousness, thus we must offer the parts of our body in slavery to righteousness by doing all kinds of good works. But whereas when we were slaves of sin we did not reap any benefit from our evil works which we are now ashamed of, now that we are slaves of righteousness the good works we do for the sake of the Lord and the elect make our call and election sure and they enable us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, a good treasure for the time to come, and we will never regret doing them and we will never be ashamed of them. Therefore, the works of righteousness are useful, very useful; let no one despise them. Let those who despise the good works know that the Scripture states that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26); such a faith is of no value before God, as it is written: “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?” (James 2:20 – NIV). Therefore, I say to these people: ‘Do not deceive yourselves!; know that those branches which don’t abide in Christ are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:6)!’.

Justification

It is obtained by faith alone

We were once enemies of God in our mind by wicked works, because we all walked according to the lusts of the flesh; but when God manifested His love toward us, He justified us, that is to say, He made us righteous in His sight, by blotting out all our sins. And through justification we were reconciled to God and became His friends, as it is written: “His friendship is for the upright” (Proverbs 3:32 – Translated from the IBRV. The NIV reads: “He takes the upright into his confidence”). We have received this justification by faith, and therefore by grace and not by works. The following Scriptures confirm this very clearly.

- Paul says to the Romans: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1), and: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24), and again: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:8-9). The words “justified by his blood” mean that we are justified through faith in the blood of Christ, as it is written: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25 – NIV). Again to the Romans, Paul says: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). Please note the words “the gift of righteousness” because they show that the righteousness of God (that is, justification), being a gift of God, is obtained freely from God. It can be received
only by faith in the Son of God; every personal merit, therefore, is excluded. Another passage of the epistle to the Romans which confirms that a man must believe in Christ in order to be justified is the following one which says: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

- Paul says to the Galatians: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of [in] Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of [in] Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16), and: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24), and again: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:8 - and this is exactly what happened, because we were blessed by God through our faith in Christ, who is the Seed of Abraham). And again to the Galatians Paul says: “For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:21-22 – NIV). And what was promised? The righteousness of God (that is, justification). To whom is the righteousness of God given? To those who do good works or to those who believe? To those who believe because the righteousness of God was promised to those who would believe in Jesus.

- “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk. 2:4 – NKJV); through these words, which were spoken by God to the prophet Habakkuk, God foretold that He will justify men by faith, as Paul says that God “will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Romans 3:30 – NKJV).

**It cannot be obtained by good works**

These other passages of the Scriptures, instead, state that those who rely on the works of the law cannot be justified and will not be justified in the sight of God.

- “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16)

- “A man is not justified by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16)

- “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:10-11).

- “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

To show you that a man is not justified by works but by faith alone, I remind you of the example of Abraham, our father. Now, according to the Scripture, Abraham was justified by God through his faith in the promise God made to him (Genesis 15:6), and he was justified after he had come out of Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:4) and after he had given a tithe of everything to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:20). Therefore we say the following things: Abraham was not justified by God because or when he obeyed God’s order: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you” (Genesis
12:1). Of course, in the epistle to the Hebrews it is written that “by faith Abraham, when he was
called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he
went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8); however, the truth is that this act of
obedience was not accounted to him for righteousness.

Abraham was not justified because or when he gave a tithe of everything to Melchizedek. Of

course, he did a good thing that was appreciated by God (that tithe was received in heaven by
He of whom it is witnessed that He lives), yet Abraham was not justified by God through that
good work.

Abraham was justified by God because or when he believed the promise of God (according to
which Abraham’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heaven), as it is
written: “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3;
Genesis 15:6); that’s why Abraham also did not have anything to boast about before God.

There is another example of a man who was justified by God by grace through his faith, apart
from the deeds of the law; it is the example of that tax collector who went up to the temple to
pray. Jesus said about that man that he, “standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes
to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13 – NKJV).

And since that man humbled himself before God, he was justified through his faith, as it is
written: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified ….” (Luke 18:14 – NKJV). On the
contrary, that Pharisee who said to God: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,
extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of
all that I possess” (Luke 18:11-12), was not justified. Doesn’t this also confirm that a man is
justified through faith by the grace of God apart from the deeds of the law? Of course, it does.

Therefore, all those who teach that faith in God is not sufficient to be justified by God are greatly
mistaken.

But why can’t justification be obtained by the deeds of the law? The reason why the

righteousness of God cannot be obtained by the deeds of the law is that the law was given by
God so that men might become conscious of sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7) and sin might abound
(Romans 5:20), and not in order to make men righteous. God, in order to make men righteous,
gave His only begotten Son, for it was through Jesus Christ that grace came and we were
justified.

Now, we have seen that the Scripture declares that a man can’t be justified by the deeds of the

law because the law is not able to justify the sinner; let’s look, therefore, closely at some of these
works of the law which can’t justify those who do them. In the law it is written: “The first of the
firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God” (Exodus 23:19); “Thou
shall not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in
any case bring them again unto thy brother” (Deuteronomy 22:1); “And this is the manner of the
release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it
of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD’s release” (Deuteronomy 15:2);
“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt
not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the
LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree,
thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the
widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall
be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow” (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). These are
just some of the good works commanded by God in the law of Moses, for there are many others.
They are all righteous deeds, yet a man cannot be justified by them. Isn’t the Scripture enough
clear with regard to this? Of course, it is clear to us. However, the Scripture is not clear at all to
those who teach that a man is justified by his good works. These people perish for they don’t
know the Scriptures, for if they knew the Scriptures, they would not say such things. In Isaiah it
is clearly written that all the righteous acts of men are “like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6 - NKJV), therefore, it does not matter how many righteous works men may do in order to be justified before God, if they don’t repent and believe in the Gospel they will continue to be sinners before God because it is not through good works that a man is justified but through faith, as it is written: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:10). ‘Too simple to be true!’ say those who think they are justified by works. It is certainly too simple to them and they don’t believe it is true, why? Because they are continually taught that a man is justified by sacrifices and their leaders hide this passage “but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5) from them. Please note the words “to him that worketh not” because they mean ‘to him who doesn’t rely on righteous deeds for his salvation’. What else could we expect them to say, then? Let such people consider this: “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21 - NKJV).

Explanation of the words of James about the value of good works

James, the Lord’s brother, wrote: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:21-24).

Let me expound these words of James. First of all, I say that James wrote these words to some believers and not to some unbelievers, for a short time before he wrote: “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (James 2:1. The NIV reads: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism”). I have said this so that you may understand that those to whom those words were written had faith and thus they were already justified as it is written: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of [in] Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of [in] Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16). Why did James speak to them those words? Because some believers, even though they had faith, refused to do good works thinking that even without doing good works their faith would save them from the wrath of God, and in this way they were deceiving themselves. (Remember that those believers to whom James wrote killed, coveted, quarrelled and fought, they were enemies of God because they wanted to be friends of the world, among them there were some who were rich but rode roughshod over the rights of the workmen who mowed their fields for they kept back by fraud their wages, some who honored the rich but dishonoured the poor man, and who grumbled against one another; therefore the hard words of James are absolutely understandable). So, James, first of all, rebuked them saying: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14), and: “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?” (James 2:20 - NIV), making it clear that faith alone would profit them nothing; and secondly he gave them the examples of Abraham and Rahab to confirm that the good deeds ought to accompany faith, so that faith may be of value. The argument of James is based on the fact that if anyone says that he has faith, that is, that he has believed in Christ Jesus, but he has no good deeds, his faith is of no value, or, as he says in another place, it is dead. The words of James are hard, but they make it clear that good works are very important to believers. Please, note that James did not say at all that righteousness is obtained by the deeds of the law or that a sinner is forgiven and receives eternal life by his good works; to interpret the words of James in that way is tantamount to saying that James had perverted the Gospel because he compelled the Gentiles to live as Jews so that they might be justified by the deeds of the law. On the contrary, the purpose of his argument is to keep every
believer from thinking that he will please God and be saved even if he refuses to do good works. Therefore, if faith in God without good deeds is of no value, just as the 'faith' of demons (they simply believe there is one God) is of no value, we must conclude that the faith which is of value is that which has good works, which is confirmed by the apostle Paul when he says to the Galatians: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6 – NIV) and to the Corinthians: "Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Corinthians 7:19 – NIV). Let's come back for a moment to the fact that James compared the faith without works to the faith of the demons, as it is written: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils [demons] also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:19-20). The comparison made by James is really appropriate, because demons also believe that there is one God, besides, they know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Holy One of God and the Christ, for when Jesus was on earth they said to Him: "You are the Son of God" (Mark 3:11 - NKJV), and: "I know who You are – the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24 – NKJV), and they knew that He was the Christ (Luke 4:41). Yet, not because the demons believe there is one God, or because they know that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, this means that they will be saved from the everlasting fire; they certainly will not be saved from the eternal fire because according to the Word of God they know that one day they will be cast into the everlasting fire, where they will be tormented forever, for on one occasion the demons said to Jesus: "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29 - NKJV). That is the punishment which God will execute on them. So, a person who has believed in Christ can't take the liberty of refusing to do good works, otherwise his faith is of no value, that is to say, it is dead.

Let's come back to the good works: they are useful to keep our faith in the Lord alive, for if a believer ceases or refuses to do good works, his faith will certainly die and he will be like a lamp switched off, which is not able to give light, or a lamp whose light is concealed. James said: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26 – NKJV); what's the use of a body without the spirit? It is no use, because it can't speak, it can't move, it can't help anybody. What's the use of faith without works? It is useless, because it doesn't work anything on behalf of those who are in need; it is dead. Paul also spoke in a similar way when he said to the Romans: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die" (Romans 8:13). Therefore, the above mentioned words of James are confirmed by Paul also. For if a believer walks according to the flesh (thus, refusing to do good works) he will die spiritually, even though he says that he has faith, that he believes in God, that he believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and so on.

James gave the example of Abraham to explain that the patriarch was justified by his works and not by his faith alone. Now, in order to avoid misunderstandings we begin to say that according to what the Scripture states, when Abraham believed the promise God made to him his faith was accounted to him for righteousness, as it is written: "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Therefore, Abraham was forgiven through faith, that is, by grace. He was not justified by any meritorious works or good works, because he also was justified by God through faith. For Paul says that "if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (Romans 4:2 – NKJV) because the Scripture says that he believed God and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore, Abraham had faith in God, but the patriarch showed his faith in God not only when he believed with his heart in the promise God made to him but also when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar in obedience to the command God gave to him. For you know that several years after Abraham had believed, God tested Abraham commanding him to go to the land of Moriah and offer his son Isaac there as a burnt offering on a mountain, and Abraham obeyed God, believing that God would raise him from the dead in order to fulfil the promise He had made (Hebrews 11:17-19). Therefore, Abraham believed that he would have his son back again through a resurrection, so he wouldn't lose his son, because God had to keep the promise He had made to him. And because of his faith he pleased God, for when he was about to kill Isaac the angel of God said to him first: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for
now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Genesis 22:12), and then: “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18). James says that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up his son, and this is true because Abraham, through that good work, showed that he feared God and firmly believed in His promise. Therefore, we can say that Abraham showed he had faith in God through facts, and because of this he was called God’s friend. Likewise, we who believe will be called friends of Christ if we do what Christ commands us to do, as Jesus said: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). But if we say that we believe in Christ Jesus, yet we refuse to keep His words, how will we be able to show that we believe in Him? And how can we expect to be called friends of Christ and of God? We will be exactly like many people of this world who say that they are Christians, they say that they believe in Jesus, but, since they are disqualified for every good work, they show that they don’t believe in Him. Therefore, just as the faith of Abraham was made complete by his works (James 2:22), so our faith also will be made complete by our good works. The apostle Peter explains this concept in his second epistle in this way: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-11). Please, pay attention to the following words “if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” for they confirm that by our good works (for we manifest godliness, brotherly kindness and charity, by doing good works) our faith will be made complete. Let’s reflect upon this: why does a believer feel he must do good works? Of course, he is sure he has been forgiven by the Lord, he is sure he is a child of God, he is sure he has eternal life; yet, in him there is the desire to do good works in order to make his election sure, because he feels that he can’t make his election sure only by saying that he believes without doing good works on behalf of the saints to the glory of God. Furthermore, we must always bear in mind that good works induce our neighbour (who sees us doing them) to glorify God, for Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Therefore, they are a way through which we honour God and His doctrine. On the contrary, if we refuse to do good works our neighbour will be induced to blame the name of God and His doctrine, as it is written: “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Romans 2:24 – NKJV). In conclusion I say this: faith needs good works in order to be made complete, but this doesn’t mean that faith is not sufficient in order to be justified because the Scripture affirms that “a man is not justified by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16). Far be it from us to behave like the Galatians who, having begun in the Spirit, wanted to be made perfect by the flesh; who, after accepting Christ, were alienated from Christ because they were trying to be justified by the law (Galatians 5:4), and their behaviour made Paul angry and worried him, and because of their behaviour Paul admonished them severely and told them that he labored in birth for them again until Christ was formed in them (Galatians 4:19). Take heed to yourselves, brethren, and bear in mind always that if we try to be justified by good works we will insult Christ because we will set aside His atoning sacrifice. Be zealous for good works, but don’t think that they can add something to the merits of Christ.
**The new birth**

The reason why it is necessary

Jesus Christ spoke of the new birth to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night. Here is what we read in the Gospel according to John: “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:1-8).

Therefore, according to the words of Jesus, one must be born again to enter and see the Kingdom of God; in other words, the new birth is indispensable. The following expressions: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ….. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God …. Ye must be born again” show the necessity of the new birth. Therefore, all those who want to enter the kingdom of God, which is in heaven, must be born again, otherwise they will remain outside it.

But why is the new birth indispensable to enter the Kingdom of God? Because men are dead in their trespasses and sins and they are without the life of God. In other words, they are spiritually dead in the sight of God. Their spiritual death is caused by sin, of which they are slaves and whose wages is death (Romans 6:23). And the new birth allows those who are spiritually dead to rise again spiritually, to become spiritually alive, and to be fit to enter the kingdom of God.

How it is experienced

How can a man be born again? According to the words that Jesus spoke to the Jews - bearing in mind that when Jesus said to Nicodemus ‘Ye must be born again’ He meant that not only Nicodemus but also all the other Jews had to be born again -, in order to be born again, a man must repent and believe in the Gospel. For Jesus said to the Jews: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Isn’t water baptism necessary, then, to be born again? No, it is not indispensable, because the new birth is experienced when one repents and believes in the Son of God and not when one is immersed in water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ or when he comes out of the water. Water baptism represents what a believer has already experienced through faith in the Christ of God, that is, the new birth: the immersion in water is the burial with Christ, while the coming out of the water is the resurrection with Christ.

Someone may ask: ‘Is it not written that one must be born of water? Yes, that’s what is written, but the water Jesus spoke of is not water baptism but the Word of God, which in the Scripture is symbolized by the water, as it is written in the epistle to the Ephesians that Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26), and in the book of Isaiah: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth
and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). Please, notice how the Word of God is compared to the water which comes down from heaven. Now, John says that “he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God” (John 3:34), for Jesus, who was sent by God, came down from heaven and spoke to us the things which He had heard from His Father, that is, the Good News of the Kingdom of God. And we who were dead in our sins, have been regenerated (or we have been born again) by the Word which by the Gospel was preached to us by Christ (Ephesians 2:17), as it is written: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:23-25) and: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18). The Word of God preached to us by Christ, therefore, is the regenerating power. That’s why one day Jesus said: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). Is it not true that the Gospel of the grace of God made us alive, giving us that life we didn’t possess before? Yes, this is the truth: we have been born again by the Word of God. However, as Jesus said, one must be born again by the Spirit of God as well. Let us therefore speak of what the Holy Spirit has done in order to regenerate us. When we heard the Word of Grace, the Spirit convicted us of sin, of righteousness and of judgement because, according to what Jesus said before He was glorified, the Holy Spirit was sent to do also this work of conviction: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11). Brethren, it was the Holy Spirit who convicted us that we were sinners and unbelievers; before the new birth we thought (leaning on our own understanding) that we were not sinners, who deserved to go into the everlasting fire, because we also were slaves of sin; we did not speak as we should have done because we also were children of disobedience. Some of us said: “What evil have I done to deserve God’s judgement?”, some others said: “I have not killed anybody, I don’t steal, I don’t blaspheme, what should I repent of, since I have no sin?”, while the Word of God stated and still states: “What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:9-18; cf. Psalms 14::1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; Psalm 36:1). But God was patient with us and waited for us to recognize that we were sinners in His sight, to repent of our sins and to call upon Him, so that He might have mercy on us. How many of us, before believing in the Lord, did say that we were believers? Many, yet we were not believers but unbelievers because we had not yet believed with our heart in the Gospel. Actually, when we said: ‘I believe’ we meant: ‘I also have heard of it’. In our judgement, to hear of the Gospel and to believe in the Gospel were the same thing, while there is a great difference between hearing of Christ (without believing in Him), and hearing of Him and believing in Him with one’s heart; in the former case one is still lost, while in the latter case one is saved and he is sure he has eternal life. Before our new birth, we were rebels and wicked, but thanks be to God who, through His Spirit, convicted us of sin first, and then He made us alive. “The
“Spirit is life” (Romans 8:10 – NKJV) and He made us alive, as it is written: “It is the Spirit who gives life” (John 6:63 - NKJV).

Many say that all men are children of God, which means that all men are born of God, but this statement is false because the Scripture states that only those who are on the way of salvation are children of God; all men were created by God, but not all men have been regenerated by God.

Jesus said: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Now, we know that Christ is the door, for Jesus Himself said: “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9), and that Christ is also the way which leads to life, for He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6), and we know also that those who find the way which leads to life are only a few, which means that those who are born of God and are on the way of salvation are few in comparison with those who believe not and walk along the way which leads to destruction. The Scripture teaches that only those who have received Jesus Christ are children of God, as it is written: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Galatians 3:16-17), and also: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). It is by faith in Jesus Christ that a man becomes a child of God, therefore unbelievers are not children of God but they are children of the devil because they don’t believe in the name of the Son of God and to confirm this I remind you of the following things.

Jesus said to those Jews who did not believe in Him and wanted to kill Him: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44).

When Jesus explained to His disciples the parable of the tares He said to them: “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil” (Matthew 13:37-39). As you can see, according to the words of Jesus, in this world there are also the children of the devil, so we can’t say that all men are children of God.

The apostle Paul called that false Jewish prophet who was on the isle of Cyprus, whose name was Bar-Jesus (who sought to turn the proconsul Sergius Paulus away from the faith), ‘child of the devil’ (Acts 13:10). We know that the false prophets are children of the devil because they don’t believe in the Son of God and they try to turn believers away from the faith.

The new birth is a real experience, of which one is perfectly aware when it occurs and he is sure he has experienced it, even though we can’t explain exactly how it took place in our life because it is an impenetrable work accomplished by God through His Word and His Holy Spirit. We can compare it to a dead person’s coming out of the tomb where he had been buried; to a prisoner’s coming out of a prison; to a person’s coming out of a very dark room where he was kept for years; to the recovery of sight experienced by a man born blind; to the deliverance from strong and heavy chains. In other words, we mean that those who have experienced it know very well what they felt when they were regenerated, because it was an experience that has changed radically their life. What a man experiences through the new birth is salvation, the forgiveness of all his sins, the disappearance of the sense of guilt, which torments those who are without God. For this reason whoever is born again is sure he has been saved, he has been washed from all his sins, and his conscience doesn’t accuse him any longer. And all this produces in him a great joy immediately, a great joy which gushes out of Christ, who has come to him and made His home with him (in his heart); as well as a great and true peace which comes from Christ too. So he becomes a child of God; how? We have already said how, that is, through repentance and faith in Christ. But is he sure he has become a child of God? Of course. On what basis can he say that he is a child of God? Because the Word of God says: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John
1:12), and also: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1); and because of the witness of the Holy Spirit who dwells in his heart, as it is written: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15-16 – NKJV). Therefore, he is sure he is an heir of God and joint heir with Christ; he is sure he has eternal life because he has in his heart Him who is the eternal life (1 John 5:20), and as a result he knows that when he dies he will go to heaven to be with Christ and the departed saints and there he will be waiting for the resurrection. Furthermore, we say that all those who believe, being born again, are God’s priests, for Peter, after saying at the beginning of his first epistle: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4), says: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). Do you understand? All those who have been born again are priests of God. And therefore, all those who believe in the Son of God are priests. And, still according to the Scripture, all those who believe have been made kings and will reign with Christ on the earth, as it is written that Christ “has made us kings and priests to His God” (Revelation 1:6 – NKJV) and “we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10 – NKJV).

How many people can be born again

At this point you may ask: ‘How many people can be born again?’ All those who wish to be regenerated. We would like to make it clear, however, that by this expression we don’t mean that those who are born again have experienced the new birth because it was they who determined to be regenerated; not at all, because those who are born again were born of the will of God, as it is written: “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13), and also: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

By that expression we simply mean that we don’t know the number of those whom God predestined to be regenerated through His Word, and thus we proclaim to all men that they must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God.

How born again people are known

Now, how are the children of God known in this world? How can we know whether one is born of God or not?

- Those who are born of God are new creatures, in whose life the old things (that is, the old and wicked habits) have passed away and all things have become new, as it is written: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, if one says that he is a Christian, but he is not a new creation (or creation), he is not born of God. Many people claim they are Christians, but they are not new creatures at all because their licentious and wicked conduct shows that they are still children of disobedience and slaves of all kinds of lusts; among them are those who worship idols – which they call ‘sacred statues and images’ - and go into ecstasies over their idols. John says: “ He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (1 John 3:8), and also: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10), and again: “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and
the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). Therefore, all those who refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ are not born of God and thus are not children of God.

- **Those who are born of God believe that Jesus is the Christ**, for it is written: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1) – the term Christ derives from the Greek Christos which means ‘Anointed one’ – therefore, all those who don’t believe that Jesus is the Christ (or the Messiah, a term which derives from a Hebrew word meaning ‘Anointed one’) are not born of God and thus are not children of God.

- **Those who are born of God loves God and the brethren** because it is written: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7). Those who love the brethren in deed and in truth are born of God and know God because God is love, but “he that loveth not his brother abideth in death … knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 3:14; 4:8). This means that those who hate us, even though they say they are Christians, are not born of God. John says: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). Before knowing God, we did not love the brethren, we did not like them, we did not like to talk with them, to visit and help them, because we abode in death; we who were dead wished to stay and talk with those who were dead like us, we were proud to be friends with sinners and we loved their perverse way of life and their way of talking. But thanks be to God who has regenerated us; the day on which we were born again our mind was renewed by the Holy Spirit and we began to love the saints, through the love of God which was poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Why then, even in this country, do many people, who say they are Christians, hate us, despise us, look unfavourably on us, detest to stay with us and to talk with us, and call us ‘a sect’ as if we were the followers of an impostor? The reason why they behave in this way is that they abide in darkness, even though they say they are in the light; they belong to this world and hate us because we are not of the world, for Jesus said: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Brethren, Christ has rescued us from this evil world, that’s why those who are of this dark world hate us; they say, ‘We also are Christians like you and God is our Father also, so we have the same Father,’ but they are not of God but of the devil.

- **Those who are born of God are sure all their sins have been forgiven them and they have eternal life**, because they have believed in the Son of God, as it is written: “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43 – NIV) and also: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Therefore, those who are of God have been washed from their sins because they were forgiven them through faith in Christ. All those who say that when they die they will go to a place called purgatory in order to be purified from their sins (or rather, to discharge their debts of temporal punishment) are not of God and thus are not members of the Body of Christ, for the Scripture says: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Purgatory doesn’t exist and those who believe in it deceive themselves. All those who go to the priest to confess their sins because they think that in this way their sins are forgiven are not of God and deceive themselves because the priest can’t forgive any man the sins he has committed against God. The Scripture teaches that God alone can forgive a man his sins, as it is written that He is the One “who forgives all your iniquities” (Psalm 103:3 – NKJV). Those who go to confess their sins to a priest are not purified from their sins at all, for they still have consciousness of sins, because a man must confess his sins to God in order to be forgiven and regenerated, as it is written: “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ And You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5 – NKJV).
Those who are of God have eternal life because they have believed in the Son of God; as Jesus said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47), and John wrote to us: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). If anyone says that he is a Christian, but he says that he doesn’t have eternal life, he is not of God; many people think we are presumptuous because we say that we have eternal life; however, what we say is the truth, for it is written: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). Those who say that they are Christians, but in the meantime they say that they don’t have eternal life because they are doing their best in order to deserve it (or to buy it) are not of God; eternal life cannot be deserved by doing good works because it is not on sale; eternal life is not the wages that God gives to the sinner who makes every effort to gain it, but it is His gift that He gives freely to all those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, as it is written: “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

*The purpose of God according to election*

**God has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens**

The apostle Paul says to the Romans: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30). Now, according to the apostle Paul, those whom God foreknew were predestinated to be justified. But what does this expression ‘God foreknew some and predestinated them to be justified’ mean? Does it mean, perhaps, merely that God knew that these people would repent and believe in Christ, and thus they would be justified? No, otherwise what would be the point of talking of predestination with regard to them? Is it not true that the verb ‘to predestinate’ means ‘to appoint beforehand’? Let me give you an example to explain this concept. If I decide to buy a certain field in order to appoint a certain part of it, let us suppose a tenth of it, to the building of a house; and another part, the rest of the field, to the citrus fruits growing; don’t I determine the destiny of that field beforehand? And when I have bought it and accomplished my purpose, cannot we say that that field was predestinated by me to be used in that way? Of course, we can. Therefore, if God predestinated us to be justified that means that even before we knew Him (that is, before we believed in Him) He purposed to cause us to believe in His Son Jesus Christ. In other words, He purposed to call us from all men He created. And therefore, at His appointed time, He overpowered us and prevailed, He persuaded us and we were persuaded, without us knowing absolutely anything about His divine plan for us. Perhaps you will say: ‘It was I who wanted to repent and believe in Jesus, it was I who made this choice?’ Then I would like to ask you some questions: ‘Who gave you repentance?’ Was it not God who gave you repentance, as it is written: “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18 – NKJV). And who gave you faith? Was it not God who gave you faith, for Paul calls faith “the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8) and says that it is not of ourselves? What do you have that you did not receive from God then? Nothing. Therefore, if you repented and believed it was because God gave you repentance and faith. He had ordained you to eternal life, that’s why you believed; just as the believers at Antioch in Pisidia believed in the Lord because they had been ordained to eternal life, as it is written: “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48 –

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NKJV). But at this point you may say: ‘But it was I who decided to come to Jesus!’ Well, you came to Jesus because you wanted to come to Jesus, that’s true; but it is also true that you came to Jesus because God wanted to draw you to Christ without you knowing anything about His will. Have you not read these words of Jesus: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him …. no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (John 6:44,65)? Please, note that Jesus said ‘except’ twice. Therefore, I tell you that you would not have come to Christ UNLESS it had been granted to you by the Father. So you came to Jesus because God drew you to Christ, that is to say, because It was granted to you by God to come to Christ.

At this point you may say: ‘Then, do those who don’t repent and believe in Jesus go to perdition because of a decree of God toward them? Yes, that’s the reason why they go to perdition. You may say then: ‘This is an injustice, thus you make people believe that God is an unrighteous God, a merciless God, who makes fun of His creatures!’ Hear what the Scripture teaches and you will see that what you say is wrong. The apostle Paul, in order to explain why only a remnant of the Israelites has accepted God’s salvation while most of the Jews have rejected it, speaks of the birth of Esau and Jacob. He says that “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her [Rebecca], The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Romans 9:11-13). The words of Paul show that God chose Jacob and rejected Esau even before they were born or had done anything good or bad. Their destiny had already been determined by God before they were born. Obviously, after their birth what God had foretold came to pass, for the older served the younger. But why did those things happen? Simply because Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, and Jacob deceitfully took away the blessing of Esau? In other words, did the older serve the younger simply because Esau and Jacob decided to act in that way (both Jacob and Esau acted wrongly)? Yes, of course, the fact that the older served the younger was the outcome of the behaviour of both brothers; however, behind all things there was the hand of God who directed all things, so that the word He had spoken to Rebecca might be fulfilled. Was God unjust by acting in that way toward Esau and Jacob? Certainly not. Is it not written that God does whatever pleases him in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths (Psalm 135:6)? Is it not written that God is proved right when He speaks and blameless when He judges (Psalm 51:4)? The apostle Paul, foreseeing that somebody would say that God is unjust, defended what God does, saying: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid [Certainly not!]. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Romans 9:14-18). The words of Paul are clear, very clear, and certainly this clearness disturbs many people. Please, note that Paul takes the example of Pharaoh in order to state that God hardens whom He wants to harden. You will ask me then, ‘Do you believe then that God hardens some people? Yes, I do believe this, God hardens whom He wants to harden, just as the Scripture declares. However, in the Scriptures there is another example of hardening caused by God. For in the days of Jesus most of the Jews were hardened by God so that they might not believe in Jesus. Here is what John says: “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:37-40). Why didn’t those Jews believe in Jesus? Because they could not believe. The reason is clear, for God had hardened their heart and had blinded their eyes. In
other words, because it was not granted to them to believe in Jesus or to come to Him. It was necessary that the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled, therefore those Jews could not believe. Whose are the words spoken by Isaiah? They are God’s. Therefore, God had purposed not to allow most of the Jews to believe. Jesus knew this, that’s why He spoke to the crowds in parables. One day His disciples asked Him why He spoke to the people in parables and He answered and said to them: “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matthew 13:11-13). Nevertheless, Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it had rejected Him and He said that they did not want to turn to the Lord. Here are His words: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37). “Ye would not”, said Jesus. Yet He knew that they were not willing to accept Him because God had hardened their heart and blinded their eyes. That shows that those who reject the Gospel are held responsible for refusing the Gospel, even though they reject the Gospel because they were appointed by God to be disobedient to the Word of God.

It was necessary for the Jews to reject Christ, so that Christ might die for our sins; that is to say, God had purposed to cause the Jews to persecute Jesus and to put Him to death, through the Gentiles, by nailing Him to the cross for our sake. For Peter said to the Jews: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:22-24 – NIV). Please note carefully the words “by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge”. Evidently the Jews did not know that by their conduct they would fulfil the words of the prophets according to which Jesus had to die for the unjust, yet God used their wickedness and unbelief so that Christ might die for our sins. Therefore, should we not recognize that God is wise and use those who have been hardened by Him to accomplish what He has purposed to do? And should we not also recognize that God gains glory for Himself by hardening the hearts of people? For both in the case of Pharaoh (I mentioned before) and of the Jews, who crucified Jesus, God gained very much glory for Himself. As to Pharaoh, he was deeply humbled by God through all kinds of signs and wonders first, and then he and his army were thrown into the Red Sea, and when the Israelites saw what God had done to the Egyptians they praised God for His greatness (Exodus 15:1-19). As to the Jews who killed Jesus, they were put to shame by God for He raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and when His disciples saw Him alive in their midst they rejoiced in the Lord, and from that time on all those who have believed in the Lord have rejoiced in the Lord for God raised His Son from the dead. At that time God gained very much glory for Himself through the resurrection of His Son (Luke 24:53) and He is still gaining very much glory for Himself through it.

First Paul said that God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wants to harden, then he said: “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:19-24). Once again the words of Paul
are clear. God reigns and He prepared in advance some men for destruction and some others for glory. Who are we to reply against God?

The will of man and the possibility of falling from grace

What shall we say then about the will of man, if all his ways depend on God and his destiny was determined beforehand by God? We shall say the following things: the will of those who still live under the power of darkness is moulded by God and turned in the direction He has appointed, without them knowing it; so those who were predestined to be justified will be allowed or enabled by God (at God’s appointed time), through endless circumstances, to believe in Jesus Christ, while those who were prepared for destruction will not be allowed or enabled to believe. And what shall we say then about the conduct of those who have believed in the Lord? We shall say this: those who have believed must see to it that they make their call and election sure by continuing in the faith and being zealous for good works, for this is the will of God. But can a believer lose justification? The answer is ‘Yes,’ because this is what the Scripture teaches us. For if a believer draws back, by committing the sin unto death (in other words, if he forsakes and denies the Lord who has rescued him), he will lose the justification he has obtained by faith and his name will be blotted out from the Book of Life. For God said to Moses: “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exodus 32:33), and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Hebrews 6:4-8) and again: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29)

How then can we ‘reconcile’ these doctrines (that is, the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine that says that a believer may lose his salvation and go to perdition)? Of course, we can, even though it seems the opposite. Actually, it seems that these doctrines nullify one another; that they contradict one another, however we know that both of them are true, both of them are part of the counsel of God. Therefore, do not deceive yourselves.

Some words in defence of predestination

We are really surprised to see that this doctrine, which is so much confirmed by the Holy Scriptures, is so much neglected among many Churches. Many pastors don’t speak about the purpose of God according to election, they never teach it. You may hear them speaking about certain things which were not revealed to us, but you will never hear them speaking about the purpose of God according to election, which was revealed to us. Why? The reasons are various. Certainly, one of the reasons is their ignorance; in other words, they don’t know the Scriptures. Unfortunately we see that they are ignorant of many other biblical doctrines as well. Another reason is that the word PREDESTINATION makes them think at once of the doctrine ‘once saved always saved’, so it is better not to speak of predestination at all lest believers think
that no matter how they may behave they will eventually be saved. However, this attitude is not right, because the apostle Paul, who said many things concerning predestination, warned in various ways believers not to think that since they had been predestinated to be justified they could do anything they liked. Hear, for instance, what the apostle said to the Romans about the fact that many natural branches (the Jews who are disobedient to God) were cut out of a cultivated olive tree and many branches of the olive tree which is wild by nature (the Gentiles who have believed) were grafted into the cultivated olive tree: “Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness. if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:20-22). Therefore, if Paul taught predestination to the saints of Rome and he warned them not to despise the goodness of God, we don’t understand why those who are appointed to shepherd the flock of God shouldn’t act like Paul. Why should we neglect or fail to teach such an important and fundamental part of the counsel of God because of a nonexistent fear? I am fully persuaded that if the doctrine of predestination is taught rightly, believers will not run the risk of deceiving themselves. In other words, if we teach that God predestinated us to be justified by faith even before the foundation of the world and at His appointed time He called us and justified us, but there is a sin (the sin unto death) of which a believer cannot repent and which leads the believer who commits it to eternal perdition, all sorts of deceitful thoughts will disappear from the believers’ minds.

However, there is another reason why predestination is not taught among many churches, here it is. Unfortunately in the heart of many believers there is some pride that keeps them from recognizing that they have been saved SOLELY because of the purpose of God according to election, that is to say, because God decided beforehand to cause them to believe. In other words, because they were ordained to eternal life. This means that all the things they now have were given to them by God; they don’t come from themselves. Both repentance (through which they humbled before God), and faith (through which they have obtained the forgiveness of sins and eternal life), were given to them by God. For this reason Paul asked the saints of Corinth: “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7 – NKJV), because he knew that all the things the saints did have been given to them by God. These believers, however, stress much, I would say too much, the fact that it was they who wanted to repent, who wanted to believe etc.. To them it is hard to recognize that their will was simply moulded by the Almighty without their knowledge. They can’t accept the fact they were able to come to Jesus only because it was granted to them by the Father! That’s why they stop their ears, or prefer not to hear those who speak of predestination. This is a foolish behaviour on their part, because it means that they don’t want to acknowledge fully the sovereignty of God over all the universe, they don’t want to acknowledge the truthfulness of God; but above all because in this way they take away from God a part of His glory. Because, if I say that I believed because I wanted to believe and not because God wanted me to believe (and caused me to believe), I don’t glorify God for giving me faith. Why then should I glorify Him? Simply because after I chose Christ He saved me!! In other words, it was I who decided to come to Jesus (God did not do anything in order that I might come to Jesus), but as far as the salvation of my soul is concerned it was Christ who saved it. According to the arguments of these believers, therefore, we should say that the faith which allowed us to believe in Christ came from us, while the faith which allows us to continue in the faith comes from God. And as a result, we should say that actually our salvation did not depend entirely on the Lord! Pride takes a lot to die out in these believers! However, you, proud believers, must understand that through your pride you do not humble God but yourselves, even though God seems to be humbled. Tell me this: what’s the difficulty you have in recognizing that repentance and faith were given to you by God because of His purpose? Why do you admit so easily that you were born the first time not of your will but of the will of your parents, or rather, because God wanted you to be born, while when you speak about the new birth you say that it was you who wanted to be born again? But if we are born of God, this
means that we were born again of the will of God and thus because of a decree of God, doesn’t it? Is it not written that He brought us forth of His own will (James 1:18)? Is it not written that we were born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God (John 1:13)? Therefore, humble before God, and give glory to Him, all the glory that He is worthy to receive from you.

Finally, there is another reason. According to these believers who deny predestination, the doctrine of the purpose of God according to election makes people think that God is unjust because He determined beforehand to save some and to send others into perdition (or to let all the others go to perdition). However, I would like to ask these people: ‘Why is He unjust? Is He unjust because He lets wicked people, who deserve to go to perdition because they rebelled against God, go to perdition? Is this an injustice? If God gave salvation to some by their good works while to some others by their faith alone, then, in this case, He would surely be unjust; but the fact that He has decided to have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy is not an injustice at all? Doesn’t the Possessor of heaven and earth have the right to do what He wants with His own things? No, God is not unjust in having mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and in hardening whom He wants to harden. I ask you a question, ‘Do you think, then, that even the antichrist may repent and believe in Jesus Christ?’ If your answer is ‘Yes’, you should explain to me the meaning of these words “will … go to perdition” (Revelation 17:8 – NKJV), and you should explain to me why the Scripture states that the Lord will consume the antichrist with the breath of His mouth and will cast him into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. How can the antichrist have a chance to repent and believe, if he was appointed to be destroyed and to go to perdition? You may say now: ‘That’s a special case!’ Let us suppose you are right, you have to admit, then, that the antichrist will be hardened by God. Why then should God let this man come into the world in order to let him go to perdition? Why will God keep him from believing and being saved? Therefore, if you admit that this human being is to go to perdition, why don’t you want to admit that many other human beings (God alone knows who and how many they are) are to go to perdition? If God can send one man into perdition, is there anything that may keep Him from sending a billion or ten billion of human beings into perdition? What is the difference between one and a billion? Isn’t a decree of God anyway? Therefore, if you say that God is unjust in hardening whom He wants to harden, is He unjust in hardening also the antichrist then? Listen to me, it is just as the Scripture says, that is, God hardens whom He wants to harden and He does this in order to accomplish His impenetrable purposes that we who are dust and ashes don’t understand fully at the moment. But the day is coming when all the purposes of God will be manifest as well as all the reasons of all His decisions, and then all of us will have to recognize that even those incomprehensible and seeming ‘unjust’ hardenings had a definite purpose, that is, the purpose of glorifying His holy name. I know that if God, by hardening the hearts of most of the Jews in the days of Jesus, provided salvation for mankind, whose fruits we enjoy today, for sure any other hardening caused by God is for our good; even if we may not understand it now, for sure one day we will have to recognize that it was caused for our good and not for our ruin.

I have said so far why some don’t teach predestination. However, I want to tell you why we teach it. The reason is that it is a biblical doctrine and thus it is a sound doctrine which does good to those who accept it. The good that the brothers receive from it is this; they can see in the way God led them to Christ a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, of His wisdom and above all of His unconditional love towards them. So they can recognize that God loved them while they were still in darkness and at a certain point of their life He revealed Himself to them through Christ. It was God, therefore, who decided to make Himself known to them, without them believing (before their conversion) in His existence or knowing God’s plan for them. Furthermore, considering their past lifetime which they spent in serving iniquity and vanity, they will recognize how God in an incomprehensible way directed their steps even when they were serving sin with all their strength, so that in the place and at the time appointed by God they might accept Christ. Every believer has his own story, and he knows that had it not been for endless circumstances created and linked together by our great God, today he wouldn’t be what
he is by the grace of God, that is, a believer, but he would be an unbeliever, and perhaps he
would be in hell. Therefore all those who recognize that God loved them and guided them and
delivered them from death even when they were sinners say with a loud voice ‘God is love!’, and
‘God reigns, and both deceived and deceiver are his’. A believer, therefore, knowing his election,
will make all efforts to make his heavenly call sure and will perfect holiness in the fear of God, in
order to honour Him who decided to call him to His glory. Such an excellent call must be
honoured at any cost, even by dying for the sake of the Lord. Besides, a believer even during
the worst moments of his life, knowing that God chose him before the foundation of the world,
feels relieved and comforted greatly, because he knows that He who did not forsake him when
he was still lost, will not forsake him now either, because he belongs to the Lord forever. It is
evident, therefore, that the doctrine of predestination is a doctrine which edifies the church; the
non-edifying doctrines are others. Perhaps, someone will say that the doctrine of predestination
is ‘not very edifying’, thus I would like to ask these people: ‘How can a ‘not very edifying’ doctrine
edify so much the brethren?

By standing firm you will save yourselves

Introduction

Dear brothers in the Lord, we are bound to thank God for you, because you also believed in our
Lord Jesus Christ, having been chosen by God, from the beginning, for salvation through
sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. However, we are also bound to remind you that
“we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the
end” (Hebrews 3:14 – NKJV. In the second part of this passage the NIV reads: “If we hold firmly
till the end the confidence we had at first”), which means that we have become one spirit with the
Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:17) through faith in Him, but if we want to remain one spirit
with Him and to inherit the Kingdom of God we have to keep our faith till the end of our life. What
will happen to us if we cease to believe in the Lord, who saved us? We will lose our salvation
and go to perdition. Through this writing of mine, therefore, I want to exhort you to continue in
the faith till the end, so that on that day you also might obtain “the crown of life, which the Lord
hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

The people of Israel: an example of disobedience

I am going to speak to you about the people of Israel and their example of disobedience in order
to make you realize that the Israelites believed in God at first, but afterwards they drew back,
and because of their unbelief their bodies were scattered in the wilderness and they could not
enter the rest of God; I believe that we all must remember the obstinate and rebellious conduct
of this nation during his journey in the wilderness and the consequences of that conduct lest we
follow their example.

According to the Scripture, the children of Israel went down to Egypt with Jacob, while Joseph
was ruling over Egypt. The reason why they went down to Egypt was that Joseph, after he made
himself known to his brothers, sent for his father and his whole family. They came to Egypt and
dwell in the land of Goshen, where they lived peacefully as long as Joseph was alive and they
survived the great famine which came upon all the nations at that time (which had been
predicted by Joseph). But after the death of Joseph “there arose up a new king over Egypt,
which knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8), who, seeing that the Israelites had become more
numerous than the Egyptians, lest they should become even more numerous and, if war broke out, they should join their enemies, fight against them and leave the country, decided to oppress the Israelites with forced labor and enslaved them to prevent them from multiplying. That oppression and slavery lasted a long time. However, all this happened by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God because a long time before God had told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a land that was not theirs, and would serve them, and they would afflict them four hundred years. But just as God had predicted the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, so He predicted also their deliverance, for He had said to Abraham: “Afterward they shall come out with great possessions. .... But in the fourth generation they shall return here” (Genesis 15:14,16 - NKJV), that is, in the land of Canaan. And that is what happened, for God sent Moses to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh, and after He had worked through Moses great and terrible signs and wonders against Pharaoh and the Egyptians (which were the judgements He executed on them), He brought His people out of the iron furnace, where they had been four centuries. After God divided the Red Sea before the Israelites and made them walk on dry ground through the midst of the sea, the Scripture says that “Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:31). In the Book of Psalms also it is written that after the Israelites saw that wonder they believed in the Lord, for it is written: “Then believed they his words; they sang his praise” (Psalm 106:12). Keep these words before your eyes because they clearly show that the Israelites, after they had gone out of the land of Egypt with joy and gladness, believed in God and in His servant Moses.

But what happened afterwards, during their journey in the wilderness? Here is what happened according to the Scripture: “They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul. They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands” (Psalm 106:13-27). As you can see, it is written that they did not believe the Word of God and they did not heed the voice of the Lord. The same Israelites whom God had brought out of the land of Egypt with joy and gladness, and who had believed the words of God at the Red Sea, cast the law of God behind their backs and refused to believe in God when God said to them: “Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 1:21). This is the sin committed by the people of Israel in the wilderness of which I am going to speak: unbelief.

Now, according to the Word of God, the Israelites, when God divided the Red Sea before them, believed the words which God had revealed to His servant Moses and feared God. Therefore, the fact that afterwards they rebelled against the commandments of God and did not believe the commandment of God, who told them to possess the land of Canaan, shows that they did not continue in the faith and in the fear of God. And consider also that those people who did not continue in the faith and in the fear of God were not people who had not seen God working miracles but were men and women who had seen with their eyes God working terrible things, both in Egypt and in the wilderness, who, after they had been delivered from the four centuries old bondage in Egypt, rejoiced greatly because after so long time they could relish their freedom.
God was disgusted with that stubborn and rebellious generation, which did not set its heart aight and whose spirit was not faithful to God, and He said: “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest” (Hebrews 3:10-11). That was the witness which God witnessed of those Israelites and the judgement He pronounced on them. As you can see, God swore that He would not make those Israelites enter His rest because of their unbelief. Indeed, when they arrived near the land of Canaan, the good news was preached to them as well, but that word did not profit them because they refused to believe it, as it is written: “But the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Hebrews 4:2 – NIV). Therefore, the behaviour of those Israelites must not be imitated. However, it must be remembered because what they did occurred as example and was written for our admonition. For it shows us what destiny is awaiting those who cease to believe the word of God.

Now, let’s talk about us because our story, in certain things, looks like the story of the Israelites. For a certain period of time we lived under the power of Satan, who oppressed us and enslaved us with his strength and his craftiness; we don’t recall that period of our life with joy (because we are now ashamed of all those things which we did while we were under his power); however, we must recall it because it helps us to understand how great and glorious is the deliverance God worked for us. Yes, because we also have been delivered from a slavery, yet not from the slavery of some earthly tyrants, but from the slavery of sin and of the devil. However, we all recall with much pleasure the day on which, by the grace of God, we were delivered from that slavery, because on that day our sins were blotted out and the joke which oppressed us was broken. We thank God for He did this through Christ Jesus, namely, the One whom God sent into this world to deliver us from our sins and from the power of Satan. On that day, our heart overflowed with joy, with a joy that we had never felt while we were under the power of Satan and slaves of sin; personally I have to say that the day I repented of my sins and called upon the name of the Lord, asking Him to have mercy on me, at first I wept because God caused me to feel sad (as it is written: “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation” - 2 Corinthians 7:10 - NKJV), but then I rejoiced because He turned my sadness to joy setting me free from my sins and forgiving them. On that day I tasted the true freedom which is in Christ Jesus, I tasted the true peace which is given by the Lord, I tasted the joy of salvation; at last, after many years of hard slavery, I was able to proclaim that the Lord Jesus had set me free, that I was a son of God; thanks be to God for saving me, as well as you, from the power of the devil. For us on that day a new life began, we began to live in the Lord Jesus Christ; we began by faith because it was by faith that we obtained the deliverance from our sins and from the power of the devil. And by faith we must continue to live this life till the end, in order to enter the Rest of God. Otherwise, that is, if we cease to believe in Him who saved us, we will go to perdition. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews exhorts the saints to continue in the faith and tells them what will happen to a believer if he draws back. Here are his words: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (Hebrews 3:12-15). Brothers in the Lord, I want you to know that just as a heart that believes in God is a good heart, so an unbelieving heart is an evil heart; and that you must see to it that you prevent your good heart from becoming an evil heart of unbelief. That kind of heart is called evil because induces a person not to believe the Word of God and thus it prevents him from inheriting eternal life. We know that God says: “My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” (Hebrews 10:38 – NIV); therefore, since an evil heart of unbelief induces a believer to draw back and to become an enemy of God (Because “without faith it is impossible to please Him” Hebrews 11:6 - NKJV), we must watch lest unbelief enter us and make us draw back to perdition.
The Scripture teaches that “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20) and that we inherit them through faith and patience. Now, this is the promise that God has promised us – eternal life, for He said through His Son: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). However, it is clear that we will inherit eternal life if we continue in the faith till the end; which means that we have need of endurance so that we may receive eternal life, which God promised us. When I say that we have need of endurance, I mean that we need to believe in the promise of eternal life daily, or rather continually, because we know that we will inherit eternal life through faith and patience, but we will lose it if we cease to believe in God.

The story of the people of Israel teaches us that they could not inherit the promised land because of their unbelief; God had promised them through Moses (while they were still in Egypt) that He would give them a wonderful land flowing with milk and honey, and at first they believed in God, but when they were on the point of possessing the land God had promised them, they hardened their heart and refused to believe in God, because they thought that God was not able to give them the land he had promised them because that land was inhabited by the giants. The fear of the giants induced them to doubt the promise of God and they could not obtain its fulfilment. Let us see to it that we don’t doubt the promises of God, because anyone who doubts them makes God a liar, as it is written: “He who does not believe God has made Him a liar” (1 John 5:10 – NKJV).

“Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4 – NKJV), therefore, since He who has promised us eternal life cannot lie, let us continue to believe His promise till the end, without wavering at the promise of God through unbelief. Only those who believe till the end will enter the rest of God, while all those who draw back like the Israelites in the wilderness, will not enter it; therefore, as the Scripture says, “let us be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:11 – NKJV).

Examples of men who inherited the promises of God through faith and patience

Brethren, you know that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4) till the end. Let us now look at some biblical examples of men who inherited God’s promises through faith and patience, because they encourage us to hold fast the confession of our hope to the end and they comfort us in the midst of the afflictions we endure for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

• Noah was a just and upright man and walked with God. However, he lived in the midst of a wicked generation, so wicked that God, seeing that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, was sorry that He had made man on the earth and decided to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which was the breath of life. So God brought flood-waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, but before bringing the flood He warned Noah and commanded him to make an ark of gopherwood for the saving of his household. The Scripture says: “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male
and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them” (Genesis 6:13-21). Now, we learn from the Scripture that after Noah was five hundred years old he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth, and that Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth. However, we do not know the exact time when God warned Noah commanding him to make the ark, because the Scripture is silent on this point. However, we know that many years elapsed from the day on which God warned Noah to the day on which the flood waters came on the earth. And it was during those years that Noah, by faith, moved by godly fear, prepared the ark: therefore, Noah did see the fulfilment of the promise of God not after a few days but after many years and during those years he had to wait with patience and to continue to believe in what God had said to him. Noah was warned of things not yet seen, but after God spoke to him he believed that God would do exactly what He had said to him, that is, that God would bring a flood of waters on the earth to destroy all flesh. He did not doubt the words of the Lord thinking that such a thing could not occur because it was too hard for the Lord, rather, he feared the Lord and began to build the ark. The work was hard and lasted a long time because Noah had to make an ark of the above mentioned dimensions. Considering all things on the whole, bearing in mind also that Noah lived among people who did not fear God at all, we have to say that both Noah’s faith and patience were tested by God; but he was approved by God because he did not draw back, in spite of the strong opposition he met with, but with faith and patience he went on until the day on which God brought the flood on the world of the ungodly, as He had promised. Of course, Noah was tested by God, but he was not put to shame by God because it is written that by his faith “he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

The prophet Jeremiah spoke from God to the people of the kingdom of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for many years; we can say that he spoke for dozens of years, because according to the Scripture about forty years elapsed from the time God began to speak to Jeremiah (in the thirteenth year of Josiah king of Judah) to the time Jerusalem fell by the hand of the Chaldean army (in the eleventh year of Zedekiah king of Judah). Jeremiah was persecuted and insulted by all those who did not want to obey the word of God which Jeremiah delivered to them. One day Jeremiah himself said: “I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me” (Jeremiah 15:10). However, in the midst of his afflictions God promised him: “Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction” (Jeremiah 15:11 - the NIV reads: “Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose: surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress”. In other words, God promised Jeremiah that He would cause his enemies, who said all kinds of lies against him, to come to him and to plead with him. However, in this case also, Jeremiah had to wait for the fulfilment of that promise with patience for many years because God fulfilled that promise after Jerusalem was broken up and many of his inhabitants were carried into exile, as it is written: “Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do” (Jeremiah 42:1-3).

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. So he came to a certain place (which afterwards was called by him Bethel) where he stayed all night because the sun had set. During that night he had a dream in which God spoke to him and promised him: “And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (Genesis 28:15). Now, according to what the Scripture teaches, Jacob saw the fulfilment of that promise after twenty
years, for he dwelt twenty years in the land of the people of the East (Paddan Aram). After twenty years God appeared to Jacob while he was in Paddan Aram and told him: “Now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Genesis 31:13). We know that Jacob endured many afflictions during his stay in Paddan Aram, but God eventually caused him to return to the land of Canaan with several wives, some children and many goods. So we affirm that Jacob also continued to believe in the promise of God during those years, thus he also waited patiently in order to obtain from God what God had promised him.

Just before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He commanded His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem "but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, he said, you have heard from Me, for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5 – NKJV). In this case, the disciples obtained the fulfilment of that specific promise of the Lord after a few days, for it was on the day of Pentecost that the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit; they waited with faith and patience for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and at God’s appointed time the Spirit came upon them all.

Brothers in the Lord, we all have a certain number of years to live on this earth, this number has been fixed by God and we don’t know it. Now, we don’t know whether the Lord will appear from heaven while we are still alive (in this case we will not die) or after we have departed from this earthly house (in this case we will taste death); anyway, we must live the rest of our life by faith in the Son of God to the end of the days God has ordained for us. In the midst of our necessities and our afflictions we endure for the Gospel’s sake, we must be patient and must have faith in the holy and faithful promises of our Saviour, knowing that it is impossible for God to lie.

Jesus said to His disciples: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). Therefore, we know that Jesus will come from heaven (where he must remain until the time comes for God to restore everything). Of course, many centuries have elapsed since the day on which the Lord spoke those words, but this does not worry us at all and does not induce us to doubt His words because we know Him who spoke those words. We know that the first coming of the Christ into this world had been predicted by God through His prophets many centuries before the Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh. The Jews also had to wait for the redemption of Jerusalem with faith and patience for a long time, but eventually they saw the fulfilment of the promise of His coming. It is true that not all those who waited for the coming of the Messiah saw Him in the days of His flesh because many of them died and “did not receive the promise” (Hebrews 11:39 – NKJV) – that is confirmed by these words Jesus spoke to his disciples: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Luke 10:23-24) – yet all those who waited for Him with patience and then died (without seeing the Messiah), died in faith believing that the Messiah would certainly come at God’s appointed time. Consider this: the very prophets who spoke about the coming of the Son of God into this world did not see Him in the days of His flesh, but they died believing in the promise of His coming and confessing their hope. However, if on the one hand many of the Jews did not have the honour of seeing with their own eyes the Christ of God who had been promised in the Holy Scriptures, on the other hand there were many who saw Him after they had waited for Him for many years, like that old man called Simeon who was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25 – NKJV) to whom it had been revealed “by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26 – NKJV), and the day on which Joseph and Mary brought the Child Jesus in the temple, Simeon took Him up in his arms and blessed God. Anna also, who was a prophetess, who was about eighty-four years old, saw the redemption of Jerusalem with her own eyes (Luke 2:36-38). The disciples of the Lord also waited for the Messiah and had the honour of seeing and touching Him. Anyway, there were many others who on those days were waiting for the Redemption of Jerusalem with faith and patience, of some of them we know the names, while of
others we don’t know the names. Even among us many brothers and sisters have died in faith waiting for the appearing of the Lord; and as long as they lived they believed that the Lord will come and confessed with their mouth that they waited for and loved His appearing. They remained faithful to the Lord until their death, and they went to be with the Lord in the Paradise of God, but they had to keep their faith with patience until the end, in order to enter the Kingdom of God. We are called to imitate those who have already entered the rest of God because of their faith and patience. We know that our faith also will be tested during the rest of our earthly life because God has determined to test it, but we know that those who stand the test will receive the crown of life, as it is written: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12 – NIV).

Therefore, brethren, stand firm in the faith, do not throw away your confidence, but hold fast the confession of your hope because He who promised is faithful. He will surely come and will not tarry; if He tarry, let’s wait patiently for Him, for He will certainly come. We don’t want to be counted among those who draw back to perdition, but among those who believe to the saving of the soul. To Him who establishes us with you in Christ in order to present us holy and blameless before Him, be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

The sin that leads to death

What the sin unto death is and the impossibility of repenting of it

The apostle John wrote: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16-17).

Brethren, all wrongdoing is sin and we know that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), as John says. Now, the Scripture says that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), therefore, if a son of God commits a sin the transgression of the law will repay him with death, that’s why if a believer sins, after he has sinned, he feels disturbed and unhappy and feels a pain that pierces him like an arrow inside him, because the wages of sin is death. But the apostle wrote: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16), which means that if we see a brother commit a sin which does not lead to death, we must pray God so that he might be made alive; yes, because God gives life to those who commit a sin that does not lead to death and repent of it, confessing and forsaking it. However, there is a sin of which a believer cannot repent, because it is impossible for those who commit this sin to be brought back to repentance and thus it is useless to pray for them, as it is written: “I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:17). In other words, for those brothers who have committed this sin leading to death there is no possibility that they may repent and receive life from God. What is the destiny awaiting these people? They will be condemned to the second death (that is, the lake which burns with fire and brimstone), because this kind of sin leads those who commit it to the second death.

Now, since all wrongdoing is sin and there are many kinds of sins, we have to ascertain through the Scriptures what the sin leading to death is, in order to prevent someone among us from saying that a certain brother has committed the sin leading to death for he has seen that brother commit a sin; that is to say, in order to prevent believers from accusing falsely other believers of having committed the sin to death. When we speak of the sin unto death (and not only when we
speak of this biblical subject but also when we speak of any other biblical subject) we have to divide rightly the word of truth lest we unsettle the souls of believers and drive them to despair through words that don’t apply to them, because they have not committed the sin unto death. Now, let us see what the epistle to the Hebrews says about this sin in order to understand what it is.

It is written: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Hebrews 6:4-8). First of all, let’s look closely at the qualities of those of whom the Scripture says “if they shall fall away it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance” because these qualities can be and are possessed only by true children of God washed from their sins in the blood of the Lamb. I say this because some believers pass this sin off as a sin committed by people who had not yet accepted the Word of God completely or people who were approaching the Lord, but that’s not true at all because those persons of whom the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews speak are true believers and not false believers.

Brethren, those who, after they hear the Gospel of grace, approach God recognizing that they are sinners and need to be saved have been enlightened by God who is light; and when they believe with their heart in our Lord Jesus Christ obtaining the remission of their sins and eternal life they taste the heavenly gift, which is Jesus Christ, for Paul says: “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23) and John says about the Son of God: “This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Afterwards, when they are baptized with the Holy Spirit they become partakers of the Holy Spirit because they are filled with the Holy Spirit (however, this does not mean that they did not have the Holy Spirit before, for every man receives a measure of the Spirit when he believes in the Lord). The words “they have tasted the good word of God” mean that they have fed on “the pure milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2 – NKJV) as well as solid food, which “belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14 – NKJV). The words “they have tasted the powers of the world to come” means that they have received some gifts of the Holy Spirit through which believers taste the powers of the world to come. Now, if these persons, who have experienced all these things, reject the Lord and draw back (they are again entangled in the pollutions of the world and overcome), deciding not to follow the Lord any longer and to renounce the Christ (they even don’t want to hear people speaking about Christ any longer), they commit the sin unto death, and we don’t have to pray for them because it is impossible to renew them again to repentance because they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God, but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and cursed and its end is to be burned; in the same way, if a believer abides in the Lord, the Lord abides in him, he bears much fruit to the glory of God and God blesses him; but if he ceases to abide in the Lord, the Lord will cease to abide in him and he will bear only thorns and briers, and thus he will become a man disapproved concerning the faith, an accursed child, who will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone where he will burn and be tormented forever.

The reason why the writer of this epistle wrote these things to the Jews who had believed in our Lord Jesus Christ was that those believers were enduring a great persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ and they were tempted, in the midst of that persecution, to draw back; and so the writer of the epistle, knowing the sufferings they had to endure for the Gospel’s sake, exhorted them to hold their confidence in Christ steadfast to the end and warned them against
drawing back and renouncing the grace to offer again those sin offerings whose blood could not take away sins, because if they drew back they would condemn themselves to the everlasting perdition, they would deserve such a punishment because in so doing they would trample the Son of God underfoot and count the blood of the covenant by which they had been sanctified a common thing and they would insult the Spirit of grace. Here is what the writer of that epistle wrote about the end awaiting those who draw back and about the punishment they deserve to receive from the living God: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31). These words are addressed to all of us who have believed as well, because the writer himself, who was a believer, included himself among those who could draw back to perdition saying: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth … ” (Hebrews 10:26) – we who are children of God have received the knowledge of the truth -, and because we are those people who were sanctified by the blood of the covenant (that is, the blood of Jesus Christ). Therefore, brethren, if those who have known the truth which is in Christ Jesus sin wilfully, that is, sin unto death, they commit a sin that will never be forgiven them (because it is a sin that will pay the transgressors back with the everlasting death) and they will go to perdition because they will lose the good hope (the hope of salvation) they have; only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God is left. They will deserve to be punished much more severely than those who broke the law of Moses and were put to death, because they have trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of Christ with which they were sprinkled a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace, that is, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts and by whom we cry out: “Abba, Father!” (with regard to this last thing, remember that Jesus said: “But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” [Mark 3:29 - NKJV]).

The possibility of repenting for those who commit a sin which does not lead to death

Brethren, I want you to know that both this expression “if they shall fall away” (Hebrews 6:6 - or “if they fall away” NKJV) and this other one “if we sin wilfully” (Hebrews 10:26), apply only to the sin which leads to death and not to all sins, because according to the Holy Scriptures a believer who commits a sin which is not unto death can repent of it and be forgiven by the Lord. Now I will show you from the Scriptures that it is possible for those believers who commit a sin which is not unto death to be brought back to repentance and that we can receive the remission of all sins except the sin unto death.

● Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Therefore, a believer who commits a sin which does not lead to death can be restored, that is, he can be exhorted to repent of his sin and be forgiven by the Lord if he repents. When the apostle says ‘in a fault’ or “in a sin” (NIV), he does not include the sin unto death among the sins in which a believer may be caught, because those who commit the sin unto death cannot be restored since it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. It is true that “a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again” (Proverbs 24:16); however, it is also true that if the just falls, committing the sin which leads to death, he will never be able to rise again.
Jesus said: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4). Therefore, a brother who commits a sin which is not unto death can repent and be forgiven. Please note that the Scripture does not say: ‘If your brother sins unto death, rebuke him,’ because – as we saw before - for those who have committed the sin unto death it is impossible to repent and thus it is useless to rebuke them and to pray for them.

John said: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:9-10). Therefore, we can confess our sins to the Lord and we know for certain that they will be forgiven us. If all sins were unto death, we would be hopeless, brethren, and the Scripture would be nullified because we could not even confess our sins to God to obtain the remission of them; we could not say to God: “Forgive us our debts” (Matthew 6:12 – NKJV), which would mean that God has deceived us. Those who commit the sin unto death will never be forgiven, that's why the sin unto death cannot be included among the sins that can be confessed to God and washed by the blood of Jesus Christ; bear in mind this always.

James says: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). From the words of James, therefore, we learn that if a brother wanders from the truth he can be converted, thus he still can repent. Therefore, we cannot say that if a brother wanders from the truth, giving heed to some strange doctrines, he has committed the sin unto death and so he cannot repent any longer, for James says that he can be turned from the error of his way and his sins can be forgiven. The point I would like to underline is this: it is possible to renew again to repentance a brother who has wandered from the truth, but it is not possible to do the same thing towards a brother who has committed the sin unto death. Paul also says that a brother who has wandered from the truth can be renewed again to repentance, for after saying to Timothy that Hymenaeus and Philetus were among those who had wandered away from the truth because they said that the resurrection had already taken place, he said to him: “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26 – NKJV). As you can see, Paul says that the servant of the Lord must gently correct those who oppose the truth (they oppose the truth because they have wandered from the truth) because God may grant them repentance and allow them to escape from the trap of the devil into which they have fallen. The same thing cannot happen if a believer commits the sin unto death because – as we saw before – it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance.

Jesus Christ said to the angel of the Church in Thyatira: “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:20-23). In the Church of Thyatira there was a woman named Jezebel who taught and seduced the servants of Jesus Christ to commit adultery with her and to eat things sacrificed to idols (that is to say, to do two things which are condemned by the law and are sins). Then the Lord revealed to the angel of that Church that He had given Jezebel time to repent, but she did not want to repent, and so He would punish her by casting her into a sickbed and by killing her children with death; and the Lord told the angel of that Church that His servants also would be punished severely if they did not repent of their evil deeds. It is evident that if Jezebel and those servants of Jesus, who had been deceived by her into doing those evil deeds, had
committed the sin unto death the Lord would not have given them time to repent because we
know that it is impossible for those who sin unto death to be brought back to repentance. So in
this case also, even though those persons had committed some sins, it was possible for them to
be brought back to repentance and be forgiven.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I
would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings,
wraths, strifes, backbittings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: And lest, when I come again, my
God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and
have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have
committed” (2 Corinthians 12:20-21). In the Church of Corinth there were some believers who
had practiced uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness, which are all works of the flesh, and Paul
was afraid that when he would come again to the Corinthians he would have to punish and
judge those who had not repented of their sins. However, they had not repented of those sins,
not because they had committed the sin unto death and so it was impossible for them to be
brought back to repentance, but because they themselves had not been willing to repent. In this
case also, we see how the Lord gives a believer who sins time to repent, but if he doesn’t repent
of his sins the Lord will judge him according to his works (that is to say, He will inflict a
punishment upon him).
THE PLAN OF SALVATION

The mystery of God which has been revealed to His saints

Jesus Christ is an elect and precious chief cornerstone to those who believe, but a stone of stumbling to those who do not believe

God said through the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6; Isaiah 28:16). That chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ, as it is written: “And [ye] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:20-21), and the building which has been built upon Him (who is a precious and elect chief cornerstone to all those who believe in Him) is the Church of God “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Now, as I said before, God predicted that whoever believes on Him (the sure foundation laid by God in Zion) will not be put to shame. However, He predicted also that the elect stone (His Anointed One) would be rejected by the builders and would become a stone of stumbling to the disobedient, for God said: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22 - NKJV) and: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isaiah 8:14-15). That man called Simeon, who was just and devout and was waiting for the Consolation of Israel, when he took the Child Jesus up in his arms, said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, among other things: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel …” (Luke 2:34), and that’s exactly what happened in the days of Jesus and of the apostles, for at that time many Jews stumbled at the Word because they were not obedient to the Gospel, and bear in mind that today many Jews (most of them) still stumble at the Word for they don’t want to obey the Gospel of the grace of God. The apostle Peter says about those Jews who were and are disobedient to the Gospel that this is “what they were destined for” (1 Peter 2:8 - NIV), because their fall is part of the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself before the foundation of the world and accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of the time, so that salvation might come to us who are Gentiles by birth.

Through the fall of the Jews salvation has come to the Gentiles

The apostle Paul says that because of their fall “salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:11 – NKJV). Therefore God’s salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, has come to every nation and people because Jesus Christ was rejected by the Jews. God’s salvation has come to all nations so that the prophetic Scriptures might be fulfilled, for God had said that He would make His Anointed One the light for the nations and His salvation to the ends of the earth. The prophets of old foretold through the Spirit that both God’s salvation and God’s righteousness would be made known and extended to every nation; let us see in which terms they foretold these things and how the things they said were fulfilled.
God, through the prophet Isaiah, said about His Holy Servant: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:1; the last part of this passage in the NIV is translated in this way: “He will bring justice to the nations”), and that was fulfilled because Jesus Christ preached to men the righteousness of God which is by faith; He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24), - he will not come into condemnation or judgement because he is clothed with the righteousness of God, or rather, because he has become the righteousness of God in Christ - and these words are addressed both to Jews and Gentiles. That we also who are Gentiles by birth one day would be justified by faith, had been foretold by God to Abraham in this way: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18), and that is what happened for we have been justified in Jesus Christ, who is the seed of Abraham, who of God was made unto us righteousness according to what the prophet Jeremiah had said about Him: “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6). Paul said to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia: “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39); these words are faithful because “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4), for whoever believes in Jesus Christ receives the remission of all his sins and is justified because Jesus became for us “righteousness” from God. God had said: “My righteousness will soon be revealed” (Isaiah 56:1 - NIV) and He kept His word because He revealed it in the fullness of the time and so was fulfilled the Scripture which says: “His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations” (Psalm 98:2 – NKJV). With regard to His salvation, too, God promised to make it known and to extend it to all men; He said: “My salvation is about to come” (Isaiah 56:1 – NKJV) and also: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. …. and beside me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 45:22: 43:11). We know that God has revealed His salvation because Christ (of God) was made for us “redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30) and this salvation is offered to all men, both Jews and Gentiles, because it is written: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32). Jesus Christ is the Lord, who still says: ‘Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, …. and beside me there is no saviour’. And we who are Gentiles have been saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation, that is, with that salvation of which the prophets spoke in ancient times and that in the fullness of the time was proclaimed by Jesus Christ, who said: “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9), and by the apostles who proclaimed this great salvation to both Jews and Gentiles.

God said about His Servant: “It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6), and that is what happened because God made Jesus the light of the nations. God had said that He would make His justice a light to the nations, and that light would shine upon those who walked in darkness and this was fulfilled because Christ – the light of the world (John 8:12) - has shone on us who are Gentiles, so we can say: “In Your light we see light” (Psalm 36:9 – NKJV). We who once were walking in darkness without knowing where we were going, now, by the grace of God, having been enlightened by Christ, we walk in the light and we know where we are going.
God said through the prophet Isaiah: “I will lift up my banner to the peoples” (Isaiah 49:22 – NIV), and also that the banner would be the Root of Jesse, as it is written: “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him …...” (Isaiah 11:10 – NIV). Who is the Root of Jesse? The Root of Jesse is Jesus Christ, for it is written: “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground …” (Isaiah 53:2) and also: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1). and these words of Isaiah were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, because He descended from David whose father was Jesse (Matthew 1:5-6). Therefore, Jesus Christ is our banner, He is the banner of all those who have believed in Him, as it is written: “The LORD is my Banner” (Exodus 17:15 - NIV) and since we are soldiers of Jesus Christ we have to hold fast the Word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, for it is written: “You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth” (Psalm 60:4 – NKJV).

God said about His Anointed One: “See, I have made him a witness to the peoples …” (Isaiah 55:4 – NIV. “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people …” according to the KJV). Jesus is the faithful witness given to the peoples because He testified to what He had seen and heard in His Father's presence, and His testimony has been made known to the peoples. John the Baptist said about the Christ: “And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:32-33). Brothers, remember that Jesus said: “I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence” (John 8:38 – NIV) and: “Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:50 – NKJV), and also: “My witness is true” (John 8:14 – NKJV). We trust with all our heart in the words of Christ, because His words are the words of God that He delivered to men without adding anything to them and without taking anything from them; and we who are Gentiles, having received His testimony, have certified that God is true.

God said through the prophet Isaiah: “See, I have made him ... a leader and commander of the peoples ” (Isaiah 55:4 - NIV). And this was fulfilled because God made Jesus Prince over us who are Gentiles; He is the One who came to rule us: He is our Ruler.

God said through the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (Isaiah 55:5). And this Scripture also was fulfilled because we are those nations that Christ has called to His eternal glory; we are those nations that have run to the Saviour whom we did not know before and all this took place because God glorified His Holy Servant Jesus.

God said about His Anointed One: “The Lord GOD, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him” (Isaiah 56:8). And this Scripture was fulfilled, for we who are Gentiles are the ‘others’ whom God had promised to gather to His Servant. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did come to gather to Him not only the lost sheep of the House of Israel but also the lost sheep of the other nations: He Himself confirmed this, saying: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Besides the remnant of Israel (that is, the lost sheep of the house of Israel which were predestined to believe in Jesus), Jesus gathered to Him also many other sheep which are not of that fold (that is, which are not Israelites according to the flesh). These other sheep are all those Gentiles who are in Christ, who are saved. Now, in Christ Jesus, there is
one flock and one people and there are no longer two folds and two peoples, because He “has made the two one” (Ephesians 2:14 – NIV).

God said: “I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me” (Isaiah 65:1 - NKJV), and this is what happened, for the Lord was found by the Gentiles who were not seeking Him, and He revealed Himself to the Gentiles who did not ask for Him. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, confirms plainly this, saying to the saints of Rome that the “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith” (Romans 9:30 – NKJV)

God said through the prophet Isaiah: “And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed” (Isaiah 61:9). And we who are Gentiles in Christ Jesus are that seed that is known among the nations and all those who see us acknowledge that we are the seed that the Lord has blessed. This seed which has been blessed by the Lord and is all over the world was begotten by God; it is God who created it in the midst of this dark world; those who were begotten by God were called and are still called ‘Christians’ and we are happy and we have the honour of bearing that name. When we suffer as a Christian we are not ashamed of bearing that name, rather we praise God that we bear that name and we rejoice in the sufferings we endure because of the name of Him to whom we belong.

God said to His Son: “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Psalm 2:8 – NKJV), and that was fulfilled. For we who are children of God from among the nations, are “the nations” which God gave the Son for His inheritance because Jesus says about us who believe in Him: “Here am I and the children whom God has given me” (Hebrews 2:13 – NKJV) and as you know the Scripture says that “children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3 – NKJV). We who are believers from among the Gentiles have been given to the Son of God for His inheritance and possession and thus was fulfilled that word concerning the Son, written in the Psalms, which says: “Yes, I have a good inheritance” (Psalm 16:6 – NKJV).

God said through the prophet Hosea: “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God” (Romans 9:25-26; Hosea 2:23). This Scripture was fulfilled, for we are those who once were not a people but are now the people of God, we are those who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy, and we who were not the people of God are now called the children of God because this is what we became when we believed on Him, as it is written: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12), and also: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1) and again: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

God said through Amos the prophet: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this” (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:16-18) and these words also were fulfilled because in Christ we who are Gentiles, too, have been built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). We who are
Gentiles in Christ Jesus are those nations which are called by the name of God; Jesus Christ is our great God and it is His name the name by which we are called.

God said through Micah the prophet: “But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:1-2). And we are the nations which have gone up to the mountain on which the House of God was built. Joel the prophet said: “In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call” (Joel 2:32), and indeed on Mount Zion and among the remnant called by the Lord there is the salvation of God, which is Christ Jesus, and we have come to Mount Zion and to Jesus, as it is written: “But you have come to Mount Zion and …. To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:22,24 – NKJV).

Beloved, there is salvation on Mount Zion, there is rest, much peace and joy on it, and we who once wandered over mountain and hill like sheep going astray, now we have come to Mount Zion by the grace of God.

The Gospel of the grace had to be preached to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles

When the Lord Jesus sent His twelve disciples to preach the Kingdom of God, He said to them: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). Why did He give them that particular order? Because the time when the Gospel had to be preached plainly to the Gentiles had not yet come; because the Gospel had to be preached to the Jews first, for the first sheep to be gathered to Christ had to be the lost sheep of the House of Israel; then God would gather to Him other sheep which did not belong to the House of Israel, that is, which were Gentiles by birth. However, it must be said that during the earthly life of Jesus there were some people not belonging to the house of Israel who believed in the Lord Jesus. For instance, the roman centurion who pleaded with Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant saying to Jesus: “Only speak a word, and my servant will be healed” and of whom Jesus said to those who followed him: “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel” (Matthew 8:10 – NKJV). Many Samaritans also believed in the Lord (John 4:39). I have said this in order to show you that the Lord showed no partiality during the days of His flesh because He Himself had said: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

After Jesus was raised from the dead, before He ascended to heaven, He said to His disciples: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47) and: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and also: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

As you can see, Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and not only to the Jews; yet, the apostles, even though they had received those orders, at first they resisted somehow the orders of the Lord, that is, they did not want to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles because they, being Jews, did not want to associate with the Gentiles or to visit them. The Lord saw their resistance and so He showed them that He was no respecter of persons but He was the Saviour of all men, rich in mercy towards all those who call on Him in
truth. Here is how the Lord showed them that He wanted the Gentiles also to be saved. In the book of Acts we read: “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and called, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John
preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree [whom they killed by hanging on a tree]:

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins [everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name]. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ: what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18).

Yes, God has granted repentance to us also, who are Gentiles, for the Gospel of our salvation was preached to us and we have accepted it. That is how God, after glorifying His Son Jesus, opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and this door has remained open until now; nobody was able to close it in the days of the apostles and nobody will ever be able to close it, because the following words of Jesus: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations ...” (Matthew 24:14) are to be fulfilled, and there are still many Gentiles all over the world whom God foreordained to eternal life and thus at God’s appointed time they will believe.
We who are Gentiles by birth became partakers of the root and fatness of the cultivated olive tree; but let us not boast against those natural branches which were broken off.

The Scripture teaches that in the days of the apostles God began to manifest His great mercy towards the Gentiles by birth, and that He chose Saul of Tarsus to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, so that they also might believe and become members of God’s household. So, from those days on, God’s salvation have been sent by God to the Gentiles, and God has opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Word of His grace and thus was fulfilled the word which says: “And those who have not heard shall understand” (Romans 15:21 – NKJV; cf. Isaiah 52:15). Now, therefore, we who are Gentiles by birth and believe the Gospel of grace are no longer strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God by the grace of God. And for this we are bound to thank God continually. However, Paul wrote to us that we must remember certain things, here are his words: “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-12). The reason why we who are Gentiles were formerly without Christ and God, therefore, was that we were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. For God in ancient times chose the Israelites as His people and committed His oracles to them alone, as it is written in the Psalms: “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them” (Psalm 147:19-20; see also Romans 3:2). That’s why Paul says that the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises pertain to the Israelites (Romans 9:4). We who are Gentiles were foreigners to all these things, because we were not Israelites. We were far from God “but now in Christ Jesus – Paul says - ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13-22). Therefore, brethren, Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, has made the two peoples one because through the cross He put to death the enmity which existed between Jews and Gentiles; He has broken down the middle wall of separation, which separated us from the Jews, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, by abolishing it in His flesh. And so through His death He reconciled us to the Jews and in one body He reconciled both us and the Jews to God. If now we are members of the household of God and we are being built together to become a dwelling (that is, the Church) in which God lives by His Spirit, we owe all this to the mercy of Christ, the Son of God, who has qualified us to enter the Kingdom of God and has reconciled us to the Jews and brought us near to God. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). Brothers, we are Christ’s, we belong to Him, and together
with the Jews who believe we are one people and one flock and we have one Head and one Shepherd, which is Christ Jesus. What I have just explained to you is “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:9-10). And we from among the Gentiles, who have believed in the Lord, thank God for He willed to make known to us what are the riches of the glory of this mystery (Colossians 1:26). This mystery – Paul says – “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:5), for it was kept secret for long ages past in order to be revealed in the fulness of the time. God has made known to us this mystery – that we who are Gentiles are fellow heirs with those Jews who believe that Jesus is the Christ, and members of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel – “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10); and besides, this mystery, by the prophetic Scriptures, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, is “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26).

Brethren in the Lord, we recognize that God had mercy on us in Christ Jesus, therefore we are bound to glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people” (Romans 15:11; Psalm 117:1). Let us rejoice in the Lord, let us praise Him with songs because He has saved us, but let us not boast against those Jews who don’t believe in Christ. Here is what Paul says to us, who are Gentiles, about the fact that we were grafted into a cultivated olive tree: “For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear” (Romans 11:16-20). Let me explain to you what Paul meant by these words. We who are Gentiles by birth were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted into a cultivated olive tree through our faith. Many natural branches of the cultivated olive tree were broken off because of their unbelief and we were grafted in among the others and so now we enjoy the blessings and consolations of Christ, having become partakers of the spiritual things which belong to the Jews, but we must not boast against the Jews who are disobedient, knowing that the root of the cultivated olive tree in which we were grafted is Jewish according to the flesh; besides, we don’t support the root but the root supports us.

What shall we say then about those Jews who do not obey the Gospel? We shall say that on the one hand they are enemies of God on our account, but on the other hand they are beloved by God on account of the fathers (the patriarchs), as it is written: “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:28-29). Therefore that means that even though many Jews reject the Gospel and don’t please God because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, God has not rejected Israel: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:2 – NKJV) says Paul to the Romans.

Therefore let us see to it that we don’t consider Israel a people rejected by God, for it is written: “Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:37) and again: “Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his
seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them” (Jeremiah 33:25-26). Of course, whereas on the one hand we see the goodness of God towards those who believe (that is, us), on the other hand we see also the severity of God towards those who fell, that is, the Jews who stumbled at the stone of stumbling; yet Paul says about these Jews who don't believe: “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again” (Romans 11:23), which means that if the natural branches which were cut out of the cultivated olive tree don’t continue in their hardness of heart they will be grafted into their own olive tree. However, let it be known to you also that if we who believe don’t continue in the faith and the good works till the end we will be cut out of the cultivated tree; so let us fear God.

The apostle Paul says: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. ….. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all” (Romans 11:25-27, 30-32).

Therefore, when the fullness of the Gentiles has come, God will save all the Israelites and will have mercy on them all. Then the veil that lies on their heart when the Old Testament is read by them, will be taken away, because the veil is taken away in Christ. Knowing all this, therefore, let us not be haughty because God is faithful and at His appointed time He will fulfil the good word He spoke to the people whom He foreknew.

The Jews who are disobedient were appointed to stumble for the salvation of the Gentiles

At this point, you may ask me the following questions about the hardening in part which has happened to Israel: “Who hardened (or blinded) the disobedient Jews?’ Why were they hardened?’ The answers to these questions are in the Bible. So let’s look closely at what the Bible says.

Now, first of all, let me say that the fact that many Jews don’t obey the Gospel of Christ does not mean that the Word of God has failed, for Paul says to the Romans: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son” (Romans 9:6-9). Let me explain to you these words of Paul. Abraham had two sons: the one (Ishmael) by a bondwoman named Hagar, the other (Isaac) by a freewoman named Sarah. Both of them were begotten by Abraham, but the son whom God had promised to Abraham was Isaac and not Ishmael; furthermore, it was Isaac the son of Abraham with whom - God had promised Abraham - God would establish His covenant, as it is written: “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Genesis 17:19), and in fact God established His covenant with the descendants of Isaac (the Israelites) and not with the descendants of Ishmael (the Arab tribes). As you know, that happened at Mount Sinai, after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, where God established His covenant with the people of Israel. In addition to this, it must be said that God had promised Abraham that He would give the promised land to his seed, that is, to Isaac, and not to Ishmael the son of the bondwoman; and in fact when the
fullness of the time came God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites and not to the descendants of Ishmael.

Now, the son of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, while the son of the freewoman was born through promise, or, as Paul says “according to the Spirit” (Galatians 4:29 - NKJV). That means that even though Ishmael was Abraham’s seed, he was not the seed that God had promised to Abraham, that is to say, Ishmael was not the child of promise. So not all the Jews are children of Abraham (even though all of them are Abraham’s descendants) because among them there are Jews who were born according to the flesh like Ishmael, who are slaves of sin because they have stumbled at the stone of stumbling and thus are not born of God. The children of Abraham from among the Jews, instead, are all those Jews who, having believed that Jesus is the Christ, are born of God and have been set free from their sin through their faith in Jesus; they are blessed with believing Abraham and heirs of the Kingdom of God because they are children of the freewoman, as Isaac was. On the contrary, the children of the bondwoman, that is, the disobedient Jews, are not heirs of the Kingdom because they are not born of God. What did God say to Abraham concerning Hagar and her son Ishmael? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (Galatians 4:30; Genesis 21:10), and in fact Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael and “gave all that he had unto Isaac” (Genesis 25:5) the son of the freewoman, and not to Ishmael the son of the bondwoman. So, among the Jews by birth, those who are born according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit (because they don’t believe the Gospel), are not heirs of eternal life (that is to say, they will not inherit eternal life) with those Jews who obey the Gospel of the grace of God. I would like you to notice that it was God who appointed Isaac heir of Abraham and that He acted according to His good pleasure. With regard to Isaac and Ishmael, therefore, we can say that God appointed beforehand Isaac and not Ishmael to be the son of promise and heir of Abraham. The fact that it was Isaac who became heir of Abraham depended on God’s will and not on Isaac’s will.

Paul continues by saying: “And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Romans 9:10-13; cf. Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:2-3).

Now, when Rebecca, Isaac’s wife, became pregnant she conceived two children, and “the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:22-23). Then, why did God - while the children were still in her womb and they had not yet done any good or evil - say to Rebecca “the elder shall serve the younger”? The reason is this: “That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth” (Romans 9:11-12). So God acted in that way in order to show that He works all things according to the counsel of His will. And in fact, with regard to our salvation, God begot us through His Word, not by works of righteousness which we had done or by the will of man, but, as James said, “of His own will” (James 1:18 - NKJV). We did not choose the Lord, but the Lord did choose us, as Jesus said to His disciples: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). During the ages many have tried to break down the purpose of God according to election, but it did not fall to the ground, it still stands and all the efforts made by the fearless persons have been vain, because the words which God spoke to Rebecca show that God chooses for salvation whom He wills. It was neither Jacob nor Esau who decided which people between the two would be stronger than the other one; it was neither Jacob nor Esau who decided whom God would establish His Covenant with; and pay attention also to this,
neither their parents decided or determined those things. Furthermore, it must be said that Jacob did not deserve to be served by his elder brother Esau because when God said: “The older shall serve the younger” he was still in his mother’s womb and he had not yet done any good or evil. At this point, Paul says to the Romans: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth’. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Romans 9:14-18 – NKJV). Therefore, God did not act unjustly towards Esau by rejecting him even before he was born, because He has mercy on whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills. Do you remember the Pharaoh? Isn’t true that God hardened his heart so that he might refuse to allow the people of Israel to leave the land of Egypt, and thus He might strike the Egyptians with terrible judgements in order to gain glory through Pharaoh and all the Egyptians? Therefore, if God hardened the heart of Pharaoh He did not commit any injustice; He hardened his heart according to the counsel of His will so that both the Israelites and all those who would hear of his terrible judgements against the Egyptians might glorify His holy name. And just as the Pharaoh was hardened by God, so many Jews were hardened by God while Jesus was on the earth (in the days of His flesh) lest they should believe in His Son, for this is what John says: “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:37-40). Therefore, the reason why many Jews refused to believe in Jesus was that God had appointed them to reject the Gospel, that is to say, to stumble at the Word of God, as Isaiah the prophet had said: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isaiah 8:14-15). That’s why John says that those Jews “could not believe”, for the words of Isaiah the prophet had to be fulfilled, and not only the words of Isaiah but also the following words of Moses: “Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.” (Deuteronomy 29:4), as well as these words of David: “Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always” (Romans 11:9-10; Psalm 69:22-23). Let it be known to you, therefore, that God is not to be blamed for His behaviour, rather, let God be true but every man a liar. If God said to Moses: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Exodus 33:19), why should He be blamed? Is He not the One who does whatever He pleases in heaven, and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places (Psalm 135:6)? Is He not the One who said: “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure …. I will work, and who shall let it?” (Isaiah 46:10; 43:13)? But who will dare to say to Him: “What have you done?” Should God act like men in order not to be criticized by them? Know this, that God will always be found blameless when He judges.

Whereas on the one hand God hardened the heart of many Jews, on the other hand He had mercy on a remnant of Jews according to the election of grace, for it is written: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. …. Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it….” (Romans 11:5,7). That only a remnant of Jews would turn to the Lord, had been foretold by the prophets. Isaiah
said: “The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness” (Isaiah 10:21-22; Romans 9:27) and again: “Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:29), and again: “And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy … For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this” (Isaiah 4:3; 37:32). Micah the prophet said: “I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold ….” (Micah 2:12) and again: “And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men” (Micah 5:7). And God through Zephaniah the prophet said about the remnant of Israel: “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity …” (Zephaniah 3:13) which accords with what John says about those who are born of God: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

Jesus knew that only a remnant would believe on Him, that only those whom God gave to Him would come to Him, that only those on whom God had determined to have mercy would come to Him; that’s why one day He said to the Jews: “No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father” (John 6:65) and: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Paul confirmed the words of Christ by saying that God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy (Romans 9:18).

Brothers, as you can see, it was because of the fall of the Jews that the Gospel has come to us who are Gentiles, as it is written: “Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles” (Romans 11:11). But do you know why salvation has come to us? “To provoke them to jealousy” (Romans 11:11), says Paul, so that it might be fulfilled what God had said through Moses: “I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people” (Deuteronomy 32:21). Let me explain to you why God said that He would provoke the Jews to jealousy with the Gentiles. Before the people of Israel entered the promised land, God said about the Israelites: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities” (Deuteronomy 32:21), and in fact in the wilderness Israel had provoked God to jealousy by taking up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of their god Remphan, images which they made to worship, and so God, in order to take vengeance on them and to repay them for the sins they had committed against Him, said: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger ….” (Deuteronomy 32:21-22). And this is what happened and still happens, for the disobedient Jews are provoked to jealousy with us, who are Gentiles and who believe in the Gospel that God promised through the Jewish prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and they are angry with us because of the Gospel. That’s why Paul said about the Jews: “Are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved” (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 - NKJV). Have you ever wondered why the Jews persecuted Paul, who was a Jew? They persecuted him because Paul, by speaking to the Gentiles about Jesus (showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ), provoked them to jealousy and made them angry. To confirm this, I remind you of what happened at Antioch in Pisidia where Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel both to Jews and Gentiles. It is written: “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (Acts 13:45). Therefore, whereas the Israelites
provoked God to jealousy by what was not God, God now provokes them to jealousy by us who are Gentiles by birth and 'who are not a nation' in their sight, yet we are 'God’s people' in the sight of God. Therefore, it was fulfilled what God had said. So, know this, that God works all things according to the purpose of His will, and that the hardening in part experienced by Israel is part of God’s plan of salvation, which He made before the beginning of time.

“Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?’” (Romans 9:19-24). Brothers, I speak to you with boldness. God, in acting in the above mentioned way in order to accomplish His wonderful purposes, has acted correctly. We don’t dare to reply against Him. Many believers don’t like these words of Paul, when they read or hear them they feel disturbed and get angry and try to nullify them with all kinds of vain words. To these believers who dare to reply against God I want to say: ‘When will you cease to rebuke God? When will you cease to judge the ways of God unjustly? God is greater than man and every man who has hardened his heart against God has not prospered and has been rebuked by God. The truth is that all men who live on the earth are like clay in His hands, He made them and from the same lump He makes some vessels for honour and some others for dishonour. He has the power to do this, and He does it because He is the Potter.

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Again about the hardening in part happened to Israel

Jesus was rejected by the people of Israel, for the Jews, the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, condemned Him to death and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor of Judea so that He might be crucified. According to the Jews, Jesus deserved to be put to death because He declared that He was the Son of God. What happened to Jesus was nothing but the fulfillment of these words spoken by the Holy Spirit through David: "Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ" (Acts 4:25-26; Psalm 2:1-2). The heathen are the Gentiles, and the people is the people of Israel, while the kings of the earth and the rulers are Herod, who at the time was king of Galilee, and Pontius Pilate who was governor of Judea (Herod and Pilate became friends the day on which Jesus was put to death).

Therefore, Jesus, the Messiah whom God had promised through His holy prophets, was rejected by Israel. Yet not by all Israel, because a remnant of Israelites accepted Jesus as the Messiah of God. Now, as far as the Jews’ position on Jesus is concerned, we have to say that after about two thousand years it is the same position, because only a little number of the Jews who live all over the world believe that Jesus is the Messiah: while most of the Jews reject the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. There are some Orthodox Jews who hate so much the name of Jesus of Nazareth that they dare not to mention it. However, the fact that most of the Jews reject Jesus does not mean that the Word of God failed, for Paul says: “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but 'In Isaac your seed shall be called’. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: ‘At
this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son’. And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger’. As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated’. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth’. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Romans 9:6-18 - NKJV). These words of Paul show that both the fact that a few Jews accepted Christ and the fact that most of the Jews rejected Him, depend on God because He has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden. In other words, they depend on the purpose of God according to election, which is not by works but by Him who calls. That’s why, therefore, most of the Jews reject Christ and only a little number of them accept Him, because God hardened the former and had mercy on the latter, even though all of them are descendants of Abraham and Isaac. On the other hand – Paul explains – the fact that all the Jews are descendants of Abraham doesn’t mean that all of them are children of Abraham. Why? Because Abraham had two sons: one (Ishmael) by a bondwoman and the other (Isaac) by a freewoman, yet the son of the promise was Isaac and not Ishmael. For Isaac, and not Ishmael, was the son whom God had promised to give to Abraham by his wife, and God had determined to establish His covenant with Isaac, the son of the freewoman, and not with Ishmael the son of the bondwoman. And in fact after Ishmael and Isaac were born, God said to Abraham: “In Isaac your seed shall be called” (Genesis 21:12 – NKJV). Ishmael was surely seed of Abraham, yet he was not appointed heir with Isaac; God blessed Ishmael, but He did not establish His covenant with him. To Isaac happened a similar thing, for his wife Rebecca gave birth to two children begotten by Isaac, but once again, before they were born, God chose Jacob, the younger; but rejected Esau the older, because He said to Rebecca that the older would serve the younger. And in fact God established His covenant with Jacob and not with Esau. All this happened – as Paul says – so that the purpose of God according to election might stand.

Obviously someone may think that this way of acting is unfair (or unjust), therefore, that God is unjust, but this is to be categorically denied because God said to Moses: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Exodus 33:19). That God had decided to have mercy only on a remnant of Jews, that is, the fact that God had decided to save only a little number of Jews, had been foretold by God through Isaiah with the following words: “For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness …. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isaiah 10:22; 1:9; cf. Romans 9:27,29). Therefore, the remnant of Israel is the remnant according to the election of grace. This remnant and those Gentiles who have accepted Christ form the Church of God, that is, the Assembly of the redeemed, the assembly of those who were delivered from this present evil age, because in Christ the middle wall of separation was broken down, and through His death He made the two peoples one. And what about the other Jews, that is, the disobedient Jews? They were hardened, as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day” (Romans 11:8 – NKJV). This hardening worked in them by God, which caused them to fall (or to stumble at the Word), was necessary in order to provoke the Israelites to jealousy and to move them to anger. For through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, and the disobedient Jews,
seeing that the Gentiles have been qualified to be partakers of the root and fatness of their own olive tree (the cultivated olive tree), are provoked to jealousy and moved to anger towards the Gentiles. This is exactly what God had said to Moses He would do: “I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deuteronomy 32:21). So now we can see the fulfilment of those words. Why did God say those words against Israel? In order to punish the Israelites for their rebellious and obstinate behaviour during their journey in the wilderness, for God said: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities” (Deuteronomy 32:21). This reminds us that God is an avenging God, and how true is that word which says: “As you have done, it shall be done to you” (Obadiah 15 - NKJV). Therefore, we can say that the hardening of the Jews is nothing but the fulfilment of the promise of vengeance made by God to Moses toward His rebellious people, because by hardening most of them God has caused salvation to come to the Gentiles provoking the Jews to jealousy towards the Gentiles. The two things, therefore, are strictly linked together.

The hardening in part happened to Israel one day will cease

However, according to the purpose of God, the hardening in part which has happened to Israel, one day will cease. Here is what Paul says: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy” (Romans 11:25-31). Now, as you can see, Paul tells us something so that we may not be conceited, that is, an hardening in part happened to Israel and it will last until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Then all Israel will be saved because God will turn away ungodliness from Jacob and will take away their sins. That here Paul speaks of all the people of Israel (that is, the Jews according to the flesh) is evident because a short time before he speaks of the hardening (or blindness) in part which has happened to Israel. Therefore, we cannot say that the words of Paul “all Israel shall be saved” refer to the Church of God. It is clear, however, that when all Israelites are saved, they will become members of the Church of God, because Christ made both peoples one, and in Him there is neither Jew nor Greek. Paul explains why God one day will save all Israel; the reason is this: because whereas on the one hand concerning the Gospel the Jews are enemies for our sake, on the other hand concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers because the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.

God’s faithfulness toward the Israelites despite their unbelief

Therefore, God did not reject Israel as a nation; He did not reject Israel either in the wilderness when the Israelites rebelled against His commandments, or after they entered the land of Canaan and they mingled with the nations prostituting themselves by their deaf idols, or (after the Kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms) when the people gave themselves to all kinds of iniquities in the days of the prophets. The prophets were reviled, killed, yet God after He punished the Israelites by sending them into captivity had mercy on
His people and He made them to be pitied by those who had carried them away captive and made them return to the land He had given to their fathers. For in the days of Cyrus king of Persia (538-529 before Christ) thousands of Jews returned from the captivity to the land of Israel and they rebuilt the temple (they laid the foundation of the temple in the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, and completed it in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (521-485) – cf. Ezra chapters 1-6; and afterwards, during the reign of Artaxerses I (465-424 before Christ), they rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem (under the direction of Nehemiah). Jesus came a few centuries later, but He was rejected and killed by the Jews, as many prophets of God had been rejected and killed by the Jews before Him. God’s vengeance came in 70 after Christ, for in that year God sent against Jerusalem the roman army whose commander in chief was Titus and God caused that army to kill hundreds of thousands of Jews and to destroy the temple of Jerusalem, and to carry many Jews away captive. In that year there was great distress in the land of Israel and wrath upon the people of Israel. Surely in those days many thought that God had rejected Israel as a nation, there is no doubt about it. For every time God has punished severely the Jewish people, the nations have said that God rejected His people. And not only in those days, but also in the following centuries, during which the Jews were all over the world without an earthly homeland. All over the world they were mocked by all, they were without a homeland, without a country that represented them. But in the second half of the nineteenth century some Jews began to think that it was time to return to the land given to their fathers by God. Some welcomed this idea with much joy, some were sceptical about it, and some others opposed it violently. Little by little the number of those who believed that a Jewish State had to be founded upon the land of their fathers increased. In 1897 Theodore Herzl founded the Zionist Movement whose aim was the foundation of the State of Israel. The Zionist Movement urged and encouraged many Jews to go to live in the land of Israel and so in the space of about fifty years there were about 500,000 Jews in the land of Israel. In 1948, after many events that I don’t want to tell on this occasion because it would take me too much time to write them, the State of Israel was founded. Therefore, God, by causing many Jews to return to Israel and to refund the Jewish State, showed all the world that He had not forgotten the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, there are many who don’t believe that all these events happened to the Jews were brought to pass by God to fulfil His word. Thus we would like to ask these persons who say that both the return of many Jews to the land that God gave to their fathers and the foundation of the State of Israel after so many centuries don’t come from God: ‘How can you say such things when it is sufficient to read the Old Testament to understand how many times God had mercy on the Israelites even after they had rebelled against Him?’ Let’s look for instance at the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness; the Israelites did not observe the law of God in the wilderness, many times they violated the law of God and they were punished by God, and when God commanded them to possess the land of Canaan they did not believe God and God, because of their unbelief, punished them by not permitting them to enter the promised land. Yet, He allowed the next generation to enter the promised land because God is faithful and He keeps His promises. Is it not written that if we are unfaithful (or faithless) He remains faithful? (2 Timothy 2:13) Why shouldn’t this be valid toward the Jews also, that is, the people whom God foreknew? God is no respecter of persons, isn’t He? If when we, who are His people, are unfaithful we can always rely upon the faithfulness of God, why shouldn’t the Jews also, despite their unfaithfulness, and even though they rejected Christ, rely upon the faithfulness of God? Obviously, we are speaking only of the return of many Jews to the land given to Abraham, and the refoundation of the State of Israel, yet the fact still remains that these two events are a manifestation of the faithfulness of God. If once many could say to the Jews: ‘You are a people without a homeland, you are represented by no State on the earth’, now these things cannot be said to them any longer, because they have a State that represents them, and even though they are citizens of another nation they can always return
to this State and become citizens of it. For sure, to the enemies of Israel, and I do not refer only to the Arabs, the foundation of the State of Israel was an humiliation. But on the other hand we know that whenever the Israelites have exalted themselves God has humbled them, and that God has humbled the enemies of Israel as well, because God is righteous. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled by God, and God silences those who open their mouth to revile. And after many centuries, during which the enemies of Israel had reviled and mocked the Israelites not considering them a nation any longer, God, at His appointed time, silenced them by restoring the State of Israel upon the land given to Abraham and his seed. Therefore, concerning the return of a part of the Jews to the land of Israel, we proclaim: ‘God has done this!’ . And how could we affirm the contrary, when we know that not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from God’s will and that the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord like the rivers of water, He turns it wherever He wishes? But let us see now the passages of the Scriptures which were fulfilled through that return of the Jews and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Isaiah the prophet said: “For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land …” (Isaiah 14:1). Ezekiel the prophet said: “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land …. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all” (Ezekiel 36:22-24; 37:21-22). The prophet Zechariah said: “I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria ….” (Zechariah 10:10). These are just some of the Scriptures which predicted the return of the Jews to their land.

What shall we say then about the temple which was destroyed in 70 after Christ and has not yet been rebuilt? It must be said that according to some words written in the New Testament it should be rebuilt before the coming of Christ from heaven. Here are these words: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4), and: “And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months” (Rev. 11:1-2) – and bear in mind that when John had that vision the temple of Jerusalem had already been destroyed -. As you can see, the temple about which Paul and John wrote is the temple of Jerusalem, the city of the great King. However, pay attention to what I am going to tell you. Even though the rebuilding of this temple will occur before the return of Christ, this rebuilding will not nullify either the fact that with the coming of Christ (the first coming) all those who have been saved have become part of the spiritual building which is a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, that is, His temple; or the fact that the earthly temple is a shadow of the heavenly things. In other words, to us who believe in the Lord, even when
the temple of Jerusalem is rebuilt, the temple of God will continue to be the Church of God and the earthly temple will continue to be a shadow of heavenly things. Obviously, to the Jews according to the flesh, the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem will be a very important event, while to us the importance of the event will not be the same. For sure, when the temple is rebuilt, knowing that the man of sin will sit as God in it showing himself that he is God, we will know that the coming of the man of sin will be nearer, as well as the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will consume the man of sin with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

At the moment, the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem on the spot where it stood in ancient times seems to be impossible, because, as you know, on the place where the old temple was in ancient times, at the moment there is an Arab Mosque and if the Jewish Government decides to destroy it all the Arab countries will immediately make war against Israel. However, the removal of the Arab Mosque is not a problem to God, because in His own time He will do what He has said and He will do it in the way He wills. Do the Jews desire to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem? Yes, for many Jews want to rebuild it on the spot where the old temple was. I remember that several years ago a brother in the Lord told me that he had heard that the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem was imminent; having doubts about that piece of news, I decided to make a telephone call to the Jewish Embassy which is here in Rome to know from them whether the news was true. The first answer they gave to me was: “If only it were true!”, and then my interlocutor denied that piece of news. However, there are some Orthodox Jewish groups which are ready to destroy the Arab mosque to rebuild the temple. But these groups don’t please many Jews because they know that if that Arab mosque were destroyed there would be a big war against Israel, a war that would have no precedent in the history of Israel. Yet this war doesn’t frighten these groups at all, because they believe that when this war breaks out the Messiah will come and fight against the enemies of Israel!

God has made a new covenant with us, not of the letter but of the Spirit

The old covenant

After God, through Moses, brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, He led them to Mount Sinai, where He made a covenant with them. For the Scripture says that God came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and He spoke to Moses many words and many laws. Then Moses went and told the people of Israel all the Lord’s words and laws. And all the people answered with one voice and said: “All the words which the Lord has said we will do” (Exodus 24:3 – NKJV). And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said: ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient’. And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said: “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words” (Exodus 24:8 – NKJV). Then likewise Moses sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. Therefore, that covenant was dedicated with blood.
The covenant that God made with the Israelites was made of moral laws (you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not make for yourself an idol, etc.), as well as ceremonial laws (you shall keep the Sabbath day, the feast of Passover, the feast of Pentecost, the feast of Tabernacles, new moons, etc.), and dietary laws (abstention from unclean foods, prohibition against boiling a young goat in its mother’s milk, etc.).

God told the Israelites that He would bless them if they kept His commandments; here is what God said through Moses to the people of Israel: “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them” (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

However, God told the Israelites also that if they did not obey His laws He would curse them and punish them severely. Here are the words of God: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase
shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway: So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head. The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee. Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit. Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume. The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her
foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates. If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! [Oh, that it were evening!] and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! [Oh, that it were morning!] for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you” (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The covenant made by God with the Israelites had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. This sanctuary was built in the wilderness according to the pattern shown by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. It consisted of two rooms; the first room was called the Holy Place, in it were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread, and the gold altar of incense. The second room, called the Most Holy Place, was behind the second veil and had the golden censer and the gold-covered ark of the covenant above which were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Outside the sanctuary, that is, before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was the altar of burnt offering.

The priests – who were descendants of Levi - performed various services in the tabernacle. One of the things that the priests had to do was to offer sacrifices in order to make atonement for their sins and the sins of the people. According to the law, there were atoning sacrifices that could be offered any day during the year (Leviticus chapter 4), and atoning sacrifices that had to be offered only on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), which was on the tenth day of the seventh month. For on that particular day the High Priest had to offer some sin offerings to make atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel. Unlike the other days of the year, on the Day of Atonement the blood of the sin offerings (not all the blood but just some of it) had to be brought inside the veil, that is, in the Most Holy Place where the High Priest (the only priest who was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place) had to sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side (Leviticus chapter 16). That’s how the High Priest, once a year, made atonement for his sins, for the sins of his house and for the sins of all the Israelites.
The promise of the new covenant

After several centuries, God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that He would make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. For He said: “For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:8-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The new covenant

When the fullness of the time came, God made with the Israelites the new covenant of which He had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. God made this New Covenant through His Son Jesus Christ, whom God sent into this world at His appointed time to die four sins and to rise again for our justification. He is the One used by God to establish the New Covenant, because it was through Him that God gave the New Law, that is, the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21), upon which the New Covenant is based, and because through His death on the cross Jesus Christ made atonement for our sins, reconciled us (both Jews and Gentiles) to God and qualified us to become the people of God, and because it is through Jesus Christ that we now have access to God the Father. Jesus Christ therefore is “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24) and the High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1) of faith. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

This New Covenant made by God with us is better than the old covenant because “it is founded on better promises (Hebrews 8:6 - NIV). What are these promises made by God? Here they are: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33); “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). These promises made by God, on which the New Covenant is founded, are better than the promises of the Old Covenant, for the following reasons.

With regard to the first promise, the reasons are these. When God made the covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai He wrote His law on tablets of stone and then He gave the tablets of stone to Moses, while when God made the New Covenant with us He wrote His laws on our hearts, thus “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3 – NKJV), and they were written by the Spirit of the living God. Let me say one more thing, according to the law, the Israelites had to write the commandments of God on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates, as it is written: “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:9 – NKJV), so that they might remember God’s commandments continually, but now, since God has written His laws on our hearts we don’t need to do such a thing any longer.
With regard to the second promise, the reasons are these. While in the sacrifices God had commanded to offer for the sins every year there was a reminder of sins every year because it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins, now under the New Covenant, since Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all for our sins and made us perfect in regard to the conscience, our sins have been blotted out and taken away, thus God does not remember them any longer. Such a thing under the Old Testament was impossible because those atoning sacrifices prescribed by the law were just a shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, as the Scripture says: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Hebrews 10:1). Therefore, the perfection in regard to the conscience could not come through the sacrifices offered by the High Priest every year for his own sins and the sins of all the Israelites; if those sacrifices could have done such a thing surely they would have ceased to be offered for the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But it was exactly for this reason that the worshipers continued to offer those sacrifices, because even after they offered them their conscience would accuse them of being sinners, that is to say, because their sins were still on their conscience. What happened when Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the good things foreshadowed by the law, came into the world? It happened that through His sacrifice, and thus through His precious blood, our conscience was purified from all our sins, and as the Scripture says “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10 - NKJV), and “by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14 – NKJV). Therefore, the perfection in regard to the conscience that could not be attained by the worshipers under the Old Testament through the blood of bulls and goats, came through Jesus Christ and therefore God does not remember our sins any longer; they were blotted out through the blood of Jesus and thus it was fulfilled the promise God had made through Isaiah the prophet: “I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins” (Isaiah 44:22 – NKJV). Therefore, this is a great and precious promise. Obviously those who wants to see the fulfilment of this promise in their life must believe that Jesus Christ offered Himself for our sins, because remission of sins is obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. The sacrifices of the Old Testament, therefore, have been replaced by the sacrifice of Christ made once for all. This replacement was foretold by the Son of God, through the Spirit, in this way: “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:6-8). As you can see, first the Son of God said that God did not desire sin offerings and burnt offerings, which were prescribed by the law of Moses, and He had no pleasure in them either. Then He said to God: “Behold I have come… to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7 – NKJV). What was the will of God? The will of God was that the Son had to offer Himself for our sins. And because of this will of God – that Jesus did – the first covenant was taken away and replaced by the second covenant. For since Christ offered Himself for our sins making us perfect in regard to the conscience, we no longer need the imperfect sin offerings of the Old Testament which could not take away sins. And therefore, since we no longer need those imperfect sin offerings, we no longer need the priests who offered those sacrifices, and in fact they have been replaced by the High Priest of the good things to come, namely Jesus, who in the fullness of the time was of God made High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek and He was made High Priest with an oath, as it is written: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). First of all, notice that the order is different, it is not the order according to Aaron (the order to which belonged the priests of the Old Testament) any longer, but the order according to Melchizedek, which is better than the one of Aaron because Melchizedek is superior to Aaron. Its superiority is confirmed by the fact
that Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, king of Salem, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, blessed Abraham in whose loins was Levi at that time (and the lesser is blessed by the better), and Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek (thus, even Levi, who had to receive tithes according to the law, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak). Secondly, notice that Christ was made priest with an oath, while the High Priests of the Old Testament were made priests without an oath, because this fact not only makes the priesthood of Christ superior to the Old Testament's priesthood, but it makes the second covenant, of which Jesus became a surety, a far better covenant (Hebrews 7:21-22) because the oath made by God to the Son shows to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, so it is impossible for the priesthood of Christ (on which the New Covenant is founded) to be replaced by another priesthood in the future and therefore, knowing this, we are greatly comforted, for we know that His priesthood is everlasting and unchangeable. As it is written in the epistle to the Hebrews: “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:16-20). Christ, therefore, has an unchangeable priesthood, a priesthood that cannot be transmitted to anyone else because He continues forever, while the Levitical priesthood was transferred from the father to his son because death prevented the high priests from continuing in office (Hebrews 7:23-24). Therefore, we can rely on Christ fully for our salvation, because He always lives to intercede for us, as it is written: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25 - NKJV). In addition, while the Levitical priests had to offer sin offerings also for their own sins, Christ was blameless and sinless because He was born without sin and lived a sinless life and so He was able to offer Himself for our sins once for all.

Let me tell you something else concerning the superiority of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is better than the Old because it delivers a man from the curse of the law. Let me explain this concept to you. The Old Covenant is based on the law that God gave to Moses for Israel, and that law is based on works, as it is written: “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Galatians 3:12), and those who rely upon the works of the law are cursed, for it is written: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10). However, Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, became a curse for us, because it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 – NIV) and thus He delivered us, who believe in His name, from the curse of the law. We were delivered through faith in His name, or, as Paul calls it, “the law of faith” (Romans 3:27) on which is based the New Covenant, of which Jesus Christ is the guarantee. Therefore, the law of faith is superior to the law of works, because while those who rely upon the law of works are cursed, those who rely upon the faith in Jesus are delivered from the curse of the law and are blessed because they are justified from all things from which they could not justified by the law of Moses. Therefore, since the First Covenant is based on the law of works, while the Second Covenant is based on the law of faith, the second covenant is better than the first. But let me explain this concept again with other words. The first covenant causes death, while the second makes people alive, as it was written by Paul to the Corinthians: “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which
glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2 Corinthians 3:6-11). Now, the Old Covenant is called ‘the ministration of death’ or ‘the ministry of death’ because when it was established with Israel, sin, which was in the world, sprang to life and through the law put men to death, as it is written: “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Romans 7:11). Besides, the law was not given in order to put away sin but to make sin abound, as it is written: “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound” (Romans 5:20). That's why the Covenant of letter is called ‘the ministration of death’, because it brought death and was not able to give life nor to justify; nevertheless, it came with glory for when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two Tables of the testimony in his hands, his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. However, that glory was fading away. On the contrary, the Covenant of the Spirit, called also ‘the ministration of righteousness’ or ‘the ministry of righteousness’, is much more glorious than the Covenant of letter because it justifies sinners, makes them alive and deliver them from the condemnation of the law and its glory will never fade away.

The New Covenant is better than the Old because while the Old Covenant was dedicated with the blood of calves and goats – for, as we have seen, Moses took the blood of calves and goats, and sprinkled both the book and all the people and with it he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry -, the New Covenant was dedicated with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therefore, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for the remission of our sins is the blood of the New Covenant. The fruit of the wine that Jesus blessed on the night He was betrayed and that represented His blood was called by Jesus “My blood of the new covenant” (Matthew 26:28 – NKJV). On the other hand, if it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with the blood of animals, the heavenly things themselves had to be purified with a better blood (Hebrews 9:23).

The New Covenant is better than the Old because while the First Covenant established by God with the House of Israel was temporary, for it had to last until the time of reformation, the Second Covenant is eternal, as it is written: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them” (Isaiah 61:8). That's why the blood of Jesus is called “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Hebrews 13:20).

In conclusion I want to say the following important things.

When I spoke about the Old Covenant I said that when the Israelites sinned they had to offer some sacrifices to God in order to be forgiven (even though those sins were not blotted out from their conscience because as I have explained those sacrifices could not take away sins). You may ask then; What must we, who are under the New Covenant, do when we sin in order to be forgiven? We must repent of our sins and confess them to God. Here is what the apostle John says: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 - NKJV). So God has promised us to forgive our sins if we confess them to Him; however, I would like to remind you of this other important thing. Jesus said: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15 - NKJV). As you can see, God will surely forgive us our sins if we confess them to Him, but on a condition which is very clear, that is, if we forgive men their sins.

Another thing I said concerning the Old Covenant was that God told the Israelites that if they obeyed Him and kept His commandments He would bless them, but also that if they disobeyed Him and broke His commandments He would punish them severely. Likewise,
under the New Covenant if we live according to the flesh (that is to say, if we steal, murder, commit adultery and fornication, etc.), God will judge us severely. First of all, we will die spiritually, as it is written: “If you live according to the flesh you will die” (Romans 8:13 - NKJV), and then we will be punished by God. He may strike us with a disease or put us to death, just as He did toward some believers of the Church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:30). I remind you also of Ananias and Sapphira who were put to death by God for they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10), and of Jezebel who was cast into a sickbed and those who committed adultery with her into great tribulation (Revelation 2:22). This teaches us that God is still the same God of the Old Covenant. Obviously, those believers who live according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit, will not inherit the kingdom of God. And now let me say something else in relation to this subject. God promised us eternal life (1 John 2:25), but we will inherit it if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first (Hebrews 3:14), otherwise, that is to say, if we cease to believe in Him, God will have no pleasure in us and we will perish. In other words, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him, but if we deny Him, He also will deny us (2 Timothy 2:12). Therefore, brethren continue in the faith, hold fast it until the end and you will inherit the kingdom which the Lord promised to those who love Him (James 2:5). Let no one deceive you with empty words.
THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

We have been set free from sin to serve righteousness

We died to sin to live for Christ

Paul says: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). Brothers in the Lord, since the death that Jesus Christ died, “He died to sin once for all” (Romans 6:10 – NKJV) and “the life that He lives, He lives to God” (Romans 6:10 – NKJV), we also ought to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God, which means that we must no longer serve sin having been made alive together with Christ to live for Him, who died for us and rose again. Sin no longer has dominion over us, who are under the grace of God, because we have been set free from it. Now we are free, however we are not free to do whatever we want because we became “slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18 - NKJV). As slaves of Christ we must pursue righteousness and we ought not to use “liberty as a cloak for vice” (1 Peter 2:16 - NKJV), for Paul said to the saints of Rome: “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19). You may ask me: ‘What does Paul mean by that?’ He means that just as we used our members to commit all kinds of sin and to chase after the wind when we were slaves of sin, so now we ought to use them to do the will of God for us because we are slaves of righteousness and the will of God is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Your reasonable service

For many years you used your feet to go to places full of demons, such as dance halls, gambling houses, cinemas, theatres, so called ‘christian basilicas’ (which are full of idols), and you took pleasure in walking with perverse people to do evil things. But now you must use your feet to go to the true places of worship to worship God in spirit and truth with other believers, to go to the houses of believers to visit them, to the hospital to visit the sick and to the prison to visit those who are in prison for the Gospel’s sake. Your favourite destinations must be those destinations you hated while you were slaves of sin. You now must not walk in the crooked ways in which you once walked and must not take pleasure in going to the tents of the wicked nor in standing in the path of sinners. Your feet must not be swift to do evil things but must be swift to proclaim the Gospel to this lost world. Our feet now are slaves of righteousness and they must serve righteousness until the end.

You once used your hands to steal and strike other people and make angry gestures, but now you must use them to work, doing something useful with your own hands; you must extend them to the poor and reach out them to the needy; you must lift them up to praise God and must not beat people any longer. Beloved, serve righteousness through your hands.

You once used your mouth to speak all kinds of malicious gossips, impure words and all kinds of foolish, vain and perverse words; but now you must use your mouth to sing to God, to give thanks to Him, to speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, to testify to the Word of grace, to comfort the fainthearted, to uphold the weak, to bless those who curse you, to
pray for one another and for those who are outside. Your mouth, which was full of perversion, must be now full of the wisdom that comes from God.
You once used your eyes to watch evil things, but now you must use them to see right and true things. You must not fix your eyes on vanity any longer, that is to say, you must not fix your eyes on high and luxurious things, because now you are called to set your mind on humble and modest things. You must not be haughty any longer, because you have been set free from haughtiness to serve humility.
You once used your ears to listen to diabolic music, worldly songs and perverse speeches; but now you must use them to listen to spiritual songs addressed to God, wise speeches and all things which help to edify you spiritually.
Brothers in the Lord, do not deceive yourselves: your body does not belong to you, because it is “the temple of God” (1 Corinthians 3:16 - NKJV) and thus you must possess the temple of God in sanctification and honour. All those who profane it, that is to say, who use it in an unworthy manner, will be punished by God because the temple of God is holy. Consider this: one day Jesus said to the Jews: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19 - NKJV). The Jews thought that He had spoken of the temple of Jerusalem, but Jesus had spoken “of the temple of His body” (John 2:21 – NKJV). Why did Jesus call His body ‘temple’? Because His God and Father dwelt in Him, as He Himself said: “The Father who dwells in Me does the works” (John 14:10 – NKJV). With regard to this, Paul said that “it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:19 – NKJV). Therefore, the body of Jesus, being the temple of His Father, was holy. Now, how did Jesus use His body? He served God through it, for Paul says that Christ “has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2 - NKJV). Jesus Christ gave His life for the world, as He said: “I am the bread of life …. and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:35,51); yes, Jesus presented His flesh a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, and in this way He fulfilled the will of the Father, who sent Him. Likewise, we who are the body of Christ ought to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, as it is written: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).
Brothers, I want you to know that by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts and living a holy life we worship God because we glorify and honour Him with our body. Do you think perhaps that we ought to glorify God only with our lips and only when we gather together in the place of worship? If you have thought such things so far, stop believing them. The Scripture teaches us that we ought continually to glorify God with all our body and not only with our mouth, therefore with all the members of it because the body is not one member. This means that we can’t see nor do nor say nor buy whatever we want. If we use the liberty, to which we were called, as an opportunity for the flesh, we will cease walking in the Spirit and we will fulfil the lusts of the flesh, and thus we will cease presenting our members (which are Christ’s members) as slaves of righteousness to holiness, which is the fruit we must bear to the glory of God, as it is written: “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (Romans 6:22 – NKJV). Therefore, brethren, keep in mind not only that one day you will inherit eternal life but also that your fruit is holiness and you can bear this fruit only if you do the will of God. What is the will of God? “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 - NKJV). Brothers, serve God with the members of your body because this is what God wants all of us to do.
We have been saved to do good works

We have been saved by grace apart from good works

The apostle John says: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Brethren, God first loved us; we cannot say that we first loved Him because all of us were once dead in our trespasses, we were all enemies of God because we fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; we were hateful and hating one another and thus we were dead because “anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14 – NIV) and did not know God because “he who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8 - NKJV). Each of us had turned to his own way; recalling the years we spent serving sin, we have to say that we also once walked according to the course of this world, we also conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, and thus we deserved to be cast into the fire of hell to be punished for our sins. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ …” (Ephesians 2:4-5) and saved us from the fire of hell. God manifested His great love toward us “in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) so that we might receive freely eternal life, and so we are bound to give thanks to Him continually for His indescribable gift, that is, eternal life, He has given to us. Consider this: God has given us eternal life not by good works which we have done, but according to His great mercy for us; we have received eternal life by grace, through faith, as it is written: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (John 3:36 – NKJV). Consider this also: the ransom for the redemption of our soul was paid fully by Jesus Christ. One doesn’t have to pay anything for the redemption of his soul because Christ, before breathing His last, said: “It is finished” (John 19:30), that’s why salvation is obtained freely, through faith in Christ apart from the works of the law.

The importance of good works in the life of a believer

As I said before, we were not saved by good works. However we were saved to do good works, as it is written that Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14) and that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Therefore, brothers, just as we once showed our folly by doing evil things, so now we ought to show our wisdom by doing good works. Good works are useful because through them we make our call and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), and we cause those who see them to glorify our God who is in heaven, as Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Good works are so important that James, the brother of Jesus, said that if faith “does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17 - NKJV) and that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26 - NKJV). Therefore, faith without good works is of no value because it is dead, while faith working through love (Galatians 5:6) is of great value in the sight of God.

Let’s look for instance at the faith of Abraham, our father. Now, Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (therefore it was his faith that was accounted to him for righteousness), and this happened before the birth of Isaac. After Isaac was born, while Isaac was still a boy, God gave this order to Abraham: “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon
one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2) and Abraham obeyed God for he arose, took his son and went to the place of which God had told him in order to offer Isaac there as a burnt offering. But as you know, when Abraham was about to slay his son God stopped him and Abraham offered a ram up for a burnt offering instead of his son. Then God told him that He would bless him and that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed because he had obeyed His voice. Now, the Scripture says: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:17-19). That means that when Abraham was tested by God, his faith did not cease working but continued to work by doing what God commanded him to do. In regard to this event of the life of Abraham, James said: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:21-23). As you can see, the faith of Abraham was made perfect (or complete) by what he did.

I would like you to notice that it is written: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac" (Hebrews 11:17), therefore Abraham acted out of faith - Abel also acted out of faith, as it is written: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain..." (Hebrews 11:4). So the Scripture teaches us that every good work we are called to do, we have to do it by faith. Besides this, it teaches that every time there is a need among the brethren we are tested (as Abraham was tested) by God because God commands us to distribute to the needs of the saints, as it is written: "Share with God’s people who are in need“ (Romans 12:13 - NIV), and through this commandment He tests us to see whether we are willing to help those who are in need or not, whether we love the brethren in tongue or in deed and truth, whether we fear Him or not. Is it not written that good works were prepared by God beforehand? Therefore it is God who creates certain needs among the brethren in order to test our faith and our love. He wants to see whether we are willing to obey Him or not. Of course, in the midst of this test the tempter tempts us to disobey this commandment, but we know how to overcome the devil, for the Scripture tells us: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Now let us return to the behaviour of Abraham: he could have said: ‘Why should I offer up my only son? What’s the good of offering him up?’; yet, he did not say or think such things; he obeyed God and offered up his son “accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Hebrews 11:19). Therefore, Abraham believed that he would not lose his son because God would give him his son back. The faith of Abraham is an example of faith to imitate because his faith was alive. Now, I take the faith of Abraham as a starting point for telling you the following things. Paul, concerning a certain contribution for the poor among the saints, said to the Corinthians. “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever” (2 Corinthians 9:7-9). Please, note that Paul gives the saints this order first: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give” and then he says: “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you”. Likewise, therefore, just as Abraham offered up Isaac believing that God was able to raise him up, so you have to meet the needs of the saints believing that God is able to make all grace abound toward you; and for sure, as Abraham received Isaac back from death (figuratively speaking), so you will not lose what you give to the needy, but you will receive it back (in the way and when God wills) because God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). God sees what you do for the sake of the poor among the saints and He will supply all your needs because He is faithful and at His appointed time He will reward you for what you have done, as it is written: “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given” (Proverbs 19:17 – NKJV).
God wants us to be fruitful in every good work so that His name may be glorified in us, as Jesus said: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). And the only way to bear much fruit is by abiding in Christ, as Jesus said: “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). But if we don’t abide in Christ, that is if we don’t put the word of God into practice, it will be impossible for us to bear fruit “as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine” (John 15:4).

Some of the good works the saints must do

Now, let’s look at some of the good works the Holy Scripture speaks of. The saints must help those widows who are really widows, as it is written: “Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:3-16). As you can see, if any believing man or woman has widows, they must relieve them so that the Church may not be burdened; while those widows who are left alone and have the above mentioned qualifications must be relieved by the church. Job said: “I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy” (Job 29:13 - NKJV); this is what the Church of God must do, that is to say, the Church must cause the heart of the widow who is really in need to sing for joy. The Church must defend widows and plead for them; let no one think that he can devour widows’ houses because for sure the “defender of widows” (Psalm 68:5 – NKJV), who is in heaven, will punish him. God punishes those who devour widows’ houses, He is righteous. With regard to widows, it must be also said that God wants us to visit widows in their trouble (James 1:27).

The saints must visit also orphans in their trouble (James 1:27). I remind you that God is “a father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5 – NKJV), and so He takes pleasure in those who help orphans and punishes all those who take advantage of the fatherless. The saints must give food, drink and clothing to those saints who need these things (and also to those who are outside who need these things, as they have opportunity). Paul remembered the poor commanding the saints to make a contribution for the poor among the saints who were in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1). The disciples of the Church of Antioch, after the prophet Agabus stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a sever famine would spread over the entire Roman world, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea and this they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:28-30). The saints must visit the sick and those who are in prison for the Gospel’s sake. While the apostle Paul was in prison in Rome, a certain disciple called Onesiphorus visited him and comforted him (2 Timothy 1:16-17). So when a brother is put in prison for Christ’s sake, we must not be ashamed of his chains but we must visit him and pray for him.
The saints must help the ministers of the Gospel on their way and see that they have everything they need, as it is written: “Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them” (Titus 3:13).

The saints must share all good things with those who teach because those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6), that is to say, because they are worthy of their wages (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

The saints must practice hospitality, as it is written: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2 – NKJV) and “practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13 – NIV). Hospitality must be practiced without grumbling, as it is written: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9 - NIV). Lydia, after she and her household were baptized, gave hospitality to some servants of the Lord in Philippi, for Luke says: “And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:15). The keeper of the prison at Philippi, too, after he and his household were baptized, gave hospitality to the apostles Paul and Silas, as it is written: “And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34). A certain Mnason of Cyprus also gave hospitality to the brethren, for Luke says: “And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge” (Acts 21:15-16). In the days of the apostles many brethren hosted the church (that is, the assembly of the redeemed). Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, hosted the brethren to pray for Peter, who had been put in prison, for it is written that after Peter was delivered from prison by an angel of the Lord, “he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12 – NKJV). Aquila and Priscilla also hosted the Church, for Paul says to the saints in Rome: “Likewise greet the church that is in their house” (Romans 16:5 – NKJV). In the sight of God it is right to host the church to pray, to sing, to break the bread, and to eat. But let him who hosts the brethren know that he must host them in a manner worthy of the saints, for when Paul commended sister Phoebe to the saints of Rome he wrote to them: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the Church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints ….” (Romans 16:1-2 – NKJV). Actually, when a brother entertains another brother in his own house, no matter for which reason, he must welcome him as if he were an angel of God, as if he were Jesus Himself. I think it is a good thing to remind you of the hospitality Abraham gave to the Lord and the two angels who were with Him, so that you may understand what ‘in a manner worthy of the saints’ means. It is written: “And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat” (Genesis 18:1-8)

I want to conclude this teaching by saying to you this. One day Jesus said to His disciples: “And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42). Consider the righteousness of God, brethren, because it is very high. Our God is righteous and rewards even those who give a cup of cold water to one of His sons. Therefore, brethren, knowing that the Lord is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His
name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister, be zealous for good works until the end, so that the name of the Lord may be glorified in you.

**We are being transformed into His likeness**

**We were predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God**

“The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17 – NKJV) and He has begun a work in us and He will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ (this work of God consists in transforming us into Christ’s image). Why did He begin this work in us? Because God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and thus God through His Spirit is transforming us and renewing us so that we may become like Jesus Christ. Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18 – NKJV). Beloved, the Spirit we have received is a spirit of power, who works powerfully in us according to the will of God, and that Spirit transmogrifies us daily so that we may be conformed to the image of Christ ….. of course, His spiritual image. Paul says also that Christ is not weak toward us, but mighty in us (2 Corinthians 13:3), for the Lord, who is the Spirit, is mighty in us and His purpose is to produce in us a Christ-like character.

**The outward and the inward man**

Now, we have an outward man and an inward man; the outward man is made of flesh and bones and is perishing, while the inward man is spiritual and “is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16 - NKJV), as the apostle Paul says. Our inward man has been made new, while the outward man has remained the same, for when we were born again our bodily image did not change in that our stature, our weight and our somatic types remained unchanged; but what changed radically was our spiritual character, for after we were born again our old friends (those who knew us very well) told us that we had become unrecognizable. They said to us: ‘You are not the same’, ‘I no longer recognize you!’; ‘You are another person!’ As far as our body is concerned, they did not notice any change, but in regard to our speech and our conduct, they saw such a renewal in us that they were amazed. Listen to what the Scripture says of Saul of Tarsus (after He turned to the Lord): “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?” (Acts 9:20-21). The Jews who were in Damascus knew that Saul of Tarsus had come to Damascus in order to bring the disciples of the Lord Jesus bound to Jerusalem, that’s why they were amazed at hearing him preach that Jesus was the Son of God. The outward appearance of Saul had not changed, but his conduct had changed radically; he had come to Damascus to destroy the Church which was in Damascus, but after his conversion he began to edify it; before his conversion He blasphemed the good name that the saints called on, but after his conversion he began to preach it in the synagogues of the Jews; he had departed from Jerusalem to bring the saints who were in Damascus bound to Jerusalem, but after his conversion he stayed with them for several days, as it is written: “Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus” (Acts 9:19 – NKJV). Afterwards, Saul went to Jerusalem and “tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26 – NKJV). Saul had become a disciple of the Lord, yet the disciples who dwelt in Jerusalem, when they saw that he was trying to join them, at first they
did not believe that he had become a disciple. But Saul had been really renewed and did not try to join with them by intrigue, and after a short time the disciples recognized that Paul had become a disciple of the Lord. That happened when Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles declaring to them how Saul had seen the Lord and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27).

Concerning the renewal

Concerning the renewal worked in us by the Spirit of the Lord, we can compare it to the renewal that the owner of a house does in his own house, making it new inside and taking away the old furnishings and putting in it new furnishings, leaving unchanged the outside of the house. Therefore, just as some people buy a house and although they leave unchanged the outside of it they renew the interior of it as they like because they want to go to live in it, so the Lord bought us at a price, left unchanged our outward man but He renewed us inwardly in order to dwell in us. Christ purged our hearts from an evil conscience and has come to us and made His home with us through the Spirit. Jesus said that “new wine must be put into new wineskins” (Luke 5:38 – NKJV) and God, before Jesus came, had made the following promise through the prophet Ezekiel: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:25-26), and that’s exactly what God has done, for He has given us a new heart and has put a new spirit within it, that is, the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’. So now we are the house of God, and let it be known to you that the Owner of the house is not inactive for He is still working in us through the Spirit He sent forth into our hearts. Therefore, let me tell you what the Spirit wants to do within us.

The Spirit wants to bring us “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13 – NKJV). That is to say, He wants us to grow up in all things and thus to become mature spiritually; and in order to accomplish His will in us He uses the ministries appointed by God in His Church. For you must keep in mind that when a man experiences the new birth, he is a new born baby; he is of course a child of God, but he possesses little spiritual intelligence and little knowledge about many things concerning the kingdom of God, so God uses His ministers to make him grow, as it is written: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The birth and growth of a child

When a woman gives birth to a child, there is much joy within the family; every member of the family is happy, both the father and the mother are happy, as well as their children, yet the new born baby is not left alone because his parents begin to take care of him, feeding him and doing many other things which are necessary. So the new born baby begins to grow. Both his stature and his weight increase, and with the passing of time he looks more and more like his father who begot him; of course, when the child is born he looks like his father because he has some somatic types he inherited from his father (It is written that “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” Genesis 5:3, so this is confirmed by the Scripture), they can be seen, however they are accentuated with the passing of time. For instance, when I was born I looked like my father, but the likeness between me and my father was accentuated with the passing of time. As I said before, he who is begotten inherits the somatic types from the father who begot him, for this is what happens in the natural realm. However, this is what happens also in the spiritual realm, for those who were begotten of God
inherited the ‘spiritual hereditary types’ from God. For instance, when we were born again (that is to say, when we were regenerated through the Gospel), those who at the time were already members of the household of God noticed at once a resemblance between us and the Son of God (the firstborn among many brethren), but this resemblance was accentuated with the passing of time and it is still being accentuated because the Lord, who is the Spirit, works in us transforming us into His likeness.

Babes and adults

God wants those who are new born babes in Christ to become in understanding adults, as it is written: “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Corinthians 14:20). However, this process takes some time because the growth of a child takes place gradually and even though the child does not understand certain things he still is a member of the family and the father is patient and merciful toward him. Now, as you know, in the natural realm there is a great difference between a child and a man, for Paul says: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Likewise, in the spiritual realm there is a great difference between a child in Christ and a man in Christ. Of course, both of them are sons of God, but the former is a child, who is not mature in understanding and consequently he thinks and behaves as a child, while the latter is mature in understanding and thus his way of thinking and behaving is different. A man in Christ has ceased to think and to behave like a child in Christ. For instance, after I was born again I was zealous for the things of God but sometimes my zeal was without knowledge and so I made some mistakes, even though I wanted to grow spiritually. But with the passing of time my knowledge increased and so one day, thanks be to God, I ceased to say certain things, to think certain things, and to do certain things. I realized I had done those mistakes because of my lack of knowledge, because I was a babe in Christ.

But how does God help babes in Christ to grow? As I said before, He helps them to grow through the ministries He has appointed in the Church, as it is written: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16). Therefore, from Christ, who is the Head of the Church, through the ministers of God, those who are children take their nourishment to grow and to become perfect men.

It must be said, however, that there are some who, even though they have been believers for many years, are still babes in Christ. By this time they ought to be teachers, but they need someone to teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God and so they need milk and not solid food. They are exactly like those believers to whom the author of the epistle to the Hebrews said: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). I would like you to notice that according to these words, the babes in Christ do not have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, while the mature have their
senses exercised to distinguish good from evil. But why do these believers not have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil? Because they walk according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. In other words, because they don't put the Word of righteousness into practice: they hear it but they don't keep it. That's why they call certain evil things good things, and some good things evil things, because they don't keep the word of God. Therefore, they lack that discernment they need. Do you remember the saints of the Church in Corinth? Paul called them babes in Christ, didn't he? Why? Because there were envy, strife, and divisions among them; they were carnal and behaving like mere men. For one said: 'I am of Paul', and another 'I am of Apollos', and another 'I am of Cephas'. They had been enriched in every thing by God in all utterance and all knowledge, they did not lack any spiritual gift, yet they were carnal because they walked according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. Therefore Paul had to speak to them as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. He had to give them milk instead of solid food, because they were not able to receive solid food. Paul rebuked them because they were not conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel and exhorted them all to speak the same thing and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.

The old man and the new man

Paul tells us that we have been taught by Christ that we put off, concerning our former conduct, the old man which is being corrupted by its deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and that we put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:21-24). Therefore, we, with regard to our former way of life, have been taught to cast off the works of darkness, that is, revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife and envy, all hypocrisy and all evil speaking, which deceive those who walk in them; while with regard to our new way of life we have been taught to be renewed in the spirit of our mind and to put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, that is, the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Brethren, I want you to know that if we want to look more and more like Christ we have to be renewed in our mind, which means that we must not conform to the tastes, the habits and the way of thinking of the people who belong to this world. Those who conform to this present evil age put a stumbling block in their ways, which prevents them from growing spiritually. You cannot grow in wisdom, nor in the grace of God, nor in knowledge, as long as you think like the unbelievers; the way of thinking of the world has harmful effects on believers and it does not help them grow spiritually; how could it be profitable to them when we know that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19 – NKJV)? Brethren, the way of thinking of the people of the world is contrary to the way of thinking of the saints. We have the mind of the Lord, while unbelievers have the mind of the wicked one, for Isaiah the prophet says about the wicked: “Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity” (Isaiah 59:7 – NKJV). However, not only their thoughts are evil, but also their works are evil, as it is written: “Their works are works of iniquity” (Isaiah 59:6). These words of Isaiah show us that the wicked act badly because they think evil thoughts, that is to say, their evil thoughts lead them to act sinfully. Consider also the following words of Paul: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” (Ephesians 4:17). As you can see, those who don't know God not only think vain thoughts, but they also live a meaningless life, and this shows that the way of thinking influences the way of life. Therefore, brethren, do not permit the thoughts of iniquity to enter your mind lest they harm you, but rather “be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). Know this, that you must be renewed in the spirit of your mind in order to prove what God’s will is. That's why many believers are not filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, because they conform to this evil present age and by so doing they walk in the vanity of their mind just as those who don’t know God do, and so wisdom is not with them. What do unbelievers think of? They think of getting rich, of becoming
famous, of giving themselves over to lewdness and all uncleanness, and of doing harm to their neighbour. But what should we, who are children of God, think about? Here is the answer: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). These are the things we have to think about in order to be transformed by the Spirit into Christ’s image and to prove what God’s will is.

Wisdom says: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. ….. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path” (Proverbs 2:1-5,9). As you can see, brethren, God has promised us He will make us understand the fear of the Lord, find the knowledge of God, and make us understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path, if we receive His words, keep His commandments and seek understanding as silver; but if we refuse to obey His commandments we certainly won’t understand the fear of God, nor righteousness nor every good path. Now, since God has commanded us: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2), those who disobey God by conforming to this world, certainly won’t prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul said that the new man “was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24), which means that we need to know the truth in order to live a righteous and holy life (the IBRV says that the new man “è creato all’immagine di Dio nella giustizia e nella santità che procedono dalla verità”, that is, “has been created in God’s image, in righteousness and holiness that come from truth”). But how do we come to know the truth? Listen to what Jesus one day said to some believing Jews: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Now, to continue in the Word of Christ means to continue to believe in it, to continue to meditate in it, and to continue to put it into practice. By so doing we will know the truth, from which righteousness and holiness come. Brothers, it is only by continuing in the Word of Christ that we come to know the truth about many things; it is not by giving heed to Jewish fables or to persuasive words of human wisdom that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge will be opened to us, but by continuing in the Word of Christ. Jesus said: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32 – NKJV). Now, the knowledge of the truth comes from the Word of God because the Word of God is truth, therefore it is necessary to know the Word of God and to keep it in order to obtain this precious knowledge. The knowledge of the truth is the strength of salvation, as it is written: “Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation” (Isaiah 33.6 – NKJV), because it delivers a believer from Satan’s devices, as well as from bad habits and bad companies and makes him feel secure and calm. Furthermore, it is written in the Psalms: “I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts” (Psalm 119:45), that’s why those believers whose delight is in the Word of God walk at liberty without any fear. The Word of God instructs in righteousness and holiness, for it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live righteously and godly, that is, in the way God wants us to live; therefore, the knowledge of the Word of God is necessary in order to be transformed into the Lord’s likeness. Today, unfortunately many despise the knowledge of the Word of God, this is what I have seen with my eyes, and their negative attitude toward the knowledge of the truth has had harmful effects on them: they look like the people of this world because they live unjustly and licentiously, they have refused to continue in the Word of Christ and are slaves of many bad actions and they are without discernment. God says in the book of the prophet Jeremiah: “Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord” (Jeremiah 8:7 – NIV) and
again: “Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?” (Jeremiah 8:9 - NKJV). That’s exactly what can be seen among the people of God today. If many who are called Christians don’t conduct themselves as Christians should do, it is because they don’t continue in the Word of Christ. They don’t know many things concerning the kingdom of God because they don’t want to know them, they don’t know many things because they like being ignorant of the Word of Christ, but their foolishness punishes them and makes them inhabit the parched places in a salt land: they resist the Holy Spirit, who wants to transform them into the Lord’s likeness and by so doing they have become enemies of God. Ah! …. my heart within me is broken because I see them behave and speak like the people of this world!

Now we are a royal priesthood

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His mercy through Christ made us priests. Yes, now we are priests by the grace of God, as it is written: “But ye are …. a royal priesthood …." (1 Peter 2:9) and again: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

The spiritual sacrifices that we who are priests of God must offer to God were foreshadowed under the Old Testament by the sacrifices that the Levitical priests had to offer according to the law of Moses. For, according to the law, the levitical priests were appointed by God to burn sweet incense on the altar of incense which was in the tabernacle, and to offer sacrifices of peace offerings and burnt offerings upon the altar of burnt offering which was before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. As for the burnt offerings, the priests had to offer with the burnt offerings a grain offering which was made of fine flour mixed with oil, and also a drink offering which was made of a certain quantity of wine (Numbers 15:1-16).

Now, let me explain to you what the spiritual sacrifices we have to offer up are.

Let us offer our life to God

Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi: “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (Philippians 2:17 – NKJV). Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Philippians and told the saints that if he had to die for the Gospel’s sake he would be glad. He preached the Gospel to the Gentiles and he endured many sufferings and many hardships for the sake of the elect from among the Gentiles, for he said to the Colossians: “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you ….” (Colossians 1:24 - NKJV), and to the Ephesians: “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you ….” (Ephesians 3:13), and he was ready to die for the name of Jesus. He had put himself upon the altar to offer himself for the elect, and he compared his death to the pouring out of the drink offering on a sacrifice. Paul was ready and willing to offer himself as a drink offering on the sacrifice of the faith of the Philippians; notice these words written by Paul to the Philippians “on the sacrifice … of your faith”. He called the faith of the saints at Philippi ‘sacrifice’ for their faith worked through love and faith working through love is a sacrifice acceptable to God, who takes pleasure in those who offer it.

Let us consider Jesus, the Lamb of God, and the sacrifice He offered to God for all of us. Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus that Christ has “given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2 – NKJV). Jesus gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. He humbled Himself so that we might be exalted, He set an example for us showing us what it means to offer one’s body as a sacrifice acceptable to
God. God was well pleased with His Son, for after Jesus was baptized He spoke from heaven saying: “You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22 - NKJV) and Jesus Himself explained the reason why the Father loved Him: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again” (John 10:17 – NKJV). Jesus was loved by the Father because He laid down His life for all of us, and God smelt a sweet-smelling aroma when His Son offered Himself for us; likewise, God will smell a sweet-smelling aroma if we give our life for the brethren because we will offer our body as a sacrifice to God, just as Jesus offered His body for us. Is it not written: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16)? Therefore let us lay down our life for the brethren, let us do what Epaphroditus and Priscilla and Aquila, who were fellow workers of Paul, did. Listen to what Paul said about Epaphroditus to the Philippians. “Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me” (Philippians 2:30), and now listen to what he said about Aquila and Priscilla to the Romans: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:3-4).

As you know, it is much easier for men to sacrifice themselves for their own interests than to sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people, but you know also that we, as followers of Christ, must not live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us, so that His name may be glorified through the sacrifice of our life offered to God for the elect.

**Good works are sacrifices well pleasing to God**

It is written: “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16 – NKJV). Those who do good to their neighbour and share their material things with him offer a sacrifice with which God is well pleased and this is confirmed by the following words that Paul wrote to the Philippians, who had sent him an offering: “Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18 – NKJV). With regard to this I want to tell you that every offering (or donation) – whether it is a money offering or not – we make to the saints, in order to be well pleasing to God, must not be stained with fraud for the law says: “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, …… into the house of the LORD thy God …..” (Deuteronomy 23:18), which means that the wages of a prostitute offered into the temple was an abomination to God, as Solomon said: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 15:8). Just as under the Old Testament, the sacrifices that had to be offered on the altar to God had to be without defects in order to be well pleasing to God, as the law says: “But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein” (Leviticus 22:20-21), so a donation must be the fruit of an honest job in order to be a sacrifice well pleasing to God.

**A broken spirit is a sacrifice well pleasing to God**

David, after he committed adultery with Bath-Sheba and had Uriah the Hittite (who was the husband of Bath-Sheba) killed, confessed his sins to God saying: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psalm 51:4) and again: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2). David had committed two serious sins, and according to the law of Moses he could not offer to God any sin offering for his sins because both the adulterers and the murderers had to be put to
death for their sin, so David acknowledged his sins before God and called on His name so that He might have mercy on him. David knew that God did not desire sacrifices for sin or burnt offerings for He said to God: “For thou desirtest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering” (Psalm 51:16), but he knew also that God wanted him to repent sincerely of his sins, as he said to God: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). When the people of Israel forsook God and cast the law of God behind their backs, they continued to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, but God did not delight in them as it is written in the book of Isaiah: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (Isaiah 1:11) and in the book of Amos: “ Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts” (Amos 5:22).

Why did God reject their sacrifices? Because they committed all kinds of sins and refused to humble themselves before God, that is to say, because they did not want to repent of their sins nor to forsake them nor to confess them to God; that's why God despised their sacrifices. As for David, if David had offered sacrifices to God (in order to be forgiven) without repenting of his sins, God would have despised his sacrifices; but David knew what sacrifices God required from him and that God would not despise them. God certainly would not reject a broken and contrite heart. So David rent his heart and with his broken heart pleaded with God to cleanse him from his sins, and God forgave him.

We, as priests of God, have to offer to God such sacrifices, that is, a broken and contrite heart; let us humble ourselves before God, knowing that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Beloved, the Lord welcomes those who come to him sincerely confessing their sins, He does not drive them away.

Praise is a sacrifice well pleasing to God

Another spiritual sacrifice that we, as priests of God, must offer to God is the sacrifice of praise, as it is written: “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). When we praise God with our mouth, we offer to Him a spiritual sacrifice He delights in. It is written: “Offer unto God thanksgiving” (Psalm 50:14) – the IBRV reads “Offri a Dio il sacrificio della lode” that is, ‘Offer to God the sacrifice of praise” – therefore to praise Him is a commandment and we have to put it into practice. Beloved, let us praise God with songs because He is good and His mercy endures forever on those who fear Him. God rescued us from the hand of the enemy and took us in His arms, therefore we have to praise His wonderful name always.

Paul wrote to the Colossians that we must sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16), therefore the sacrifice of praise must be offered to God with our hearts under the impulse of grace so that it might be well pleasing to God.

God says: “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me” (Psalm 50:23 – NKJV), therefore the sacrifice of praise we offer to God is a sweet-smelling aroma which comes up into God’s nostrils and in which God delights. And David knew how much God delighted in the praise of His saints, for he said: “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs” (Psalm 69:30-31).

These words were spoken through the Spirit by a man after the heart of God, who offered the burnt offerings and peace offerings (of which the law of Moses speaks) as well as the sacrifice of praise. Keep this in mind always in order to understand how the sacrifice of praise is more important than all the sacrifices commanded by the law.

Now, I want to say to you two other things which I consider useful.

The first thing is this. The fact that a song has a beautiful melody does not mean necessarily that the words of that song are in accord with the truth, and with regard to this I will give you an
example that you may understand what I mean. In our hymnals there is a song that many of you
sing, which says among other things: ‘Il tempio di Dio voglio essere anch’io …. col sangue del
Figliuolo Tuo distruggi Tu la schiavitù che mi separa da Te’, that is, ‘I also want to be the temple
of God ….. through the blood of your Son destroy the bondage that separates me from you’.
Now, I ask you: ‘Don’t you know that you are already the temple of God?’ ‘Don’t you know that
the blood of Jesus Christ has already destroyed the bondage that separated you from God?’
You are already the temple of God and you don’t need to wish to become the temple of God;
when you say ‘I also want to be the temple of God’ it is as if you said: ‘Lord, save me because I
am dead in my sins’ or ‘I also want to be born again’. You have been already delivered from sin
through the blood of Jesus, why do you say then: ‘Through the blood of your Son destroy the
bondage that separates me from you’? I must admit that after I was born again I sang this song
for a while, but one day I stopped singing it because I came to the conclusion (searching the
Scriptures) that it is not lawful for us to sing these words because through them we grieve the
Holy Spirit, who dwells in us.

The second thing is this. In the Holy Scriptures there are no songs addressed to the Holy Spirit,
yet in our hymnals there are many hymns and strophes of songs which are addressed to the
Holy Spirit. Now, provided that “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17) and that the Holy Spirit
is the Third Person of the Godhead, I ask you: ‘Why should we sing to the Holy Spirit, when the
Holy Scripture does not confirm that we should sing to the Holy Spirit? Why should we go
beyond what is written? Consider the Psalms. We have one hundred fifty Psalms, yet none of
them is addressed to the Holy Spirit.

Many of the Psalms were written by David (Israel’s beloved singer), who spoke by the Holy
Spirit, as it is written (the following words were spoken by Jesus Christ): “For David himself said
by the Holy Spirit: The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your
footstool” (Mark 12:36 - NKJV) and again (the following words were spoken by the apostle Peter
before the day of Pentecost): “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled,
which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to
them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now
this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in
the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem;
insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of
blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell
therein: and his bishoprick [or office] let another take” (Acts 1:16-20). The words of David quoted
by Jesus are written in the Psalm number 110, while the words of David quoted by the apostle
Peter are written in the Psalms number 69 and 109. I would like to point out to you that in these
two Psalms (69 and 109) the Holy Spirit through David spoke these other words as well: “I will
praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:30
-NKJV), “I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth; yes, I will praise Him among the multitude”
(Psalm 109:30 - NKJV). Furthermore, in Psalm 95 we read: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not
harden your hearts” (Psalm 95:8 - NIV), and according to the author of the epistle to the
Hebrews these words also were spoken by the Holy Spirit, as it is written: “So, as the Holy Spirit
says: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8 – NIV), but in the
same Psalm we read these words also: “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! …. Let us come
before His presence with thanksgiving, let us shout joyfully to Him with Psalms” (Psalm 95:1,2
-NKJV). I have quoted all these Bible passages in order to show you that those who wrote the
Psalms, spoke those words by the Holy Spirit, and the songs and the hymns they sang were
addressed to God through the Holy Spirit. They never sang by the Spirit to the Holy Spirit, even
though they believed in the Deity of the Spirit and they accepted the manifestation of the Spirit.
The book of Psalms is an hymnal free of error of any kind and I am convinced that if among one
hundred and fifty psalms written by men who prayed and sang to God by the Holy Spirit not one
of them is addressed to the Spirit, no one has the right to write songs which are addressed to the
Holy Spirit.
Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, He preached by the Holy Spirit, He taught by the Holy Spirit, He cast out demons by the Holy Spirit, He healed the sick by the Holy Spirit, He raised the dead by the Holy Spirit, yet He did not praise the Holy Spirit but His Father, as it is written: “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25-26). The Son of God who came down from heaven, left us an example in everything, let us imitate Him.

After the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church at Pentecost, neither the apostles nor the disciples sang to the Holy Spirit, yet they were full of the Holy Spirit and knew the Spirit. It is written: “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God …” (Acts 2:46-47), that’s what happened after the day of Pentecost in the early Church!

Now, let us see if in heaven there is somebody who sings to the Holy Spirit. One day, the apostle John was in the Spirit and was caught up to heaven where he saw the throne of God, and the angels of God, the twenty four elders, and the four living creatures around the throne of God. He saw also those who had been victorious over the beast and his image. Here is what he says: “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Revelation 5:8-12 - NIV), and again: “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:2-4). All these Scriptures show us that John did not see nor hear anybody singing to the Holy Spirit, and let it be known to you that when we are in heaven we will not sing to the Holy Spirit, because in heaven we will praise God and the Lamb of God. Brothers, answer this question of mine: ‘If someone asks you: ‘Could you show me from the Scriptures that the early disciples also
did sing to the Holy Spirit? what passage of the Scripture do you quote to show him that by
singing to the Holy Spirit you do not go beyond what is written?
Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos
for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond
what is written. Then you will not take pride in one man over against another' (1 Corinthians 4:6
– NIV). Therefore, we all must learn not to practice beyond what is written, and we can learn this
only by following the example left by the apostles, and since they knew the will of God in Christ
Jesus for the saints, and in their epistles (as well as in the Acts of the apostles) we don’t read
that they sang to the Holy Spirit, I believe that it is not lawful for us to do something they
themselves did not do and they did not exhort us to do. As for me, I stopped singing to the Holy
Spirit for the sake of the brethren, so that they may learn in me not to go beyond what is written.
What is the use of going beyond what is written? Notice that Paul said: "Now brothers, I have
applied these things (the things he had just written to the saints) to myself and Apollos for your
benefit", which means that Paul applied those things to him and Apollos for the sake of the
saints so that the saints, seeing their example, might learn to practice only what was written and
they might not be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. When we say to those who sing
to the Holy Spirit that what they are doing is not written in the Scripture and that neither Jesus
nor the apostles sang to the Holy Spirit, many of them begin to say bad words because their
pride prevents them from recognizing that what they are doing is not scriptural. They speak
against us saying: ‘You don’t believe in the Holy Spirit!’. But I want to say to these brothers: ‘Pay
attention to what I am going to say. Those who don’t believe in the Holy Spirit are not those who
don’t sing to the Holy Spirit, but those believers who reject the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.’
Many believers are carnal and don’t know what happened on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem,
and besides this they reject the manifestation of the Holy Spirit because they don’t believe what
the Holy Spirit says and reveals through visions today, they reject the gifts of the Holy Spirit, yet
they say to us who don’t sing to the Holy Spirit: ‘You do not know the Spirit’, or ‘You are not
spiritual’ and many other untrue things.
Many children of God refute through the Scripture the wrong teachings and behaviours of the
sects, and this is a right thing in the sight of God because by so doing they defend the Gospel.
However, when they have to refute an unscriptural teaching or behaviour which is gaining
ground among them, then they don’t show the same zeal for the Word of God that they show
when they have to refute the teachings of the Roman Catholics, of the Mormons, of the Jehovah
Witnesses (who are false witnesses of God), and of many other sects, and the reason is
because they refuse to learn not to go beyond what is written. Some of them say to us: ‘Those
who wrote the songs addressed to the Holy Spirit were children of God, and some of them did
preach the Word!’ Listen, I am not saying that those who wrote these songs were not children of
God, but I think that we have the right and the duty to search the Scriptures to find out whether
the things which are said and done by the ministers of the Gospel are scriptural or not. And if the
Scriptures show us that some of the things which are taught and done by them are not right, we
must abstain from these things, lest we learn to go beyond what is written.
Should I sing: ‘Rough cross which is still bleeding ….’ or ‘Jesus Christ is still bleeding’ because
he who wrote the words of this song was a brother? Or because the melody of this song is
beautiful? Should I sing a lie in order to please men? Or just because many Christians sing it?
The Scripture teaches us that it was Jesus and not the cross who bled, and furthermore it
teaches us that Jesus does not bleed any longer, for it is written: “But one of the soldiers pierced
His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (John 19:34 - NKJV). His
blood came out of His body once for all, why then should we sing that His blood is still coming
out of His body?
Brothers, test all things, even the words of the songs, test them carefully through the Scriptures.
Thanksgivings are sacrifices well pleasing to God

Under the Old Testament, the priest offered some sacrifices which were called ‘sacrifices of thanksgivings’, that’s how they are called in the IBRV while in the KJV and in the NKJV they are called ‘sacrifices of peace offerings’, and in the NIV ‘fellowship offerings’ (read Leviticus chapter three). We also have to offer to God sacrifices of thanksgivings, but these sacrifices are spiritual, for Paul says: “In everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 – NKJV). Therefore we must continually thank God for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Prayer is a sweet-smelling aroma

God commanded to build an altar of incense and to burn on it sweet incense. According to the Scripture the incense had to be made of some particular substances, as it is written: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy” (Exodus 30:34-36).

The prayer of the saints is a sweet-smelling aroma which ascends before God, for this is what David says: “Let my prayer be set before You as incense” (Psalm 141:2 – NKJV). The apostle John confirms this by saying: “Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8 – NKJV). Furthermore, just as the incense under the law had to be pure in order to be well pleasing to God, so our prayer is to be pure in order to be heard by God. Job, who was a righteous and upright man, said: “My prayer is pure” (Job 16:17 – NKJV), and thus he could say that he “called on God, and He answered him” (Job 12:4 – NKJV) because he prayed to God with a pure heart. But if we pray with a sinful heart, our prayer will not be heard, for it is written: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).

The Scripture says that God answers the prayer of those who are pure of heart, as it is written: “The prayer of the upright is His delight” (Proverbs 15:8), but also that God rejects the impure and saltless prayers, that is, those prayers offered to Him with a heart full of hypocrisy and iniquity, as it is written: “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Proverbs 28:9). That’s why God said to those Israelites who refused to obey Him but continued to pray to Him and to offer incense upon the altar: “When ye make many prayers, I will not hear …. Incense is an abomination unto me” (Isaiah 1:15,13). Therefore, brothers, let us keep the commandments of God, or else God will reject our prayers also.

We pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ because Jesus said: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). The Son of God is at the right hand of the Father and makes intercession for us, therefore let us come boldly to the throne of God with full confidence, and God will help us at His appointed time through His powerful deliverances.

The lifting up of our hands is a sacrifice

We can pray God lifting up our hands, as it is written: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8 - NKJV), and the lifting up of our hands also is something that pleases God, for David said: “[Let] the lifting up of my hands [be set before You] as the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:2 - NKJV).

Ezra, who was a priest of God and a scribe, after he returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, when he heard that the Israelites who had returned from captivity had taken some of the pagan
women as wives for themselves and their sons, he tore his garment and his robe, and plucked out some of the hair of his head and beard and sat down astonished. Then, at the evening sacrifice, said Ezra, "I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God. And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens ….." (Ezra 9:5-6). Ezra, therefore, prayed on his knees and with his hands spread out to the Lord, confessing the sins of the people of the Lord.

Solomon also prayed to God before the people of Israel with his hands spread out toward heaven, as it is written: “And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart ….. “ (1 Kings 8:22-23).

However, with regard to the lifting up of hands, it must be said that God does not delight in the lifting up of those hands which are full of blood and acts of violence, for God said through the prophet Isaiah to those who committed sins and then spread out their hands toward God: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you …. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity" (Isaiah 1:15; 59:3 - NKJV).

**Our spiritual worship**

Paul said to the saints of Rome: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1 – NIV).

We, who are priests of God under the New Covenant, must offer our bodies in sacrifice to God, and we can do this by abstaining from the fleshly lusts which war against our soul and by presenting ourselves to God as being alive from the dead and our members (which are the members of Christ) as instruments of righteousness to God (Romans 6:13). To offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God does not mean that we have to cut ourselves with knives as the prophets of Baal did in the days of Elijah, nor that we have to climb so called holy stairs on our knees grazing our knees and causing them to bleed. In this world there are many false prophets who command their followers to torture their bodies; let it be known to you that these things are an abomination to the Lord, these people don't glorify God in their body but they hurt themselves because they are led to do such things by the devil. Wisdom says: “The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh” (Proverbs 11:17 – NKJV). We as children of God must not destroy our body because it is the temple of God. It is written: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you” (Leviticus 19:28 – NKJV), therefore making cuttings in one’s flesh to bleed as well as tattooing one’s body (as many pagans do) are practices which are contrary to the sound doctrine.

We have to take care of our body, but we must not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, as it is written: “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14 – NKJV). You may ask: ‘Can we really abstain from the lusts of the flesh?’ ‘Of course, we can, for it is written: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 – NKJV). But – you may also ask me – ‘how can we deny the lusts of the flesh?’ Here is the answer, which we find in the epistle to the Galatians: “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16 – NKJV). To walk in the Spirit means to fulfill the desires of the Spirit, yes, because the Spirit has good, right and holy desires, as it is written: “Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5 – NIV), which “is life and peace” (Romans 8:6 - NIV). But our flesh lusts against the Spirit, as it is written: “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires” (Romans 8:5 - NIV), which is death (Romans 8:6). Therefore, since we still walk in the flesh and we feel the sinful spurs of the flesh, we must watch and be sober lest we obey the fleshly lusts again and
(as a result of this) we die spiritually, as it is written: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die” (Romans 8:13 - NKJV). However, the Scripture says also: “But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13 – NKJV). What are the deeds of the body? They are sinful and unclean acts the flesh desires to do, as it is written: “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5 – NKJV). Therefore, we know the things we must put to death and we can manage to put them to death only by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and not by our own strength for the Lord says: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (Zechariah 4:6 - NKJV).

The Lord set us free from sin, therefore our way of life must be holy and right, as it is written: “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15 – NKJV). Now, you know that we were sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and “by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11 – NKJV), but you know also that “God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7 – NIV), which means that whereas on the one hand Christ was made to us “sanctification” (1 Corinthians 1:30) and thus we have the right and the privilege to be called “the saints who are on the earth” (Psalm 16:3 – NKJV, on the other hand we must pursue holiness. Paul was sanctified in Christ and pursued holiness and he exhorted the saints to do the same, for he wrote to the Corinthians: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1 - NKJV).

Brothers, we must perfect holiness by abstaining from every form of evil and in so doing we strive against sin. Do not think that our life on earth is a sort of vacation, do not deceive yourselves, for we are at war, in that we fight against sin. The Scripture says: “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:4 – NKJV), which means that we as believers must resist sin, for the Word speaks of a struggle against sin. Therefore, brothers, bear in mind that you also should spend the rest of your earthly life serving righteousness and not serving fleshly lusts any longer. Sin is an enemy, whose destructive power should not be underestimated; anyone who underestimates it deceives himself. Sin is a work of the devil and it kills those who serve it (Romans 6:23); sin is a killer like the devil (as it is written: “He was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44 – NKJV), therefore, take heed to yourselves.

We know that we can’t say that we are without sin or that we have not sinned, and if anyone says: ‘I am without sin’ or ‘I have never sinned since I was converted’, we know that he lies against the truth because the apostle John says: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8 - NKJV), and again: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:10 - NKJV). However, we can say that we strive against sin, we resist it and hate it; we fight the good fight, that’s why God takes pleasure in us.

Brothers, it is true that we all stumble in many things, that we have not yet been made perfect, that we have to run with perseverance the race that is set before us, and that we are bound to say to God: “Our Father in heaven forgive us our debts”; but I exhort you not to be indifferent to the works of the devil; have no fellowship with the works of the devil but rather expose them; do not let darkness blind your eyes and do not be deceived by those who put darkness for light and bitter for sweet, and who live a kind of life that shows clearly that they are dead while they live, because they give themselves over to the pleasures of sin. These people walk according to the flesh and then when they go to the place of worship on Sunday they sing: ‘I want to spend my best years for you, for You my Lord who died for me’ (note of the translator: some words of a Christian song we sing here in Italy), yet they spend their time serving sin and not righteousness. Some pastors and teachers have told them: ‘You were sanctified, you came to the knowledge of the truth, and you will never lose your salvation, for it is impossible for you to lose salvation!’ But that’s not true because Jesus said: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). Jesus Christ is the vine and we who have believed on Him are the branches, but some of these
branches have withered because they have decided not to remain in the Lord any longer, they have ceased to keep the commandments of God because they spend their time serving their own belly. They have deceived themselves: they thought they could serve sin again without receiving in themselves the due penalty for their sins and thus they died. We have no fellowship with such people because they have set their minds on earthly things; if they don’t repent they will reap torments, to them God says: “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jeremiah 3:22 - NKJV).

Sanctification

Introduction

Dear brothers in the Lord, this book of mine deals with sanctification (or holiness), which I consider a very important subject to us who are children of God.

First of all, you must understand that when you were born again (that is, when you were regenerated by God) you were sanctified, that is to say, you were made holy. For the Scriptures teach that at the new birth God performs an act of sanctification on believers, through which they are declared holy. Here is how Paul and Peter expressed this concept in their epistles. Paul said to the Corinthians: “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are [were] washed, but ye are [were] sanctified, but ye are [were] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11); and to the Thessalonians: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of [by] the Spirit and belief of [in] the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13); while Peter said to God’s elect: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:1-2). That’s why the apostles in their epistles called the believers ‘saints’ (1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2), ‘holy nation’ (1 Peter 2:9), and ‘holy brethren’ (Hebrews 3:1 - NKJV).

Secondly, beloved, you must understand that you are holy because of the obedience showed by Jesus Christ, for it was through His atoning sacrifice that you were sanctified, as it is written: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10 – NKJV). It follows that you don’t have anything to boast about before God, for - as Paul says - Christ became for us sanctification from God (1 Corinthians 1:30).

When I say that you were sanctified in Jesus Christ I mean these things.

- You attained the perfection in regard to the conscience through the blood of Christ, as it is written: "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). The perfection in regard to the conscience could not be obtained under the Old Covenant because the gifts and the sacrifices which were offered according to the law were a shadow of the things which were to come and in them there was a reminder of sins every year (Hebrews 9:9-10; 10:1-4), while under the New Covenant it can be obtained because Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins once for all and His blood makes those who believe in Him perfect in regard to the conscience (Hebrews 9:13-14).

- God separated you from the world, so that you might serve righteousness. In other words, God separated you from those who live in darkness so that you might be a holy people to the Lord for the rest of your earthly life. In ancient times God chose the Israelites so that they might serve Him, for He said to them: “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy
God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6), and again: “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2). Now, in these last days God has set apart for Himself a people (His Church) which is formed of all those Jews and Gentiles whom He has rescued from this present evil age so that they might serve Him. This concept is expressed by Paul in his epistle to Titus when he says that Christ Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14 - NKJV).

Therefore, brethren, you were set apart by God so that you might pursue sanctification, as Paul said to the saints in Rome: “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness .....” (Romans 6:22), and to the saints of Thessalonica: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification ..... For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:3,7); and as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews says: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14), and as Peter says to the elect (whom he called holy nation); “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct because it is written: Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16 - NKJV).

As you can see, the Scriptures clearly state that we were called to be holy, that is to say, to perfect our sanctification before God. Therefore the pursuit of sanctification (or the perfecting of sanctification) is a divine command, and it is so important that the Scripture states that without sanctification no one will see the Lord. I say this because I know that today among many Churches many despise sanctification, making light of it and not considering it so important (for they consider it a human option).

Now, brethren, we have our fruit to sanctification, but how can we bear this fruit? We can bear this fruit by abiding in Christ, for Jesus Christ said: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). In other words, we can bear this fruit by keeping the commandments of God, for John said: “He who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (1 John 3:24 - NKJV). Therefore, we must keep the commandments of God in order to have a holy conduct before God and men. And obviously to keep the commandments of God means that on the one hand we must not do certain things and on the other hand we must do some other things.

Before I go on, however, I would like to point out that we can perfect our sanctification (which is a process that involves a separation unto God, a purification of flesh and spirit, and a conformation to the image of Christ) only by the power of God, who works in us what is well pleasing to Him. In other words, we are able to perfect our sanctification because God works in us. However, it is very important to note that God will work in us if we allow Him to work. This principle that recognizes both God’s initiative and man’s responsibility is expressed by Paul in the epistle to the Philippians when he gives them this command: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13 – NKJV). So, God enables us to perfect our sanctification, but we MUST respond.

Let us now look closely at the things from which we, as believers, must abstain in order to live a holy life.

**Murder**

It is written in the law: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13 - NKJV). Therefore we must not take our neighbour’s life. Let us not act as Cain, who was of the wicked one – says the apostle John – and murdered his brother; and why did he murder him? “Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12 – NKJV).
Brethren, the way of the murderer leads to death, for it is written: “A man burdened with bloodshed will flee into a pit; let no one help him” (Proverbs 28:17 – NKJV; the NIV reads: "A man tormented by the guilt of murder will be a fugitive till death; let no one support him"). God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:17 – NKJV), and many times He causes murderers to be killed, for it is written: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6 - NKJV). Everybody can see the fulfilment of these words, for in criminal circles it happens very often that murderers are themselves murdered in turn. “As you have done, it shall be done to you” (Obadiah 15), the Lord still says to the wicked. Therefore, those who murder run the risk of being killed, for Wisdom warns us saying: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the Pit; we shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse’ – My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird; but they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives” (Proverbs 1:10-18 – NKJV).

The biblical account of the punishment which God executed on those who murdered the sons of Gideon shows very clearly that God hates those who shed innocent blood and does not leave them unpunished. Here is what we read in the book of the Judges: “And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem. And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; (For my father fought for you, and冒险ured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour
Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother. When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech. And Abimelech the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him? And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out. And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field: And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion. And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that was with him, from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them. And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate. And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt. And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women. Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon
Abimelech’s head, and all to brake his skull. Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (Judges 9:1-57).

Under grace, however, even he who hates his brother is a murderer, for John says: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15 - NKJV). The reason is because the law of Christ is stricter than the law of Moses, for Jesus said to His disciples: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell [geenna] fire” (Matthew 5:21-22). Therefore, brothers, let us see to it that we keep hatred (against a brother or an unbelieving person) from entering our heart. Let us love one another fervently with a pure heart, for love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). If a brother sins against us, let us rebuke him (with love), in the hope that he will repent, but let us not hate him, for the law says: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Leviticus 19:17 - NKJV). If he who wronged us is a sinner, let us bear with him patiently continuing to love him, for it is written that we must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27).

Among the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad and to which James wrote, there were some believers who were murderers and James called them sinners and exhorted them to cleanse their hands and to humble themselves in the sight of God (James 4:2,8-10). Peter says to us: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer" (1 Peter 4:15 - NKJV). Murderers will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21), for they will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

Abortion

Abortion is ‘the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy’. Therefore, abortion is sin because is the deliberate killing of an unborn baby.

So, brothers and sisters who are married, I exhort you to flee this sin, lest you move God to anger. Surely, if you decide to have an abortion, God will punish you for your sin. Obviously, I am not speaking of miscarriage because miscarriage is ‘the spontaneous or unplanned expulsion of a fetus from the womb before it is able to survive independently’, that is, something which is not caused or planned by the woman or the couple.

To show you from the Scriptures that abortion is sin in the sight of God, I want to quote some passages from the Law of Moses, which is made for anything which is contrary to the sound doctrine. Here is what God said to Moses on Mount Sinai: “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Exodus 21:22-25 – NKJV). Now, as you can see, the law envisaged a situation in which two brawling men accidentally injure a pregnant woman. The injury causes the woman to go into early labor, resulting in a premature birth of her child. If neither the woman nor the child is harmed, then the Law of Moses commanded that the one who caused the premature birth should pay a fine. But if injury or even death resulted from the brawl, then the law imposed a parallel punishment: if the premature baby died, the one who caused the premature birth was to be put to death – “you shall give life for
life.” So to cause a pre-born infant’s death was homicide under the Old Testament - homicide punishable by death. Now, if according to God the one who caused a pre-born infant’s death accidentally was deserving of death, it is evident that since abortion is the deliberate killing of the unborn by an abortion doctor in collusion with the mother, those who deliberately put to death an unborn child are deserving of death too, in the sight of God. It cannot be otherwise. Therefore, brothers and sisters, I say it again, flee abortion.

Now let us examine in the light of the Scriptures the reasons why women have an abortion, in order to show that they do not justify at all abortion.

Many women have an abortion because they don’t want to give birth to many children, so in their opinion there are ‘wanted and unwanted children.’ However, this doesn’t justify abortion because the creature which is in the woman’s womb is a human being formed by the hands of God. Women in Christ, do not be afraid of giving birth to many children; God will not forsake them, but will meet all their needs. Have faith in Him. Know this, that the Scripture states that those who have many children are happy (Psalm 127:5). There can be no unwanted children in the life of a Christian couple, for every child is a gift of God, and every Christian must be willing to receive any gift from God.

Many other women have an abortion because they have been raped or because tests reveal that the unborn child has severe abnormalities. These arguments given in favour of abortion do not justify abortion either, for the creature which is in the woman’s womb is still a human being formed by the hands of God, and thus he has the right to be safely brought into the world regardless of how he was conceived. Therefore, I exhort all those Christian women who are with child because of a rape or know that their unborn child has severe abnormalities to give birth to their child. For sure, since all things work together for good to those who love God, God will turn evil into good: He will take that evil and its horrible effects on your life and bring good out of it; have faith in God.

Today, abortion is lawful in this country (as well as in many other countries), yet it is sin in the sight of God. That abortion is sin is confirmed by the sense of guilt a woman feels after she has had an abortion. On the contrary, those women who, even though they had been advised to have an abortion, refused to have an abortion are now happy and don’t regret taking that decision.

**Euthanasia**

Here is how euthanasia is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary: ‘The painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable disease or in an irreversible coma’. In other words, it is a death hastened by doctors with the permission of the sufferer’s relatives (or the sufferer himself) to keep him from continuing to suffer.

I exhort you in the Lord to reject and expose euthanasia because it is a murder in the sight of God. He who has the power to kill and to make alive is God alone (1 Samuel 2:6). Therefore, if the country where you live permits euthanasia and one of your relatives is in a hopeless condition from a medical point of view, because according to the doctors he is condemned to die after unspeakable sufferings without any chance of recovering, you must not give the permission to let him die in advance (before time) in order to put an end to his sufferings or to make him suffer less, because if you give such a permission you will share in a murder. And then who said that that man will surely die? The doctors, thus human beings who can’t lengthen the life of men and who have a limited knowledge like all the other human beings. Therefore they do not have the last word, for it is God (the Omnipotent, the Omniscient and the Omnipresent) who has the last word in the life of men. It is God who decides when a man is going to die and what kind of death he will die. Thus what counts is His decision, is what God says.

So, let us suppose that one of our relatives is dying of an incurable disease and is suffering terribly. How should we cope with such situation? Well, first of all, we should ask: ‘What did God
determine to do? Did He determine to let him live or die?’ Nobody knows (unless God reveals His will by a word of wisdom). Therefore we must plead with God to heal that person who is dying of an incurable disease. For we must never give up hoping in God, for our God is able to raise up a man the doctors say he’s done for or a man who thinks he is done for. Job is a clear example of how God can change the most desperate situation. Job was suffering terrible pains, his flesh was wasting away from sight and his bones clung to his skin and to his flesh, he thought that he would soon depart from this world, and his wife was waiting for his death; but God healed him and made him prosperous again. Another eloquent example of what God can do when there is no more hope from a human point of view is that of king Hezekiah, who was taken ill and in the midst of his illness thought that he was a dead man, but God heard his prayer and saw his tears and added to his days fifteen years. “I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me” (Isaiah 38:10-12) said Hezekiah in his song after he was healed by the Lord, and he added: “What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isaiah 38:15-17). As you can see, the above mentioned examples show us clearly that God can change the most desperate circumstances in the life of men, for both Job and Hezekiah were ‘terminally ill,’ but God healed them. Knowing this, therefore, let us pray for our relative who is terminally ill so that God may heal him, and God will surely heal him if it is His will to heal him. Do not lose heart, with God nothing is impossible.

But not only can God heal incurable diseases, which lead to death, if it is His will; but He can also raise the dead. Therefore He can act on behalf of a man even after his death. So he can allow a man to die of an incurable disease in order to raise him from the dead before or during even after his funeral. The resurrections which are recorded in the Scripture confirm this concept. So it is lawful for us to plead with God to raise a dead person, and obviously if it is God’s will to raise him from the dead, it will come to pass that that man will rise again in answer to our prayers.

But what shall we say if God has determined to let him die of that incurable disease but not to bring him back to life? We will say: ‘The will of God be done.’ If the dying person is a believer, when he dies he will go to heaven to be with the Lord; if he is a sinner, he will go to Hades (hell), where he will be tormented with fire, and thus he will continue to suffer in another world, and we know that the sufferings in Hades are greater than any suffering on the earth. I would like to point out that many of those who die in severe pain are people who have been struck by the rod of God for their wickedness. For God makes them reap the evil they have sowed. The Scripture says that God struck king Jehoram with an incurable disease because of his wickedness, as it is written: “After all this the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness: so he died in severe pain” (2 Chronicles 21:18-19). You may ask me now: ‘Does God strike with incurable diseases even Christians, for certain sins which they have committed?’ Yes, He does, for God is no respecter of persons. Know this, that some Christians have been struck by the rod of God because they take pleasure in committing adultery and fornication, in murdering, in getting drunk, in keeping back by fraud the wages of their labourers, and in other serious sins. They walk after the flesh, God gave them time to repent of their wickedness, but they did not repent, and thus they were struck by God. I realize that it is painful to see these people suffer on their bed of illness, yet we have to admit that it is right that God should make them suffer in that way for their iniquities. Nevertheless, we, who are
not glad to see people suffer, must have compassion on them and pray for them, so that God may grant them repentance that leads to salvation and thus after death they may go to heaven.

Male and female homosexuality

Homosexuality is a sexual inclination according to which many people feel sexual attraction to persons of their own sex and have sexual relations with them.

The Scripture says that God at the beginning made them male and female (man first, and then the woman to satisfy man’s need for a marriage companion) and said: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Therefore, a man can lie carnally (that is, can have sexual relations) only with a woman (that is, his wife), and a woman can lie carnally only with a man (that is, her husband), for woman was created for the man (1 Corinthians 11:9). This is the natural order ordained by God, which thus excludes any form of sexual activity between men or between women. The Scripture condemns male homosexuality, for the law says: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22 – NKJV) and Paul calls the sexual acts which men commit with other men “what is shameful” and “their error” (Romans 1:27 – NKJV); and it condemns also female homosexuality, for Paul calls the sexual acts between two women “vile passions” (Romans 1:26 - NKJV).

That homosexuality is contrary to nature, that is, a violation of the natural order ordained by God, is confirmed by the fact that those who lie carnally with people of their own sex cannot reproduce, that is to say, cannot keep the divine commandment: “Multiply” (Genesis 1:28 – NKJV), which God gave to male and female, for God’s natural order is for male and female to mate and reproduce, and the fundamental human anatomy confirms this. For this reason homosexuality is associated with bestiality (in that God, after saying, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” - Leviticus 18:22, said: “Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion” - Leviticus 18:23 NKJV), for also those who practice bestiality – that is, those who have sexual relations with animals – cannot reproduce, in that they violate the natural order ordained by God.

Those men who have sexual relations with other men (commonly called gays) will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10), but they will be cast into the lake of fire along with those women who exchanged the natural use for what is against nature (these women are commonly called lesbians).

Gays and lesbians sin against nature (for both gays and lesbians have exchanged the natural use for what is against nature - Romans 1:26), and against their body, and receive in themselves the due penalty for their perversion, for God does not leave them unpunished but He makes them reap what they have sowed. For Paul says to the Romans: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:26-28). AIDS, which is a disease contracted also by those who give themselves over to unnatural vices, is one of the punishments inflicted on them by God.

Take heed to yourselves, brothers and sisters, and flee homosexuality; know this, that if you give yourselves over to homosexuality you will spend eternity in the lake of fire along with the devil, his angels and all sinners. Remember that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed also for the sins against nature which were committed by their inhabitants, and that they are set forth as an example “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7 – NKJV).
Several Evangelical Churches accept and tolerate homosexuality, for they accept homosexuals as members and even as pastors. They call homosexuality ‘an existential condition which imposes itself at a certain moment of one’s life’ or ‘an alternative lifestyle’; they don’t call it ‘sin’ nor ‘a abominable way of life chosen by some men who are without God and sometimes even by some human beings who once knew God.’ According to these Churches, those who condemn homosexuality are ‘out-of-date persons’ or ‘people who are behind the times’. Brothers in the Lord, beware of these Churches, for they lie against the truth. And beware also of all those who call themselves brothers and sisters but are homosexuals. From such people withdraw yourselves. Do not associate with them, for they profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work (Titus 1:16).

Fornication

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body .... For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3), says the Scripture. When the apostles and the elders gathered together at Jerusalem to discuss whether it was lawful to command the Gentiles to keep the law of Moses or not, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit to command the brethren who were of the Gentiles to abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from fornication (Acts 15:20).

Fornication is the sexual intercourse between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. Therefore, if a man has sexual intercourse with his fiancée, both of them commit fornication, because in the sight of God a man can have sexual intercourse only with his wife, as it is written: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24 – NKJV). Note that God said: ‘He will be joined to his wife’ and not ‘He will be joined to his fiancée’, in order to understand that God commanded that a man should have sexual intercourse only with his wife. But the world, which has perverted the straight ways of the Lord, doesn’t think so, for it encourages the sexual intercourse between the betrothed, as if it were a right thing which they are allowed to do, as if there were no offence in it. Those who raise their voice against the sexual intercourse between the betrothed are called ‘people full of taboos who refuse to conform themselves to the times’. Well, yes, we refuse to conform ourselves to this present evil age; we refuse to call evil good. It is crazy to call what the Creator said it is harmful for man and woman a good thing; the God who made the human body and put into it the breath of life knows very well what is good for man and what is harmful for him. Sex before marriage produces a sense of guilt because it is sin (instead, sex does not produce any sense of guilt after marriage). For this reason we, as believers, refuse to listen to those who pass fornication off as a lawful and beneficial thing, because they boast and lie against the truth, being full of selfish ambition. God cannot lie, and if He said through Paul: “Flee fornication”, it is because He knows the evil consequences of fornication and He wants to spare us all kinds of troubles and pains. Sometimes young believing men are tempted to think that God, by forbidding them to have sexual intercourse with their fiancée before marriage, does not pursue their good, but that’s not true; it is a lie, whose father is the devil. It cannot be true because God is love, God is good, God is right. They wilfully forget that it is God who made man and woman, and that He knows very well whether a thing is good for us or not. Young people, heed the Word of God and you will find good (Proverbs 19:8)!

However, fornication is also the sexual intercourse between a man and a prostitute; therefore we must flee any sexual intercourse with a prostitute. For Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid [Certainly not!]. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one
body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:13-16). Wisdom says that “a harlot is a deep pit” (Proverbs 23:27 – NKJV), and those who went to prostitutes before their conversion know how deep that pit is.

We, as believers in Christ Jesus, must always bear in mind that when we received Christ we became the temple of God, that is, we became members of Christ in that we became one spirit with Him, and let it be known to you that when the Scripture states that we are the temple of God it means that we are His house, as it is written: “And we are his house” (Hebrews 3:6 – NIV). Note that it is His house and not ours; therefore our members, having been bought at a price by Christ, do not belong to us any longer. We are His treasured possession, we don’t belong to ourselves; for this reason we can’t use our members to do whatever we like, because they are Christ’s. Fornicators sin against their own body, and therefore they profane the temple of God; that’s why the Scripture states that they will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9). Fornicators are punished by God as were those Israelites who committed fornication with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1-9). Paul warns the saints against fornication, reminding them of that disobedience of the Israelites, when he says: “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1 Corinthians 10:8).

We must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is a fornicator, with such a man we must not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

Adultery

Adultery is the sexual intercourse that a married man or a married woman has outside marriage. For instance, if a married man lies carnally with his neighbor’s wife he commits adultery. Adultery is commonly called ‘extramarital affair’

The Scripture condemns adultery in various ways, for the law says: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14 - NKJV), and again: “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10 – NKJV). Notice that, according to the law (therefore according to the righteous judgement of God), those who commit adultery deserve death.

Jesus Christ completed the commandment of the law concerning adultery, for He said: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

The Lord Jesus said also: “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18). As you can see, both he who sends away his wife and marries another and he who marries her who is sent away from her husband commit adultery. Furthermore, if a woman sends away her husband and marries another, she commits adultery, as it is written: “And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:12), because the married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; therefore she can remarried only if her husband dies. Paul explains this when he says to the Romans: “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man” (Romans 7:2-3). For this reason those brothers and sisters who were called by God while they were divorced or separated cannot remarry as long as their partners live, because if they remarry they commit adultery. Therefore, beware of all those who teach that a divorced brother is allowed to remarry while his wife is still alive, and that if a brother sends
away his wife for fornication (that is, for marital infidelity) he can remarry, because they lie against the truth and through their lies they encourage some believers to commit adultery. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4 – NIV), and Wisdom says that no one who touches another man’s wife will go unpunished (Proverbs 6:29). This means that those who defile themselves with their neighbor’s wife are punished by God. Do not be deceived, therefore; don’t be deceived by those who say, in order ‘to tranquilize’ those who want to marry their neighbor’s wife, that even David, who was a man after God’s heart, committed adultery and then he was forgiven by God! Because even though David was forgiven by God, he was also punished by God because of his adultery with Bath-Sheba, for God, through the prophet Nathan, pronounced these judgements on David: “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun …. because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.” (2 Samuel 12:10-12, 14), and after a while He executed them, just as He had said. The book of Proverbs exhorts us to flee the immoral woman and contains many words which show what awaits all those who lie carnally with their neighbour’s wife. I want to quote these words that you may understand how harmful and dangerous is to lie carnally with another man’s wife. “If thou seekest her [wisdom] as silver, …. understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life” (Proverbs 2:4, 11-19); “For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?” (Proverbs 5:3-20); “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproves of instruction are the way of life. To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his
house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts" (Proverbs 6:23-35); “Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:4-27)

We live indeed in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, which calls evil good! But we know that foolishness stops its mouth and it is not justified by its actions because its actions are unfruitful works, whose end is death. The facts speaks for themselves: those who commit adultery are unhappy, they live in fear, they are full of all kinds of troubles (some of them have heart troubles, some have contracted venereal diseases, some are blackmailed, some are threatened, some are abused, and some have left the wife of their youth and their children); and many of them are put to death by the husband or the lover of the adulteress and they go in the fire of hell. What shall we say? We have to recognize that the words of the Wisdom of God are true; we see their fulfilment in those who refuse to heed the Word of God.

Therefore, to sum up, both those who are unmarried and those who are married must flee from the immoral woman because she leads men to destruction. Yes, it is true that adultery seems to be an harmless and wonderful act because that’s how the devil makes it appear in the movies and on many worldly magazines, yet know this, that bitterness and death are hidden behind its seeming beauty. It can’t be otherwise, because the Scripture calls adultery sin and says very clearly that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Do not be deceived; do not be deceived by sin! Flee the adulteress, who lies in wait like a robber, even in the place of worship.

**Impurity**

What is impurity? In the Oxford English Dictionary we read that impurity is 'a constituent which impairs the purity of something’. Therefore, for instance, if the olive oil contains certain
substances it will be called impure. But you must not avoid this kind of impurity, because you can eat an impure olive oil (I mean an olive oil which has been altered with harmless substances). The impurity which you must avoid is something that is able to defile you spiritually and causes you to lose the purity of your heart and of your body. Therefore, you must avoid impure thoughts, impure talks, impure behaviours, impure readings. In other words, you must avoid all kinds of obscenities, any thing which may offend the sense of decency. By so doing you will keep yourselves pure and blameless at the coming of the Lord. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8 - NKJV) said Jesus. Therefore, having this promise (which was made by the Lord), “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ....” (2 Corinthians 7:1 – NKJV).

Divining arts, spiritualist séances, black masses and other works of the devil

Magic is the art that purports to control or forecast natural events, effects, or forces by using supernatural powers, which are of the devil. Those who practice magic, therefore, purport to have the power of influencing the course of events by using devilish powers. As it is fitting for the saints, we must flee all kinds of magic, knowing that magic is a work of the devil, which is condemned by God. No matter if magic is called white magic (employing magic to cure disease, or assure success in love or business, etc.) or black magic (using magic for personal gain, or for revenge in order to bring sickness, death, or adversity to an enemy, etc.), magic is magic and we must abhor it with all our heart. Here are some words that God spoke to Israel, which make it clear that God detests those who practice magic: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Those who practice magic or resort to magic (sorcery) will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).

Now, I am going to speak very briefly of some well-known divining arts (or forms of fortune telling), and of some other magic practices, and warn you against them.

Astrology is the ancient practice of studying the movements and positions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars in the belief that they determine the character, the health and the activity of every human being, and that by observing the position of the celestial bodies at a given time one can foretell future events. When a person consults an astrologer, the astrologer tells him the map of the sky over his birthplace at the moment of his birth (his personal horoscope, called also birth chart), and the fortunes and misfortunes which depend — according to the astrologer — on that specific map of the sky. However, there is another kind of horoscope cast by astrologers for their clients, it is called horary horoscope and it concerns specific problems. In this case the client tells the astrologer a specific problem he is facing, and the astrologer — after complicated calculations — tells him the outcome of that problem and gives him the ‘solution’ of the problem, on the basis of the map of the sky at the time the question is asked.

Know this, that behind the astrologers there are evil spirits who want to deceive you into believing that your destiny is in the hands of the stars and of the planets. Your destiny, as well as the destiny of every man, is in the hands of God; therefore, do not deceive yourself and let no one deceive you with empty words. The stars, the planets, the sun and the moon cannot influence your life (your decisions, your character, etc.), just as a stone along the wayside or a flower or a tree cannot influence your life. You will say to me then: ‘What should I do then when someone asks me when I was born in order to see if he or she will agree with me and some other things?’ Answer him or her that you refuse to tell him or her your date of birth because you don’t want him or her to waste time and because you don’t want to hear lies.
I close with the following words which God spoke through the prophet Isaiah against Babylon, which make it clear what God think of astrologers and their work “Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.” (Isaiah 47:12-14).

Therefore, do not consult any astrologer and do not read your horoscope. Astrology is an abomination to God, and those who rely on astrology put their trust in lies, which influence their behaviour and decision to their disadvantage. Astrologers are nothing, and their work is nothing; he who chooses them is an abomination.

**Cartomancy** is a form of fortune-telling or divination using a deck of cards. Thus this divining art claims that you can know your future or someone else’s future by interpreting playing cards. Flee from it, for it is a device of the devil through which he deceives people into believing all kinds all lies, which lead them to take wrong decisions.

**Chiromancy** (also known as palmistry) is the art of foretelling the future through the study of the palm. Thus those who practice it claim that they can predict people’s future from the lines on the palms of their hands. However, the palmist like the card reader tells fortunes not by actually reading the anatomical lines and other features of the hands, but divines the future by an evil spirit, which is called spirit of divination (Acts 16:16), which has endowed him with psychic powers of telepathy and clairvoyance.

Brothers, do not learn to read hands nor let anyone read your hands Therefore when you meet a gipsy fortune-teller (or anyone else) who asks you if you want her to read your hands, answer ‘No’. And I say the same thing to you young people, who meet so often at school some schoolfellows who want to read your hands, answer ‘No’. I know that the reading of hands is not a serious sin in the sight of most people, for it looks like a joke to them, but I assure you that it is a work of the devil despite its seeming harmlessness. It is a practice which lies under the sway of evil spirits, which may lead you to other forms of divination.

**Tasseography** (sometimes called tasseomancy) is a divining art according to which a man can read his present and his future in the bottom part of a cup of coffee after drinking the coffee. You must flee and expose also the coffee cup reading. Know this, that it is a work of the devil; in the bottom part of a cup of coffee you can’t read anything about your present and your future. Those who claim that they are able to read your future in the bottom part of a cup of coffee are ministers of Satan. If they tell you that they want to read the bottom part of a cup of coffee for you, tell them that you don’t believe their words because they are lies.

**Crystallomancy** (or Crystallography) is a divining art based on the consultation of a crystal ball and on the use of crystals as ‘power objects’, and many New Agers (members of the New Age Movement) have had the subjective experience of some type of occult energy amplification and focusing when involving crystals in New Age practices. Here is what the late Randall Baer, who had been an expert on crystallography before his conversion to Christ, wrote about his ‘crystal initiation’: ‘Vicki had received a small but perfect quartz crystal from an American Indian medicine man – one of his ‘power objects’. One day when doing New Age meditation, she was instructed by her ‘spirit guides’ to give me the crystal and to ask me to meditate with it. This was bizarre. The idea of meditating with a hunk of rock sounded patently ridiculous. After laughing about the idea for a couple of days, I decided to give it a shot. It couldn’t hurt, could it? Only minutes after focusing on the crystal in a state of trance-like meditation, my consciousness was catapulted into electrifying domains of extra-natural light the likes of which I had never before perceived. The upper part of my head felt like it wasn’t
there, like it had become invisible, as my awareness raced upwards at the speed of light. From a high distance, I could see in my mind’s eye that my body was trembling and shaking as the power of the experience rattled through it. This was my ‘crystal initiation’ into an entirely different supernatural realm. Wow! Was this ‘crystal power’ or what? For the rest of the week my crystal-aided meditations brought vivid visions of strange high-tech machines and contraptions all using crystal in different ways. It was like stepping into a science fiction novel about technologies on an alien planet. I also saw visions of a high-crystal-tech holistic health clinic with lasers, holography, color beams, glowing liquids, and more in this mind-boggling sci-fi film. Several close friends remarked on a distinct change in my demeanor. Somehow, they said, I was more charged and outgoing. I felt blissful, as if I had found an entirely new part of myself. Sadly, though, in reality I blindly had entered an entirely different realm of Satan’s high-tech, dazzling deceptions. Sure, all this was a blast and I was riding a high like I had never known, but later there would be a very dear price to pay for all this occult adventurism. A dear price indeed.’ (Randall Baer, Inside the New Age Nightmare, Published by Huntington House, 1989, pag. 25-26). As you can see, it is evident that crystalomancy opens the door to demonic influence; so flee from it.

A spiritualist séance is a meeting of people during which the spirits of the dead are consulted or evoked (this occult practice is called necromancy or spiritism). It is led by a person known as a medium who usually go into a trance that allows evil spirits to communicate through him or her, which spirits make the participants believe that they are communicating with the dead. Séances are conducted in dark or semi-dark rooms with participants seated around a table. Sometimes the table leans and tilts, participants (sitters) may feel a cold breeze on their faces, items may materialize apparently out of thin air and musical instruments may play mysteriously. During the course of the séance, the medium speaks under the control of a spirit. Other methods of spirit communication includes automatic writing, writing on sealed slates, writing with planchettes, and impressing images onto photographic plates which have been kept in sealed enclosures. During séances evil spirits may even appear in human form to those who are present assuming the appearance of this or that dead loved one evoked and imitating his voice, so those who talk with these spirits believe that they are talking with their loved ones. A black mass is a ceremony supposedly celebrated during the Sabbath, which is a parody of the Roman Catholic Mass. The purpose of the black mass is to mock God, to blaspheme against the Trinity. Horrible things are done during black masses; the participants commit all kinds of sexual perversions, and sometimes they even offer human sacrifices to Satan their master. Beloved, do not attend spiritualist séances, and do not attend black masses and any other meeting which is held by a wizard, a witch, etc., for these meetings are full of demons, who hate you and want to oppress you and enter your body in order to cause you to do evil things and to destroy you. Know this, that if you attend spiritualist séances or any other meeting held by ministers of Satan (who have evil spirits in their body), not only will you be defiled, but you will become demon oppressed or even demon possessed, and you will make God angry and for sure He will punish you, as He punished king Saul (by killing him) because he went to a medium (a woman who was a medium at En Dor) and inquired of her. Therefore, if anyone invites you to a spiritualist meeting or any other devilish meeting answer ‘no,’ and warn him against attending such meetings (for – as I have just said - one becomes demon oppressed or even demon possessed). Remember that the Scripture states that those who turn to mediums, or seek out spiritists, or consult the dead, and get involved in sorcery are an abomination to God (Deuteronomy 18:10-13).

Amulets, talismans, fetishes, and any other object about which it is said or believed that it protects the possessor from all dangers and evil spirits or has any other power, have to do with magic, for they have been made by ministers of Satan and over them a charm or spell has been cast, and thus they carry or attract evil spirits. It follows that the atmosphere of the houses where these occult objects are placed (or the life of those who wear these objects) is evilly influenced
by the spirits which are behind these objects. If you still have some of these objects, I exhort you to destroy them and burn them immediately.

**Hypnosis** is the induction of a state of consciousness in which a person loses the power of voluntary action and is highly responsive to suggestion or direction, and **self-hypnosis** is hypnosis induced by yourself. Self-hypnosis generally combines relaxation techniques with visualization and imagery to induce a hypnotic state. They are spiritual phenomena worked by demons, which open the door to demon oppression and even to demon possession. So flee from them.

I conclude by saying this, involvement in any form of magic practice invariably opens the door to influence, control, or oppression by demons, and it alienates you from God. So stay away from magic.

If you want to know your future, read the Bible; if you want to know God’s will for your life, pray God that He may reveal you His will, and He will make it known to you. If you want to know something about another person, pray God about it, and if it is His will, He will reveal it to you. If you need power, ask God for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. If you want to have some supernatural powers, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. If you need a job, a wife, a house, etc. or you have a problem of any kind, let your request be made known to God, believing, and you will receive what you have asked for. Trust in Him with all your heart, and He will give you the desire of your heart. But do not turn to divination, sorcery, necromancy and any other kind of magic practice, for all these things are an abomination to God.

**Eastern practices**

Today here in Italy (as well as in many other countries all over the world) many people speak of yoga, eastern meditation, macrobiotics, acupuncture, and of many other practices which originated in the Eastern countries.

These eastern practices are very much widespread and every time they are advertised we are told that those who practice them experience peace, joy, relaxation, and even that they have been healed of some diseases. Should we believe what it is said about them? No, we must not believe it, because these practices are works of the devil, through which all those who practice them give place to the devil (or open the door to demonic influence).

Let us look closely at some of them. (To explain yoga and eastern meditation I have used the glossary which is in the book *Death of a guru*).

**Yoga**, which literally means ‘to unite’, is a Hindu ascetic discipline which includes breath control, simple meditation and the adoption of specific bodily postures. Its aim is to make people reach the union with Brahman. Who or what is Brahman? Brahman is the ultimate reality: formless, inexpressible, unknowable, and unknowing; neither personal nor impersonal; both creator and all that is created. Brahman is all and all is Brahman according to the Hindu philosophy. The ultimate truth and salvation for those who practice yoga is to ‘realize’ that they are themselves Brahman, that they and all the universe are one and the same Being. There are several kinds and schools of Yoga (the most important are raja-yoga, jnana-yoga, karma-yoga, hatha-yoga, and tantra-yoga) an various techniques, but all have this same ultimate goal of union with the Absolute or Brahman (which is not the God of the Bible but the devil, who is the enemy of God). The positions and breath control are intended as aids to Eastern meditation, and a means of controlling the body in disciplining oneself to renounce all desires which the body might otherwise impose upon the mind. Yoga is designed specifically to induce a state of trance which supposedly allows the mind to be drawn upward into a yoking with Brahman. It is a means of withdrawal from the word of illusion to seek the only true reality. No part of Yoga can be
separated from the philosophy behind it. One who has attained, through the practice of Yoga, union with Brahman, which is its aim, is called Yogi.

As you can see, yoga is a work of the devil because the goal of yoga is 'self-realization' (to achieve godhood), and also because through it a man comes into contact with the devil (or with demons) and thus he can become demon-oppressed or demon-possessed. Actually this is what happens all over the world, when those who practice yoga manage to arouse the kundalini, which – according to the Hindu religion - is the latent power which resides in the body of man near the base of the spine. When aroused, the kundalini rages like a vicious serpent inside a person with a force that is impossible to resist (which is undoubtedly a manifestation of demonic power). Furthermore, according to yogis, the kundalini will produce special occult powers (including: becoming invisible, curing diseases, knowing or discovering certain things, leaving the body and travelling to any part of the world in a few seconds, hurting one’s enemies, etc.), which have their source in demonic beings and will lead ultimately to moral, spiritual, and physical destruction.

Eastern meditation, such as TM (which stands for Transcendental Meditation, which is a well known form of meditation), is a technique for detaching oneself from the world of things and ideas (which is called maya) through freeing one’s mind from all voluntary or rational thought, which projects one into ‘higher’ states of consciousness. Though popularized in the West under many names, the aim of all Eastern meditation is to ‘realize’ one’s essential union with the Universe (which is Brahman – or God - according to the Hindu religion), therefore its aim is to lead the meditator to think that he is God. Eastern meditation is the doorway to the ‘nothingness’ called nirvana. Generally sold as a ‘relaxation’ technique, meditation really aims at and ultimately leads to the surrender of oneself to mystical cosmic forces which are nothing but demons. Eastern meditation also, therefore, is a work of the devil because its goal is ‘self-realization’, which is a superconscious state in which one thinks that he is God and that truth and salvation (which is not the salvation about which the Bible speaks) are inside himself. In addition to this, Eastern meditation can lead to demon oppression or possession like yoga, for the meditator is invited to repeat the mantra, which is a sound symbol of one or more syllables often used to induce a mystical state. It must be passed on by the living voice of a guru and cannot be learned in another way. One does not need to understand the meaning of the mantra; the virtue is in the repetition of the mantra. For it is said to embody a spirit or deity, and the repetition of the mantra calls this being to the one repeating it. Thus the mantra both invites a particular spiritual being to enter the one using it and creates the passive state in the meditator to facilitate this fusion of beings. Brethren, know this, that these spiritual beings or deities called on by the meditators through the repetition of the mantra are demons, that is, evil spirits who hate mankind and whose aim is to destroy people.

Now let me explain to you what the Bible says about meditation. A Christian must meditate, for the apostle Paul says: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8 – NKJV). How does a Christian know what is true, noble, just, of good report, excellent and praiseworthy? By the Holy Spirit who dwells in him, for He is truth. For instance, the Holy Spirit bears witness that the Holy Scripture (that is, the Bible) is truth and so he must meditate on it; the Holy Spirit bears witness also that the heaven, the earth and the sea and all that is in them is the work of God’s hands which testifies to His eternal power and Godhead, so it is good for a Christian to meditate on the work of His hands. Why must a Christian meditate on the things spoken of by Paul? In order to please God and to have fellowship with Him, and not in order to become one with God or to come to the conclusion that he is God, for he knows that he is and always will be a creature of God. A Christian knows that no matter how long he meditates on what is right and good, he will never become God nor will he come to the conclusion: ‘I am that Being who created all things’, for the Holy Spirit will keep him from thinking these evil thoughts. Rather we can say from experience that the Biblical
Meditation will lead the Christian to realize that he is a worm, a weak and little being, so little and full of limitations in the sight of His Creator who fills and rules the universe. Therefore the biblical meditation will lead him to humble himself before God and not to exalt himself. The Christian, while meditating, can call upon the Lord, thank Him and praise Him; he has no mantras, that is, no magical formula to use, but only thanksgivings and praises which come out of his heart spontaneously. And these words make him feel, by the Holy Spirit who is in him, in close communion with His God, they make him feel His presence in a particular way on some occasions.

**Acupuncture** is an ancient practice of Chinese medicine in which the alleviation of pain and/or the cure of a disease condition is accomplished through the pricking of the body at well-defined, specific points with fine needles. Let me explain to you why the cure of a disease condition is accomplished through the pricking of the body at well-defined, specific points with fine needles. The Chinese recognize ‘the existence of a life force that flows through all living things. They call it chi (variously spelled qi or ki). It is analogous to prana in Hindu thought. Chi flows through the body along invisible paths called meridians. Along the meridians are a number of points that connect the meridians with the organs of the body. It is into these points that the needles are inserted in acupuncture treatment. It is assumed that in the healthy person the chi is circulating freely. Conversely, the chi in an ill person has been blocked or is unbalanced in its flow. Through the discriminating use of acupuncture, practitioners seek to restore health by improving the circulation of the chi in the subject’s body. There are varying numbers of points recognized, but approximate 365 are commonly known and any given practitioner will use around 100 regularly.

A precise knowledge of the location of these points is essential to the acupuncturist’ (J. Gordon Melton, *New Age Encyclopedia*, Detroit 1990, page 6).

There is no doubt that acupuncture is of the devil, for it leads people to believe the following principles of the Chinese philosophy: all of nature and the universe (including man) is eternally existing as vibrations of impersonal, polarized energy called Yin and Yang, and the key to physical well-being is to balance the positive and negative aspects of this energy. Which principles – being rooted in occultism - opposes the truth, and therefore they are false principles; and as you know the father of lies is the devil, who is the prince of this world. And the Scripture commands us to resist the devil. Brothers, beware of the Chinese philosophy (as well as of any other kind of philosophy), lest you wander from the truth which is in Christ Jesus. Remember what Paul wrote to the Colossians: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8 – NKJV).

I conclude by saying this: know this, that whoever claims to be able to manipulate the imbalance of Yin Yang energy by placing needles along some points in the human body to stimulate the increase or decrease of Yin and Yang is involved in the occult and you must beware of him, lest you come under the influence of the evil spirits which assist the acupuncturist in the practice of acupuncture or rather of which the acupuncturist is slave, for all those who are involved in the occult are slaves of the evil spirits which assist them. Well, someone may say to me now, ‘Don’t you think that one can be an acupuncturist without being involved in the occult?’ No, I don’t think so, for acupuncture is a therapy based on occult principles, and thus anyone who practices it is involved in the occult somehow, for he is assisted by occult forces. Even if he is not a magician or does not know that there are evil spirits behind acupuncture which enables him to do his work, he is performing something which needs the assistance of evil spirits and he himself is under the influence of evil spirits.

So, brothers and sisters in the Lord, you who are sick, flee acupuncture and put your trust in the Lord who is the One who heals all your diseases (Psalm 103:3). I say it again, flee from acupuncture.

**Macrobiotics** is both a comprehensive vegetarian diet and a spiritual worldview based upon ancient oriental beliefs and practices refined during the twenty century. 'Macrobiotic thought is
based upon the ancient Chinese doctrine of the Tao, which has at least three interrelated but distinct ways of being used. Tao is the absolute, the impersonal but creative ground of existence, from which all phenomena derive; it is the operation of the Absolute within phenomena; and the path or way of coming into union with the Absolute. The Absolute manifests into two tendencies, yin and yang, which are at once complementary and antagonistic. Yin and yang combine in various proportions to produce differing phenomena. All phenomena have some yin and some yang. No pure yin or pure yang exists; there is no neutral phenomena. Each phenomenon contains either more yin or more yang. The yin-yang approach to phenomena can be applied to the entire world of experience from diet to government and chemistry to sociology. While applying yin-yang concepts to almost every sphere of life, Ohsawa [a Japanese Macrobiotics teacher] emphasized its application to diet and health. According to him, diet is the basic reality determining the other spheres of life. Bad diets distort reality and lead to all of the world’s problems, especially war. The basic element in the macrobiotic diet is cereal, which Ohsawa taught was the principal food for human beings. … His diet prohibited potatoes, eggplants, and tomatoes … Fish, salads, and fresh fruit are allowed in the transition diets, but should gradually be withdrawn. No red meat or processed, chemically prepared, or synthetic foods are to be consumed’ (J. Gordon Melton, New Age Encyclopedia, Detroit 1990, page 274). In other words, according to macrobiotics a man can become happy, he can find peace, and live a long life on earth by following a particular diet. His peace as well as his happiness and health depend on what he eats! Some foods influences negatively the life of men and therefore must be avoided.

However, the Scripture teaches that in order to have peace and to be happy a man must repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, a man can eat everything “for every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5 - NKJV). That's why the apostle Paul states that those who command to abstain from foods which God created (to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth) teach a doctrine of demons (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Macrobiotics is based on the same occult principles of acupuncture, so flee from it.

**Martial arts** are forms of combat-techniques. They are called martial arts because they are ‘of warfare’ or ‘suitable for warfare’ (that’s the meaning of the word martial), and they are not merely combat-techniques but also an expression of an eastern spiritual philosophy (that’s why they are referred to as ‘arts’). Martial arts are strongly influenced by eastern religious doctrines for they encourage the practitioners to cultivate and use the life force called chi and their aim is to make them reach a perfect union with the universe or rather with the so called chi energy. In the New Age Encyclopedia we read that it is believed that originally the monks of the Shao-lin monastery in China ‘adopted some kind of martial art out of practical necessity, but discovered that, when approached with the right attitude, the discipline of regular practice could assist them in developing the kind of one-pointedness of mind that is necessary for effective meditation. This discovery was so fruitful that it is presently difficult to find a traditional martial art that is not somehow associated with a religious vision of the world’ (J. Gordon Melton, New Age Encyclopedia, Detroit 1990, page 278).

Therefore, martial arts must be avoided not only because we, as children of God, must not learn to fight against our enemies with carnal weapons nor to do any harm to them (for Jesus said that we must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us), but also for these reasons: 1) Because martial arts are based on occult philosophies, which encourage martial artists to develop and use the chi energy, which is an alleged mystical force that pervades the universe. This force is from the devil, the prince of this world, and the demons which follow him, and enables martial artists to perform feats which actually go beyond the outer limits of their personal human capacity. Therefore, anyone who seeks to use this energy is actually using a demonic power, behind which there are wicked spiritual beings, and as a result he is under the influence of these spiritual beings. 2) Because martial arts encourage the individual to practice a form of meditation whose purpose is to lead to a non-dualistic state of mind in which the distinction
between subject and object disappears and the practitioner becomes one with ‘god’ or ‘the absolute’, and so when the individual reaches such state of mind he believes that he is God and that all is God, and therefore this form of meditation advocates a form of self-salvation.

In the light of this, therefore, if anyone among you is still practicing martial arts I exhort him to stop practicing them.

Brothers, remember that in ancient times God rebuked the Israelites saying that He had forsaken them because they were filled “with eastern ways” (Isaiah 2:6 – NKJV).

Superstitions

A superstition is a widely held but irrational belief that an object, action, or circumstance not logically related to a course of events influences its outcome. So there are objects, actions or circumstances which are believed to bring bad luck and others good luck.

We are surrounded by people who believe all kinds of superstitions. Let me cite some of these superstitions.

Bad luck superstitions

- Opening an umbrella inside a house, walking under a ladder, taking a journey on the thirteenth day of every month (it is extremely unlucky on Friday the thirteenth) or at the thirteenth hour (that is, at one past twelve) of every day, living in a house whose street number is 13, a black cat crossing your path, spilling salt, putting a shirt on inside out, breaking a mirror, a picture falling. There are also two bad luck superstitions associated with the wedding ring (which, being considered a symbol of union, of love and of faithfulness, should be put on the left-hand annular finger, for it is believed that the fourth finger of the left hand has a vena amoris, that is, a love vein running directly to the heart, and that the nuptial sign is thus joined to the seat of life, which is obviously a superstition): it is extremely unlucky to drop the ring during the ceremony and to lose it.

Good luck superstitions

- Crossing the fingers, knocking on wood, placing a horseshoe over the front door, wearing a horn-shaped amulet made of gold, wearing a locket round the neck, a robin flying into the house, to find a four-leaf clover, cutting your hair during a storm, avoiding cracks in the sidewalk.

Should we believe such things? Not at all, because all the above mentioned beliefs are lies, whose father is the devil, who uses them to cause millions of people to live in fear and to induce them not to trust in God but in objects, actions and circumstances. In other words, Satan uses superstitions to bind and oppress the lives of millions of people across the world. So – I say it again - don’t believe the above mentioned vanities and all the other vanities that I have not mentioned, lest you give place to the devil in your life.

You are sons of God, and God is your Keeper and Guide, therefore nothing can happen to you apart from His will. Whether an event is good or evil, it is the Lord who permits it to happen to you, it does not occur by chance or because you are a lucky or unlucky person. Furthermore, know this, that all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28), thus even so called misfortunes work for good to you who love God. God turns evil into good, so be of good cheer.

Fear God and trust in Him with all your heart and you will find good for He will bless you (Psalm 112:1; Jeremiah 17:7). When a distress comes upon you, examine your ways; if the distress is a judgment of God upon you because of some sins which you have committed, repent of them and confess them to God, and God will forgive you and deliver you out of your distress; whereas, if you are walking in righteousness before God and thus the distress which comes upon you is not a judgement of God but simply a trial, rejoice, for the testing of your faith develops perseverance (James 1:2), and call upon God so that He may deliver you and God will deliver you. When you are in danger call upon the name of the Lord, and He will deliver you (Psalm 50:15). You may ask me now, ‘What should I do then if God does not deliver me out of my distress after I have
done what you tell me to do?’ Well, continue to fear His name and to trust in Him, knowing that – as I said before – all things work for good to those who love Him. Do not lose heart, God is always in control and somehow will turn evil into good.

Don’t be afraid of the bad luck superstitions and do not put your trust in the good luck superstitions, for numbers, specific rituals and circumstances cannot influence the course of events in your life. Let no one deceive you into believing that the performance of certain prescribed acts will bring good fortune, or cause something desired to happen, or prevent something unpleasant from occurring. If you want something desired to happen, or you want to prevent something unpleasant from occurring, pray to God in faith, and you will receive what you have asked in prayer (Matthew 21:22).

I exhort you to keep before your eyes the following biblical passages: “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25 – NKJV), “The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted” (Proverbs 10:24 – NKJV), for they clearly show the bad effects that superstitions have on those who accept them and they make it clear that believers do well to refuse superstitions.

**Idolatry**

The Holy Scripture commands us to flee from idolatry, for Paul says: “Flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14 – NKJV) and John says at the end of his first epistle: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21 – NKJV). Let us see now how idolatry manifests itself in order to understand what we must avoid in order not to become idolaters in the sight of God. While the Israelites were camped before Mount Sinai it came to pass that they became idolaters, here is what the Scripture says: “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (Exodus 32:1-6). As you can see, the Israelites gave themselves over to idolatry because they made an idol and offered sacrifices to it. The apostle Paul took this example of idolatry in order to admonish us and warn us against idolatry, here are his words: “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” (1 Corinthians 10:6-7). But why are we forbidden to make for ourselves an idol in order to worship it? Because those who make for themselves idols and worship them provoke God (who is a Jealous God, who wants men to worship Him only) to jealousy and move Him to anger. For the Israelites, by making idols and worshipping them in the wilderness, provoked God to jealousy and anger, as God said: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities” (Deuteronomy 32:21). That’s why God said to Israel: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Exodus 20:4-5) and again: “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the
day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth" (Deuteronomy 4:15-18). As you can see, among the sculptures and the images forbidden by God there are also those sculptures and images representing men and women, and this confirms that according to God are idols not only the sculptures and images that represent animals, but also those which represent a man or a woman, therefore those statues or images representing Jesus, Paul or Mary are idols. Yet, as we all know, the Roman Catholics don’t call them idols and don’t want us to call them idols but ‘holy images,’ because they say that they don’t worship them rather they venerate them because these images help them to remember those who are represented by those statues and images in order to imitate their virtues. And since someone could try to persuade you into making for yourselves these so called holy statues and images, I want to tell you these things. First of all, God commanded us not to make for ourselves an idol in the form of any figure, whether formed like a man or a woman or like any animal or any bird or any fish or any creeping thing of the earth; secondly, He commanded us not to serve them, which means that we must not clean them, nor carry them on our shoulders, nor put flowers or candles before them, nor offer sacrifices to them, nor honor them in any way, which are all things that will happen once the statue or the image has been made, for as we saw before, after the Israelites made the golden calf they worshiped it and offered sacrifices to it. And let no one of you think that by serving a statue or an image you would serve God because that is a lie, rather you would serve the demons which hide themselves behind any idol. For the apostle Paul said that “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (1 Corinthians 10:20 – NKJV); we can say the same thing about every service or sacrifice offered to a statue or an image, it is offered to demons and not to God. Therefore, we must flee any service or sacrifice offered to a so called holy image or holy statue, lest we provoke God to jealousy. In regard to the sacrifices offered to idols I want to tell you that you must abstain from things offered to idols (Acts 15:20,29; 1 Corinthians 10:14-31); no matter if they are fruits or animals or sweets or something else, we must abstain from them because those things are polluted by idols, being offered to demons and not to God. Therefore when the day of the so called patron saint of your town or country comes, you must abstain from every thing which is made to honor that dead man or that dead woman. Brothers, if you still have in your house some statues or images of the Roman Catholic Church, destroy them.

However, there are not only idols made of wood, of plaster or of stone or of paper representing animals or human beings, but also other kinds of idols. For instance, when someone begins to love money he becomes an idolater and thus money becomes his idol; that’s why Paul said that a covetous man “is an idolater” (Ephesians 5:5 – NKJV). Even those who love one of their relatives more than Jesus Christ are idolaters, that’s why Jesus said: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37 – NKJV). And the same thing must be said about those who love their job, or their house, or their car, or any other object, more than Jesus Christ. They indeed are not worthy of Jesus.

Also the worship offered to a minister of the Gospel or to the angels of God is idolatry, for the apostle Peter rebuked Cornelius, when he fell down at his feet and worshiped him, saying to him: “Stand up; I myself am also a man” (Acts 10:26 – NKJV), and the angel who showed John the things to come rebuked the apostle, when he fell down to worship before the feet of the angel, saying to him: “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God” (Revelation 22:9 – NKJV). As for the worship of angels, Paul warns us saying: “Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels” (Colossians 2:18 - NKJV). Last but not least, also the worship of Satan (Satanism) is idolatry, for when Satan tempted Jesus to worship him in exchange for power and glory, Jesus said to him: “Away with you, Satan! For it is
written, You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10 – NKJV).

Therefore, to conclude, brothers, let us not provoke God to jealousy nor provoke Him to anger by any form of idolatry. Know that idolaters will not inherit the Kingdom of God but they will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone where they will be tormented forever (1 Corinthians 6:9; Revelation 21:8). We must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but he is an idolater (1 Corinthians 5:8-12).

Fear God, brothers, love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and worship Him in spirit and truth until the end of your life. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Revelries and drunkennesses

Revelry and drunkenness are works of the flesh; revelry consists in eating immoderately while drunkenness consists in getting drunk with wine or with alcoholic drinks. Both of them are very widespread all over the world and they have harmful effects on the life of those who give themselves over to them. We who are children of God must abstain from eating immoderately and from getting drunk because our body is the temple of God and we must possess it in sanctification and honor at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ by abstaining from any vice and overindulgence. Several Scriptures warn us against these works of the flesh and tell us what is the end awaiting those who walk in them.

- Wisdom says: “Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Proverbs 23:19-21), and again: “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women [things - NKJV], and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Proverbs 23:29-35)

- Jesus said: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34).

- The apostle Paul said to the Romans: “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness ….” (Romans 13:13 - NKJV), and to the Ephesians: “Don’t get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery” (Ephesians 5:18 – NIV); and to the Galatians, after saying that revelries and drunkenness are works of the flesh, he says: “And the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21 – NKJV).

As you can see, the Scripture says in various ways what happens to those who give themselves over to revelries and drunkennesses; they will ruin themselves in this world, and at their death they will go to perdition. On the other hand, it cannot be otherwise because the Scripture says that “he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption” or destruction (Galatians 6:8 – NKJV) and that “the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:6 – NKJV).

Brothers, the fruit of the Spirit is temperance, that is, self-control (Galatians 5:23), and we must walk in the Spirit, that is, temperately, because this is the will of God for us. For sure, if we walk in the Spirit we will manage to use foods and drinks moderately and we won’t fulfil these desires of the flesh, that is, revelry and drunkenness.
We must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but he is a drunkard, with such a man we must not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:8-12).

**Eating blood and things strangled**

Even though Jesus said that “whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated” (Mark 7:18-19 - NKJV), and in saying this, he declared all foods ‘clean’, there are certain things that we who have believed in the Lord must not eat.

According to the decrees which were determined by the apostles and the elders, who gathered together at Jerusalem in order to discuss whether it was lawful to circumcise the Gentiles and to command them to keep the law or not, the things from which we must abstain are the following ones: things polluted by idols (of which I have already spoken), blood (therefore we must not eat blood sausage nor blood pudding) and things strangled (the meat of animals choked or strangled to death). For we read in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “Wherefore my sentence [it is James who is speaking] is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:19-29).

Therefore, brethren, any teaching that somehow nullifies the decrees determined by the apostles and the elders under the guide of the Holy Spirit is to be rejected vigorously. Let no one deceive you, beloved.

**Throwing away the leftovers**

The apostle John says that after Jesus fed about 5000 men with five loaves and two small fish He said to His disciples: “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost” (John 6:12-13 – NKJV). Therefore, they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

From the above mentioned words of Jesus we learn that we must not throw away the leftovers, but they must be kept in order to eat them afterwards. Someone may ask: ‘What’s the use of keeping four spoonfuls of soup or a little piece of bread or a few spaghetti?’ Here is my answer: ‘Why should we throw away some things which are still good to eat and which have been sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer? What right have we got to do such a thing?’
Not saying grace in the presence of unbelievers

Brothers, since I know that there are some who think that we who are sons of God must give thanks for the food we are about to eat only when we are at home with other brothers, but we don’t need to give thanks for the food when we are together with unbelievers or in the marketplace or somewhere else, I exhort you to expose this way of thinking and doing. Know this, that you must give thanks to God before you eat wherever you are. With regard to this, I remind you that Jesus gave thanks to God for the five loaves and the two fish before five thousand men besides women and children (John 6:11; Matthew 14:19), and that on one occasion Paul gave thanks to God for the food he was about to eat in the presence of more than two hundred unbelieving people (Acts 27:35-37).

Do not be ashamed to give thanks to God for your food in the presence of unbelieving people because this act also is a testimony to them. For it reminds them of the fact that there are some persons on earth who believe that their food is given to them by the God who is in heaven and thus (unlike the unbelieving persons, who don’t think at all that the food they eat is given to them by God in His mercy) they give thanks to Him before they eat.

Smoking

The Word of God doesn’t say explicitly that smoking is sin, but it does give directions and principles that can be used as a guide, which lead us to the conclusion that smoking is sin. Let us examine smoking. Is it necessary? Is it a healthy habit? No, it is neither necessary nor healthy for our body. Paul says: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12 – NKJV), and smoking is among the things which are not helpful. But not only it is among the things which are unhelpful, but it is also among the things which are harmful to the human body, for smoking harms smokers (for it causes bad breath, brown stained fingers and nails, it ages the skin prematurely; and causes cancer and emphysema, of which many people die every year). Now, since smoking harms the body, this means that if a believer smokes cigarettes he will destroy or damage the temple of God (because our body is the temple of God) and Paul says that “if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:17 – NIV). Besides this, smoking harms also other humans if you smoke near others, for it is common knowledge that second-hand smoke harms non-smokers lungs too and cause breathing problems for children. That’s why in this country a few years ago the Government issued a law which forbids smoking in public places (such as offices, restaurants, bars, schools, hospitals). Last but not least, smoking leads smokers to waste much money, and this is not right in the sight of God, for every Christian should spend his money wisely, thus on useful things and not on vain things as smokers do. God warns all those who waste their money saying: “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2 – NKJV). That’s why all those who turn to the Lord must quit smoking.

Several years ago the pastor of a Baptist Church during an interview (which was reported by a newspaper) said that according to him smoking a cigarette after a cup of coffee was not a sin. It is most likely that his opinion on smoking was influenced by that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the well known Baptist preacher who lived in the nineteenth century, who stated (in the autumn of 1874): ‘If anybody can show me in the Bible the command, ’Thou shalt not smoke,’ I am ready to keep it; but I haven't found it yet. I find ten commandments, and it's as much as I can do to keep them; and I've no desire to make them into eleven or twelve. ...... I wish to say that I'm not ashamed of anything whatever that I do, and I don't feel that smoking makes me ashamed, and therefore I mean to smoke to the glory of God.’

Unfortunately Charles Spurgeon was deceived by the seeming harmlessness of this sin, that’s why he said those words. We thoroughly disagree with what he said about smoking
(Unfortunately many Evangelical pastors agree with what he said). Smoking is sin, it is a worldly lust from which a believer must abstain in order to possess his own body in sanctification and honor. Let me make some remarks about the following words of Spurgeon ‘If anybody can show me in the Bible the command, 'Thou shalt not smoke,' I am ready to keep it; but I haven't found it yet,’ for I consider them very pernicious and deceitful. The fact that smoking is not prohibited by an express divine command, does not mean that we are allowed to smoke cigarettes or cigars; just as the fact that gambling is not expressly prohibited by a divine command does not mean that we are allowed to bet on horses or the results of the soccer championship; or just as the fact that the Bible does not expressly forbids us to go to discotheque to dance does not mean that we are allowed to go to this amusement place. For the Bible does not contain the list of all the worldly lusts from which we must abstain. However, the Bible – as I said before - does give directions and principles which help us to understand what God does not want us to do. You may ask me then, ‘How can you affirm that a certain habit or behaviour, which is not expressly prohibited by the Bible, is a worldly lust or a fleshly lust and thus is wrong?’ Well, by observing and examining the effects which that behaviour or habit has on people. Now, ‘Are the effects of smoking, gambling and dancing, good effects?’ No, they aren’t, rather they are very harmful (for smoking damages the body of smokers and leads them to waste money; gambling creates a lust for riches and encourages covetousness; and dancing promotes lust and sensuality). A tree is known by its fruit, isn’t it? So we judge a person by his fruits, and not by his leaves, don’t we? Likewise, we judge a certain habit or behaviour, which is not mentioned in the Bible, by the effects it has on people. Thus, if a certain habit or behaviour damages somehow our body or leads us to waste our time and money or tends to make us become violent or sensual or spiritually idle or unfruitful, etc. we regard it as a bad habit or wicked behaviour.

Now, as for smoking, some say: ‘Smoking soothes my nerves’. That is untrue, because smoking cannot soothe the nerves of anyone; it is God who soothes a man’s nerves and this is what He does without the help of cigarettes or cigars. If smoking soothes nerves, then we should say that sedatives calm down those who don’t have peace and that sleeping draughts make people sleep; while it is better to say that these medicines befuddle those who use them and intoxicate them. We believe that just as believers don’t need to take sedatives and sleeping draughts because they have the Lord who gives them peace in the day of trouble and sleep when they need to sleep, so a believer does not need any cigarette ‘to relax’. The soothing effect of smoking is a device of the devil through which he gets people to believe that smoking is helpful and keeps people in this form of slavery.

In the book of Isaiah are written the following words that are fit for any believer who still smokes because he thinks that smoking is not a sin: “He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside; and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isaiah 44:20 – NKJV).

Let it be known to all those who are still smoking that they must quit smoking immediately. You will say then: ‘How can we quit smoking?’ First of all, you must understand that you can do it in Christ Jesus, for it is written: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 – NKJV); secondly, I tell you to pray God in the name of Jesus Christ, so that He may set you free from this vice and He will certainly set you free once for all. Strife against sin, do not caress it.

**Taking drugs**

We have just said that smoking is sin; but it is sin also to take drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, and to take hallucinogens, such as LSD. The reason is the same I told you before, for our body is the temple of God and this temple is holy and we must possess it in sanctification and honor (1 Thessalonians 4:4) abstaining from all those things which are able to destroy or damage it, and drugs and hallucinogens damage the body.
Therefore, brothers, you who were formerly drug addicts, do not return to your old ways, that is, to drug addiction, for any reason; and you who have never known drug addiction, do not become drug addicts. A word about hallucinogens: not only do they destroy the body (particularly the mind), but they also put people in touch with demons, for those who take hallucinogens make astral trips during which they meet monsters and see strange things which belong to the occult world. So abstain from them.

**Stealing**

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28 – NKJV).

Therefore, he who was formerly a thief because he took pleasure in taking possession of his neighbor’s goods by fraud and violence, now he must not steal any longer, but rather he must labor, working honestly, so that he may help the needy. I would like you to notice that Paul says ‘working with his hands what is good’ or ‘doing something useful with his own hands’ (NIV) which means that a believer not only must work with his hands in order to conduct himself in a manner worthy of the Gospel, but he must also work honestly, that is, he must not cheat anybody through his work. Remember that Wisdom says: “Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice” (Proverbs 16:8 – NKJV). Therefore, let no one deceive you with the following words which are on the lips of many people: ‘All people steal, so I also steal’.

Stealing is sin, yet the devil makes it appear lawful or innocuous, but it is neither lawful because God says: “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15 – NKJV), nor innocuous because Wisdom says: “Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17 – NKJV). Therefore, let us not associate with those who steal, lest we set a snare for our soul. I would like to say something else: even stealing something from one’s parents is sin, for Wisdom says: “Whoever robs his father or his mother, and says, ‘It is no transgression,’ the same is companion to a destroyer” (Proverbs 28:24 – NKJV). And it is sin also to steal something in order to help the needy (on the contrary, the catholic ‘morality’ allows people to steal for this purpose because the Roman Catholic Church does not consider it an injustice).

According to the Scripture, slaves must not steal from their own masters but they must be obedient to them and show all good fidelity (Titus 2:9-10). Thieves will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10).

**Lying**

Today, many people are in the habit of lying, therefore they have a bad habit. But you, brothers, must not fall into this bad habit, for you must say the truth always, as it is written: “Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25 – NKJV).

Remember that Ananias and Sapphira his wife were put to death (by God) because they lied to the Holy Spirit. Here is what Luke wrote: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that
heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:1-11).

Brothers, we all are often tempted by the devil to tell lies. What should we do then? Let us resist the devil and speak truthfully to our neighbor. Let us remember that “lying lips are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 12:22 – NKJV) and that all those who love and practice falsehood will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8; 22:15)

To conclude, I want to say one last thing; since we must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, we are not allowed to lie in order to help someone. For instance, those who work as a secretary sometimes are commanded by their boss to tell those who ask by phone to speak with him that he is not in the office. How should a believer conduct himself in such circumstances? Should he/she obey his or her boss, and thus say that his or her boss is not in the office (even though he/she knows that the boss is in the office and does not want to be disturbed), or refuse to obey such an order? He/she must refuse to tell lies, and therefore he/she must say to his/her boss that he/she will say the truth, thus if the boss is in the office he/she will say that he is in the office, while if the boss is not in the office he/she will say that he is not in the office.

**Calumny**

Brothers in the Lord, you must hate and expose calumny. What's calumny? Calumny is the making of false and defamatory statements about someone. In the Scriptures we have several examples of persons who calumniated innocent people in order to ruin them.

- When the wife of Potiphar saw that Joseph refused to lie carnally with her and he left his garment in her hand she calumniated Joseph before the men of her house and her husband, for it is written: “She called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out” (Genesis 39:14-18).

- Jezebel the wife of king Ahab, induced the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth to calumniate Naboth in order to put him to death and thus she managed to give the vineyard of Naboth to Ahab his husband (the vineyard of Naboth was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab and Naboth had refused to give it to Ahab). The Scripture says: “And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so
sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die. And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died” (1 Kings 21:1-13).

● The chief priests calumniated Jesus in the presence of Pilate by saying: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar ….” (Luke 23:2). That accusation was false because Jesus did not pervert the nation of Israel nor did He forbid to pay taxes to Caesar, rather, with regard to the payment of taxes, He commanded to pay taxes to Caesar, for He said: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s ….” (Matthew 22:21 – NKJV).

● Some men were induced (by some members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen) to calumniate Stephen by saying: “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God” (Acts 6:11 – NKJV).

According to the law of Moses, calumniators, that is, false witnesses, after their witness proved to be false, had to be punished, for God said: “If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you” (Deuteronomy 19:16-20). The book of Proverbs says about the false witness: “Whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18 – NKJV), and: “A wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame” (Proverbs 13:5 – NKJV), and again: “The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor” (Proverbs 11:9 – NKJV), and again: “A false witness will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 19:5 – NKJV).

As you can see, the false testimony spoken against somebody in order to ruin him is condemned by the Scripture, and whoever speaks it is a fool and will not go unpunished. But even though the Scripture is very clear with regard to this, there are some among the people of God who take pleasure in calumniating, for they spread all kinds of false accusations against certain upright men who live righteously in order to move their friends away from them and make them appear evildoers.

To these people calumny is a weapon through which they think they can ruin people and they put their trust in calumny, but calumny sooner or later will prove to be a false accusation and therefore it will fail and those who have spread it will be put to shame and punished by God because they are deserving of God’s punishment.
Judging the brethren

Jesus said: “Judge not ….” (Matthew 7:1 – NKJV). It is clear therefore that we must not judge our brothers. But what does it mean not to judge our brothers? I will answer this question through the Scriptures.

- Paul says to the Corinthians: “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Corinthians 4:1-5 – NKJV). Now, some of the believers in Corinth had judged Paul to be inferior, in the sight of God, to Apollos and Cephas, for some of them said that they were of Apollos and others said that they were of Cephas, but there were other believers who had judged him to be superior to Apollos and Cephas because they said that they were of Paul. Then Paul admonished them and among other things he said to them: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord”. In this way Paul explained to them that judgement belongs to God and it is God who will judge him to be inferior or superior to Apollos or Cephas, while they (the believers in Corinth) could not judge him because they did not know all the counsels of his heart nor did they know all the counsels of the heart of Apollos and Cephas. Therefore, he commanded them not to judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who will reward each one of His sons according to his own labor but also according to all the hidden things (both good and bad things) done or said or thought by him. It is evident therefore that from this point of view we cannot judge a brother by saying that he is greater than another or by saying that he will receive a bigger reward than another or by saying that God will make him sit nearer to the Lord than another, because only God knows all thoughts, all works and all words of each one of His sons.

- Paul said to the Romans: “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. ….. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:1-6, 10-13). From these words we learn that if a brother has a certain opinion about foods which is different from the opinion of another brother - for instance, he thinks that he should abstain from eating meat, while the other brother is convinced that he may eat all things - he must not judge him who has a different opinion. Why? Because God has received both him who eats only vegetables and him who eats all things. Both of them, even though they have a different opinion about meat, act in that way to the Lord, for they give thanks to God, therefore he who is weak in the faith (he who eats only vegetables) must not judge him who is strong in the faith (that is, him who eats all things). On the other hand, even he who eats all things must not despise him who eats only vegetables. As far as days are concerned, we need to say the same thing; if a brother esteems one day (Saturday or Sunday, etc.) above another and thus he
observes it to the Lord, he must not judge him who esteems every day alike. And he who
esteems every day alike must not despise him who esteems one day above another. In other
words, the sons of God must receive one another just as God also received them in Christ and
must not pass judgement on disputable matters. In this case, each one must be fully convinced
in his own mind before God and must not grieve the other because of his different opinion.
Therefore, no matter what is the opinion of a brother about a particular food or day, we must
respect him. That's how we must conduct ourselves toward a brother who has a different opinion
than ours about a certain food but he does not command the others to conform to his opinion.
However, if a brother says that everybody must abstain from this or that food, then he must be
rebuked harshly because he teaches a doctrine of demons for "every creature of God is good,
and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of
God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5 – NKJV).

James said: “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and
judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judg the law, thou
art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy:
who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:11-12). First of all, bear in mind that James wrote
his epistle to believing Jews who were part of the diaspora, for at the beginning of his epistle he
wrote: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are
scattered abroad, greeting” (James 1:1). Therefore, he wrote to persons who knew the law and
still observed some precepts of the law (not in order to be justified by the law). Probably among
those brethren, who were Jews by birth, some thought that they did not have to keep any longer
some of the rites of their forefathers and spoke against or judged those who kept them. - Let us
remember that in Jerusalem, at the time when Paul returned from his third apostolic journey,
there were thousands of believing Jews who were zealous for the law (Acts 21:20), therefore we
should not be surprised if among the Jews who were scattered abroad there were some
believing Jews who were zealous for the law. - Then James found it necessary to write to those
brothers, exhorting them not to speak against (that is, not to judge) one another, because by so
doing they would speak against or judge the law. That's how we must interpret these words of
James.

At this point someone may ask: ‘Are we forbidden to judge brothers under any circumstance,
according to the Word of God, then? Not at all, because there are some other Scriptures which
affirm that we can, or rather, we must judge. Let us look at the circumstances in which we are
allowed to judge.

We can judge a dispute between brothers. For, concerning the fact that in the Church of Corinth
some brothers went to law against some other brothers before unbelievers rather than before
the saints, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?
and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye
not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have
judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the
church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that
shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Corinthians 6:2-5). As you can see, we, who are
the saints, are allowed to judge a dispute between believers. Therefore if a believer has a
dispute with another believer, he doesn’t need to take it before the ungodly for judgement but he
must take it before the saints because the saints are able to judge the things of this life.

We can judge those believers who have committed certain sins, which are particularly serious,
by handing them over to Satan and by expelling them from among us. For instance, Paul judged
that man who lived in Corinth who had his father’s wife; here is what he wrote to the Corinthians
concerning that man: “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already,
as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord
Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus
Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be
saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:3-5). Paul judged in this way also
Hymenaeus and Alexander, for he wrote to Timothy: “Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander;
whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:20).
That’s why Paul told us: “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13), because we have, as Church of God, authority to judge the wicked (fornicators, covetous persons, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards and swindlers) and expel them from among us.
There are other Scriptures which attest that we, as believers, can judge. For instance, Jesus said to the Jews: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24 – NKJV), and also: “Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?” (Luke 12:57 - NKJV). And Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “I speak as to wise men: judge for yourselves what I say” (1 Corinthians 10:15 – NKJV), and again: “Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:13 – NKJV), and again: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge” (1 Corinthians 14:29 – NKJV). Therefore, as believers, we can judge, but not according to appearance but with righteous judgement, also the teachings of a minister of the Gospel, prophecies and revelations. And obviously we will be able to judge with righteous judgement if we fear God and know the Scriptures.
Now let me give you a few examples of prophecies and people judged with righteous judgement. These prophecies are false, because they are inconsistent with the Scripture. ‘Thus says the Lord, You want to know if the commandment concerning the veil (1 Corinthians 11:10) is still mandatory; well, know this, it has passed away.’ ‘Thus says the Lord, You want to know if you, as a divorced man, can remarry, as long as your wife is alive; well, you can, so do not be afraid to marry the woman you love.’ These other prophecies also are false, because they strengthen the hands of the wicked, so that they do not turn from their evil ways to save their soul, ‘Thus says the Lord, the Roman Catholics are Christians, for they have been born again through water baptism and they also heed my Word, so do not be afraid to accept them as brothers and sisters.’ ‘Thus says the Lord, those who affirm that you, as sons of God, must abstain from going to the beach, watching television, and telling jokes, are trying to deceive you, so do not listen to them.’
Those prophets who are greedy for money, sensual, arrogant, sexually immoral, and who lie against the truth and make false predictions, are false prophets, ministers of Satan who transform themselves into ministers of righteousness. Why do we say this about them? Because they bear bad fruits. For Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruit, and thus, just as we can recognize a good tree so we can recognize also a bad tree (Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33-35). And these persons who call themselves prophets are bad trees because the fruit of their mouth and their works are evil. Therefore if the Scripture calls them false prophets we must call them in this way. Likewise, those teachers who are lovers of money, who are presumptuous, self-willed, who speak evil of dignitaries, who carouse in the daytime, who are slaves of the pollutions of the world, who teach damnable heresies, are false teachers; for their words and works are evil, and thus we judge them to be false teachers. Don’t be deceived by the smooth and flattering words of some (who have been believers even for many years) who refuse to expose these impostors in order to avoid persecution.
Those sisters who wear miniskirts, or low-necked dresses, or jewelry, or trousers, or make up, etc., do not perfect holiness with propriety. We are not judging them unjustly because we don’t pass judgement on them according to appearance but according to real facts.
Those brothers and sisters who say ‘Yes’ to the worldly lusts love the world and don’t have the love of the Father in them: we don’t judge them unjustly, for the facts speak for themselves; they love the world and the things which are in the world.
Those preachers who charge a certain amount of money for every sermon or for every prayer for the sick or for every prophecy serve Mammon and not the Lord Jesus; we are not judging them unjustly but righteously, according to their wicked conduct.
To conclude I want to say this: many pastors, not wanting to expose the worldliness which exists in the midst of the Church (lest they make enemies), cite the biblical passage which says that we
must not judge according to appearance, and thus they accuse us, who judge those brothers who say ‘Yes’ to worldly lusts to be carnal, of judging people according to appearance. Now, brothers, I speak as to wise men, judge for yourselves what I am going to say. Tell me this: ‘If one tells you that he has planted a cherry tree in his field and that tree bears plums and you say that that tree is a plum tree, could you ever accept his reproof according to which you must not say that that tree is a plum tree but a cherry tree? I don’t think you would accept such a reproof. Why then, in seeing some believers who love the fashion, make up, jewelry, television, soccer, money, who love to go to dance, to the beach and to the amusement parks, who love to fornicate, to commit adultery, to practice falsehood and duplicity, should we be accused of judging them unjustly or according to appearance because we say that they don’t have the love of the Father in them and they live for themselves and not for the Lord? Is it not true that their fruits bear witness that they love the world rather than the Lord? Is it not true that these people do not bear good fruits to the glory of God? Is it not true that they walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit? Why then should we say that they are spiritual? Should we call them spiritual just because they attend a place of worship on which it is written ‘Pentecostal Church’ or because they speak with other tongues or because they prophesy? And why should we call some ‘servants of God,’ when they live a rebellious life for they have a heart trained in covetous practices and give themselves over to the lusts of the flesh? Should we call them ‘servants of God’ because they have ‘a piece of paper’ and are able to make a speech by quoting a verse of the Bible after another? How can we call them ‘servants of God’ when everybody can see that they serve their belly rather than God? And besides this, why should I not expose the worldly lusts, when God commands me to expose them? Should I refrain from exposing them to please those who say ‘Yes’ to them and thus to avoid persecution? Certainly not, because it is written that if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

So, brothers, in the light of what the Scripture teaches, I tell you to beware of all those pastors who tolerate worldliness, for in so doing they deceive themselves and the hearts of the simple.

Bad language (stupid words, vulgar and frivolous witticisms, jokes, etc.)

Brothers, now I want to speak to you about the tongue, that is to say, about our speech. The tongue is a little member of our body situated in our mouth. God said to Moses: “Who has made man’s mouth? .... Have not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11 – NKJV), therefore our mouth was made by God and since God “works out everything for his own ends” (Proverbs 16:4 - NIV) the man’s mouth is useful. We know that God made man’s mouth in order to enable him to speak, to eat and drink, and in fact we use our mouth to praise and to pray God, to deliver to other people our thoughts, our opinions, our feelings and above all the Word of God, and we use our mouth also to eat and to drink in order to nourish our body so that he may have the necessary strength to work and to move freely. Now, one day Jesus said: “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (Matthew 15:11 - NKJV), this means that there is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him because “there is nothing unclean of itself” (Romans 14:14 – NKJV), for “every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5 – NKJV). However, whereas on the one hand it is true that what we eat cannot defile us because it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, on the other hand it is also true that we can defile ourselves by speaking corrupt words. At this point, it must be said that “those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart” (Matthew 15:18 – NKJV), therefore the things that a man says are nothing but the things which are in his heart. We can compare man’s heart to a store from which a man draws out continually what is into it. This is why we can know what kind of person is the one with whom we talk also by his speech, for his words reflect exactly the thoughts of his heart. For Jesus said: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth
forth evil things” (Matthew 12:35). Have you ever wondered why a good man speaks in a way which is very different from the way a wicked man speaks? This happens because a good man has the wisdom of God in his heart and thus when he speaks he speaks with wisdom and righteousness, as it is written: “Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding and even among fools she lets herself be known” (Proverbs 14: 33 – the first part is from the NKJV and the second part from the NIV) and again: “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom” (Proverbs 10:31 – NKJV); while a wicked person speaks evil things because his heart is full of wickedness.

What should we do then lest we sin with our mouth and defile ourselves through our words? We must keep our heart, as Wisdom says: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23 – NKJV). But if we give place to unbelief and wickedness, know that this will have harmful effects on our speech. I will give you some examples taken from the Scripture in order to explain to you this concept. In the Psalms it is written: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1), however, besides saying it in his heart the fool says it also with his mouth; why? Because out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks. Therefore, it is clear that out of an unbelieving heart come expressions of unbelief. Is not this what the example of the Israelites in the wilderness teaches us? Yes, that’s exactly what the example of the Israelites teaches us. Let us look closely at it. God called the Israelites “a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God” (Psalm 78:8 – NIV) and “a people whose hearts go astray” (Psalm 95:10 - NIV). Now, God is He who searches the minds and hearts and the witness He witnessed of the heart of those Israelites is true. Let’s look therefore at what those Israelites spoke, that we may understand that their speech reflected the stubbornness of their heart and the unbelief which was in their heart. When the twelve spies, who had been sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan, returned from spying out the land and came back to Moses and all the congregation of the children of Israel, since ten of them said to the congregation that although the land of Canaan was a good land they were not able to overcome it because the land was inhabited by the giants, the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron and said: “Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us” (Deuteronomy 1:27) and also: “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Numbers 14:4). So they did not believe in the Lord, who had said to them: “Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 1:21). And it was because of their unbelief that God swore to them that they would not enter the promised land, that in the wilderness they would be consumed and there they would die. But where did those words of unbelief come from? They came from their heart, which went astray and was an unbelieving heart.

Let’s see now what are the evil things which come from within and defile a man. Jesus said: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23). Therefore, Jesus called all these things ‘evil things’ and said that they defile those who speak them. That’s why the apostle Paul said to the Ephesians: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:3-4), for he knew what are the things that must not be named by the saints lest they defile themselves. I ask you: ‘If those things edified and imparted grace to the hearers, would have Paul commanded that they must not even be named among us?’ Not at all, because Paul never commanded the saints to abstain from things which were useful to the saints and because he wrote all things to the saints “for what is proper” (1 Corinthians 7:35 - NKJV) and for their own profit.

Why should we abstain from all these things? For these reasons: in order to please God and to be an example to the people of the world, who take pleasure in the things forbidden by God, for Jesus said that we are “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13 - NKJV), so that the name of God
may be glorified in us. Now, salt seasons foods, but salt is not seasoned by foods. What do I mean by that? I mean that it is the people of the world who need to see in us an example, and not the contrary, because we are light while they are darkness. And so that they might see in us an example we need to use a sound, serious and blameless language, without foolish talk or coarse joking and any turbid word. In this way, that is, through our example, they will understand how they should speak. But if we conform ourselves to the violent, coarse and irreverent language used by the unbelievers, we will be of no use to them because they won't be able to taste the salt since the salt has lost its flavor, as it is written: “But if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” (Matthew 5:13 - NKJV). Therefore, I say it again in these terms, if we cast away the fear of God and the wisdom of God, we will become just as the tasteless salt which is good for nothing but to be thrown out. I ask you: ‘What good is, in the midst of this dark world, a believer who in the place of worship reads the Word of God and weeps and cries when he prays, but outside the place of worship, that is, at home and in the road or at work, he uses a language full of bad words and vulgarities and he speaks evil of his neighbor?’ He is good for nothing, don’t you think so?

James said: “Indeed we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body” (James 3:3 - NKJV), which means that it is sufficient to put bits in the mouths of these animals so fast and strong in order to turn them wherever we want them to go. Likewise, if with the help of God we put bits into our mouth we will manage to bridle our whole body and so we will not make threatening gestures, we will not lift our hands against our neighbor, we will not move our body in a way that is not fitting for the saints. Think about what I am going to say: when the buffoons (that is, the comic actors and the comedians) perform in public, they make threatening gestures, they make strange and ridiculous faces, they are dressed in an indecent and abominable way, and they move their body perversely, do you know why? Because they refuse to put bits into their mouth and thus their tongue leads them to act in that way. Think about the quarrels also: do you know what causes men to quarrel? The tongue, for it is written: “A fool’s lips enter into contention” (Proverbs 18:6- NKJV). And do you know what leads men to lift up their hand against one another? The tongue, for it is written that the mouth of the fool “calls for blows” (Proverbs 18:6 – NKJV). Wisdom says also that “a whisperer separates the best of friends” (Proverbs 16:28 – NKJV), which means that those who slander their neighbor manage with their tongue to separate him from his best friends. Do you realize how much evil power is in the perverse tongue? Therefore, let us watch, so that no corrupt word may proceed out of our mouth because corrupt words have only bad effects on ourselves and on others.

James said that “the tongue is a fire” (James 3:6 – NKJV) and what kindles this fire? The apostle says that the tongue “is set on fire by hell [Greek: geenna]” (James 3:6 – NKJV), that is, the everlasting fire; therefore let us not permit geenna to set on fire our tongue, so we will not kindle strife.

James calls the tongue “a world of iniquity” (James 3:6 – NKJV) because through it men say the most wicked and perverse things; the same apostle says that the tongue is “full of deadly poison” (James 3:8 – NKJV) to show us that death is in the power of the tongue. How should our speech be then? We find the answer in the Scripture. Paul said to the Colossians: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one …. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 4:6; 3:16 – NKJV), and to the Ephesians: “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18-20 – NKJV). If we keep these commandments, we will be able to distinguish ourselves from the people of the world. Why? Because we know that those who are outside speak to one another with jokes, stupid and offensive words, empty words spoken by their favourite comedians and singers, and by philosophers and famous writers, and they tell one another impure stories and all kinds of witty
remarks. On the other hand, the word of God does not dwell in them, they don't know the psalms, the hymns and the spiritual songs, and thus they speak to one another with the things they have in their heart.

However, those who know the truth must speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and those of the apostles and the prophets, so that they may comfort, edify, teach, and admonish one another. Does this happen among the people of God? Yes, but it happens rarely, for almost all the believers speak to one another with impure stories, stupid words, vulgar and frivolous witticisms (witty remarks with a double meaning, one innocent and the other unchaste), and jokes.

As for jokes, they tell all kinds of jokes, such as jokes about the governing authorities appointed by God and sometimes even jokes about God, Jesus, the prophets and the apostles. And this form of speech in many cases passes unnoticed because it has become fashionable to use it. I can assure you, brothers, that this form of speech, which is present even in the sermons of some preachers, does not impart any grace to the hearers; it makes people laugh and sneer, but it does not edify the hearers. But on the other hand most believers want preachers to speak with jokes and not seriously; most believers hate serious sermons, they hate reprimands and exhortations because they don't take pleasure in the Word of God any longer; they want to laugh, they want to joke, just as the people of the world. They even say to us: 'God does not want us to sulk!' But have we ever affirmed the contrary? It is written and we proclaim: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4 – NKJV) and also: "Rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16 - NKJV). But what kind of joy Paul is speaking about? Paul is speaking of that joy which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and not of the false and deceitful joy which is caused by jokes. When I was a slave of sin I had plenty of this kind of joy and I caused people to laugh a lot with my jokes, but what good was that joy? It was useless to me because Paul says to the Romans: "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Romans 6:21 - NKJV).

So you deceive your neighbor so that you may laugh; but have you never read that Scripture which says: "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, 'I was only joking!' (Proverbs 26:18-19 – NKJV)? Listen, you who takes pleasure in entertaining the believers with jokes and witticisms: have you ever read that Scripture which says "all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10:23 – NKJV)? And if you have read it, did you understand it or do you pretend you have not understood it? You justify your perverse language by all kinds of arguments, but you cannot confirm it through the Word of God because this offensive and dishonest language, that you like so much, is abhorred by God. Yet you ignore it and keep on using such a perverse language, not knowing that also because of this "the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6 - NKJV). When will you come to your senses? When will you acknowledge the truth? Be sober-minded, use clean language, seasoned with salt. It is written: "For the ear tests words as the palate tastes food" (Job 34:3 – NKJV); how is it then that your palate perceives that a certain food is insipid, but your ear has not yet perceived that your conversation is insipid? You have become dull of hearing and your ear has become calloused, so you don't consider the words you speak, even though they are improper, dishonest and offensive. I exhort you to circumcise your ears, so that you may begin to expose the jokes you say together with your arrogant friends .... even during the worship service. If the righteous is grieved when he hears you speaking, it is because your jokes grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who is in Him and in you also; he does not take pleasure in your jokes because he pursues righteousness; you see that he is sad and angry because of your conduct but you don't care about this because you feel strong, since besides you there are many others who use this perverse language.

As I said before, it is a rare thing to see brothers speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; the reason is because many don't want to do the right things rather they want to do the wrong things. In the Church, a brother who is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, troubles those who take pleasure in witticisms and jokes. In order to be esteemed and accepted by some, it seems that one needs to tell continually
jokes, and speak ambiguous words, even from the pulpit and not only when one meets the brethren outside the place of worship. On the contrary, persecutions and insults await those who have decided to put the Word of God into practice. Why? Because they are ‘fanatic’, ‘too much spiritual’, ‘a real misery’. There are some preachers who in their sermons mention more witticisms than biblical passages, and if you tell them that witticisms are not to be said even from the pulpit because that’s not the way the Word of God must be preached, then they reply: ‘We think that Jesus told some jokes to His disciples sometimes, and that the apostles also told some jokes while they were teaching?’ Listen, you who have not yet given up preaching with witticisms and jokes; neither Jesus nor the apostles preached the Word of God stuffing their messages with witticisms as you do. Therefore, repent, why do you mix the sacred with the profane? Can’t you see that certain false prophets are more serious than you when they preach; you are puffed up, that’s why you say those things. I know that your hearers like very much your witticisms and jokes, for they laugh, they move their head to show you that they agree with you, they wave their handkerchief, they clap their hands when you tell them your jokes. You think you are very important, so esteemed; they, who don’t have enough discernment, almost bow down before you!! Purify your hearts and then you will cease entertaining your hearers with jokes. “Let your laughter be turned to mourning” (James 4:9 – NKJV); it’s time for you to put in practice this word.

Beloved, let us ask God to set a guard over our mouth and let us put bits into our mouth; this does not mean that we must not speak at all, but that we must be slow to speak and that when we speak we are to use a sound speech; if we do these things we will prosper. Certainly, we all stumble in many things (James 3:2), so we all make mistakes when we speak, sometimes because we are hasty, some other times we are in high spirits because of a spiritual victory but our attention is distracted all of a sudden and that lack of attention costs us dear, some other times unintentionally (that is, without premeditation) we say something which is incorrect. Nevertheless, we want to be perfect; surely the mistakes we make will not stop us from aiming for perfection because we wish to be an example …. also in speech, by speaking truthfully and seriously and peaceably to one another, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, comforting one another with the words of God, telling Bible stories or Christian testimonies to edify one another, giving thanks for all things to God the Father.

Grumbling (or murmuring)

The story of the people of Israel during their journey from Egypt to the promised land is studded with grumblings (or murmurings) against God and against Moses and Aaron.

At the waters of Marah, since the waters were bitter, the Israelites “murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (Exodus 15:24).

In the wilderness of Sin “the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:2-3).

At Rephidim the children of Israel murmured against Moses, as it is written: “And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Exodus 17:1-3).
At Taberah it came to pass that “when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp” (Numbers 11:1).

At Kibroth Hattaavah “the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (Numbers 11:4-6).

At Kadesh, after ten of the twelve spies gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, “all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Numbers 14:1-4).

On another occasion the Israelites murmured because they did not have any food and water and their soul loathed the bread God gave to them (called Manna) and for this reason God sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died (Numbers 21:4-6).

All these things happened to them as examples, for Paul says: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Corinthians 10:10). James confirms that we must not murmur, saying: “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9 - NKJV). Therefore, we must not grumble against God nor against our brothers, beloved, lest we be punished by God. On the contrary, we must be patient in the midst of our sufferings (James 5:7), as James says, and we must take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience (James 5:10), as well as Job who was patient in the midst of his trials (James 5:11).

Reviling (or slandering)

We must not revile the brethren nor the people of the world nor the governing authorities appointed by God to rule our nation (as many do often when they demonstrate against the governing authorities because of a certain law which they consider to be unjust). For the Scripture commands us “to speak evil of no one” (Titus 3:2 - NKJV).

As for not reviling the governing authorities, it is written: “You shall not … curse a ruler of your people” (Exodus 22:28), and not only with your mouth but even in your thought, for it is written: “Do not curse the king, even in your thought ….. For a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter” (Ecclesiastes 10:20 – NKJV).

Revilers (slanderers) will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10). We must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is a reviler, we must not even eat with such a person (1 Corinthians 5:8-12).

Blaspheming the name of the Lord

In the law it is written: “Do not blaspheme God” (Exodus 22:28 – NIV), therefore we must not blaspheme the Holy Name of God. Under the law anyone who blasphemed God was deserving of death and had to be stoned. The following incident, occurred during the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, confirms this clearly: “And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose
father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death" (Leviticus 24:10-16).
Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan, so that they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20).
Blasphemers will not inherit the kingdom of God but they will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

**Tempting God**

Brothers, see that you do not tempt God. Someone may ask: 'What does it mean to tempt God?' I will answer this question by mentioning one of the temptations Jesus bore while He was in the wilderness. Matthew wrote: "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:5-7). As we can see, the devil tried to induce Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple by quoting a passage of the Scripture which assures divine protection to those who trust in God. Certainly, Jesus was a man who did trust in God with all his heart and knew that He was protected by the angels of God continually, but He did not consent to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and resisted the devil by quoting the passage of the law which commands us not to tempt God. Therefore, if Jesus had thrown Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple He would have tempted God and He would have broken the law.

But how does the devil try to induce the children of God to tempt God? In many ways, and he often uses the Scripture to tempt them. For instance, while there is a tempest on a sea or on a river he may try to induce a believer to walk on the water because Jesus commanded Peter to come to Him on the water; or he may try to induce a believer to walk in the midst of the fire because God protected the three young Jews (Shadrach, Meshac and Abed-Nego) from the fire which was into the burning fiery furnace; or he may try to induce a believer to pick up poisonous serpents because Jesus promised that those who will take up serpents will be protected by God (this is what actually takes place among some churches in the United States of America). In all these cases, it must be said to the devil: 'It is written: You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'

On the contrary, if in particular circumstances God commands (through a word of wisdom) one of his children to pick up a serpent (God commanded Moses to reach out his hand and take a serpent by the tail), or to walk on the water (Jesus commanded Peter to come to Him on the water); or to walk through the fire, then the matter is completely different because he who obeys that specific order of God does not tempt God. But I say it again, there must be a divine revelation (and when a believer obeys such commands of God the gift of faith is manifested).

Finally, I want to say that if a child of God believes that God is able to heal him and he expects to be healed of his sickness, he does not tempt God because he obeys the Word of God which commands us to trust in God with all our heart and to call upon Him in the midst of all our distresses. Therefore, if a brother who is sick refuses to send for the doctor, but he calls for the
elders of the church so that they may pray over him the prayer of faith, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, as James says (James 5:14-15), he does obey what God commands him to do, and the elders of the church must pray over him in faith so that God may heal him. They must not send him to the doctors, but they must pray over him. I have said these things because I know that in many Churches some pastors, who don’t have the necessary discernment, call good evil, for in their opinion those who trust God with all their heart so that God may heal them are tempting God! This is one of the devices of the devil, who makes every effort to induce men not to trust in God. According to some pastors, if a brother is sick and close to death (that is, if the doctors say he’s done for) then he does not tempt God by trusting in God with all his heart for his healing, but as long as his sickness can be cured by the doctors he must trust in the doctors for his healing and not in God, lest he tempt God!! Unfortunately this is what happens among the Churches of God.

Swearing

Jesus said: “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord’. But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:33-37 - NKJV), and James confirmed His words saying: “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgement” (James 5:12 – NKJV).

Therefore, as believers, we cannot swear any kind of oath, lest we fall into the judgement of God. Thus, if we are called to testify in court, we cannot swear to tell the truth. We simply tell the truth, for God commands us to speak truthfully to everyone.

Taking God’s name in vain

We, as children of obedience, must not take God’s name in vain, as it is written: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7). For His name is holy, and thus it must be hallowed (Matthew 6:9). You may ask me, ‘When does one take God’s name in vain?’ Here is the answer.

If one makes a vow (a solemn promise) to the Lord, and he does not perform it, he takes God’s name in vain. That’s why Solomon said: “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

If one swears by God’s name falsely, he takes God’s name in vain, for he profanes His name. That’s why the Law says: “Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:12 – NIV). – However, remember that we, as Christians, are forbidden to swear any kind of oath, lest we fall into judgement (Matthew 5:34; James 5:12). If one claims to be speaking for God (that is, in His name) when he is not speaking His Word, he takes God’s name in vain. That is what the false prophets did in the days of Jeremiah, and because of their sin God foretold Jeremiah He would punish them. “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets
that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.” (Jeremiah 14:14-15).
If one refers to God in trash talk or he uses God's name as an exclamation, he takes God's name in vain.

**Meddling in other people’s business**

Brothers in the Lord, the Scripture says: “We urge you brethren ... that you also aspire to lead a quite life, to mind your own business ....” (1 Thessalonians 4:10-11 - NKJV) and again: “But let none of you suffer .... as a busybody in other people's matters’ (1 Peter 4:15 - NKJV).
Therefore, do not be curious and do not meddle in other people's business; you have got enough things of yours to mind and enough problems to resolve in your own house and you don't need to know the things and problems of other people.
Beloved, mind your own business.

**Being ashamed of the Gospel**

The devil tries to induce believers to be ashamed of the Gospel and thus of the Lord Jesus Christ, because the Gospel is the announcement of His death, which He suffered for our sins, and of His resurrection, which took place for our justification (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 4:25).
Why does the devil try to induce believers to be ashamed of the Gospel? Because he knows that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, therefore according to the devil sinners must not hear the Gospel; and also because he knows that if a believer is ashamed of Jesus, Jesus also will be ashamed of him in that day, as it is written: “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38 – NKJV).
Therefore, this temptation worked by the devil has two purposes: to keep those who are under his power from hearing the only message which is able to save them from his hands and thus from eternal perdition, and to keep those who have been delivered from his hand from being delivered from the wrath to come.
But you, brothers, do not be ashamed of the Gospel, rather proclaim it every time you have the opportunity to proclaim it, at the barber’s shop, at school, at work, in the street, in the marketplace, at the supermarket, on the bus or on the train; in other words, wherever you are and every time you see that God gives you the opportunity to speak to the lost. Do not be shy, don't be afraid of men, do not be afraid of their insults: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7 – NKJV).
And proclaim the Gospel with boldness, as you should, not with persuasive words of human wisdom nor with excellency of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. Because this message, which is called by the scornful 'old tale' and which is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, is the message that brought you up out of the miry clay where you were, and set you free from the bondage of sin and gave you peace and joy, and it is able to save the greatest sinner on the face of the earth.
Beloved, be strong.
Covetousness

One day Jesus said: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Therefore, as it is fitting for the saints, we must beware of covetousness. What is covetousness? It is a greed for money or possessions, and those who are greedy for money and possessions want to heap up more and more money and material things for themselves and do not want to share their things with those who are in need and need their help. The apostle Paul called covetousness 'a root of all kinds of evil' for he said to Timothy: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10 – NKJV), and he told the Ephesians that no "covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5 – NKJV).

Solomon warned us against covetousness through these words: "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Proverbs 23:4-5), "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Jesus Christ spoke the following parable to warn us not to be covetous: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21). Notice that this man was already rich when his ground produced a good crop, and since he was covetous, when he saw his abundant crops he did not think of giving part of them to the needy but he decided to keep all his goods for himself and to enjoy them. However, he was called by God 'fool' because he refused to lay up for himself treasures in heaven.

Brothers, let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with what you have, for God Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you’ (Hebrews 13:5); and give generously and with a cheerful heart every time you are called to meet the needs of the poor or of your pastor, or you are called to pay for the expenses for the place of worship (that is, for the rent, the light, etc.), or you are called to do all kinds of good work, because this is the will of God. And, as Paul says, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8 – NKJV).

Do not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is covetous; with such a man you must not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:11)

Ungratefulness

As children of obedience, we must be grateful to God for He revealed to us His Son, and He rescued us from the power of darkness, and we are grateful to Him by doing what is right in His sight. However, we must be grateful also to all those who do good to us. We must be grateful, for it is written: "Be thankful" (Colossians 3:15 – NKJV). Ungratefulness is caused by greed, and by a short memory toward those who have done good to us.

Nabal, for instance, was ungrateful to David and his men, as it is written: “And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard
that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was
there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they
will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good
day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.
And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the
name of David, and ceased. And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David?
and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man
from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my
shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?” (1 Samuel 25:5-11). And
because of his answer he made David angry, and had it not been for Nabal’s wife (who took the
initiative in overriding the effect of her husband’s bullish behaviour) David would have killed
Nabal.
The children of Israel were ungrateful to the house of Gideon, for it is written: “And it came to
pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring
after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the
LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:
Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the
goodness which he had shewed unto Israel” (Judges 8:33-35).
Therefore, let us take heed to ourselves and let us make every effort to repay the good which
our neighbour, whether he is a child of God or not, does to us.

Envy

What is envy? According to the Oxford Dictionary envy is a ‘discontented or resentful longing
aroused by another’s possessions, qualities, or luck’. The Holy Scripture states that “for all toil
and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbour” (Ecclesiastes 4:4 – NKJV), and this is
confirmed by the following incident written in the Scripture: “Then Isaac sowed in that land, and
received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed
great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks,
and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. For all the
wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines
had stopped them, and filled them with earth” (Genesis 26:12-15).
Wisdom says that “envy is rottenness to the bones” (Proverbs 14:30 – NKJV); therefore it
consumes or eats away to the marrow those who walk in it. Envy is one of the works of the flesh
(Galatians 5:21), therefore we must flee it.
Why should we avoid being envious of a brother, if he is successful in his work or God answers
his prayer or he is successful in the ministry God has given him? Because we are members of
one another and we form one body. Let us suppose that someone compliments you on the
beauty of your eyes and your arm is annoyed for the compliments received by your eyes, or that
a member of your body is angry and hates another member of your body because it has a
different function, what would you think? Would you not think that some of your members are
walking in an unworthy manner.
Likewise, those who are envious of other brothers, do not conduct themselves in a manner
worthy of the Gospel of Christ.
Paul says that “if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26),
this is the right thing we must do when our brothers are honored by God, we must rejoice with
them. Just as David did, for in the Psalms David said first: “May the Lord answer you in the day
of trouble ..... may He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your purpose”
(Psalm 20:1,4 – NKJV), and then he said: “We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of
our God we will set up our banners!” (Psalm 20:5 – NKJV).
Obviously, there are some who don't heed the Word of God and, being full of envy, rise up
against some brothers because they see that God is with them and honor them in a particular
ministry, but these people don’t walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel, for they lead a disorderly life and in due season the Lord will repay them according to their works.

Bear in mind always that those who are envious of another person conduct themselves badly toward that person who is envied by them, for envy only leads to evil, this is confirmed by the conduct of the Philistines toward Isaac, for – as we saw before – the Scripture says that they stopped up all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father and they filled them with earth. But there are other passages of the Scripture which confirm this, here they are.

- “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt” (Acts 7:9 – NKJV).
- “They envied Moses in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord” (Psalm 106:16 – NKJV); these words refer to Korah, Dathan and Abiram and to other Israelites who gathered together against Moses and Aaron accusing them of exalting themselves above the assembly of the Lord (Numbers 16:1-3).
- “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with envy, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison” (Acts 5:17-18).
- “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 13:44-45 - NKJV).

However, we must not be envious only of the righteous who are blessed by God, but also of the wicked who prosper, for the Scripture says: “Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity” (Psalm 37:1 – NKJV), and again: “Do not let your heart envy sinners” (Proverbs 23:17 – NKJV).

The reason is always the same, because it leads only to evil.

Jealousy

Jealousy also is one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Therefore we must flee it. Jealousy causes people to be fiercely protective or vigilant of a person whom they love or the things they possess because they are afraid of losing the persons they love or the things they possess.

So a man who is jealous of his wife can even forbid his wife to speak with other men or to go out, because he is afraid that his wife may fall in love with another man, and this feeling does not come from God. Anyone who is jealous of a thing will forbid everybody to use that thing (a car, a tractor, a cell-phone, etc.) because he is afraid that thing may be damaged, stolen, etc.

In the Scripture we have an example of jealousy which shows that jealousy leads people to act wrongly. While the Israelites were at Kibroth Hattaavah it came to pass that God took of the Spirit that was on Moses and put the Spirit on the seventy elders chosen by Moses, and when the Spirit rested on them they prophesied. “However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp’. Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said: ‘Moses, my lord, stop them!’ But Moses replied, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!’” (Numbers 11:26-29 – NIV). Please, notice how Joshua on that occasion was jealous of Moses and Moses rebuked him.
Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is called duplicity, simulation and falsehood, and is something you, beloved, must beware of. For Paul says that love must be “without hypocrisy” (Romans 12:9 – NKJV) and Peter says that we must lay aside hypocrisy (1 Peter 2:1).

The hypocrites are those who simulate goodliness, goodness, zeal and other good qualities; we have an example of hypocrites in the Pharisees who lived in the days of Jesus. According to what the Scripture says, the Pharisees gave a tenth of all they got, they travelled land and sea to win one proselyte, they paid much heed to the outward cleaning for they did not eat unless they washed their hands in a special way and when they came from the marketplace they did not eat unless they washed, they did not eat with sinners and tax collectors lest they should defile themselves, they fasted twice a week, they sat in Moses’ seat and taught the people, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others and they were considered righteous by the people, but actually they were full of hypocrisy and wickedness because they themselves did not put into practice what they taught people to do, for they loved money, they neglected justice, mercy and faith, and they did all their works in order to be seen by men. And because of their hypocrisy Jesus said to them: “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell [geenna]?” (Matthew 23:33 – NKJV). Therefore, according to the words of Jesus, the Pharisees will be thrown into the everlasting fire, even though they outwardly appeared righteous to men. That's where the hypocrites will go, brothers.

Therefore, take heed to yourselves and beware of all sorts of simulations and duplicities. Don’t tell others to do what you yourselves refuse to do; and don’t pretend to be righteous and holy, when you conduct yourselves as the sinners; don’t pretend to be generous or willing to give an offering, when you are covetous; don’t pretend to pray long prayers, when you never pray to God; do not love to be seen reading your Bible in the place of worship, as if you love very much the Bible, when at home you never open your Bible; and you, sisters in the Lord, don’t pretend to be an example in clothing on Sunday in the place of worship, when during the other days of the week you dress like the fashion models or the prostitutes, thinking that no one of the brethren will see you; and you, brothers, do not pretend to be an example in clothing at the place of worship on Sunday, when during the other days of the week at home you wear shorts or sleeveless shirts or you are bare-chested or half-naked, and you go at work dressed in a provocative way.

Do not deceive yourselves; because sooner or later every simulation of yours will be manifest to all because the brethren will find out what you really are and how you conduct yourselves at home or at work. Be sincere, acknowledging your faults, but do not deceive the brethren nor yourselves above all. See to it that you conduct yourselves in manner worthy of the Gospel, without any simulation at home, at work, at school, at the place of worship, whether you are alone or with other people.

I conclude with these words of Jesus: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be shown” (Luke 12:1-2 – NKJV).

Unrighteousness

Paul says to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Corinthians 6:9). But who are the unrighteous? They are those who, having a matter against another brother, go to law before the unbelievers and not before the saints (1 Corinthians 6:1-9); those who have plenty of material things but they don’t want to help the needy; those who show favouritism, thus they honor the rich, the nobles and the wise after the flesh by speaking to them good and favourable words and are very attentive toward them, while they despise the poor, those who are of low position and the unlearned, by dealing violently and
harshly with them and by showing complete indifference toward them (James 2:1-13); those who are racist, thus they treat well those who belong to their own race, while they deal badly with all those who belong to other races because they despise them or because in their own country they can oppress people of other races since they go unpunished or almost unpunished for their racist behaviour; those who belong to a particular denomination and despise all those who do not belong to that denomination looking on them as a sort of second-class Christians or just ‘Christian friends’ and not ‘Christian brothers’ and thus they show that if one enters their denomination he will have the right to be called by a more noble name; those who exalt those who are corrupt of mind and lovers of money calling them ‘servants of God’ and ‘servants of the Lord’ and despising instead those who pursue holiness and make every effort not to give any offence to anybody (Ezekiel 13:22); those who have become rich and get rich keeping back by fraud the wages of their workers (James 5:1-6) or giving them much less than what they deserve to receive, not paying the taxes to the State or paying much less than what they ought to; those who are ready to resort to all kinds of illicit means (lies, threatenings, violence, falsehood, bribes, etc.) in order to reach the pulpit of a Church.

It is evident, therefore, brethren, that you must flee each one of the above mentioned improper behaviours, lest you be counted among the unrighteous. Pursue righteousness, knowing that God “loves the righteous” (Psalm 146:8 – NKJV) and surely rewards them for their righteousness. Of course, you will be persecuted by men, even by some brothers, but do not give up, look to your reward which is before your God, who is in heaven.

Haughtiness (arrogance)

Haughtiness is another thing of which we, as believers, must beware for our good and in order to shine as lights in this dark world. In other words, we must see that we do not set our mind on sumptuous things. The Scripture says that the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16); and those who belong to this world show this pride in many ways, one of them is by buying costly and sumptuous things which draw the attention of people for their outward beauty. For instance, many people buy clothes which are very expensive in order to appear greater and more important than other people. Many buy high-powered cars or special models in order to appear very important people in the sight of the other people and to draw the attention of people when they travel by car. Many buy country seats with swimming-pool or sumptuous apartments (and sometimes they even run into many debts) just because they want to be noted, they want people to say that they live like the lords. There are indeed many people who act in this way, and all of them refuse to set their mind on humble things.

But the Scripture is against haughtiness, for Wisdom says: “The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this; they will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5 - NIV), and again: “A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin” (Proverbs 21:4 – NKJV), because God wants us to be humble, as it is written: “Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble” (Romans 12:16 - NKJV), and again: “Be … humble” (1 Peter 3:8 – NIV). What does it mean to be humble? It means that, concerning the material things we need, we must not buy or seek the most expensive things or those things which would certainly make us feel more important and higher than the other people and would induce other people to pay us a lot of compliments or to envy us. In other words, when we intend to buy something we need we should wonder whether it is a humble thing or not, whether it is something that will pass unnoticed because it is modest or something that will draw people’s attention and induce them to pay us some compliments for its sumptuousness and will cause many to envy us for it.

Now, in the Scripture we find an example of humility that is perfect, and that is the example of Jesus Christ. He was the King of Israel and the King of Jerusalem as well, yet on earth He did not live like the kings of this world, that is, wearing splendid clothes and living in luxury in a royal
palace, and riding powerful horses or commanding His servants to carry Him on a royal litter. Let me dwell upon a circumstance of His life, that is, His entry into Jerusalem, in order to show you what it means to be humble and not to set one's mind on high things. Here is what Matthew wrote about this incident: “And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:1-9). As you can see, the King of Jerusalem entered Jerusalem sitting on a donkey and not on a powerful horse or on a royal litter; is this not a great example of humility left by Him who said: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29 – NIV)?

Indeed, all the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ was marked by humility, from His birth in Bethlehem to His death in Jerusalem. But how many among the people of God have learnt or want to learn to be humble like Jesus? According to my personal experience, I must say that only a few believers want to be humble like Jesus; all the others walk according to the pride of life and when you see them they look like people of this dark world rather than people who have turned from the worldly lusts to Christ. It is sufficient to stand outside a place of worship about the opening time of the worship service or after the service has been closed in order to see a line of high-powered cars which have been polished beyond measure. It is sufficient to stand at the entry of the places of worship in order to see a real fashion parade. And in addition to this, you should go to the homes of these believers because it is there that you can see the rest of their haughtiness!

Be sure of this: the people of the world do not glorify God for the conduct of these believers, and in fact many unbelievers, who are offended, point out (and I must admit, they point out rightly) that they see much haughtiness in many who claim to be followers of Jesus. What can we answer these people when they make such remarks about these believers? They don't know many things about Jesus, but they know that He was poor and humble, that's why they are offended when they see some Christians living in unbridled luxury and setting their mind on the high things.

Those who are haughty show their haughtiness not only by seeking material things that can draw the attention of other people and cause them to be envied, but also in the following ways. For instance, when they are invited by someone to a wedding feast or when they go to the place of worship they choose the best places in order to be noticed. They say that they are great, and because of their studies they despise those who are not educated like them. They want to hold an office in the church at all costs and are ready to resort to cunning, fraud and vainglory to hold that office. They refuse to submit to those who have been appointed by God to shepherd the flock of God, and also to other brothers (as it is written that we must submit “to one another in the fear of God” Ephesians 5:21 - NKJV). And besides this, they boast about tomorrow (James 4:16), and they speak evil of dignitaries (2 Peter 2:10), and they despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7). We can describe the attitude of the haughty in this way: somehow they want to draw people’s attention and exalt themselves.

According to the Word of God, they will be humbled by God, as it is written: “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled ....” (Matthew 23:12 - NKJV), and also: “God resists the proud” (1 Peter 5:5 – NKJV). The best thing to do is to humble oneself before the brethren (as well as before the unbelievers) as well as in the sight of God in order to receive grace from Him, because God “gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5 – NKJV) and exalts them in due time (1 Peter 5:5-6;
James 4:10). The example of Jesus teaches us this very clearly; He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, and therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name (Philippians 2:8-10). Let us follow His steps, and we will be blessed by God, even though we will have to suffer many things. Brothers, it is true that we all stumble in many things, but let us make every effort to be humble in order to honor our God through our consecrated life.

**Vainglory**

Vainglory, as the word itself indicates, is a vain glory, therefore we must see that we do not glory in vain. You may ask: ‘Could you tell me how a believer can glory in vain?’ Here is the answer: if a believer glories in his riches (because he has got much money and many houses etc.), or in his physical strength (because he can lift big weights), or in his own wisdom (because he has studied some particular scientific subjects for many years, or he has some degrees, or he received some academic acknowledgements), etc. he glories in vain.

For God commands us not to glory in these things, as it is written: “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches” (Jeremiah 9:23). To glory in being a Jew by birth or a descendant of one of the twelve patriarchs such as Judah, Benjamin, and Levi is to glory in vain, for Paul – who was a Jew according to the flesh and a descendant of Benjamin - wrote to the Philippians: “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:4-9).

However, while on the one hand we are not allowed to glory in certain things, on the other hand we are allowed to glory in other things, for God said through Jeremiah: “But let him that glorieth glorify in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:24).

In other words, it is a right thing to glory in the Lord, that is to say, to glory in having received intelligence from God, to glory in knowing God or rather in being known by God. In addition to this, it is a right thing to glory in having been reconciled to God through faith in Christ, as it is written: “We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:11 – NKJV. The IBRV reads ‘ma anche ci gloriamo in Dio……,’ that is, ‘we also glory in God…..’); in having been called by God to His everlasting glory, as it is written: “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2 – NIV. The IBRV reads ‘ci gloriamo nella speranza ….’ that is, ‘we glory in the hope…..’). And not only that, but it is also right to glory in our sufferings, as it is written: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:3-5).

Brothers, let us not become vainglorious, provoking and envying each other.
Craftiness (cunning)

Some brothers say that we must be crafty as serpents. Is that true? Not at all, because Jesus did not tell His disciples to be crafty as serpents but He told them to be “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16), which is a very different thing, for to be wise means to be prudent, wary and shrewd and not to be crafty.

To explain to you what it means to be crafty I am going to quote some Scriptures.

- Matthew says: "Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" (Matthew 22:15-18. The IBRV reads ‘ma Gesù, conosciuta la loro malizia, disse ….’ that is, “but Jesus, having perceived their cunning, said …”, and Luke 20:23 says: “But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me?”). As you can see, the Pharisees acted cunningly with Jesus in order to cause Him to sin. They were crafty people, for Jesus called them ‘serpents, brood of vipers’, therefore on that occasion they showed the craftiness of the old serpent, who was their father. But you, brethren, are not vipers but sheep, and you must not be crafty, but wise as serpents (which are prudent animals for when they hear a rustle they move because they perceive a danger) lest you fall into the snare of the devil. Therefore you must imitate the wisdom of the serpents and not their craftiness because craftiness is of the devil, as it is written that he “deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Corinthians 11:3 – NKJV).

- Stephen said that Pharaoh “dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live” (Acts 7:19). The IBRV reads: ‘Costui, procedendo con astuzia contro la nostra stirpe, trattò male i nostri padri’ that is, ‘he, dealing cunningly with our kindred, evil entreated our fathers ….”. As you can see, Pharaoh did not act honestly toward the Israelites but he acted cunningly.

Know this, that wisdom says that “a crafty man is hated” (Proverbs 14:17 – NIV), and in fact people hate crafty persons, and God also hate crafty persons, as it is written: “The Lord condemns a crafty man” (Proverbs 12:2 - NIV). And know also that God shows Himself shrewd to the crooked (2 Samuel 22:27). Do not be crafty, brothers, because God will return your craftiness on your own heads, for it is written in the Psalms: “Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate” (Psalm 7:14-16).

Imitate Paul and Timothy, who never acted cunningly with the saints, so they could say to the Corinthians: “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Those who conduct themselves honestly and sincerely toward their neighbour will have a sure and great reward; of course, such a conduct costs them because they need to make many sacrifices, but such a conduct gives them much peace and joy and enables them to keep a pure conscience.

Counterfeit baptism with the Holy Spirit, interpretation of tongues and prophecy

Brothers in the Lord, I exhort you to flee any counterfeit in the spiritual field, because just as the Italian law punishes those who counterfeit banknotes and circulate counterfeit banknotes, so God punishes those who counterfeit and urge to counterfeit the spiritual things.
Concerning the baptism with the Holy Spirit, I exhort you, if you have not yet received it, to desire it earnestly; pray God continually that He may give you the Holy Spirit, and fast as well, if you perceive that God leads you to fast, in order to receive the Holy Spirit. But while you wait for the baptism with the Holy Spirit do not lean on your own understanding nor act as some advise you to do, whether directly or indirectly with their words or behaviour. In other words, do not invent strange words to utter them in order to make others believe that you have received the Holy Spirit, because such a behaviour would profit you nothing and besides deceiving yourselves you would deceive the other people. Know this, that when the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer, it is the Holy Spirit who moves the believer to speak in other tongues, and He does this in an irresistible way for He seizes the mouth and the tongue of the believer and causes the tongue to speak the tongue (or the tongues) He wants the believer to speak. Luke confirms this when he says that on the day of Pentecost “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘How will we be able to speak in an unknown tongue never learned at school?’ because this is something that the Spirit of God will work in you in a glorious and inscrutable way. When He comes upon you, you will be forced to speak in other tongues, and you will realize that you have not invented anything of what you have spoken in another tongue but that you have acted in that way because the Spirit of God moved you to speak in other tongues. And then you will feel just as the Scripture says, that is, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), thus you will see that when you speak in other tongues rivers of living waters will flow out of your heart. In addition to this, you will perceive that you have been clothed with power from on high, that is, that you have received something you did not have upon you before; this will help you realize that you have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Once you are filled with the Holy Spirit and you speak in other tongues, of course, Satan will not stop tempting you, because he will continue to try by his craftiness to deceive you. One of the things he will try to induce you to do is this: he will try to induce you to interpret falsely what you or others have spoken in other tongues. How? He will try to deceive you into thinking that those words spoken in other tongues are addressed to His people according to some particular need existing in the Church or that even though you do not understand those words spoken in other tongues and you don’t have the gift of interpretation of tongues you can ‘interpret’ it anyway provided that the interpretation ‘does not oppose the sound doctrine’. Take heed to yourselves and do not deceive yourselves and the others either. Let it be known to you that just as speaking in tongues is supernatural, so is supernatural interpreting tongues; that is to say, it is through the Holy Spirit that you can interpret tongues and not by intuition nor by your own ability. Therefore if the Holy Spirit enables you to interpret tongues, you will understand them as you understand the English language and so you will be able, without understanding how you can do such a thing, to interpret tongues for the Church. But this will happen by the Spirit; it is something that is beyond our understanding, it is something that proceeds from the Spirit of God. Finally, I remind you that since he who speaks in other tongues speaks to God and not to men (1 Corinthians 14:2), the interpretation is directed toward God, but you have no need that I should write to you about this because when the Holy Spirit enables you to interpret you will realize it personally. The devil will try also to induce you to think that by repeating some passages of the Bible, one after another, you are manifesting the gift of prophecy. Take heed to yourselves and do not fall into this diabolical trap. When the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer and moves him to prophesy he does not begin to recite some biblical passages learnt by heart, not at all, because the message comes from the Spirit of God and thus it is extemporary and unpredictable. It is always something you did not prepare beforehand and you did not intend to say. The reason is because the gift of prophecy is not a human ability but a supernatural ability.
Laziness

Wisdom says: “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks” (Ecclesiastes 10:18 – NKJV) and again: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11).

Through these words Solomon condemned laziness and rebuked sluggards, that is, those who do not want to work with their own hands but are busybodies. Paul also condemns laziness and rebukes sluggards, for, concerning some believers of Thessalonica who were idle, he wrote to the saints of Thessalonica: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

Therefore, brothers, I warn you against laziness, for it has harmful effects on people, as also the people of this world say, ‘The devil finds work for idle hands’.

However, there is also a spiritual laziness of which we must beware, for Paul says to the Romans: “Never be lacking in zeal” (Romans 12:11 – NIV. The IBRV reads, “Quanto allo zelo, non siate pigri”, that is, ‘concerning zeal, do not be lazy”). Therefore, brothers, beware of any laziness in the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, such as prayer, reading and meditation of the Word of God, visiting the sick, evangelizing the lost, attending the church services, doing good works such as taking an old brother (or sister) to the place of worship in your car, doing the shopping for him because he is sick, and many other useful things.

Let it be known to you that just as he who does not want to work with his own hands because he is lazy will bear the consequences of his rebellion, for he will become poor, so he who is lazy in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God will bear the consequences of his rebellion because he will become – spiritually speaking - naked, poor and miserable.

The Scripture says: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (John 2:17 - NKJV). Can you say to God these words? If your answer is ‘Yes’, continue in this holy zeal, but if your answer is ‘No’ then I exhort you not to be idle but zealous for the House of God. Consider how zealous are the supporters of the soccer teams, consider the sacrifices they make in order to go to the stadium to cheer on their favourite team; consider also how zealous are certain members of certain political parties, who are willing to spend part of their time and money on spreading the ideas of their party. Now, I say: ‘If sinners are so zealous for the vain things, which pass away, should you not be much more zealous for the truth, which abides forever?’ Awake, you who are spiritually lazy!

Overworking

The apostle Paul said: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Therefore, we must see to it that we do not become slaves of our work by giving ourselves over to it with our body, soul and spirit. Work is a useful and lawful thing, but it must never become the most important thing in our life. Therefore, brother, work in order to supply the needs of your family and to help the needy, but do not try to get rich by your work (or, if you can’t get rich by your work, by looking for a second work) lest you stray from the faith and pierce yourself through with endless sorrows. Remember that besides a physical life you have a spiritual life, of which you must take care by praying alone and together with other believers in the place of worship, by
reading and studying the Scriptures at your home, by going to hear the sermons and the teachings in the place of worship (the place of worship can be the house of a brother or your own house), by doing good works, etc., but remember also that when the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter the heart of a believer they choke the word of God planted in him and it becomes unfruitful (Mark 4:19-20). Watch and pray, brothers, lest you fall into this diabolical trap.

**Some kinds of jobs**

The saints are not allowed to do certain works because these works lead them to break the commandments of God. Let us see some of these works you must not do. You must not work in an industry which produces weapons (bombs, rifles, pistols, mines, etc.) lest you be guilty of making some objects men use to kill other men or to harm them. You must not work in a nightclub, lest you see indecent behaviours and hear obscenities and you have fellowship with the unfruitful works of the devil. You must not work as a wedding photographer, lest you be led to frequent perverse people and to attend religious services in places of worship full of demons (such as those of the Roman Catholic Church and of the sects) and to say to the bride and the bridegroom to do certain things which they are allowed to do only privately and not publicly, and because many women who attend weddings are dressed like the prostitutes to draw attention to themselves. You must not work as a goldsmith, lest you produce jewelry for men and women, and medals with the image of Mary or some other saint engraved in them, which are used by many people as lucky charms. You must not work as a seller of worldly magazines and newspapers, lest you help to spread vanity and perversion. You must not work as a bartender, lest you be forced to give wine and alcoholic drinks to the drunkards and alcoholics, to sell cigarettes, etc. You must not work as a seller of worldly tapes, records and CD, lest you help to spread the diabolical music. You must not cultivate tobacco, for cigarettes are made from tobacco and as you know smoking harms people. You must not work as a jeweller, lest you help men and women to adorn themselves with vanity. These are just some of the works that believers must not do, lest they have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and they defile their own conscience, yes, because if we have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness we will defile our conscience. And we must strive “to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16 - NKJV). Do not despise this spiritual exercise, brothers, lest you suffer shipwreck concerning the faith.

**Provocation**

Beloved, as it is fitting for the saints, you must flee provocation, that is to say, you must not provoke anybody. What does it mean to provoke? It means to stimulate a reaction or emotion, (typically a strong or unwelcome one), in someone. We may provoke someone to anger, to jealousy, or in order to seduce him or her. For instance, the Israelites in the wilderness provoked the Lord to anger by their idols, as it is written: “They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols” (Deuteronomy 32:21 – NKJV) and again: “Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you” (Deuteronomy 9:8 – NKJV), and bear in mind that God is slow to anger. Therefore, according to this example of provocation, we may say that we can provoke a
person to anger by doing deliberately something that you know he hates, that is to say, by annoying him. For instance, it is written: “And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath ….. lest they become discouraged” (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21 – NKJV), which means that fathers must not annoy their children. Believers, for instance, must not provoke their leaders by doing what they detest, and so on.

The Israelites in the wilderness provoked God to jealousy, as it is written: “They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God” (Deuteronomy 32:21). In this case also, provocation was made by idols. What do we learn from their behaviour? We learn that if we do something that annoys someone we love, that person will be provoked to jealousy. Thus, for instance, a husband must not provoke his wife to jealousy by taking pleasure in talking with his neighbour’s wife or by having a walk with her alone or by paying other women compliments on the way they dress or talk and on other things. A wife also must not provoke her husband to jealousy by wearing provocative dresses, that draw the attention of men, or by taking pleasure in talking with other men or by paying other men compliments on their body or on the way they dress, and so on.

Finally, a person can provoke someone in order to seduce him or her. For instance, a woman can try to seduce a man by putting on some exciting perfumes, or by speaking ambiguous words or frivolous words, or by adopting certain provocative postures, or by wearing some provocative dresses. However the same things can be said about a man toward a woman. Such a behaviour is diabolical and you must flee it.

Causing someone to stumble

Beloved in the Lord, you must not cause any brother to stumble, for it is written: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13 - NKJV). Someone may ask: ‘How can I put a cause to fall in my brother’s way?’ Here is my answer. You may cause a brother to fall in this way. He considers something to be unclean, and even though there is nothing unclean of itself, you must not grieve him because of his opinion, otherwise, as Paul says, “if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died” (Romans 14:15 – NKJV). Therefore, we must see that we don’t destroy with a food or a drink (for instance, wine) the work of God in the life of our brother. Is it not written that “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17 - NKJV)? So we ought to abstain from any food or drink which makes our brother stumble. Therefore, if you invite a brother to your house or you have to stay with a brother for some time, and you know that he doesn’t eat rabbit or pork or he does not drink wine because he considers these things to be unclean, you must not grieve him by setting before him that kind of meat he does not eat or that kind of drink he does not drink nor by eating or drinking those things he considers to be unclean, lest you lose him and destroy the work of God in him because of things that the Lord one day will destroy together with the stomach (1 Corinthians 6:13). And love does not seek its own profit, but the profit of the others that they may be saved. However, it is good not only to abstain from eating a certain kind of meat or drinking wine (if these things make our brother stumble), but also to abstain from doing anything by which our brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak (Romans 14:21). Therefore, be careful how you behave toward those brothers who are weak in the faith, lest you lose them and sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:7-13).

Bear in mind also that you must not cause any unbeliever to stumble either, for Paul says: “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32 – NIV). Therefore, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel you announce to the lost, because if you evangelize them and in the meantime you give offense to them, as some do, your scandals will be stumbling blocks to them and thus you will hinder them from turning to

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Christ and they won’t feel attracted to the congregation of the righteous, because they will think that you are a bunch of hypocrites, who love to sing Christian songs with a loud voice and play and listen to Christian music but don’t put into practice the precepts of the Gospel. Remember that many people pay more attention to your facts than to your words.

**Unbelief**

One of the schemes of the devil is this: he tries to induce the saints not to believe the Word of God. Now, I will give you some practical examples of how the adversary seeks to induce you not to take God at His word, that is, not to believe what God says but to believe what men say (sometimes even by quoting some passages from the Bible) and how you must resist him.

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law, but that’s not true, keeping the law is necessary in order to be justified, because it is written: “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Romans 2:13 - NKJV). *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is also written: “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4 - NKJV).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that Jesus is God, but that’s not true because it is written that He is the beginning of the creation of God and the firstborn of all creation. How then can he be God? Did Jesus Himself not say that the Father was greater than Him?’ *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is also written that Jesus Christ is “the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5 - NKJV), and that He said to the Jews: “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58 – NKJV), and again that the Word (who became flesh in the fullness of the time) in the beginning was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you place so much emphasis on holiness by saying continually ‘don’t do this’ and ‘don’t do that’, yet we are already holy and we are free in the Lord to do whatever we like.’ *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written: “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16 - NKJV) and that without holiness “no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 – NKJV).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that believers must not go to the beach, nor watch television, etc, but it is wrong to command the believers to abstain from these things for it is written: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Colossians 2:20-23).’ *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is also written: “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22 – NKJV) and again: “Pursue …. holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 - NKJV).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that a believer should ask God for the Holy Spirit, but every believer has already the Holy Spirit, thus it is absurd for a believer to ask something that he already possesses.’ *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that God still speaks through visions and dreams, but that’s not true because the canon of the Scripture we have is already complete and therefore we don’t need further revelations.’ *Answer:* ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17) and again that “in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction” (Job 33:15-16).’

*The tempter:* ‘So you say that Jesus Christ still performs miracles and healings, but that’s not true, for the time of miracles ended with the death of the apostles; today we do not need
miracles and healings for people believe in the Lord even without seeing miracles and healings.’

Answer: ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 – NKJV) and also: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7) and again: “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17).’

I could go on with more examples but I stop here because I have confidence in the Lord that you have understood how the devil with his craftiness tries to induce you not to believe the Word of God. But why does the devil try to induce you not to take God at His word? Because he knows that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Bear in mind this, because it is very important. He knows very well that if a believer ceases believing justification by faith or the deity of Christ or the fact that holiness must be pursued earnestly testing all things and holding fast what edifies and is useful and is according to the will of God, or the promise of the Holy Spirit, or the fact that God speaks by visions and dreams revealing the secrets of His knowledge and of His wisdom, or the fact that God heals and works miracles because He did not change and therefore everyone can ask God to heal him, I say, he knows very well that if believers stop believing one of the above mentioned teachings (besides them, there are many other sound teachings which the devil does not want Christians to believe) they will harm themselves. If they reject some of these teachings the harm will be very serious, while if they reject some other teachings the harm will be less serious; however, in any case they will harm themselves.

Therefore, brothers, take heed to yourselves and when doubt or unbelief comes to knock at the door of your heart take the shield of faith with which you can quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and take also the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and resist the wiles of the devil. Have faith in the Word of God, in every circumstance continue to believe that the Word of God is truth and will never fail. Remember that God is truthful and that it is impossible for God to lie and that the devil is a liar (and the father of all lies) even when he quotes some passages of the Scriptures. Be watchful, brothers.

### Trusting in man

You have lost your job; you want to get married; you have been taken ill; you have been given notice to quit; you can’t have children; these are some of the situations in which one of you may find himself. What should you do? There are two possibilities before you; to put your trust in man or to put your trust in God.

If you trust in man, you will do what men will tell you to do in order to come out of your distress, and thus, according to the circumstances, you will pay a backhander, you will give presents to someone, you will court someone’s favour, you will take the medicines that the doctor will prescribe for you, etc. and you will expect to receive your deliverance from man because you will resort to him. By so doing you will not experience at all the peace of God, nor His joy, and you will have no fellowship with Him because you will make yourself an enemy of God.

However, if you trust with all your heart in God things will be completely different, because you will experience a great peace and joy in your heart and you will expect to receive in a glorious way what you need and desire from Him. You will pray, you will fast, you will be reviled and discouraged by both unbelievers and believers, but you will have plenty of joy and peace while you wait for the deliverance and eventually God will reward your faith and your steadfastness and will show to everybody that the goodness He shows towards those who fear Him and trust in Him with all their heart is really great. And you will be able to proclaim that the Lord heard your prayer and He will be highly glorified through you.

I urge you to choose the second way, because it is the best way, it is the way God commands us to follow. Of course, it is a way full of pains and afflictions and sometimes you need to wait on God for a long time, but it is also a way on which you can experience the powerful and great deliverances of God, which astonish everybody.
I conclude this exhortation of mine with the following words of the prophet Jeremiah, which show the difference existing between those who trust in man and those who trust in the Lord: “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

Brothers, things are just as Jeremiah said so long ago; therefore, have faith in God, for He delights in those who rely on Him alone, I say it again, on Him alone. But God not only delights in them, but also delivers them from all kinds of distresses. Remember that He is the Almighty.

Dissensions (or divisions)

There is one God; one Lord, that is, Jesus Christ; one Spirit, who is the Spirit of God; one faith and one Church, which is the Church of God, whose head is Jesus Christ. And all those who are members of this holy Assembly are called to pursue peace with all people and to be like-minded, to have the same love, and to be of one accord and to speak the same thing and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. There should be no divisions among them (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2). However, it must be said that even though divisions must be rejected, there must be divisions among the Church of God. For Paul said to the Corinthians, among whom there were divisions: “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:18-19 – NKJV). Notice that divisions are called factions by the apostle Paul and that they must be among us so that those who live in a manner worthy of the Gospel, and thus are approved by God may be recognized.

What are divisions, according to the Scripture? And why must you flee them? To answer these questions I will remind you of the divisions existing among the saints of Corinth and how Paul exposed them. While Paul was at Ephesus, those of Chloe’s household told Paul that among the saints of Corinth there were divisions because each of them said: “I am of Paul’, or ‘I am of Apollos’, or ‘I am of Cephas’ or ‘I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12 - NKJV). Therefore, the saints of Corinth did not speak any longer the same thing and they were not any longer perfectly joined in the same mind and in the same judgement, for some said that they belonged to Paul, some to Apollos and some others to Cephas, and some others to Christ. When Paul heard this, he was angry and grieved and so he rebuked the Corinthians saying: “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13) and again: “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, and he that watereth; but God gave the increase. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Corinthians 3:2-9, 21-23). Paul explained to the Corinthians that they committed a sin by saying that they belonged to Paul or to Apollos because Paul and Apollos were just God’s fellow workers, who
worked in God’s field according to the grace of God which was given to them, and that it was not Paul nor Apollos who made the Word grow in them (thus, neither Paul, who had planted the seed, nor Apollos, who had watered it) but God alone. Therefore, the fact that they said ‘I am of Paul’ or ‘I am of Apollos’ was a wrong behaviour. They were carnal and they were moved by jealousy and strife (as you can see, divisions are associated with jealousies and quarrels, because it is the jealousy for a particular minister of the Gospel and the desire to exalt him above another minister of the Gospel that lead believers to part from one another and to quarrel), and they had forgotten that it was God who had worked in them what pleased Him and not Paul or Apollos. To what conclusion did Paul come then? He told the Corinthians not to boast in Paul nor in Apollos nor in Cephas because they were only ministers of the Gospel, who were theirs, because they had been given by God to the Church, while they were of Christ, who had bought them at a price, and Christ was of God. Therefore, you must not say ‘I am of this minister of the Gospel’ or ‘I am of that minister of the Gospel’ because that is a carnal behaviour. Anyone who says such things walk according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. You are of Christ, and therefore you must not boast in men but in Christ. Look unto Jesus, remember always what He did for you, and you will avoid saying ‘I am of Tom’ or ‘I am of Dick’.

Sects (heresies)

Among the works of the flesh there are also sects or heresies (Galatians 5:20). The Greek word *haeresis* is translated as ‘sètte’, that is, ‘sects’ in the Italian Bible Riveduta Version, while in the King James Version it is translated as ‘heresies’. For *haeresis* can be translated also as ‘sect,’ for in the KJV the word ‘sect’ we find in Acts 5:17 is translated from the same Greek word ‘haeresis’ which we find in Galatians 5:20.

What is a sect? A sect is group of people who part from the Church of God and proclaim that they are the only true believers existing on the face of the earth. Very often the sect is founded and ruled by someone who claims to be a very important person. One of the names of these leaders, who are nothing but false ministers of God, is often ‘the messenger of God for the last days’, but there are many other names by which they are called. One thing is evident and sure, he who founds a sect somehow or other thinks that he is the only person who preaches the true Gospel on the face of the earth because usually he claims that he was chosen by God to restore the Gospel or the Church. He expects obedience from his followers, a blind obedience, under pain of eternal perdition. Revelations, prophecies and messages of the ‘head’ of the sect are considered Word of God, even if they nullify the Scripture openly and impudently. Among the revelations, the prophecies and the teachings of those who have founded a sect we find revelations, prophecies and teachings that deny the deity of Christ and sometimes even His humanity, that deny the doctrine of the Trinity, that deny somehow the doctrine of salvation by grace, and we find also commandments according to which men must abstain from certain foods and drinks, and sometimes marriage is forbidden. I have cited the main false revelations, prophecies and teachings which can be found in a sect, but there are many more false revelations, prophecies and teachings that are taught by sects. One of the marks of a sect is greed because on the pretext of carrying on the work of God the founders of the sects extort money from their followers: there are sects that wants their members to give them all their possessions. Life in the sects is a bondage, for the members of the sects are slave of impostors who are the masters and the rulers of the life of the members.

Brothers, if from among you someone rises up who claims to be ‘the prophet of God for the last days’ (and claims he has received special revelations from God, which may concern even the date of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that those who want to be saved must follow him otherwise they will perish), admonish him and expel him from among you because he wants to deceive you and turn you away from the Lord. Admonish those who have been deceived by
such a man once, and then admonish them a second time, and after that have nothing to do with
them because such men are warped and sinful and are self-condemned (Titus 3:10-11).
Finally, beloved, I tell you this: remember that the Church of God is formed of all those who,
apart from the denomination they belong to, have been born again, and thus they are washed
and sanctified in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, see that you are not deceived by sectarian
feelings and attitudes existing even among some Pentecostal Churches, according to which
somehow or other if you are not with them you are not Christ's, because such a persuasion does
not come from Him who calls you. Let no one deceive you.

Contentions (quarrels)

Contentions or quarrels are works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Those who are haughty, being
full of pride, love to quarrel, as it is written: “By pride comes nothing but strife” (Proverbs 13:10 –
NKJV. The NIV reads “Pride only breeds quarrels”). They reject any advice, they don’t want to
be taught, they know everything! When one speaks with them strife rises at once, and the
atmosphere becomes bad, very bad. In the life of these people, who are quarrelsome (as well as
envious), there is confusion and every evil work, as it is written: “Where envying and strife is,
there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). We must admonish them, as James did
(James 4:1-10).
We, as servants of the Lord, must not quarrel, but be gentle to all and patient with all (2 Timothy
2:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:14), just as the Lord Jesus Christ did not quarrel (Matthew 12:19) but
was gentle to all and patient with all.

Wraths

To be angry is not a sin, for Jesus Himself got angry, as it is written: “And when he had looked
round about on them with anger ….” (Mark 3:5). However, to be swift to wrath is a sin, for it is
written: “He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly” (Proverbs 14:17) and again: “A quick-tempered
man displays folly” (Proverbs 14:29 - NIV).
Therefore, brothers, you must not be quick-tempered but slow to wrath, because – as Wisdom
says – “he who is slow to wrath has great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29 – NKJV).
When you get angry with somebody take heed that you don’t speak corrupt words or you don’t
lift your hand against him or you don’t make threatening gestures because whereas on the one
hand you are allowed to be angry on the other hand you are not allowed to sin, for it is written:
“Be angry, and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26 – NKJV).
Control yourselves, so that you may remain blameless even when you are angry.

Avenging oneself

The Scripture says: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath
[but leave room for God’s wrath]: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shaltheap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans
12:19-21) and again: “See that none render evil for evil unto any man” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
Jesus Christ left us an example to follow, for He did not render evil for evil to His enemies, as it
is written: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not;
but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).
Therefore, brothers, when you are wronged by someone (whether he is an unbeliever or a believer) do not render evil for evil to him to avenge yourselves, lest you bear sin because of him. For if you return evil for evil, you commit a sin because you seek to take justice into your hands and because we are not allowed to do any harm not only to those who do good to us but also to those who wrong us. Of course, when we are wronged by someone we are greatly tempted to avenge ourselves somehow, but by watching and praying we can bear the temptation.

But why should we refrain from avenging ourselves? Because vengeance belongs to God. Therefore God alone can avenge Himself and avenge those who are wronged, and that's what He does. Let no one deceive himself; our God is an avenging God and at His appointed time He makes people reap all the harm that they have done to other people, because - as Jeremiah said - “the LORD is the God of recompense, He will surely repay” (Jeremiah 51:56 – NKJV).

To God be the glory forever. Amen.

Rejoicing at the destruction of those who hate us

Wisdom says: “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him” (Proverbs 24:17-18).

Therefore, brothers, take heed that you don’t rejoice when God punishes those who wrong us because God dislikes such a behaviour. Imitate Job, who was an upright man who feared God, who said he did not rejoice at the destruction of those who hated him nor did he lift himself up when evil found them (Job 31:29).

Military service and war

A child of God is a person who is called to pursue peace with all (Hebrews 12:14) and to do good to all (Galatians 6:10), thus he cannot be in favour of war. As a consequence, he cannot be in favour of military service either, because through it people are trained to fight against other people and to kill them. Therefore, I exhort young people to choose the alternative service (of course, provided that there is alternative service in the country they live; in any case they must refuse to do the compulsory military service) lest they learn to use carnal weapons against other people, because their use brings only death and destruction. Thus, beloved, you must be against war, and if a war breaks out and you are called to leave for the war you must disobey the governing authorities in order to obey God.

We who are believers are soldiers of Jesus Christ, and we must fight against the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places; however, we must not fight using carnal weapons but spiritual weapons, because our enemies are spiritual beings and not human beings, and the apostle Paul speaks of these weapons in the epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-20). The weapons of our warfare are these: truth, righteousness, the preparation of the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer. And through them we pull down the strongholds of our enemies (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Our warfare is called “the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12 - NKJV) because it is useful to us and to our neighbour, for by fighting this fight we stand firm in the faith, we help our brothers to stand firm, and we help people to be delivered from the hands of the devil. Furthermore, we are sure of overcoming our enemies because they have been defeated by our head, namely Jesus Christ, who triumphed over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).
Evil thoughts

We who are children of God must love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; for when Jesus was asked which is the first commandment of all He answered saying: “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:29-30). Therefore, our mind also must serve righteousness. For this reason you must not think evil thoughts, brothers, because God dislikes evil thoughts, as Wisdom says: “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 15:26 – NKJV).

What should you do then when you are tempted to think evil thoughts? You must bring them into captivity to the obedience of Christ, as Paul said: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

If you don’t do this, evil thoughts will spread like cancer and will lead you to act sinfully. Therefore, make every effort to keep also your mind pure by observing the following commandment of Paul: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). Among the things to think about, which impart grace to the believer, I mention these: your new birth; the purpose of God according to election; your water baptism, the baptism with the Holy Spirit (whether you have received it or not); paradise, as it is described by the Word of God, and the day of your death when at last, if you stand firm in the faith till the end, you will enter this marvellous place; the judgements of God, so that you may walk in the fear of God; the way God has guided you till now; how He protected you from many dangers; how God answered your prayers when you called on Him; the story of Jesus of Nazareth, above all His death and His resurrection, but also His glorious return as it is described by the Scripture. Also think about how God all of a sudden can manifest Himself to you by giving you a dream or a vision or by sending an holy angel to you to reveal to you some secrets; the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the edifying of the Church; think of doing good to all, both believers and unbelievers, whether in word or in deed; think about the love of God, His goodness, His righteousness; think about His invisible attributes which are clearly seen being understood by His works; think about all the things which are written in the Bible.

The ignorance of the things of God

Brothers, you must flee the ignorance of the things of God, because God does not want you to be ignorant of His will. Some expressions of the apostle Paul show this very clearly.

● Paul wrote to the Romans: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25).

● Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1 Corinthians 10:1-5), and again: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1), and also: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3).
Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Paul wrote to Timothy: “I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15 - NIV).

As you can see, the apostle Paul wanted the saints to know certain things, he did not want the saints to be ignorant of those things. Obviously, Paul wanted the saints to know not only the above mentioned things but also all the other things he wrote in his epistles. However, today the attitude of many Church leaders is not the same as that of Paul, because they don’t want the saints to know certain things. Yes, they want you to know that you must pay tithes or that you must give the ‘8 per mille’ (8 cents per thousand) to their Church - which is a percentage of money that an Italian citizen may choose to give to the State or to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Waldensian Church or to the Assemblies of God or to some other religious groups, and that sum of money which he gives according to his income tax return to the Italian Revenue (afterward the Italian Revenue will give that sum of money to the religious group chosen by the taxpayer) will be used by the religious group for humanitarian aims or for supporting the ministers of the religious group (it depends on what the religious group decided to do with that money when it reached an agreement with the Italian Government) -; they want you to know that you must attend the Sunday service (which is a right thing), or rather, that you must go to the House of God (so you are induced to think that those four walls of the place of worship are the House of God, when on the contrary it is you who are the House of God); they want you to know that you must submit to the statute of the denomination you belong to (which is a document which resists the Holy Spirit, but perhaps you have not yet read it because only the Church leaders of your denomination are allowed to read it); they want you to know that you must not have fellowship with brothers and sisters who belong to other Churches because they are dangerous (on the contrary, the dangerous people are right those who tell you such a diabolic thing and therefore you run the risk of being deceived by them) and many other things. But, as far as many other things are concerned, they want you to be ignorant of them or they try to frighten you in order to keep you from having certain experiences, which they call sarcastically ‘mystic experiences’. So you hardly ever hear of visions or dreams or revelations, and when you hear of them you hear people speaking about them in a negative way and thus you have come to the conclusion that such things are not important today or that today God is not so much interested in giving visions, dreams and revelations as He was in ancient times or that God has ceased giving visions, dreams and revelations; and they may frighten you by telling you always the false revelations which many who claim to be Christians have received (which false revelations of course exist); when you hear of the miracles and the healings recorded in the Bible they are allegorized, so you think that miracles and healings are not so much important today. As far as the baptism with the Holy Spirit is concerned, you hear of it and you have come to the conclusion that it is a biblical experience but not a revolutionary experience, as it was for the early disciples, therefore it is sufficient for you to hear someone saying ‘I spoke in tongues’ in order to think that he was baptized with the Holy Spirit, but unfortunately those tongues are the fruit of his craftiness or of his ignorance because such a person was without power beforehand and he is still without power after he has spoken these so called tongues. And what shall I say about holiness? Of course, you hear of it, but in the way they want you to hear of it. ‘No rules’, they say (while their statute is full of human rules), and again: ‘Yes, we must be holy, but not bigot’ (by that expression they mean that ‘exaggerations’ are not allowed) and many other things. Therefore you have formed a particular idea of holiness. What’s this idea? You think that God looks at the heart and he does not look at the clothes you wear or at many other ‘trifles’ (such as watching television, going to the beach to get sun tanned and to bathe, going to the cinema, going to dance, attending amusements parks, etc). So you wear haughty and indecent dresses, as when you were under the power of Satan; you go to the beach to get sun tanned and to bathe (maybe along with your blind pastor), and you watch television as if nothing
happened in your life; and you do many other things which now I can’t write because it would take too much time to speak about them. How then can you say that the old things have passed away and all things have become new? You can’t say such a thing; if you say it, you will deceive yourselves. But why are these ‘Pentecostal pastors’ interested in letting you know certain things and they speak about them to you with boldness, but they are not interested in letting you know other things (provided that they know them)? Why, if some believers do not pay tithes, on Sunday do they preach their sermons based on Malachi accusing the brethren of robbing God? While, if a sister comes to the place of worship wearing a miniskirt or a low-necked dress or a close-fitting dress or jewelry or with her face made up, do they close their eyes and keep silent? Why do they insist so much on the fact that believers must give money for the work of God, but they don’t insist that the daughters of God must wear decent and modest dresses? Why do they proclaim with power and boldness that some Churches don’t accept the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, but they do not expose with the same power and boldness the counterfeit baptisms with the Holy Spirit as well as the counterfeit interpretations of tongues, which are passed off as prophecies but are nothing but inventions? Why do they say to you with so much boldness and power that you must not attend a particular place of worship because there the full Gospel is not preached, but they do not say to you that you must not go to the beach to get tanned and to bathe lest you defile yourselves? And I could go on, but I stop here.

The reason why they don’t want you to know these things is because they fear that those who hear these things will choose another Church, that is, a Church whose pastor tolerates these things and therefore they are afraid their Church might lose some members and thus the offerings might decrease and their prestige might decrease as well because in their denomination the more souls they shepherd the more important they are in the sight of believers.

But as for me, I want you to know these things and many other things these pastors hide from you, so that you may grow spiritually and be consecrated to God, and I will do my best by the grace of God to remind you of them every time I will have an opportunity to do it. However, on your part, you must desire earnestly to know the truth about all things pertaining to the counsel of God. Therefore, brothers, search the Scriptures every day, meditate on them, devour them, absorb them, asking God to explain to you those things which you have not yet understood. pray, fast and abstain from every form of evil, and you will see that little by little you will find out those things many people want you to be ignorant of or don’t know or don’t want to know in their ignorance. Every time it seems to you that something is wrong, kneel down before God and ask Him to give you wisdom and to guide you and He will answer you, He will not disappoint you. Do not be afraid of anything and of anybody because I know that the devil will try to dissuade you from doing what I have just told you to do; then you will see the awful ignorance existing in many brothers, who take pleasure in being ignorant, and you will realize that those who do not seek the good of the people of God, but only their own interests, are very numerous. And when you know the truth about this or that thing, acquaint the other brothers with it, so that they also may know it and you may be a testimony to them.

False doctrines

One day Jesus told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In other words, He told them to beware of the doctrine of those Jewish sects because it nullified the Word of God (Matthew 16:6,12).

So we who are disciples of Christ must beware of all those doctrines which nullify the Word of God. To know which are these doctrines, I exhort you to read my confuting writings. False doctrines, as the word itself indicates, are false, and thus they cannot do any good to those who accept them, for they do nothing but harm to them. Only true and sound doctrines can edify believers. Therefore, hold the doctrines which are true and expose the false ones.
Do not accept strange doctrines, lest you wander away from the truth and you be put to shame. If you find out with the help of God that you are professing a false doctrine, I exhort you to reject it and to tell the others to do the same.

Preventing conception

Anyone who does not want to have children or tries to prevent conception in order to limit the number of children commits a sin, for the Scripture says: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28 – NKJV) and also that the woman “will be saved in child-bearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” (1 Timothy 2:15 – NKJV). Therefore, brothers, do not prevent conception, lest you resist the will of God. Know this, that the Scripture speaks well of those who have many children, for it states: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5).

Since I know that among the brotherhood there are some (both men and women) who have been sterilized in order not to have children or to limit the number of children, I tell you that this is an abomination to God. Know this, that those who have undergone sterilization will bear their sin. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Not chastening one’s children

There are many believers who, having been deceived by some who are wise according to the world but not according to God, refuse to rebuke severely or to beat their own children (according to the need, of course) when they disobey. For they say, ‘Our children also must have their own experiences’, ‘It is the Lord who will make them understand what is right and what is wrong’, ‘How can I beat the blood of my blood?’ etc.

Brothers, I exhort you not to be deceived by these words, rather expose them earnestly and destroy them because they openly oppose the Word of God which says: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24) and also: “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23:13-14), and again: “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Proverbs 19:18).

Why is correction (not only the verbal correction but also the correction with the rod) necessary? Because Wisdom says: “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

Therefore, there is only one way to bring up one’s children well, that is, by correcting them. Let no one deceive you, because if you allow them to do whatever they like they will grow like brute beasts and they will be your grief and your shame.

Offending little children

Brothers, take heed that you don’t offend and despise little children, for Jesus said: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6) and again: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in
heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).

But how can one offend and despise little children who believe in Jesus? By beating them or by kicking them, by forcing them to steal, by committing indecent acts before them, or by sexually abusing them, or by beating his wife or parents before their eyes (as well as not before their eyes), and in many other ways. Take heed to yourselves, brothers, and flee all these works of the flesh, lest you incur the wrath of God by your evil actions.

Disobeying one’s parents

According to the Word of God, disobeying one’s parents is sin, for according to the law the rebellious son who did not want to obey the voice of his parents had to be put to death, as it is written: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). It is sin also to curse one’s father or mother, as it is written: “For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him” (Leviticus 20:9).

Therefore, children must not disobey their parents, rather they must honor them and obey them, as it is written: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12) and again: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:20).

Marriages with unbelievers

The Scripture commands believers not to marry unbelievers, for it says: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Therefore, brothers and sisters who want to get married, do not seek you wife or your husband among the people of the world but among those who are not of this world, that is, the saints or the redeemed. Perhaps someone of you will say to me: ‘I am seeking a good unbelieving person and not a bad one!’ Do not deceive yourself, because even if an unbelieving person is sweet and affectionate to you, the fact still remains that there can be no spiritual communion between you who are a believer and him or her who is an unbelieving person, because you are spiritually alive while he or she is dead in his/her transgressions. You are under the power of God, while he or she is under the power of the devil. You want to serve righteousness but he or she wants to serve sin. And I could go on. Know this, that there are no good sinners, but only sinners.

Perhaps someone else will say: ‘Little by little I will win him or her to Christ!’. Do not deceive yourself either, because eventually the person who is under the power of Satan will overcome you and you will stray from the faith and thus you will give up meeting together with other believers. And you will regret bitterly leaning on your own understanding. Know this, that many believers said that before their marriage, but afterward they disappeared and they were not seen
in the midst of the flock of the Lord any longer because they went on the mountains of unfaithfulness.

Young people, I say it again, see to it that you marry only a believer even if your community is a little community and you don’t have the possibility of meeting many young people like you, do not worry about that because God from the place of His dwelling looks on you and sees your need and at His appointed time He will cause you to meet the right man or the right woman, that is, the person God has appointed for you. Be patient and trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lose heart. He is faithful and will turn your mourning into joy, and your wailing into dancing, but remember, at His appointed time.

“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:4), and: “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5). Do not let these words depart from your eyes and your heart because in the saddest moments they will give you much joy and peace.

The woman teaching and having authority over a man

Sisters in the Lord, you must learn in silence with all submission; therefore without grumbling and without interrupting him who is teaching the Word of God. So, when the Church comes together in one place (that is, during the worship service) you must not talk with anybody, rather you must keep silent “for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:35 - NKJV), says Paul; and if you want to learn something, do not ask the pastor (while the church is gathered together in one place), but ask your husbands at home, as it is written: “And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home” (1 Corinthians 14:35 – NKJV). You ought to keep silent in the churches, for women “are to be submissive, as the law also says” (1 Corinthians 14:34 - NKJV).

Therefore, since you, sisters, must learn in silence, you are not allowed to teach the doctrine of God, that is, the same doctrine that Paul, Peter and the other apostles taught to the saints and which Paul commanded Timothy and Titus to teach. Neither are you allowed to exercise authority over your husband because he is your head and you are to submit to him.

To sum up, therefore, what I have just said: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:11-12 – NKJV).

A woman is not permitted to teach

With regard to the fact that a woman is not permitted to teach, the law also confirms it, and we know that the law is made for whatever is contrary to the sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10). For, when God chose the Levites, under the law of Moses, to entrust them with the service of the tabernacle and that they might teach His laws to the Israelites, as it is written: “They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law” (Deuteronomy 33:10 – NKJV) he chose men and not women.

I can confirm this also by what we read in the book of Nehemia, for in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, after the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, when the law of God was read and explained publicly before the people, that was done by some men from among the Levites, as it is written: “Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused [helped] the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused [helped] them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:7-8). On the basis of these passages, nowadays among the Jews (the Orthodox Jews) the woman is not permitted to read the law publicly in the synagogue nor to explain any passage of the law to the congregation.
Obviously, the New Testament’s writings confirm that a woman is not permitted to teach, for the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus, whom He sent to preach (Matthew 10:1-8; Luke 6:12-16) were all men, as well as the seventy disciples whom He appointed afterward and sent before His face (Luke 10:1).

There were of course some women who followed Jesus, but they did not teach the Word of God, for they ministered to Jesus and His disciples, as Luke says: “The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means” (Luke 8:1-3 - NIV). As you can see, the women who were with Jesus and His disciples did not preach nor teach the Word of God, but they provided for Jesus and His disciples from their substance. Is it not written: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Galatians 6:6 – NKJV)?

Replies to the main objections

Let us now reply to the main objections raised by some sisters and brothers.

● ‘Since a woman can prophesy, she can teach because he who prophesies teaches’. That’s not true, because the gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching are two different gifts, they are not the same gift. That is confirmed by Paul when he says: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching” (Romans 12:6-7 – NKJV). Bear in mind this, that Paul did not say: ‘I do not permit a woman to prophesy’ because such a statement would have contradicted the Scripture which says: “Your daughters shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28 – NKJV), but he said a different thing, that is, “I do not permit a woman to teach” (1 Timothy 2:12 - NKJV).

● ‘According to the Scripture, a woman can serve as a deaconess, which means that she can also teach’

That’s not true; now I am going to explain why. The Word declares that in the Church of Cenchrea there was a deaconess, for Paul wrote to the Romans: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [or deaconess] of the Church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me” (Romans 16:1-2 – NIV). Therefore, a woman can be ordained as a deaconess in the Church, if she has the necessary qualifications. But the deacons are not appointed to teach the doctrine of God, but to minister to the saints; that’s why among the qualifications a believer must have to serve as a deacon we don’t find this one ‘able to teach’. Therefore, it is evident that since deacons do not need to be able to teach the doctrine of God because their job is not to teach the Word, those sisters who are appointed deaconesses are not called to teach the doctrine of God.

● ‘A woman can teach because in ancient times God appointed some women prophetesses.’

That’s not true, for the ministry of prophet is different from the ministry of teacher, and the fact that one is a prophet does not necessarily mean that he is able to teach. Deborah (who lived in the days of the judges), Huldah (who lived in the days of king Josiah) and Anna (who lived in the days of Jesus), were all prophetesses, but they were not appointed by God to teach the law to the people because according to the law of Moses the precepts of the law had to be taught by the Levites, as God said: “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth” (Malachi 2:7 – NKJV).

The prophet Micah also made a distinction between the office of a priest and the office of a prophet, for when God rebuked the people of Israel through him He said: “Her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money” (Micah 3:11 – NKJV). As you can see, it was the priests and not the prophets who were appointed to teach.

A woman, under grace, can be appointed by God prophetess, but to be a prophet does not mean to be enabled by God to teach the Word; a woman who is a prophetess prophesies by the
Spirit when the Spirit comes upon her, and tells the visions and the revelations God gives to her, but this does not mean at all that God has appointed her to teach the doctrine of God. In order to be able to teach, a prophetess needs to possess also the ability to teach, but that’s an ability which she can’t receive from God.

- ‘A woman can teach because when Jesus rose from the dead He appeared first to a woman, that is, Mary Magdalene, to whom He said: “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17)’

Now, according to the Scripture, “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her” (John 20:18 - NKJV), but she did not go to teach the doctrine of God to the disciples of the Lord. Nor from that day on did she teach, because Jesus had not given her authority to teach. Jesus gave that authority to the eleven disciples, for when He appeared to them on one of the mountains in Galilee He said to them: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20).

To confirm this I remind you that the Scripture says that (after the Spirit was poured out upon the Church) the early believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). As you can see, the Scripture does not say that some of the women to whom Jesus had appeared were teaching together with the apostles.

- ‘A woman can teach because Anna was a prophetess’.

Now, Anna was a prophetess who “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37). Therefore that godly woman was always in the temple, which was a holy place where the Jews always met. But Anna did not teach the law of Moses to the Jews in the temple, but she served God with fastings and prayers. Then, when the Child Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord, Anna was there and “spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38 - NKJV). Does this mean that she taught the doctrine of God? How could we say such a thing when the Scripture states only that she spoke of the Child Jesus? I am convinced that if those women who want at all costs to teach began to serve God in the same way Anna served God, that is to say, with prayers and fastings, and stopped teaching, they would do something well pleasing to God.

- ‘A woman can teach because some of the women who helped Paul taught the Word of God’.

These women, according to this objection, were Priscilla, Euodias, and Syntyche, for it is written: “And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26), and again: “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:2-3).

Now, if the above mentioned passages meant that Priscilla, Euodias and Syntyche did teach the Word, that would mean that Paul permitted them to teach. Then, if it were so, Paul told a lie to Timothy, because He told him that he did not permit a woman to teach. So, who says the truth? Those who say that these passages mean that those women taught or Paul? Perhaps we might say that Paul permitted some women to teach while he did not permit other women to teach! But if it were so, how could Paul say to Timothy: “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21)? The truth is that Priscilla, Euodias and Syntyche did not teach. At most, we can say that Priscilla and her husband Aquila told Apollos something about the new Way privately, but certainly we cannot say that Priscilla taught the brethren publicly as Paul and the other apostles did.

I am convinced that you, sisters, ought to follow the example of Mary, Martha’s sister, who “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (Luke 10:39 – NKJV). Jesus said that Mary had chosen that good part, which would not be taken away from her. However, what happens in many Churches? It happens that many sisters have not chosen that good part, that is, they have not
decided to hear the Word of God and to learn in silence, but they have chosen a part which is not fit for them, that is, they have decided to teach!

A woman is not permitted to exercise authority over her husband

I said before that a woman is not permitted to exercise authority over her husband, let us see therefore how a woman must behave towards her own husband. Paul wrote: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Ephesians 5:22-24), and again: “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33 – NKJV).

Now, the Church is the Lamb’s wife and she must submit to Her head, that is, Christ Jesus, therefore just as the Church submits to Christ with all reverence and doesn’t dare to exercise authority over the Christ of God, so, in the same manner, the wife must submit to her husband.

Sarah is an example of a woman who submitted to her husband, for the Scripture says that “Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Peter 3:6 - NKJV). I would like to point out that even though she was submissive to her own husband, she was not a slave of her husband but a free woman, as it is written that “Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free-woman” (Galatians 4:22). Why do I say this? Because some women think that in ancient times the wives of the patriarchs were treated and regarded as bondwomen. Consider this: the holy women who trusted in God were submissive to their own husbands, and because of their respectful behaviour they are called ‘bondwomen’! The reason why today many women think that those holy women were bondwomen is that they think that in this modern age for women to submit to their husbands, as did those holy women, is absurd. Today, what should be a normal thing for a woman, is considered outdated and inadequate; therefore, no wonder that many women do not want to submit to their husbands. Those women who call the obedience and the submission of Sarah towards Abraham ‘bondage’ are nothing but women who have become slaves of a perverse way of thinking, and if they want to escape the snare of the devil into which they have fallen they must repent and obey the truth.

We live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation which has perverted the straight ways of the Lord, and we see with our eyes that many so called ‘feminist movements’ have risen and these movements are fighting against God, for their purpose is contrary to the sound doctrine of God. The fight which is called ‘the fight in favour of the emancipation of women’ is nothing but a device used by Satan to destroy the family. Furthermore, there are some women who do not know what the verb ‘to emancipate’ means. Now, to emancipate means ‘to set free from slavery’ and when a married woman says that she wants to become an emancipated woman she means that she wants to stop obeying her husband and submitting to him, and if she is unmarried she means that she doesn’t want to submit to man. After the woman was deceived and fell into transgression, God said to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16 – NKJV); these words were spoken by God, the Creator of all things, and the woman, who is just a creature, has decided to nullify the Word of God. Will she manage to nullify it? No, she won’t. Did her struggle improve our society? No, it didn’t, rather things in this world are going from bad to worse, and we see that what the woman is doing in order to emancipate herself is hastening the destruction of the family. Am I wrong in saying that divorces and separations are increasing in number because of the perverse ideas displayed by the feminists, who are under the leadership of the devil? Am I wrong in saying that today a woman who is obedient and submissive to her own husband is considered by the feminists (who are filled with hate for the Word of God because it reduces their claims to silence) a crazy and ignorant woman, and thus they encourage her to rebel against her husband to claim her ‘rights’? Today that old serpent, that is, Satan, is still deceiving the woman: he began in the Garden of Eden and is actively prosecuting his diabolical work to this day. Satan knows how to deceive the woman; he knows that it is sufficient to make her believe that God is a liar in order to cause her
to fall into transgression. What did God say to Adam? He said: “In the day that you eat of it [that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17 – NKJV); but what did the serpent say to Eve: “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), and she believed the serpent and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thinking that she would not die, and the baleful consequences of that disobedience can be still clearly seen today.

Sisters, I exhort you to obey the Word of God and not to deceive yourselves (by thinking that the freedom proclaimed by the feminist movements is useful to you and to your families). The true freedom is in the Lord, for it is written: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17 – NKJV). On the contrary, where the spirit of this world is, there is no liberty but only slavery to sin. Sisters, do you want to be really free? Well, then, continue in the Word of Christ, for Jesus said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

Daughters of Zion, be homemakers, so that your husbands, when they come home from work, may find the house clean and in perfect order and their clothes washed and ironed ready to be put on. Let them find savoury food, so that their spirit may be refreshed after a tiring day; do them good and not evil, they need you, you are the helper suitable that God made and gave to man; respect them and do not despise them (do not behave like Michal, David’s wife, who despised David in her heart when she saw David leaping and whirling before the Lord, and for this reason she “had no children to the day of her death” 2 Samuel 6:23 - NKJV); show them in deed and in truth that you love them; be faithful to your husbands, do not be quarrelsome, do not raise your voice against them; when they are tested by God stand by them to give them strength and do not behave like Job’s wife who, when she saw her husband’s sufferings, said to Job: “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9 – NKJV); bear children and bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord because this is one of the good works with which you must adorn yourselves.

The reasons of these prohibitions

Now, let us see why the woman is not permitted to teach nor to exercise authority over her husband but she must keep silent. Paul says that it is because “Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:13-14 – NKJV).

Therefore the reasons of this prohibitions to women are these.

First, because man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man (1 Corinthians 11:9), as it is written that after God formed Adam, He said: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18), and He took one of his ribs and made it into a woman. So man was formed before the woman. Being created first, the man has the creational priority, he is the head; and creational priority entails functional authority.

Second, because in the Garden of Eden it was not Adam who was deceived but Eve. Paul confirms this by saying to the Corinthians: “The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Corinthians 11:3 - NKJV). Why is it not written that the serpent deceived Adam by his craftiness? Because it is not true that the serpent deceived Adam. Of course, when Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he sinned, as it is written: “Like Adam they have broken the covenant – they were unfaithful to me there” (Hosea 6:7 – NIV), and again: “By the one man’s offense many died” (Romans 5:15 – NKJV). But we need to say all the truth about what happened in the garden of Eden, by saying that the serpent deceived Eve and not Adam. The woman herself recognized that she was deceived, for – after both she and her husband had sinned - when God said to her: “What is this you have done?” (Genesis 3:13 - NKJV), she said: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13 – NKJV). And that is what the old serpent is still doing, for he is still deceiving the woman. Why do many women refuse to submit to their husbands in everything? Why do they refuse to be homemakers? Why do they refuse to bear children, and if they want to have children, they say arrogantly: ‘Just one or at the most two’? Why do they refuse to do what God commands them to do, but they want to do what they are
not allowed to do? Because the serpent has deceived them by his craftiness, and through them he induces many men to sin.

Yes, I am fully convinced that in the Church of God, many men are deceived into disobeying some commandments of God by these women, who, having been deceived by that old serpent, through smooth and flattering words, induce them to take crooked paths, and the consequence of their disobedience is confusion.

Therefore, women, submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord, and do not have the presumption to teach. Be humble and respectful and you will be honored by God and by all those who love God and fear Him. Do not think about the so called emancipation of women, because you have already obtained the true freedom, and this freedom is in the Lord.

Some other words about the emancipation of women

The emancipation of women is a thing that the women of this world likes very much, because through it women and men are put on the same level both in society and in the family. Unfortunately, this so called emancipation of women is accepted even by many sisters in the Lord, who want at all costs to be considered equal to men and not inferior to them (in roles and functions), and therefore they don’t want to submit to them. So, besides going to work to earn their monthly salary (because the salary earned by their husbands was considered insufficient and humiliating to them), they took hold of the pulpit in some Churches and thus they are behind the pulpit teaching and rebuking the brethren. On the other hand, they say, if in Christ there is neither male nor female, why should only men have the opportunity to become pastors or elders?!!

First of all, I want to speak to you, women who keep the Word of God: take heed to yourselves and do not let this diabolical feeling enter you because it is a cancer which would destroy you, your family and the Church you belong to. Know this, that your head is man and whether you are married or not you must submit to man and as sign of this submission you must cover your head with a veil when you pray or prophesy. Be submissive to your husbands and respect them, love them and take care of them. Know that he needs you and by doing the housework you are a great helper to him.

Now listen, you ‘emancipated’ sisters, how long will you follow vanity and love lies? Is it not time for you to come to your senses and cast away your haughtiness and stop thinking that you have the same rights as men have? Do you not realize that since you gave heed to this so called emancipation you and your families have become less and less spiritual? Don’t you see that you are nervous, restless, full of worries and anxieties? Don’t you see that you are neglecting your husbands, who are forced to bear the baleful consequences of your so called emancipation? And what shall I say about your children? Don’t you see that they are growing bad because during the day you are not with them but you see them only in the evening when you have supper?

Therefore, stop deceiving yourselves and walk according to the Word of God, that is, submit to your husbands and be busy at home. Resign from your post and work in your house where there is plenty of work for you to do. Then you will see that the money earned by your husband is enough to live, and it is not absolutely humiliating to you.

Now, I want to say something to you brothers who reject the emancipation of women. Continue to abhor it for the sake of your wives and your families; you will be called male chauvinists, antifeminists, selfish persons, etc, but don’t worry about that.

On the contrary, I say to those who accept the emancipation of women: ‘Stop supporting it. Don’t you see how many harms it has done to our society and to your family? Don’t you see the evil things caused by it in the midst of the Church?’
The woman’s praying or prophesying with her head uncovered

Paul says to the Corinthians: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head [the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head] because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:3-16).

Sister, know that your head, that is, the one who is in a role of authority over you, is man. Whether you are an unmarried woman or a married woman (or even a widow), know that your head is man. Therefore, because of the angels (that is to say, because the angels are being taught through the Church that the woman is under man’s authority) you must have on your head, when you pray or prophesy, a sign of man’s authority over you and that sign is the veil, which I advise you to tie well in order to keep it from falling on your shoulders. You will say to me: ‘What offence do I commit if I don’t put on the veil (that is to say, if I don’t cover my head)? Here is my answer: If you pray or prophesy with your head uncovered you dishonor your head, that is, man (in other words, you deprive him of the honor he is worthy to receive from you). Therefore, you must recognize that if you pray or prophesy with your head uncovered (obviously, not only when you are in the place of worship but also when you are in any other place, because your head is the man and the angels looks at you even outside the place of worship) you commit a sin.

Replies to the main objections

● ‘The words of Paul about the veil are just an advice’. The words of Paul about the veil are not an advice, for Paul says: “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10 – NKJV. The NIV reads ‘a sign of authority’). That ‘ought to’ does not indicate that Paul advised believing women to put on the veil, but rather it indicates that he commanded them to put it on. Paul advised the Corinthians to do something when he said to them: “And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have” (2 Corinthians 8:10-11), but surely he does not give them an advice when he speaks of the veil. I am convinced that many sisters, if their boss told them that they ought to wear a veil or a particular hat, then they would keep that order lest they should make an enemy of their boss. But as chance would have it, God has commanded them through Paul to cover their head with a veil when they pray or prophesy and they don’t want to obey God. ‘It’s just an advice!’ they say, while it is a commandment of the Possessor of heaven and earth and of their life as well. That means that they fear men more than God; they fear the punishment which a man may inflict on them more than the punishment which the One who gives them life, breath and all things, may inflict on them. We are really surprised and filled with indignation because of such a behaviour. I am also convinced that if one day it becomes fashionable to cover one’s head with a veil, many sisters who refuse to cover
their head with a veil will buy a veil immediately lest they should appear anticonformistic. But
again, as a chance would have it, the custom of covering one’s head is a holy custom which is
confirmed by the New Testament, which is the Word of God, a custom which must be kept as
long as the Church is on the earth, but they are indifferent to it. They don’t want to look
‘outdated’, they don’t want to keep what Paul says. Therefore, they don’t want to conform
themselves to the Word of God, but they are willing to conform themselves to the fashion of this
wicked world! How many contradictions we see with our own eyes!!

● ‘The order about the veil given by Paul had to be kept only at that time and only in some
places’.
That’s something we can’t affirm after reading carefully all the words of Paul. For we read that
Paul said that the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, “because of the angels”,
that is to say, because the angels are being taught through the Church that the woman is under
man’s authority.
Now, I ask you, ‘Did the angels observe only the saints who lived in the city of Corinth, or did
they observe also the saints who lived in Ephesus and in Thessalonica and anywhere else at
that time? We believe that the angels observed the saints wherever they were. Therefore,
women had to cover their head with a veil – when they prayed or prophesied – also in Ephesus,
in Thessalonica and anywhere else, because they had to show a sign of authority to the angels
of God everywhere.
That is confirmed by the fact that Paul says that the Churches of God did not have the custom
of letting women pray with their head uncovered (therefore it was not only the Church of Corinth
which had the custom of letting women pray with their head covered).
But there is another question I want to ask you: Did the angels of God, after the death of Paul
and of the other apostles, cease watching the Churches of God? The answer is ‘no’, therefore
the woman must still cover her head because of the angels, when she prays or prophesies (I say
it again, both inside and outside the place of worship).
What happens if she refuses to obey this commandment? The Scripture says that she
“dishonors her head”, that is, man, because Paul says that the head of woman is man.
To confirm that the commandment about the veil for the woman when she prays or prophesies
was not just for a place nor temporary, I want to point out to you that Paul commands man not to
cover his head when he prays or prophesies, for he says: “A man indeed ought not to cover his
head, since he is the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7 – NKJV), and that if a man
does not keep this commandment he dishonors his head, that is, Christ, for Paul says: “Every
man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head” (1 Corinthians 11:4 –
NKJV). Why do I say that this prohibition to men confirms that the necessity for the woman to
wear a veil did not apply just to that time and to a place? Because today when believing men
pray or prophesy, if they have a hat on their head, they feel they have to uncover their head,
while if they have their head uncovered they don’t feel they have to cover their head. Why that?
Because they feel inwardly that if they prayed with their head covered they would dishonor the
Lord (and this confirms what Paul says to the Corinthians). And if they prayed or prophesied with
their head covered, surely their conscience would immediately rebuke them. With regard to this,
I want to tell you an incident which happened to me many years ago. I was doing my military
service (I was a babe in Christ at that time and I did not understand that according to the Word
of God we must not learn to fight against other men) and I wore a military hat very often while I
was in the barracks. I always took off my hat before saying grace. However, one day, maybe
because I was in a hurry to do something or because I was lost in thought, I forgot to take it off
and I gave thanks before my lunch. But after I prayed, since I noticed that I had not taken off my
hat as usual, my conscience rebuked me because I knew that according to the Scripture I had
dishonoured Christ. Therefore, I immediately confessed my sin to the Lord and I resolved not to
fall into the same transgression any more. Therefore, since we who are men dishonour Christ if
we pray or prophesy with our head covered, we must abstain from praying or prophesying with
our head covered. I remind you that Christ is worthy of all honor being Lord of lords, King of
kings, and the supreme head of the Church, and thus we must not dishonour Him. Maybe someone thinks that to dishonour Christ is not a mistake so serious, thus I want to remind this person that Jesus said to the Jews: "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5:23). On another occasion, precisely when the Jews insulted Him by saying: “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48 - NKJV), Jesus said to them: “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me” (John 8:49 - NKJV).
The words ‘you dishonor Me’, spoken by Jesus to the Jews after they insulted Him, indicate that those who insult Christ dishonor Him. Therefore if Jesus rebuked the Jews because they had dishonoured Him, surely if we dishonor Him by praying or prophesying with our head covered He will rebuke us also. Therefore, if we, who are men, must not pray or prophesy with our head covered, for sure women must have their head covered when they pray or prophesy lest they dishonor man. Therefore, sisters in the Lord, I exhort you to cover your head when you pray or prophesy. Daughters of Zion, do not be contentious.

- ‘Long hair is given to the woman for a covering, therefore since she has long hair she does not need to cover her head with a veil’.

Long hair is certainly a glory to the woman (for it adorns her as an ornament and its appearance contributes to her beauty), but long hair is not the sign of authority on her head which must be seen by the angels of God, because her hair is given to her “as a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15 – NIV), that is to say, it serves as a shawl for her, thus her hair is not the veil she must wear. This is confirmed by what Paul says in verse 6: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off,” (NIV) for if we were to substitute ‘hair’ for ‘covering’ this statement of Paul would be ludicrous. Listen how it would read, ‘If a woman does not have her hair, she should have her hair cut off!!!’ My question is: ‘But if her hair is already off, how can she have her hair cut off?’ That’s why to the question of Paul: “Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:13 – NKJV), we answer that it is not proper for a woman to pray God with her head uncovered (even if she has long hair).

- ‘So, should women go around always veiled as the Arab women, so that only their eyes or their face may be seen?’

The Word of God does not say such a thing. First of all, it says that the woman must cover her head only when she prays or prophesies and not always. Obviously, if a sister prays continually or often, it is right for her to keep her head covered even while she does her housework, etc. And then it must be said that Paul doesn’t say that the woman must cover her face, as the Muslim religion commands the woman to do, but that she must cover her head, thus her eyes and her face can remain uncovered.

- ‘Will a sister who does not cover her head go to hell then? Isn’t she a daughter of God any longer then?’

Absolutely not, a woman in Christ is a sister in the Lord even if she prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, but the fact is still true that in so doing she demonstrates that she does not want to obey the Word of God with regard to this particular order which applies to her. Therefore she proves to be a rebellious woman. And God does not take pleasure in any form of rebellion because He is righteous. Will she be punished then? Yes, even this disobedience will not go unpunished.

I conclude with the following words of Paul: “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16 – NKJV).
The man’s praying or prophesying with his head covered

As I said before, while a woman ought to pray or prophesy with her head covered in order not to dishonor her head, that is, man; a man ought not to cover his head when he prays or prophesies, for Paul says that “a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7 - NKJV) and again: “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head” (1 Corinthians 11:4 - NKJV). Therefore, brothers, remember that you must take off your hat or whatever other thing you have upon you head before you begin to pray or prophesy in order not to dishonor Christ Jesus.

Lack of affection and respect toward one’s wife

One’s wife must be loved as oneself and respected, for Peter says to the husbands: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7) and Paul says: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). Therefore, brothers, don’t beat your wife, don’t throw anything at her, don’t speak to her any bad word, don’t treat her brutally, don’t slander her, and don’t think that she has only duties toward you because she has also some rights according to the Scripture. And woe to those husbands who ride roughshod over the rights of their wives; they will surely be punished for their haughtiness!

Lack of respect toward those who are older

It is written: “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man” (Leviticus 19:32 – NKJV). Therefore you younger people do not be lacking in respect toward those who are older. The apostle Peter tells the younger people to be submissive to those who are older (1 Peter 5:5).
Life is a wheel, those who are old today were once young, and those who now are young will be old. The younger people, therefore, ought to consider that as they will desire to be respected by the younger people when they are old, so now they must respect those who are older. And let them remember the words of the prophet: “As you have done, it shall be done to you” (Obadiah 15).

Lack of respect toward the governing authorities

Many people of the world speak evil of the governing authorities by mocking them and slandering them, and they would like you to do the same. I exhort you not to imitate these people, because it is not right to speak ill of the governing authorities in the sight of God. The Scripture says that we must render to all their due: “Honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:7 – NKJV) is due, and the governing authorities are worthy to be honored because God appointed them to do us good. Even when scandals come through them, we must take heed that we don’t slander them because to slander one’s neighbour is not fitting for the saints. Consider the fact that the Scripture rebukes those who speak evil of dignitaries, that is, the devil and all his invisible ministers, for it says about the false teachers: “These dreamers defile the flesh, reject
authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said: ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ (Jude 8-9 - NKJV) and again: “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord” (2 Peter 2:10-11).

Therefore, if the Scripture rebukes those who slander the devil, who is the evil one and the enemy of all believers, no wonder that it rebukes also those who speak evil of the governing authorities even when the authorities make some mistakes. Take heed to yourselves and shine as lights in the midst of this generation which likes to slander the governing authorities. Remember that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is a slanderer, with such a man you must not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Selling things which pertain to the Kingdom of God

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples to preach the Kingdom of God, to cast evil spirits, to heal the sick and to raise the dead, among other things He said to them: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8 – NKJV). What do these words mean? They mean that Jesus told His disciples that since they had received freely the Gospel, as well as the power to heal and cast demons and raise the dead, they had to give freely to others what they had received; therefore without charging for their sermons or for their healings or for the resurrection of a dead person, or for the deliverance of a demon possessed person, and so on. Therefore, according to these words of Jesus, it is sin to sell Bibles, hymnals, teaching books, and tapes. It cannot be otherwise, because if we can’t accept the fact that a pastor charges € 25 or € 50 for a sermon, or € 15 for a prayer on behalf of a sick person, or € 10 for each visit paid to a believer who is sick, in the same way we can’t accept the fact that some believers sell the Bible, and all those things which can help to edify the Church. Therefore, I exhort all those who are still selling Bibles and other things which edify the Church to stop selling them; give everything freely, believing that God will provide you with all the things you and your families need to live and to spread His Word. Instead, I encourage those who give freely to continue to act in this way because this is well pleasing to God. Be strong and don’t be afraid of anything and anybody.

Taking the collection by passing an offering basket during the worship service

In almost every place of worship, either a short time after the worship service has started or just before it ends, the collection is taken. In some places of worship the collection is taken through a little offering-basket while in some others through an offering-plate. This way of collecting the offerings of the saints is not confirmed by any passage of the Scripture, therefore I exhort you not to use it in order to collect the money which is needed for the work of God. Actually, this way of collecting offerings looks like a form of begging, and it must be said that so far it has offended not a few of the unbelievers who have come to the place of worship in order to hear the Gospel. ‘They ask for money just like the Roman Catholic priests!’, some say; while others say: ‘Entry is not really free because once you are inside the place of worship they put the offering-basket before your nose because they want to be paid’. However, let me show you from the Scripture the right way to collect the offerings of the saints. When God commanded the Israelites to make Him a sanctuary, He said to Moses: “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and
silver, and brass, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:1-8). After Moses received that order, he “spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD ....” (Exodus 35:4-5). And the Israelites obeyed, as it is written: “And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. ....

The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses” (Exodus 35:20-21,29). And bear in mind that the Israelites brought much more than what was needed, they brought so many things that Moses had to command the people of Israel not to bring any more offerings, as it is written: “And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much” (Exodus 36:6-7).

When king Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each man according to his service, “he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD. And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the LORD their God, and laid them by heaps” (2 Chronicles 31:4-6). I have cited this incident not to uphold tithing under grace, which is not mandatory, but just to show you from the Scriptures the right way to collect offerings from believers.

It is written that in Jerusalem, after the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early disciples, “as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet ....” (Acts 4:34-35).

Concerning the collection for the poor among the saints, Paul said to the Corinthians: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). As far as these words are concerned, which are quoted by some to confirm that it is right to pass an offering-basket in the place of worship, I want to point out that the offering had to be set aside by the saints at their houses (and when the apostles would come they would take their offering) and it was not to be put inside an offering basket which was passed among the saints during the worship service in the place of worship.

As you can see, no one of the above mentioned passages shows that an offering basket or a drum or any other container was passed out among those who were called to give for God's work.

In case all these passages of the Scriptures are not enough to make you understand that it is unscriptural to pass out the offering basket among the saints or among the unbelievers after the preaching of the Gospel, I remind you brothers of the way our Lord Jesus acted. He went through every city and village, preaching the Good news of the Kingdom of God and teaching and casting out demons and healing the sick, but He never asked people for money, after or before preaching, by commanding His disciples to pass out an offering-basket among the people (who sometimes were thousands) who gathered together to hear the Word of God from Him. Did
people make offerings to Him? Of course, they did, for many women provided for Him from their substance (Luke 8:1-3), and one of His disciples, namely Judas, kept the money bag (John 12:6) into which was put the money given to Him by His disciples. And the apostles also acted like Jesus, for they never passed out an offering basket among those who came to them (whether they were believers or not) to hear the Word of God. Read carefully the book of the Acts of the apostles and all the epistles and you will find not even a single passage which confirms somehow that it is lawful to pass out an offering basket in the place of worship or when Gospel meetings are held under a tent. He who has ears, let him hear.

Why is to pass out an offering basket in the place of worship (which can be the house of a brother) wrong?

- Because thus some are ‘forced’ to give money, and according to the Scripture a believer must not give under compulsion but willingly and joyfully, as Paul says: “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7 – NKJV), and it is not right to force anyone to give, otherwise the offering is no longer made willingly but grudgingly, and if there is something disgusting and annoying is to see those who are covetous give to be seen (therefore, they give grudgingly) by those who give willingly, and therefore their giving is an act of hypocrisy. Let them keep their money in their wallet, lest we hear them complaining outside the place of worship as if they gave their money to support the work of a man or a useless work and not the work of God which is useful to men.

- Because by passing out the offering basket you cannot test the love of believers, that is you say, you can’t see if they really love the work of God. You could always think that some believers make offerings only because they don’t want others to see that they don’t make any offering.

- Because it looks like a form of begging; it looks like the way of begging of those who play a flute or a violin or an accordion in the underground railway, who, after playing their instrument for several minutes, pass out an offering basket to collect alms.

- Because it is as if the pastor after the sermon says: ‘I preached, didn’t I? Now, then, you must pay me for it!’. In other words, the preaching looks like the sale of a product rather than a service offered unselfishly to men.

- Because there might be some unbelievers among the saints, who would be offended by seeing an offering basket passing before them, and that’s what actually happens.

What is then the right way to collect the offerings of the saints? Here it is: an offering-box should be put in a corner of the place of worship and it must be said to the saints that those who are willing to make an offering for the work of God must put their offering into that box. Perhaps some will say: ‘If we do this, many brethren will forget to give!’ I don’t think so, because the Holy Spirit will remind them of the commandment of Jesus according to which we must give. Did not Jesus say: “He [the Holy Spirit] will …. bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you’ (John 14:26 – NKJV)? Do you think that the Holy Spirit reminds the saints that they must go to the place of worship but He does not remind them that they must give to support the work of God?

Arriving late at the worship service

There are some believers who are in the habit of arriving late at the worship services, that’s a bad habit, do not imitate them. Rather make every effort to arrive always in advance at the worship services, remembering that you go to the place of worship to meet the members of the body of Christ in order to edify one another and to glorify God. If the people of this world arrive early at the stadium or indoor stadium to watch a soccer game or a basketball game, if those who attend the black masses make every effort to arrive in advance to glorify Satan their master, if students make every effort to arrive at school early to attend the lessons, how much more the saints must see to it that they arrive at all costs early!
Sleeping during the worship service

In those communities where the worship Sunday service is held in the afternoon, it is not rare to see somebody fall asleep in his chair during the preaching of the Word of God. That’s a work of the devil, who does not want believers to hear the Word of God because he knows that faith comes by hearing the Word of God and through the preaching of the Word of God believers are edified. Expose this work of the enemy, and take heed to yourselves lest you fall into this trap of the devil. I advise you to eat in moderation at lunch in order to be sober during the worship service.

Making noise during the worship service

Besides causing some believers to fall asleep, the devil causes some other believers to make noise during the worship service in order to distract those who are listening to the Word of God or those who are praying or those who are singing. Some move a bunch of keys in their hands; some others move themselves in their chair because they start talking with someone who is beside or before or behind them; some distribute sweets to children; and some others move continually their mouth because they have a chewing-gum in it. Take heed to yourselves and expose these things. Pay attention to everything which is done for the common edifying during the worship service.

Improper clothing (whether female or male clothing), and other improper things concerning the outward adornment and one’s conduct

You, brothers and sisters in the Lord, being the light of the world and the salt of the earth, must be an example to the children of this age in clothing also. And in order to do this, you must not conform yourselves to this present age, that is to say, you must not follow the fashion, and you need to keep the commandments of God. And when we speak of the fashion of this world we must always bear in mind that it is provocative, expensive, and indecent, because that’s the kind of fashion the children of this age like.

Let’s see now, therefore, what a believing woman and a believing man must not put on and how she/he must dress in order to be an example. First of all, I want to say that a believer, as far as modesty and decency are concerned, must dress always in the same way. Whether a believer goes to the place of worship or to work, whether it is winter or summer, a believer must always dress modestly and decently. The only difference we permit and understand is the weight of the clothes because it is evident that during summer we cannot wear the clothes that we wear in winter. Therefore, in this case the weight of the clothes is different because the material of which they are made is different. A believing man or a believing woman is the temple of God wherever he/she lives on the face of the earth and every day of the year, that’s why he/she must dress always modestly and decently.

Woman

As far as the outward adornment of the woman is concerned, the apostle Paul says: “In like manner also, [I will] that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9-10), and Peter confirms these words by saying to women: “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of
wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adored themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands” (1 Peter 3:3-5).

Let’s start speaking of the things which a believing woman must not wear. She must not wear tight blouses, transparent blouses, and low-necked blouses. And her blouses must not be short-sleeved nor sleeveless, and they must not be made of costly materials. In addition to this, she must not wear trousers (whether they are man trousers or woman trousers), miniskirts, or skirts which reach her knees lest when she is seated she show off her thighs, which must be kept covered.

She must not wear slit skirts, or skirts made of expensive materials. Furthermore, she must not put on fishnet stockings nor those shoes with stiletto heels, nor silver or golden shoes. All these things are not proper for a woman professing godliness, because they make a woman provocative and haughty. Let the woman wear long skirts, which reach their ankles, and let her skirts be decent and modest; and let her blouses be decent and modest as well as her shoes.

Concerning gold or silver jewelry, she must not put any jewelry around her neck, in her ears, around her wrists, and in her fingers. Obviously, she should not put on the wedding ring either, also because the custom of wearing a wedding ring is based on a superstition, which can be read in almost every dictionary of superstitions. This superstition – as I have already said – holds that the fourth finger of the left hand has a vena amoris, that is, a love vein running directly to the heart, so the wedding ring, which is symbol of union of love and of faithfulness, should be put on the left-hand annular finger. Pearls also must not be worn by a woman.

As for the make-up, a woman must hate it, therefore she must not paint her eyes nor put rouge on his face, nor put on any lipstick. The Bible says that Jezebel, Achab’s wife, who was a very wicked woman painted her eyes (2 Kings 9:30). A woman should not put on any perfume because it distracts greatly men and attracts them to her.

As far as his head is concerned, a woman should not cut her hair, because it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut as a man (instead, if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her), and she must not braid her hair nor perm her hair and nor have her hair dyed. A woman should not wear sun glasses because they make her appear haughty. And when she prays or prophesies she ought to cover her head with a veil, lest she dishonor her head, that is, man.

As for her behaviour, when a woman is seated she must not cross her legs nor part them, lest she provoke men. And she must not put a chewing-gum in her mouth, lest she move her lips in a provocative and sensual way.

Man

Now, let us speak of man, because many tailors have made also man provocative. In the law is written: “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 22:5). Now, this is the only passage in the Scripture which refers clearly to the way a man should not dress, therefore we will start from it. Some time ago, I happened to read some words spoken by some famous tailors about the male fashion; the substance of what they said was that the man of this age must look like a woman in his bearing and therefore the male fashion must help to feminize him. Needless to say, those who speak in this way are effeminate men or sodomites. So in this age, through these famous tailors, who are under the power of the devil, many clothes for men which look like female clothes (both in the cut and in the colours) have been made. These tailors don’t pay any attention to the Word of God, rather it must be said that they scoff at the Word of God openly. That’s why believers, especially younger people for the fashion is addressed mainly to them, must be careful what they put on because various male clothes are influenced by this perverse tendency whose purpose is to make a man flabby and frivolous.
Before I start speaking of those articles of clothing that a believing man must not wear, I want to point out that it is not only women who seek to attract men through their clothes, for men also seek to attract women through their clothes. Remember that many tailors have made diligent researches on women in order to find out what male clothes attract women the most. Do not underestimate this, brothers, do not be ignorant of Satan’s devices.

Let’s start from the shirts. Men should not wear those pink or yellow shirts with strange and attractive drawings, because their purpose is to attract women’s attention. Shirts must not be close-fitting lest they show off the muscles of man’s bust and arms; I know that some believers like to show off their muscles in this way; brothers, abstain from doing such a thing, which is improper. Shirts must not be made of very expensive materials; the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world.

As far as the tie is concerned, it is something which is superfluous and something which makes a man ‘higher’ and therefore don’t put it on. Put a man without a tie near a man with a tie on and you will notice immediately the difference; there is great demand for ties, in some places it is mandatory; what’s the use of it? At least, the belt helps to keep the trousers adherent to the waist and keeps them from falling down, but what’s the use of the tie? I believe that the tie – especially the tie which is fashionable – is useful only to make man attractive. Today, it’s not difficult to meet believers who forget to bring their Bible to the place of worship but don’t forget to put on their flashy and odd tie! They have all kinds of ties; always a new tie on, always an expensive tie!

As for trousers, they should not be too loose-fitting nor too tight-fitting; in the former case because they tend to feminize the man (which is the aim of many tailors), while in the latter case because they show off a man’s curves making him provocative and attractive. If the woman must not wear miniskirts, a man must not wear minitrousers (shorts and bermudas), which are so fashionable during summer, because it is shameful for men to show off their thighs and legs. As for shoes, they must not be luxurious shoes made of crocodile skin or made of some other very expensive material. Let man dress with propriety and decency in order to glorify God in his body.

As for jewelry, men also must not wear any jewelry, therefore no necklaces around the neck, no bracelets around the wrists, no earrings, no rings.

As for hair, a man also should not perm his hair nor have his hair dyed. And since if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, he should not have long hair like a woman, he must not have a pigtail, and he must not have his hair shaved on both sides of his head in order to have the hair only on the top of his head as many young people do today. Men also should not wear sunglasses, nor put on any perfume because it distracts the woman and attracts her. And when a man prays or prophesies, he must not have his head covered, lest he dishonor his head, that is, Christ.

As for his behaviour, a man must not open his shirt to show off his chest, and he must abstain from crossing his legs in the place of worship and outside it; when it is hot he must not put himself bare-chested before other people because that is a bad habit.

 Replies to the main objections

● ‘God looks at the heart!’
That’s true, but it is also true that God does not look only at our heart, I mean that He looks also at the way we dress, and if we don’t honor our body and the sound doctrine through our clothing he is not well pleased with us. If God looked only at the heart, He would not have said through Paul how a woman must adorn herself, nor would He have said through Moses that a woman must not wear anything that pertains to a man. Don’t you think so? If God looked only at the heart, we could go to the place of worship or to work completely naked!!! But obviously we can’t do such a thing because it is an abomination to God. Then, I put the following question to you sisters: ‘If God looks at the heart, what do men look at?’ It does not seem to me that when men see you walking with your miniskirts or with your low-necked dresses or with your close-fitting
dresses, they look at your heart! They look at everything except your heart. They don’t care about your heart at all, I say it again, ‘at all’!!! Here is the point, men looks at your body. Therefore, knowing that men feel attracted to women, and when they see you the first thing they look at is your body, you must be careful what you put on because the less covered you are the more exposed you will be to their insolent compliments and to their provocative and piercing glances.

Therefore, you must do every effort not to attract men’s attention through your clothing and anything else which may help to attract their lustful attention, which will cause them to sin and thus in this case you will cause them to stumble. However, there are men who, because of your provocative dresses, not only will look at you but will also try to touch you and to rape you. And in fact there are many women who have been raped because they were dressed in a very provocative way. There are some people who have come to the conclusion that it is not men who rape women but women who rape men! I must confess that they are not completely wrong in saying such a thing because there are some women who, through their clothing and behaviour, really solicit men to sin against them. Consider what I am saying, and you will see that it is so. Therefore, sisters, you run several dangers by wearing provocative and indecent dresses.

• ‘The cowl does not make the monk!’

I agree with you, however the fact still remains that a monk must put on the cowl. Whether he is a true monk or a false monk, therefore, he must wear the cowl. This applies to the nuns also, who must wear a special dress. The fact still remains, however, that when a woman meets a monk or a man meets a nun, her or his senses are not stimulated as when a woman meets certain brothers or a man meets certain sisters who wear very provocative and tight-fitting clothes! Ah, if only many sisters were dressed like nuns! For sure they would not induce their neighbour to fall into temptation.

Furthermore, it must be said that the clothes a person wear show what the person is inwardly. That is something that have been said even by some sociologists and psychologists. That shows the importance of clothes. Younger people who rebel against the modern society show their rebellion through eccentric clothes. Prostitutes wear particular dresses to attract men. Transvestites are dressed like men or women, according to their perversion, in order to attract people of the same sex. In other words, in our society people speak also through the clothes they wear. And since we Christians live in the midst of the world, and we also have to say something to this world through our clothes – what we want to say to the children of this age is that God is holy and we are called to honour our body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we no longer belong to this world, having been delivered from this present age –, we will be able to deliver this message to the world only if we are dressed blamelessly. That’s why a believing man or a believing woman must appear a holy person outwardly. Be careful, I am not saying that we must pursue only the outward holiness, but I am only saying that the outward holiness also is important because it indicates that we want to honor God with our body, and also because in certain cases the world will see only this of us, it will hear only what we will say to it through our clothes.

Obviously, we must have also a pure mind, a pure conscience, a pure behaviour in our private life, otherwise we will be hypocrites, we will be like those whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful outwardly but inside are full of dead men’s bones. And we must beware of every form of hypocrisy since the hypocrites will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Nevertheless, clothes are very important in the life of a Christian. Some people of the world have gone as far saying: ‘Tell me what you eat and I will say who you are!’ and, ‘Tell me what kind of people you frequent, and I will tell you who you are!’, but also: ‘The way you dress is a reflection of what you are on the inside and indicates what you intend to do!’ As for the last two expressions, I must say that they are not wrong, because the people we frequent and the clothes we wear indicate what kind of people we are.
● ‘Many of the things you say are not written!’
You are right in saying that they are not written, but in the way I have spoken them, for they are written in another way. How? Let’s take for example the following words of Paul: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are [were] bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and also these: “For this is the will of God, … that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel [body] in sanctification and honour” (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4). What do we learn from these words? We learn that our body does not belong to us but to God, for He bought it, that the Holy Spirit dwells in it and thus our body is holy, as it is written: “The temple of God is holy” (1 Corinthians 3:17), and therefore we must see to it that we dress it properly and we do not adorn it with gold and silver nor uncover parts of it, as the children of this present age do. Answer this question of mine: ‘If the Scripture states that our body is the house of God, thus a sanctified house, what right have we got to profane this house by besmearing it with cosmetic and colouring creams or by adorning it with gold jewelry, or by putting haughty and indecent clothes on it? As you know, the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world, which lies under the sway of the wicked one, therefore what shall we do if we wear haughty clothes? We will clothe the temple of God, or adorn the house of God, with the pride of the world. Jewelry is vanity and is not necessary to the body, therefore if we put jewelry on our body we will adorn the temple of God with the deceitful vanity, as the people of the world do. To uncover parts of our body in the presence of other people is a dishonor to us and dishonors our body, therefore if we uncover it we will dishonour God.
You see, brothers, what you need to bear in mind is that if you wear indecent clothes or haughty dresses and you uncover your body as the children of this age do, you will show that you don’t esteem your body, which is the temple of God; for this reason you must understand what the will of the Lord is, so that you may live as wise and not as fools.

● ‘There is no need to say these things (the Lord Himself will reveal them to the brethren!)’
That is what many pastors say. However, answer this question of mine: ‘What would you answer me if I told you that you don’t need to tell your child not to put his fingers in the wall socket when you see him touching it? Or what would you answer me if I told you that you don’t need to tell your children not to speak bad words when you hear them using a bad language? Or what would you answer me if I told you that you don’t need to tell them that they must not steal if you know for sure that they have stolen something? Wouldn’t you say to me: ‘We are their parents, therefore we must instruct and admonish them! We can’t permit them to do whatever they like! As parents we have this duty towards our children!’? Likewise, as for the things which a believing man or woman must not wear, those who have been appointed to shepherd the saints MUST warn them and exhort them, so that they should not wear certain articles of clothing because they are indecent and dishonor the doctrine of God. If a sentry sees that the enemy is coming and does not blow up his trumpet, what shall we say about that sentry? We shall say that sentry is a sentry in name but not in deed, because such a sentry does not do his job. Obviously, those who rule over the sheep of the Lord must be an example, ruling their own houses well, because if they are not able to settle things in their own families they will not be able to settle things in the life of other believers. But the fact is that today most pastors are not careful what they put on (especially outside the place of worship), and the same thing must be said about their wives and their children. When we see them, they look like people of this world, who have not yet turned from worldliness and the vanity of this wicked world. Maybe when they go to the place of worship they are dressed properly, but outside it they are unrecognizable. That’s why these pastors don’t urge the sheep to dress modestly and decently, for they themselves don’t dress how they ought to, and thus they are afraid of the reprimands of the sheep, who know their way of dressing outside the place of worship. Things being as they are, therefore, the words ‘the Lord Himself will reveal these things to the brethren’, are lying words, for actually they don’t want the Lord to reveal these things to the brethren.
● ‘We have been saved by grace and not by works, what you teach is a form of legalism which kills spirituality’.

It is true that we have been saved by grace, but it is also true that God did not give us permission to live like the heathen who don’t know God. At least, the Bible that I read does not say that we have permission to live like the heathen. My Bible does not say to me such a thing, either directly or indirectly. The apostle Paul said that we have been set free from sin to serve righteousness, therefore we must present our members as slaves of righteousness and not as slaves of iniquity. Therefore, since we have been called to serve righteousness with our body, we must no longer dress as when we belonged to this world and we served sin. However, the fact is that today almost all speak of the salvation we obtained, but they hardly ever speak of the fact that when we turned to Christ we became slaves of righteousness. I mean that we hardly ever hear that we became slaves of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:22), and thus as slaves we must obey His word by doing what is right in His sight. Yes, we are Christ’s slaves; He is our Lord and our Master, who bought us with His blood, and therefore we must obey Him, we must honour Him, we must not provoke Him with unjust deeds and words. On the contrary, it seems to me that many have forgotten these things, because they are dressed just like the heathen. Perhaps someone will say to me: ‘Did Jesus not say that we are His friends?’ Yes, Jesus said that we are His friends, but He also said: “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14 – NKJV). On the contrary, it really seems that – according to the things that are said by these rebels – Jesus said that we are His friends even if we don’t obey Him, that is, even if we love the world and all or just some of its lusts. No, Jesus of Nazareth did not teach that we are His friends even if we conduct ourselves like the heathen. Rather, James says that those who love the world are enemies of God, and thus they are enemies of Christ as well, because the Father and the Son are one. Therefore, consider carefully the fact that we are friends of God if we obey Him; the condition is very clear.

Another thing that must be said is this: to tell the brothers and sisters that they must not dress indecently but with decency and propriety is not a form of legalism which kills spirituality. The commandments which quench the Spirit and nullify the grace of God are the commandments regarding circumcision, the Sabbath day, the Jewish feasts and the new moon, foods (the prohibition of eating certain ‘unclean’ foods), and the commandment on tithing as well, to mention just some of them. Yes, even the commandment on tithing kills, because it is part of the mosaic law, thus of the Old Testament. However, it seems that no one realizes it. The commandment of tithing kills, that’s the legalism which kills. On the contrary, according to these pastors who love money rather than the Lord, tithing does not kill but does good to believers, much good to the faithful who pay tithes, but above all to them who collect the tithes of the faithful. Hypocrites, did you forget that according to the law tithes had to be collected by the Levites? Are you Levites? The levitical priesthood was abolished in Christ, therefore we cannot command the people of God to tithe any longer. I really don’t understand why according to you the levitical priesthood and the atoning sacrifices, which had to be offered by the priests, were abolished in Christ, while the tithes that the Levites had to collect from the people were not abolished!! However, you command the saints to tithe and you take advantage of the fact that the saints don’t know the Scriptures! You don’t care about the fact that many sisters are dressed like prostitutes, but you care about their tithes, you are very much interested in their tithes. You greatly err, for to command the brethren to dress properly is not legalism. The commandments which urges the saints to keep their own body in sanctification and honour are not precepts which bring the saints into the bondage of the law and cause them to fall from grace. Rather, it is your indifference that kills the saints, because it encourages them to dress indecently and to profane their body. Your jokes kill, your desire to become powerful after the flesh kills, your impudence kills, your misdeeds kill!! You mistake salvation for holiness. Therefore I remind you that the end of our faith is the salvation of our soul, while the fruit of our faith is holiness. Salvation is obtained by grace, through faith in Christ Jesus; but sanctification (the progressive sanctification) is achieved by keeping the commandments of the Lord and of the apostles. Therefore, if you don’t command the saints to dress with propriety and decency it means that
you don’t want them to pursue holiness. This is serious, very serious, because it means that the biblical passage which says that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) is of no importance to you. Therefore, you do not honour the Word of God and you induce the saints to do the same. However, do not deceive yourselves, in due season you will reap the fruit of your rebellion.

You even say that these exhortations cause unbelievers to stumble. On the contrary, your exhortations, whose purpose is to induce people to give you tithes and a lot of money for God’s work, do not cause those unbelievers who hear you to stumble, do they?! No, these precepts which I teach, whose purpose is to honour the doctrine of God, do not cause unbelievers to stumble, rather it is your greed, your love for money, of which you are full, that causes unbelievers to stumble. It is the passing of the offering basket - and sometimes you even pass it out twice or three times because once is not enough for you – before the face of both believers and unbelievers, accompanied by all kinds of blessings for those who give a lot of money, which causes the unbelievers who hear you to stumble.

I conclude by saying: ‘Wisdom says “It is a joy for the just to do justice” (Proverbs 21:15 - NKJV). To do what pleases God is not something that makes us angry or kills us or saddens us, rather it is something that makes us glad. As for dressing with decency and propriety, there is not a single God-fearing believer who is displeased with this way of dressing because by it the name of the Lord is glorified through him or her. It is a joy for the just to dress with decency and propriety also because he knows that God will reward him also for his efforts to pursue holiness. God is just and will never be indebted to anybody.

Therefore, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation which I wrote for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you. I have spoken openly to you, brothers. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Making cuttings in our flesh and tattooing marks on us

The law says: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you” (Leviticus 19:28 - NKJV).

Therefore, both the custom of making cuttings on one’s flesh for the dead, which is a custom that some peoples have, and the custom of tattooing one’s body, which is a custom that many like very much, are sins in the sight of God. We, as believers, are called to flee these vain customs, because our body is the temple of God and doesn’t belong to us for we were bought at a price.

Not washing oneself

There are some believers who think that to be humble means not to wash oneself or to wash oneself rarely, so wherever you meet these believers (even in the place of worship) they are dirty and smelly. Such a behaviour is of the devil, because it does not honour one’s body, which is the house of God and the Scripture says that God wants the saints to keep their body in sanctification and honour (1 Thessalonians 4:4), and because through it one causes people to blaspheme the doctrine of God, and thus he causes them to stumble. How will the people of the world honor the doctrine of our God if we say to them or show them that our God does not want us to wash ourselves? I am sure, they will by no means honour His doctrine because they will think that we have a God who wants us to be bad-smelling and to have lice or some other little animals on our body running the risk of passing them on to those who are near us.

The law was against the presence of dirt in the midst of the camp of God, for God said: “Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an
implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse. For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you: therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you" (Deuteronomy 23:12-14 - NKJV). And since we are now God’s field (1 Corinthians 3:9) and God walks in the midst of us and dwells among us, we must keep ourselves clean even from the physical point of view and not only from the spiritual point of view because God does not take pleasure in seeing dirt in the midst of His field, which dirt I remind you has a bad smell.

So, brothers, I exhort you to wash yourselves, in order to keep your body clean and not to smell bad, otherwise your bad smell will keep people far from you. Remember that your body does not belong to you but it belongs to the Lord because it was bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Your body is His house and we must take care of His house because it is a holy house. If the servants of an earthly king make every effort to keep the house of their master clean, so that their king may be honoured, shouldn’t you, who are servants of the King of kings and the Possessor of heaven and earth, make every effort to keep His house, which is your body, clean? If the place of worship, which is not the house of God, is cleaned and kept in order because the saints gather together in it, how much more must your body be kept clean because the God of glory dwells in it, I say it again, because the God of glory dwells in it!

The improper use of hands and feet

Unfortunately, among the brethren there are some violent men who use their hands and their feet against the children of other people, and even against other brothers and against their wife and against their parents. These men are corrupt men, who do not fear God, and at the proper time they will reap all the harm that they have done to others. The day is coming when what they have done to others will be done to them, because God will send against them some violent and cruel men. Do not walk in their ways, and make no friendship with them, for it is written: “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go. Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Proverbs 22:24-25 – NKJV). Expose every wilful act of violence against anyone to harm him, because you must present your members as slaves of righteousness and not of iniquity, of meekness and not of haughtiness. Obviously all those beatings a father gives to his children to drive foolishness far from them are allowed and thus must not be exposed.

Among the things you must not do with your hands there are also those gestures which are made by the unbelievers to revile other people and to avert danger (for they are superstitious).

Winking with one’s eyes

Beloved, do not wink with your eyes, because it is written: “A worthless person, a wicked man, .... winks with his eyes ....” (Proverbs 6:12-13 - NKJV) and also that “he who winks with the eye causes trouble” (Proverbs 10:10 – NKJV).

Being surety

A surety is a person who takes responsibility for another’s undertaking, e.g. the payment of a debt. Brothers, avoid being surety for another, lest you suffer, as it is written: “He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure” (Proverbs 11:15 – NKJV).
Running into debts

Brothers, the Scripture says: “Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, one of those who is surety for debts; if you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?” (Proverbs 22:26-27 - NKJV), and also: “Owe no one anything except to love one another ....” (Romans 13:8 - NKJV) and again: “The borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7 – NKJV).

Therefore, I exhort you not to run into debts. If you have the money with which to pay you can buy what you intend to buy, but if you don’t have enough money do not buy it, otherwise you will become a servant of those who lend you the money and you will lose your peace. The grievances, the anxieties and the troubles of those who run into debts are many; talk with those who have run into debts and you will realize what I am saying. Be wise, for the sake of your soul.

Displaying in one’s house the photos of departed loved ones and visiting their grave

As for the photos of the dead people and going every now and then to visit the grave where they are buried, how should a believer behave after one of his loved ones has died and been buried? As to the photographs, he should not display them in his house, and as to visiting his grave he should not go to visit it periodically, as the Roman Catholics do thinking that they do a good work. The dead are either with the Lord in heaven or in hell, they know nothing, they cannot receive any good from us any longer, and we cannot receive any good from watching their photographs (rather we receive harm because by watching their photos our grief increases). Therefore, if you still have in your house some photographs of dead people, maybe with some flowers before them or even with some candles before them, I exhort you to take away all these things which grieve the Holy Spirit and attract demons. And if you are in the habit of visiting the grave of the dead people, I exhort you to stop doing such a thing, which is useless, which troubles, and which causes you to waste your time. Do good to the living, visit the living.

Pretending not to see the brothers

Beloved, when you meet a brother, whom you know, in the market place or on the train or on the bus or in the street, do not pretend you do not see him, as some do because they are ashamed to greet him (saying ‘Peace unto you!’ and giving him a holy kiss before the unbelievers). Rather, you should go to him with joy and greet him brotherly and ask him how he is and you should also begin to talk with him about the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Do not pretend you do not see him, for such a behaviour grieves your brother and dishonors the Word of God.

Not giving a holy kiss

Unfortunately, among the brotherhood there are some who don’t give a holy kiss when they greet one another because they are ashamed or because they are disgusted. Such a behaviour is to be exposed because it is contrary to the Scripture, which says: “Greet one another with a kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14 – NKJV) and again: “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12 - NKJV).

Do not seek to avoid those who want to greet you with a holy kiss, rather give them a holy kiss.
Going out alone with one's fiancée (going on dates alone)

As we know, young men go out alone with their fiancée. They go out with her to the beach or to a mountain or to some other places to spend time alone with her. Such a behaviour is not fitting for the saints, for promotes lust and moderate sexual activity, opening the door for fornication. Therefore you brothers, who are betrothed, take heed that you don't go out alone with your fiancée; make every effort to be with her always in the presence of other people who know you, whether you are at her house or at the house of some other persons or in the open air.

It is written: “Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22 – NKJV) and again: “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12 – NKJV). But if you conduct yourselves like the people of this world, that is to say, if you spend time alone with your fiancée (at home, in your car, etc.) you will not be able to keep these commandments, because you will give an opportunity to people to speak ill of you, you will rouse all kinds of suspicions, and you will lose your purity. How? By doing what is lawful for you to do only after marriage, that is to say, by petting and having sex. You may ask me, ‘Why is petting between two people who are engaged and love one another wrong?’ For the Scripture warns us to avoid any physical involvement with the opposite sex that excites desires which cannot be legitimately fulfilled, that’s why petting between a believer and his fiancée is wrong. Petting before marriage is a form of impurity, and we must not be involved in any impure acts (Galatians 5:19).

Furthermore, petting usually leads to sexual intercourse, which is sin in the sight of God when it takes place before marriage. This sin is called fornication, and the Scripture states that those who commit fornication sin against their own body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18).

For this reason a Christian man ought not to spend time alone with his fiancée, because he must avoid all these evil things.

I am aware that some raises some objections against what I have just said, so I want to reply to these objections.

The first objection raised is this, ‘On what basis can you state that I will certainly lose my purity by spending time alone with my fiancée?’ On the basis of what the Scripture teaches me, and of the experience of many people. The flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41), says the Scripture, and by spending time alone with your fiancée you will incite your flesh to perform acts which only husband and wife are allowed to do, that is you say, you will be tempted to act as if you and your fiancée were husband and wife, for you love one another, and sooner or later you will fall into temptation. What will happen if you pour out some fuel on a little fire? The fire will become a big fire, won’t it? What will happen if you scoop fire into your lap? Your clothes will be burned, won’t they? And what will happen if you walk on hot coals? Your feet will be scorched, won’t they? (Proverbs 6:27-28) Likewise, if you decide to spend time alone with your fiancée, you will sooner or later sin. Do not lean on your own understanding, lest you do yourself harm. Have you ever read that though Potiphar’s wife spoke to Joseph day by day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her (Genesis 39:10 – NIV)? Why did Joseph refuse even to spend time alone with Potiphar’s wife? For he feared God, and he knew that if he had spent some time with that woman alone, he would sooner or later fall into temptation. Well, you may argue, ‘That woman was not Joseph’s fiancée.’ That’s true, however the conduct of Joseph teaches us an important lesson, which is this: for a man it is very dangerous to be alone with a woman (in a room or in a car), who is not his wife. In other words, a Christian ought to avoid not only sin, but also the risk of sin. Therefore I am fully persuaded that a believer ought to avoid spending time alone with his fiancée, lest he fall into temptation.

The second objection is this, ‘I don’t care about what people may think of me and my fiancée, if we go out alone! People should mind their own business! Furthermore, people always think evil!’
Well, according to the Scripture, it is wrong not only to commit sin, but also to give the appearance of committing sin, as it is written: “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Therefore we, as Christians, ought to conduct ourselves always blamelessly in order to keep people from suspecting that we have committed this or that sin. But if people see or hear that you stay alone with your fiancée in your or her room/apartment till 2 a.m., they will certainly think evil, whether you sin or not. So, see to it that people have nothing bad to think or say about you. Do not ruin your own reputation for the desire of being alone with your fiancée. Wait, be patient; once you are married, you will have plenty of time to spend alone with the woman whom God has appointed for you.

Please note: In the light of the Scripture, petting is permitted after marriage, but must not include oral sex, for this sexual practice is unnatural

**Going to dance and to the amusement parks**

Those who have turned to the Lord must stop going to dance and to the amusement parks. As for going to dance, it must be said that it is a bad habit which is widespread above all among young people. It is they who speak about it most and go to discotheque. On Saturday night millions of young people go to discotheque, which shows that this amusement place attracts many young people, who can’t do without going to dance. They are slaves of this habit, for they are mad on dancing, to them dance is everything, to them it is life. Why do they go to discotheque? They go there to listen to the music, to dance, and to pick up girls or boys. However, many go to discotheque also to push drugs and hallucinogens, some other people go there to buy drugs, some others go there to get drunk and to beat other people. In other words, the discotheque is a place where you can find people who are slaves of all kinds of fleshly lusts, a place full of perversions where a son of God must not go for the sake of his soul. So, why should a believer avoid going to discotheque to dance? First of all, because the music you hear there is a diabolic music; rock music, disco music, and rap (to mention just some kinds of music) are kinds of music which excites listeners and urges them to act in a bad way (do not forget that many famous singers practice witchcraft or somehow are involved in it). The songs one listens in a discotheque are full of vanity, full of obscenities and full of perversion, therefore a believer must not listen to them, lest he defile himself. Furthermore, a believer must not dance sensually because he must present his members as instruments of righteousness and no more as instruments of iniquity, as it is written: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13). He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him, how then can he use the members of Christ to twist, to make strange gestures, and to move sensually in the midst of people who do not fear God at all? Furthermore, as I have said, the discotheque is a dangerous place also because brawls break out in it, there are people who push drugs and it is full of seducers and seductresses, therefore how can a Christian go to such a place to spend his time? It is written in the Psalms: “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10), and again: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1). That’s why we don’t want to go to discotheque and any other dance hall, because they are tents of wickedness where sinners gather together to amuse themselves while they listen to their favourite perverted music. It is a place which is not fitting for us, we will not be blessed if we go to such a place to amuse ourselves together with sinners.

As for going to the amusement parks, the name itself indicates what kind of parks they are. They are places where those who want to amuse themselves find what they like; the roller coaster, the halls with mirrors which deforms the image of those who are reflected in those mirrors, the horror
tunnel (where you can find all kinds of bad pictures), the bumper cars, the big wheel, and many other things. Why should a Christian avoid going to the amusement park? Because if he goes there he will spend his money for things which don’t satisfy and don’t edify. You who still go to these places, I will ask you some questions: ‘What’s the good of going to the amusement parks?’ ‘Do they strengthen you in the faith? Do they edify you? Why don’t you realize that you are wasting the money and the time that God gave to you? Don’t you realize that you could spend that money and that time on serving righteousness rather than vanity? Don’t you realize that you could spend that time praying, reading the Word of God, testifying of the Lord, and doing some good works? The Word of God says: “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let you soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live ….” (Isaiah 55:2-3).

Therefore, brothers, stop going to these amusement places and consecrate your life to God not in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth. Don’t you know that the pleasures of life, which Jesus compared to the thorns, choke the Word? Come to your senses; awake, for the enemy has entered your life. I know, your pastor also goes to the amusement park, for he takes the initiative in bringing you there; do not follow him, lest you defile yourselves. Ah, my heart within me is broken because I hear that some pastors and elders go to Gardaland (a famous Italian amusement park located in the north of Italy) or in some other amusement parks. Those who should lead the sheep in the paths of righteousness and should be an example to the sheep, take the sheep and lead them in the crooked paths to amuse themselves. Darkness has blinded their eyes, they have been overcome by the pleasures of life. Then they sing: ‘I want to spend my best years for you, for you my Lord, who died for me ….’. Of course these are beautiful and truthful words, but when they are sung by people who want to spend their life serving vanity they are out of place.

**Worldly music and worldly concerts**

A son of God must stop listening to the worldly music and going to the concerts held by the singers of this world. Therefore he must take all his old music tapes and records and throw them away. However, he’d better break them first, to keep those who may find them from picking them up. Furthermore, as I said before, he must stop going to the concerts held by his former idols. The reason is this: since he is a new creature in Christ, he must no longer present his ears as slaves of iniquity, so he can’t listen to the music of those who don’t know God, which music exalts vanity, obscenity and perversion. The Scripture says: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). That’s why when a man comes to the knowledge of the truth he thinks that he must get rid of all the worldly music he used to listen when he was lost, because he knows that he is no longer the same, he knows that he has new tastes, which are completely different from the former ones. What was formerly a pleasure for him, now it’s an abomination; what he formerly liked to hear, now it disturbs and distresses him. All these things must be said also about the concerts; therefore, if he formerly inquired about the time and place where the concert of his favourite singer would take place, now he is no longer interested in knowing these things because he does not want to attend his concerts any longer. He knows that if he attends these concerts he will spend his money for useless things, and will defile himself. But there are some believers who have not yet got rid of their worldly tapes and records, for they still keep them in their cars and in their houses and from time to time they listen to them. To these people I say: ‘It is time you put a stop to this worldly music!’ You even go to the worldly concerts, what kind of edification your receive from them? You are asleep, awake! Stop loving the music of this world’.
Brothers, know this, that if you begin to listen with pleasure to the worldly songs they will little by little enter your mind and your heart; for we easily memorize the melody and the words of a song. That’s why we must watch, so that we might not be fascinated by the vain melodies and the empty words of these songs which sometimes we hear involuntarily.

**Going to the beach**

In this country, near the end of spring, as soon as the days begin to be enough hot, it happens that the beaches begin to be crowded with bathers, both Italian and foreign bathers. And the beaches remain crowded for the whole summer and then they empty and remain deserted during the cold months. Why do so many people go to the beach during summer? Because they want to bathe and to get tanned; and also because they want to amuse themselves, for they find all kinds of amusements on the beach. When summer comes, those who live near the sea hear very often of sea, baths and tans; many of those who work till two or five o’clock in the afternoon look forward to finishing their work so that they might go to the beach, while those who have to work till eight o’clock wait anxiously for Saturday or Sunday, and all of them wait for their holidays in order to go to the beach nearly every day. In addition to these people, there are many others who travels for hours by car or by train or by bus to spend at least one day each week on the beach. It is sufficient to go to one of the railway stations which are near the beach to see an enormous and continuous flow of people dressed indecently going towards the beach. What happens on the beach? People take off their clothes and remain half-naked, and sometimes even naked, under the hot and shining sun to get tanned. From time to time they bathe, they listen to the music, they play soccer or volleyball or basketball where there are the necessary facilities, they eat and drink what they have brought there from their houses or they have lunch in the restaurant or pizzeria which is in the bathing establishment. Not to mention all those obscene actions which are done by some people in the presence of all, and all those vulgar speeches and jokes, which concern almost always the woman, which one can hear. That’s the atmosphere you find in all the bathing establishments during summer.

You, beloved brothers, must not go to the beach to bathe and to get tanned for the following reasons. Because your body is the temple of God and it is holy, as it is written: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?….. the temple of God is holy” (1 Corinthians 3:16,17), and because you must control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable (1 Thessalonians 4:4) at the coming of the Lord, as it is written: “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23 – NIV). But if you go to the beach to put yourselves half-naked before other people you will profane it and you will use it in an unworthy way and you will provoke God to anger. So that you may understand what you would do by putting yourselves half-naked on the beach, I will give you an example using the Old Testament. Let us suppose you are among the priests appointed by God for the service into the temple of God which is in Jerusalem; well, let us suppose you give a part of the temple to some prostitutes or you build a room where people can amuse themselves or you fill one room of the temple with idols. Would you not profane the temple of God and provoke God to anger?

What you need to bear in mind when you consider your body is that it does not belong to you because it is of the Lord, who bought it, for Paul calls the members of your body “members of Christ” (1 Corinthians 6:15 - NKJV) and he says to the saints of Corinth: “You were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20 - NKJV). And the Lord not only bought it but also sanctified it by His Spirit, who dwells in you. Therefore your body is holy and you can’t use a holy thing unworthily. That’s why the apostle Paul exhorted many times and in various ways the saints to present their members as slaves of righteousness and not as slaves of iniquity; such as when he said to the Romans: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield
yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:12-13), for he knew very well that their body was holy and had to be used in a holy way.

Therefore, brothers, since the temple of God is holy and you are that temple, you must pursue holiness, that is, you must abstain from all the things that can defile you and among these things there is also this bad habit. Perhaps someone will say: 'Why do we defile ourselves by going to the beach then?' First of all, because there you watch people who are half-naked and sometimes even naked; secondly, because you go to dwell among people who, not knowing God, speak and behave in a evil way and give themselves over to dissoluteness before all, and in watching this indecent sight you defile yourselves. Your body becomes full of darkness because the lamp of your body, that is, your eye, which should illuminate your body, goes out, for Jesus said that the lamp of the body is the eye and if our eye is bad, our whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22-23).

Now I will show that the arguments given by those believers who still go to the beach to amuse themselves like the sinners are vain and how these arguments are only pretexts.

• ‘The air of the sea is good and the doctor has advised us to go to the beach above all for the sake of our children’

It is true that the air of the sea is good, and that it is good to breathe it, however it is good not only at twelve o’clock or in the afternoon but also in the morning just before the rising of the sun, and in the evening after the sunset, when the beaches are empty, and it is good also if you breathe it staying off the beach. Yet, according to some, it seems that the air of the sea is good only if you breathe it while you are half-naked and you are standing among half-naked people! I ask you: ‘How is it that almost all say that the air of the sea does good to their children, but they hardly ever say that the air of the mountain also has a salutary effect on their children?’ The truth is that many believers are slaves of this pleasure of life and they say that they go to the beach for their children’s sake in order not to appear worldly people to certain believers. In other words, they play on their children in order to go to the beach and thus cover their lust.

Furthermore, the Scripture tells the parents to bring their children up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), therefore parents must not take their children to the beach because this does not mean to bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. If you accustom your children to go to the beach of the sea or to the shore of the lake or to the outdoor swimming pool when they are young, when they are older they will continue to go there, and since they will be able to go there by themselves without you, they will go there together with their school friends or fellow workers or even with their girlfriend. What will you do then, when your children go to the beach in order to amuse themselves and to give themselves over to immorality and they cause you endless sorrows? What will you say to them when they say to you: ‘I go to the beach because the air of the sea is good!’ or ‘It was you who took me there since I was a child, what do you want now from me?’.

Brothers, wisdom says: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 – NKJV). Therefore, be careful where you take your children because when they are old they will go to the same places where you brought them when they were very young.

• ‘I go to the beach to get tanned since I have a fair skin!’

What’s the good of this tan so extolled? Maybe it helps you to draw attention to yourself, doesn’t it? But I say to you: ‘Don’t you see that it disappears so quickly? And what’s more, it cost you much money because you had to buy special creams. Vanity has become so precious to you! You are chasing after the wind like the people of this world! Be content with the colour of your skin that God gave you! Don’t you realize that speaking in this way is tantamount to accusing God of not making your skin a little darker?’ Why don’t you glorify God – as David did (Psalm 139:14) - because you are wonderfully made, instead of complaining about the colour of your skin? You are like those who dye their hair in order to appear blond or blonde, or like those who
touch up their face or some parts of their face because they are not happy with their outward appearance. Your mind needs to be renewed for your thoughts are wrong.

● ‘The sea was created by God’
That’s true, God created the sea and all the things which are into it. However, what do you mean by that? Do you mean that you have the right to put yourself half-naked on the beach because God created the sea? If that is what you mean, then the heat also is made by God, should we then wear indecent clothes as unbelievers do during summer? How could we think of doing such a foolish thing? So that you may understand how your words are a pretext and out of place, I remind you that even the drug addicts, who take pleasure in taking drugs, say that the plant from which heroin is extracted was created by God; even those who look at women to lust for them say that it was God who created women; even fornicators and adulterers affirm that it was God who created sex; even drunkards say that it was God who created grapes from which wine is made! As you can see, even those who give themselves over to evil things, in order to justify their infamous and deceitful lusts, affirm that after all they use something which was created by God! When will you realize that it is wrong to justify this deceitful lust of the old man (that is, going to the beach) saying that after all you have the right to give yourselves to this pleasure of life because God created the sea?

● ‘To the pure all things are pure’
These words are written in the epistle of Paul to Titus and are taken by many believers, who are slaves of this deceitful lust, to affirm that to them, who are pure, going to the beach is a pure thing. But they are wrong, because the correct meaning of these words of Paul is completely different. The apostle says: “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15 - NIV). As you can see, Paul says that to those who are corrupted and do not believe nothing is pure; what shall we say then? Shall we say that to those who are corrupted and do not believe, going to the beach is not pure? We can’t say this, because we know that to them it is a good thing in which there is no harm. But what is not pure to those who are corrupted and do not believe? Here is the answer: both their consciences and minds, for they are defiled. Therefore we come to the conclusion that to those who are pure both their minds and consciences are pure. Let’s take for instance the conscience of those who believe in the Lord, is it not written that: “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14) and again that Paul says: “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience ...” (2 Timothy 1:3 - NKJV)? Realize that we can’t say that an amusement or a worldly lust is a ‘pure thing’; if it were so, that would mean that the pollutions of the world (that’s how the Scripture calls them), are no longer pollutions, because they are pure. Shall we say then that the pollutions of the world do not defile us any longer because they were ‘purified’ for the pure? Certainly not! Ah, there are really many believers who have been deceived into accepting this wrong interpretation of the words of Paul!!

● ‘It is true that on the beach there are women who are half-naked or completely naked, but it all depends on the way one looks at a woman who has her swimming suit on or does not have it on!’
We find these words on the lips of many women and men, both married and unmarried. However, I want to say this: ‘If we men strive with difficulty against the flesh as we walk along the streets of a village or town during all the four seasons, because the streets and marketplaces are full of women dressed like the prostitutes, who are everywhere and it is impossible for us not to see them, what will happen if we go among women who practically have no dresses on? How will our mind remain pure among them? If our flesh is weak, how shall we keep it from falling into temptation? I would like to say to those sisters who say such things: ‘If I told you that once you
have fallen into a pit full of mud you can continue to keep your dresses clean, it all depends on how you look at the mud into which you are, what would you answer me? It seems to me that you are like the superiors of the priests, who say to the priests when they receive the priesthood: ‘Take all precautions in order not to fall into temptation while you confess women in the confessional!’ I say: ‘How can these poor souls, on whom even celibacy is imposed, avoid sinning with their mind or body while they are confessing (or after they have confessed) when they are commanded to put to women some questions that husbands do not dare to put to their own wives?’ Indeed, it seems to me that you don’t know what you say, I say it again, you don’t know what you say.

Probably you forgot or you have never heard that king David, who was a man who feared and loved God and to whom God gave testimony and said: ‘I have found David a man after My own heart’, fell into temptation and committed adultery because one evening he saw the wife of one of his soldiers bathing. Here is what the Scripture says: “And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house” (2 Samuel 11:2-4). Now, we don’t know whether Bath-sheba had some clothes on or not, but one thing is sure, she was not dressed as usual because she was washing herself. However, it is more likely that she was naked. That’s when the fall of David began, then; when he looked at a woman who was bathing. And how many men sinned after they saw on the beach a woman bathing or undressing? Only God knows. The fact is that many men go to the beach to look at women, and many women go there to look at men. And the sad reality is that right on the beach begins the ruin of many marriages. Know this, that many extramarital affairs begin on the beach of the sea.

Then there are the causes of separation, divorces, and in some cases there is a crime of passion, which is called in this way because the unfaithful wife or husband is caught in the act and she or he is killed, and often the lover also is killed. And who will hear the cries of their children? How many tears will they shed because of their parents, who divorced because one of them or both of them decided to pursue unfaithfulness? And where did they begin to be unfaithful? Right on the beach.

Sisters, when will you come to your senses? When will your realize that by putting yourselves half naked before men you induce those who look at you to fall into temptation? When will you realize that by so doing you are guilty because you cause those who look at you to sin? Is it not enough for you to undress before your husband, who has authority over your body? Why do you want to undress also before other men? O women, who lack discretion, when will you understand what decency is? When? And now I speak to you brothers, both married and unmarried, who go the beach: ‘When will you realize that by putting yourselves half naked before women you induce women to fall into temptation? When will you realize that you too cause other people to stumble?

• ‘The money I spend to go to the beach is mine, it is not yours, I earned it and I am free to spend it as I like’

It is true, you are absolutely right in saying that the money is not mine and that you earned it by the sweat of your brow, but it is also true that it was given to you by God. Therefore, since it is God who gave you the money you have, you are called to spend it rightly and not to spend it to satisfy your fleshly lusts as the unbelievers do. Wisdom says: “The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin” (Proverbs 10:16 – NKJV). Therefore, since going to the beach is not something which is necessary for your body, but just a pleasure of life, if you use your wages to serve this worldly lust you conduct in a way which is not worthy of the calling with which you were called.
● ‘I carry my Bible to the beach to read it and I even evangelize those who are there’
This is another expression used as a pretext by those who are rebuked by their conscience when they hear someone exposing this pleasure of life.

Now, it is a good thing to carry one’s Bible to read it, however the fact is that when you are in the midst of so many people half naked and in the midst of so much confusion on the beach you can’t concentrate; as for evangelizing on the beach, it doesn’t make sense for a believer to say that he has turned to the Lord and then he goes to the beach to evangelize because in this way he doesn’t show that he has turned from the pleasures of life to the Lord and he can’t say to the sinners that they must turn to the Lord from the pleasures of life. From what should a sinner (who goes to the beach during summer) turn, if he who tells him to turn to the Lord is still a slave of this deceitful lust? Furthermore, I would like to ask you: ‘How can you speak of Jesus Christ to men and women who are half naked and you yourself are half naked? Then, when these believers return from their holidays spent on the beach they stand up in the place of worship to thank God for sending them to evangelize on the beach to people half naked! Indeed, some believers say all kinds of absurd things in order to justify this deceitful lust!!

However, what distresses me most is that most pastors never expose this deceitful lust, rather if they have the opportunity, they say some words in favour of it (some of them even change the time of the Sunday worship service to enable the brethren ‘to enjoy the sea created by God’) for they themselves are still slaves of this lust. And many sheep are encouraged to go to the beach right because their pastors say nothing against this lust (for they can’t see the harm which is in it) and they see or hear that their pastors themselves go to the beach. Many pastors in name but not in deed say: ‘What’s the harm in it?’ There is harm in it, but they, having been blinded by darkness, can’t see it, or maybe they pretend they don’t see it.

Brothers, I say to you who still go to the beach: ‘Stop going there’; and to you who were appointed to shepherd the sheep of the Lord and go to the beach I say: ‘Stop going there and begin to expose with boldness this bad habit’. Instead, to you who don’t go to the beach – I know you are a minority – because you are fully convinced that this habit is a bad habit I say: ‘When it’s very hot, continue to resist the enemy who tempts you to join the sinners and those believers who go to the beach, resist him, standing firm in the faith and he will flee from you; know this, that you are abstaining from an evil thing and that God takes pleasure in your position’.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and among other things he refuses to go to the beach to amuse himself as the wicked do and recommend him to do.

Television

Television is still considered one of the greatest technological inventions ever made in the field of mass-media. Now, it is common knowledge that television has changed society for the worse. What are these changes? First of all, television has reduced the time which the family’s members spend on talking with each other, for as they have lunch or supper they hardly ever speak to one another about their problems because they are watching television and listening carefully to what the television says. In addition to this, television has helped to increase obscenity, perversion, violence and many other bad things among people. How did television manage to change society? Because of its power, which is very big; those who study the ‘television phenomenon’ recognize that television has a great influence on people, which surpasses human intelligence because it influences the subconscious of human beings.

Now, I’m going to show you from the Scriptures that watching television is harmful to a believing person.

● The apostle John says: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh,
and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

If one considers carefully what is broadcasted on television, he will come to the conclusion that the television broadcasts all the things which are in the world, that is to say, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. That’s why we are not surprised to see that this mass-media has been ‘successful’ all over the world, because the television broadcasts what belongs to this world, and since the world loves its own things, the television is loved by the sinners to the point that they can’t do without it. Watching television is like breathing the air to them, it is like eating bread, it is like drinking water; in other words, it is necessary to them. If their TV set is broken, they call immediately the television engineer to repair it, as if a water or gas piper is broken. Let’s say it very clearly; sinners love television because they find in it all the garbage they like feeding on.

Unfortunately, television is loved also by many believers, who love it as if it were one of their loved ones. They don’t dare to speak against it, and when they hear someone speaking against television they get angry as if someone had touched the apple of their eyes!! They begin to tremble with rage, to gnash their teeth, the colour of their face changes, they can’t stand people speaking against their domestic idol. Yes, it is an idol, because the television has entered their heart, but not without their permission, for they themselves allowed it to enter into their heart and put it into their heart. They adore television, they exalt it, they have bowed their knees to the television which has become their master, they are slaves to it! These are hard words, yet they reflect the sad reality existing in the midst of God’s people today. They like watching television, rather I would say that they watch it passionately because in it they find pasture for their insatiable eyes and ears. They want to fix their eyes on what is passing away, that is, on the vanity of this world, on the deceitful vanities; they watch the fashion shows, the Sanremo Festival, those amusing shows where comedians insult everybody and everything, they watch different kinds of films, they can watch whatever they like! Someone will say to me: ‘What are you talking about?’ I am talking about the things which are happening in the houses of many believers and many pastors. Why then should we be surprised at seeing such a widespread worldliness among the Churches here in Italy also? Believers speak as the television speaks, they are dressed like the people they watch on television, they behave like the people they watch on television, that is to say, they have the same tastes and customs which are exalted and spread by television (saying ‘by television’ is tantamount to saying ‘by the prince of this world through his sons and daughters who appear on the television screen’). What can you expect then from believers and pastors who are slaves to television? Holiness? Not at all. Maybe justice? Not at all! Zeal for the things of God? No! Brotherly love? No. You can expect from them only indifference, superficiality and thoughtlessness towards the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God!

Why are the prayer meetings ignored by most of the believers? The reason is because when believers come back from work in the evening, the first thing they do is to turn on their television (unless it is already turned on) and to watch all the ‘beautiful and interesting’ things which will be broadcasted that evening. The Festival will be aired in a few minutes! Their favourite comedians, who make them die with laughter, will perform on TV in just a short time! The soccer game of their favourite team will be broadcasted live on TV! The latest film by Tom is on first release! Therefore, they have no time to go to pray to God together with other believers. Why, after the worship service is finished, do most of the believers want to go home as soon as possible? Because they want to be at home in front of their television set at the fixed time, in order to watch their favourite program. And why do many believers arrive late to the worship service? Still because of the television, for they leave their home when their favourite television program is finished or almost finished. How shameful! Many unbelievers are indeed more zealous than many believers, for when they go to the stadium to see the soccer game they arrive even five hours earlier, whereas many believers always arrive several minutes or half a hour later. Why do so few Christians desire the spiritual gifts? Because today almost all are so attached to the television that they have no intention of desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Why is there so much
lack of knowledge of the Word of God? Because the faithful spend most of their free time watching television instead of spending it reading, meditating and studying the Word of God as they should do. Then it is right those who stay day and night in front of their television set who get angry when they hear some brothers quoting more biblical passages above the average. ‘Brother, the letter kills but the Spirit gives life’ they are ready to tell you to discourage you from studying the Scripture. However, you know that the meaning given to these words by these believers is wrong, because the apostle Paul by these words meant that the Old Testament (the letter) kills, whereas the New Testament (the Spirit) gives life. I would like to say to these believers: ‘Know this, that the studying and assimilation of Scripture don’t kill, but rather it is your dear serials, your dear soap operas, which are an abomination, your dear festivals, the jokes and the coarse jesting of your favourite comedians, the violence and the obscenities you watch on television, which kill’. For this reason you are dead, even though you have a name that you are alive, because all that garbage you watch on television, which you have put into your heart, choked the Word of God and you became unfruitful. Why don’t you speak using the Word of God, but you have a very short memory (as if you lost your memory), or you show such a lack of biblical knowledge that it seems that you turned to the Lord yesterday? You look for the book of Psalms between Genesis and Deuteronomy, the Bible is an unknown book to you, you carry it to the place of worship just because you want to appear Christians, but you hardly ever open your Bible at home. You know by heart the times of the movies, the titles of the movies, the actors of the movies and many other things; but you don’t know the Word of God. At your house one can see upon the table in your living room the magazines which speak about the television programmes, whereas he can’t find the Bible. Where is it? When you pray you say always the same things, you don’t pray in faith, you recite your prayers, you don’t pray with your heart. Your prayers are grammatically correct, every word and verb is at the right place, yet your prayers are dead, lifeless, without zeal. I know, all this is discouraging and distressing to those who want to pursue holiness and who seek continually the face of the Lord, yet on the other hand is the result produced by the love of the world and the things in the world when it enters the heart of a believer.

Therefore, brethren, since television promotes the love of the world and the pleasures of it, and tends to cause you to neglect the reading of the Word of God, prayer and the assembling of brethren together, and to cause you to forget the Word of God, don’t watch television any longer because it’s a waste of time and money and through it you don’t bear any fruit to the glory of God. Furthermore, television is a powerful instrument in the hands of the devil to imprint perverse and violent images in the minds of believers, who will think of them when they have turned off their television. Therefore, they will meditate on perverse things instead of meditating on good, right and true things, as the apostle Paul commands us to do (Philippians 4:8) and thus they will disobey God. A similar thing must be said about children, who memorize very easily in their minds all the things they watch and hear on television, and besides this they tend to do what they see on television and to speak the words they hear on television. That’s why they are violent, attached to vanity, and not attached to the family; that’s why when they are rebuked, they answer with bad words and vulgarly and they give themselves over to many vices. We can say that they are ‘brought up’ by the television and not by their parents. They ought to be brought up in the training and admonition of the Lord, but they are left to themselves.

Some of you will wonder why I say these things about television; well, the reason is that I myself have experienced both the harm that it causes to those who watch it and the peace and the joy which one experiences after he is set free from its dominion. Obviously, some will say that I am exaggerated or too much exaggerated; however, I can assure you that if you decide to understand the will of God, and to understand if what I am saying to you is right or wrong, and you pray God about this matter, God will reveal to you that watching television has an evil influence on you and your families and He will deliver you from the habit of watching television, of which billions of people are slaves all over the world. When this happens, you will get rid of your television set, and after that you will inform the RAI (which is the Italian broadcasting company to which every citizen, who has a television set, must pay a licence fee annually) that
you have no longer a television set in your house. Your life will change for the better because you will begin to spend more time serving the Lord, as you have never done before.

- Jesus said: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [good], thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23).

Our body has a lamp, which is the eye; note that Jesus did not say that the lamp of the body is another member of our body but He said that the lamp of our body is the eye. Now, if this lamp is burning it will enlighten all our body, but if it has gone out our body will be full of darkness. Therefore, if we want to keep our lamp burning (so that it might shine on us) we must see good things, true things and decent things; only on this condition we will keep the following words of Jesus: “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning ….” (Luke 12:35 – NKJV). However, if we fix our eyes on vanity, obscenity, and violence, our lamp will go out, that is to say, our eyes will be lifeless eyes and not living and bright eyes which emanate light from the Lord. Therefore, considering the fact that on the television screen are broadcasted all kinds of perverse and violent images, we conclude that by watching them our eyes become bad and thus our body becomes full of darkness; that’s why it is better not to watch television. Someone may ask: ‘What do you mean when you say that if our eye is bad our body will be full of darkness?’ I mean that, for instance, if we watch on television a sensual scene or a person dressed indecently, we will become corrupted because that perverse scene stimulates or stirs up the lust of the flesh. However, this can be said also about all the other perverse television images (wizards and witches performing their occult arts, people killing one another or beating one another, etc), for they also have harmful effects on our body. For instance, violent scenes promote violent behaviour. Remember that the prophet Isaiah says that the just “shuts his eyes from seeing evil” (Isaiah 33:15 – NKJV) because he (the just) knows the evil effects which a wicked image has on him.

- Isaiah says that he who walks righteously “stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed” (Isaiah 33:15 – NKJV).

Now, the television news, which seems so innocuous to many people, gives all kinds of bad news, such as murders, wars, atrocities, injustices, frauds, falsities, perversions and so on: so I ask you: ‘What grace does the TV news impart to you?’ Do you feel edified when you listen to it? Does the news do any spiritual good to you?’ I watched all kinds of television news (even foreign television news) for many years and I can say that I did not receive any spiritual good from them, rather I was disturbed, discouraged and many times I got angry because of certain news. Furthermore, it is a well known fact that the television news gives bad news every day, why then should we rush to listen to it? Oh, that those believers who take delight in the television news and are in a hurry to listen to the daily news were in the same hurry to listen to the Word of God! I think that if they were attached to the Word of God as they are attached to the television news, we would see a great deal of spiritual progress in their life. I think that if they had a thirst of hearing the words of the Lord (which abide forever) and not of hearing the television news, they would be different. But the facts are upsetting: believers know what the television news has said, but they don’t know what God has said in His Word; they remember perfectly what the television news has said, but they immediately forget what they have heard from the pulpit: they remain many hours in front of their television set to watch the television news and all kinds of programmes of current affairs, but they get bored listening to their pastor when his sermon is longer than usual, for at a certain point they begin to look at their watch saying to themselves: ‘When will he stop preaching?’

Many pastors speak about revival; they do a right thing, but I believe that the revival will come when the believers get rid also of their television set and begin to spend their time (which they spend watching television) on praying on their knees, on searching the Holy Scripture and on doing good works. But as long as ALSO the television is so important to them, the revival will not come; the reason is that at the root of this affection for the television there is the love of the
world and its worldly lusts. And we know that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Do not love the world, do not love the things in this world, and then the light will dawn upon you, then the early zeal and power will return, as well as the early love. You will see the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the world will know that God is truly among us; you will begin to see that brotherly love by which all will know that we are disciples of Christ; then the pastors will expose those worldly lusts which today are accepted and thus the sheep of the Lord will pursue holiness because their pastors will rebuke and correct them. Our desire is that the believers may return to perfect holiness in the fear of God and that the Lord may work powerfully among the Churches as He did in the days of old.

Brothers, I implore you in the name of the Lord not to watch television anymore and to take it away from your house. Do not keep in your house this instrument that the devil uses to create strife in your family, to discourage you from doing good works, and to cause you to return to the pollutions of the world, which you once escaped by the grace of God (in other words, the devil uses your television set to destroy you), and for which – do not forget this – you pay a licence fee to the RAI annually!! Imitate that brother who, when he read the following words ‘THE WORLD IN YOUR HOUSE’ on the box in which was the television set he had just bought and which was about to be brought in his house, said to himself: ‘What! I was delivered from this world, why should I bring the world in my house?’ Know this, that you will never regret your decision, I say it again, NEVER, because you will be blessed, greatly blessed. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

Carnival

In this country, as well as in many other countries all over the world, the feast called ‘carnival’ is kept by many people. During this feast many people wear a carnival mask, many women dress up as Cinderella, as a witch, etc, and many men dress up as a woman, as a clown, Batman, Superman, etc.; many masked balls and many masquerade parades are held in many towns and villages. In relation to these events, many competitions are held during which the most beautiful mask and the most beautiful allegoric wagon, and so on, win a prize. In addition to this, the children of this age give themselves over to drunkenness and guzzlings, and to all kinds of jokes because they say: ‘When it’s carnival time, anything goes!’

The children of God must not keep the feast of carnival because it is an unfruitful work of darkness from which the children of light must abstain, as it is written: “Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord …. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them ....” (Ephesians 5:7-8, 11 - NKJV). Bear in mind that according to the Scripture everything that does not bear fruit to the glory of God and whose wages is death is an unfruitful work of darkness. Consider the feast of carnival. Can we say that by keeping the feast of carnival we perfect holiness? Or that by keeping it we are blessed? Or that by keeping it the name of God is glorified through us? Certainly not. That’s why we must abstain from carnival and we must expose it.

However, not all Christians abstain from carnival, for some dress up their children as clowns, Batman, Superman, etc., in order to please their children. They say: ‘We do it for our children’s sake and not for our sake!’ What does the Scripture say? It says: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15 – NKJV), therefore by letting their children wear carnival masks these Christians allow foolishness to remain bound up in the heart of their children, instead of driving it far from their children; that’s exactly what the devil wants them to do, so that their children may become rebellious and spoilt. Furthermore, the Scripture says: “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification” (Romans 15:2 – NKJV), and it does not say we have to please our neighbour for his bad also: that’s why at carnival we must not please children by dressing them up as Zorro, or Superman, or another television personage who is in fashion in those days. Know this, that if
you allow your children to wear carnival clothes and carnival masks you will spoil your children, you will spend much money in vain, and you will cause unbelieving persons to blaspheme the doctrine of God. In conclusion I want to remind you, brethren, that the devil uses children to bring corruption in the houses of believers; therefore we need to watch out, lest we fall into his traps. One example; many believers bought a TV for their children’s sake because they wanted to fulfil their desire and make them happy, and afterwards they themselves became slaves to television. They thought that by buying a television they would do good to their children, but as time went by they understood that they made much harm to them.

The circus

Every now and then in our town we see some wall posters advertising a circus, or a car with megaphones announcing the hour of the circus’ show or a car with megaphones followed by some tropical animals (camels, elephants, etc.). What do they promise to the people? They assure them that they will spend an unforgettable and different afternoon or evening because they will watch a show full of amusements and extraordinary performances. We have to recognize that the circus always attracts many people, especially children, because people can see under the circus’ tent certain animals, which live in very distant countries, such as dromedaries, camels, giraffes, hippos, monkeys, tigers, lions, and many others; people can see also clowns and their clowneries; they can see the trapeze artists performing their dangerous acrobatics; they can see magicians performing their ‘conjuring tricks’ (which are nothing but works of the devil which are passed off as ‘tricks’), and many other things. We who are children of God must abstain from going to the circus, lest we spend our money for what does not satisfy; lest we see things such as clowneries, men and women who are half naked who perform their acrobatics through trapezes, someone who throws knives at a wheel to which a woman has been fastened to show how good he is at throwing knives; men and women who put big snakes upon their own bodies and kiss and caress those snakes, people who put some petrol in their mouth and they spit it out and set it on fire by some fire they hold in their hands; men and women who practice their occult arts; some animals who have been trained to do certain things in order to astonish those who see them; that is to say, lest we go to admire vanity.

I would like to point out to you that at the root of the success of the circus show, as well as of many other worldly amusements, there is the lust of the eyes, that is, that insatiable desire to see new, perverse and vain things which is in man. That’s why we abstain from going to the circus, because the lust of the eyes is not of God but is of the world (1 John 2:16). We can say that the circus tent is a tent under which sinners gather together to amuse themselves, and one of the paths in which sinners walk; therefore, it is not a place fitting for the saints: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners . . . .” (Psalm 1:1 - NKJV), says the Psalmist.

Playing sport

What should a soccer player, or a basketball player, or a volley player, or a baseball player etc., do after his conversion to Christ? He must stop playing. You will ask: ‘Why?’ For the following reasons. Because the sporting world is perverse. You can hear bad words, blasphemes, and see fits of rage during the trainings as well as during the championship matches. In addition to this, those who play soccer and basketball sometimes must use cunning and that’s something which is not fitting for the saints. Nor is fitting for the saints to use violence towards a player of
the opposite team by causing him to fall to the ground or by tripping him up, or by striking their elbow in his stomach or in his face (running continually the risk of harming both themselves and the opposite player). Furthermore, the sport environment is an environment where you have to show off your body, your muscles, and obviously everybody tries to make his own body more beautiful by playing body building for instance, or by using all kinds of creams and so on. And this is not a right thing in the sight of God. Then the sport environment is full of fornicators and adulterers, and many women with a crafty heart into whose traps it's very easy to fall. Another reason is that both the trainings and the official matches cause you to miss sometimes all the worship meetings and some other times just some of them.

Finally, I want to warn you, brothers, against the soccer games between churches which are so in fashion in these days. Do not play them, lest you wear shorts in the presence of those sisters who come to see the match, you trip up and kick some brothers, and you get angry very often with the risk of saying bad words. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11 – NKJV), have a serious conduct.

Are the saints forbidden to do any bodily exercise then? No, we cannot affirm that they are not allowed to do any bodily exercises. However, even though we are allowed to do some bodily exercises, the Scripture says that “bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things” (1 Timothy 4:8 – NKJV). Therefore, the Scripture with these words does not encourage believers to spend their time doing bodily exercises rather it encourages them to pursue godliness.

Going to the stadium to see the soccer match

Believers must not go to the stadium to see the soccer match: you may ask: ‘Why?’ For the same reason I told before, that is, lest you have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Let us consider this other worldly lust: what is it? It consist in going to see two soccer teams playing a game with violence and many fouls. However, the point is that those who go to the stadium go to hear people blaspheme against God, insult the opposite team, the referee and the supporters of the opposite team, and sometimes they go to see the supporters of both teams beating one another. Those who, before turning to the Lord, used to go to the stadium, know very well the atmosphere which is in a stadium during a soccer match, that’s why they have decided not to go there any more.

The fact is that when you watch a soccer match together with many other people, it happens that somehow you are led to make remarks about the match, the referee, the fouls and many other things; and these remarks are made in a state of enthusiasm (if your favourite team is winning) or in a state of affliction (if your favourite team is losing) and your mood influences what you say and how you say it. I mean that when you are among a crowd of unbelievers who are happy or disappointed you are easily led to say wrong things or to act badly against somebody. All these things lead us to say that going to see a soccer match is useless and harmful to the spiritual life of a believer, and in fact it does not help him to honor his neighbour or to be meek towards all men (while, according to the Scripture we must honor all men and be meek towards them). Rather the atmosphere which is during a soccer match makes him become corrupted and causes him to speak against the opposite team and become violent.

The Scripture says that “a violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good” (Proverbs 16:29 - NKJV), and that’s exactly what a fanatic supporter does when he brings his neighbor to the stadium. Therefore, brothers, above all you younger people, when you are invited to go to the stadium reject the invitation, lest you walk in way which is not good and which is full of thorns and snares.
Doing the pools, betting on numbers at the State lottery, and betting one's money on horses

The pools is a form of gambling on the results of soccer matches, and is very much widespread also in this country. There are other widespread forms of gambling such as the State lottery and the bet on horses. Those who bet on the pools present their coupon to a bar (or some other place) and on this coupon they have written the results of the soccer matches as they expect them, they pay some money hoping that they have guessed right. As for the State lottery, people bet on certain numbers that they think will be drawn on the appointed day of the week, in this case also they pay some money hoping that they have guessed right. As for betting on horses, people bet some money on a certain horse that they think will win the race (and even on the horse that will come second), hoping that they have guessed right.

Why do so many people bet money on the pools, on the numbers at the State lottery, and on horses, every week? Why do they try their fortune, as they say? Because they hope to become rich without working and in a very short time, and to be the next ‘lucky’ bettor. Why must believers abstain from betting their money on soccer matches’ results, on numbers, and on horses? Because to try one’s fortune (or luck) is not fitting for people who confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth and who desire to depart from their body and be with the Lord in heaven. To try one’s fortune means not to be content with what one has, while, as believers, we are commanded to be content with what we have, as it is written: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have” (Hebrews 13:5 – NIV), that’s why we don’t need to bet on the pools!!

In addition to this, it must be said that doing the pools and betting on the numbers of the State Lottery and on horses have some harmful effects on people, because these forms of gambling lead them to follow soccer matches, the drawing of numbers at the State Lottery, and the horse races, and these events fill them with anxiety while they wait for the results, they fill them with despair and wrath when they lose, and then they lead them little by little to specialize in the bets and to bet more money; “Deep calls unto deep …” (Psalm 42:7 – NKJV), and a believer, knowing what harmful effects these bets have on people’s life, abstains from them, lest he walk in paths where there is no peace, or joy, and where people waste much time and much money.

To sum up: the children of God, being strangers and pilgrims who are on the way to heaven, must be content with what they have and therefore they must not desire to become rich. Furthermore, they must not bet money on these things because that would have harmful effects on their life. I remind you that many bettors all over the world have ruined themselves.

Various kinds of games

I exhort you, brothers, not to play cards because cards have occult origin (we don’t know for sure who invented cards because there are different opinions about this matter) and in fact, as you know, they are used by fortune-tellers to predict the future (they practice an occult art called cartomancy). It doesn’t matter if someone wants to play cards with you in order to bet some money or just to spend some time playing cards; do not play this game, which the devil has used and still uses to destroy whole families and to induce many people to commit suicide. If you still have some playing cards, take them and burn them.

I exhort you not to play those videogames so much in fashion today, for they are powerful weapons in the hands of Satan to cause men to waste much money and much time. Not to mention that in many of these videogames appear monsters and other diabolical things which are connected to the world of occultism. I warn you to abstain also from playing with Ouija Board, which is an occult game using wooden board and pointer, which spells out messages allegedly from the dead. This game can lead to demon oppression or possession. Those who
attempt to contact the dead by means of a Ouija Board practice necromancy, and thus they are an abomination to God.

Furthermore, be careful about the toys you buy for your children because many of the children toys which are on the market are connected to the world of occultism. These toys tend to present witchcraft as a joke, and to induce children to make friends with monsters, snakes, dragoons, etc. If you still have some of these toys, I exhort you to destroy them (do not give them to other people) and to throw them away immediately.

There are other games we, as believers, must abstain from, such as those games many Churches play on the last day of the year or on some other occasions. Tombola, Monopoly, eating spaghetti without fork and spoon, but just with one’s mouth, to see who comes first, and many others. They cause you to waste time and some of them are buffooneries.

We must abstain also from all the worldly riddles and puzzles which are so widespread, it is not difficult to see people on the bus or on the train taking pleasure in solving riddles and puzzles. They are a waste of time and tends to cause believers to use their mind in a wrong way, that is to say, they induce believers to look for the answers to some questions and to solve some riddles which are in most cases useless, and they tend to distract believers. That’s why I exhort you to abstain from them.

**Buying and reading worldly newspapers and magazines**

The sons of this world are dominated by the desire to know as many things as possible about all the latest events; wars, murders, divorces among actors or showmen and their new affairs, all kinds of scandals which happen in all circles, the results of the soccer championship, or the basketball championship and so on; just to mention some of the things those who are outside want to know. To understand how widespread is this desire it is sufficient to stand for a few minutes before a newspaper kiosk and see how many people buy newspapers and magazines. Now it is a good thing to reflect upon this behaviour. First of all, let us wonder: ‘Why are the sons of this world so attached to newspapers and magazines? Why can’t they do without them?’ The answer is because they are under the power of the devil (who is the prince of this world), who rules over them causing them to read all the things which don’t edify and which pass away. This is how the devil manages to distract people, so that they might not seek God and be interested in the things of God; by causing them to read newspapers and magazines continually.

This answer of mine may seem an overstatement to someone, yet nobody can demonstrate that this is not the truth. Answer this question of mine: ‘Why, when we proclaim the Gospel, that is, the Good News of the Kingdom of God, to the children of this world, do many of them say to us: ‘That’s an old tale!’ and they depart in a great hurry saying that they have no time to listen to us, while when they are alone they spend many hours reading all kinds of newspapers and magazines with all the latest and most sensational news? Don’t you think it is because, as Paul says, “those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh” (Romans 8:5 – NKJV)? Of course, that’s the reason, it cannot be otherwise.

And why, when you want to give a Gospel or even the whole Bible to the sons of this world, many of them refuse to accept it because they are ashamed to accept freely the written Word of God, and some of them accept it and after a while throw it away, while each month they spend so much money to buy their favourite newspapers and magazines which speak about things that pass away, that can’t edify them nor save them? Don’t you think it is because they are ruled by the devil, who doesn’t want them to read the Word of God because he doesn’t want them to be saved? For sure, the devil uses all these newspapers and magazines to corrupt people, to distract them and to discourage them from believing in God. For the worldly newspapers and magazines induces people not to believe in the existence of God. Have you ever heard someone say to you: ‘If there is a God – as you say – why is there so much wickedness and injustice in this world’? As far as I am concerned, many people have asked me this question so
far. Well, don’t you think that it is bound to happen that those who daily feed on the wickedness and injustice committed by men all over the world are induced to question the existence of God and His sovereignty? Of course, they speak in that way because they ignore the existence of the devil and his devices, yet the fact still remains that if they read the Word of God instead of the bad news, faith would come in their hearts and they would believe in the existence of God and in His sovereignty. But how can faith come by reading worldly newspapers and magazines? But all these things concern those who are outside. So let us come to those who are inside. What shall we say about them? It must be said that among God’s people it is not a rare thing to find believers who buy newspapers and sport magazines, fashion magazines, car magazines, etc, daily or weekly or monthly. They are dominated by these things, they can’t do without them (bear in mind that I am not speaking about useful magazines, such as a magazine which helps you to learn a job, but about useless magazines full of perversions, obscenities and vanities and profane arguments). For it is not a rare thing to see in their homes, and in their cars, all kinds of newspapers and magazines; perhaps you can’t see the Bible for it is not there, but you can see their newspapers! Obviously, since a man tends to talk about what he reads and hears, when you hear these believers talking it seems you are hearing some children of this age because they show that they are acquainted with all the wickedness, the obscenities, the injustices, the latest political, sporting, cinematographic, and musical events, and they talk about them even with pleasure! They have time to talk about the perverse and vain things they read in their newspapers, but they have no time to talk about the things of God which are written in the Word, for they say that they have something else to do and therefore they can’t talk at length, and in addition to this they show a terrible ignorance of the Word of God. When they talk they cite with much enthusiasm and a striking precision many details about the bad news they have read or about the latest worldly ‘happenings’, but if they hear someone citing with the same enthusiasm and the same precision the Scriptures then they begin to say: ‘Brother, be careful, the letter kills but the Spirit gives life’, and ‘Be careful, the devil also knows the Scripture and quotes it sometimes!’ In other words, they are so corrupt that they take more pleasure in reading the vanities than in reading the Scriptures, and instead of being glad to meet some believers who know the Scriptures and speak about them seriously, precisely and deeply, they are sorry; that’s what we deduce from their conduct. What I am saying to you is a sad thing, a very sad thing, yet it’s true. I feel sick at heart when I see that unbelievers are so much attached to their newspapers and magazines while many believers are not at all attached to the Word of God; when I see that unbelievers read so many vanities and obscenities and perversions, while many believers read the Word of truth so rarely.

Why should then a believer abstain from buying and reading these newspapers and magazines (dailies, Stop, Novella 2000, Sorrisi e Canzoni, Grazia and many others) to which the children of this age are so attached? Because in reading them we defile ourselves! I myself have experienced what I am saying, therefore I know what I am talking about. If I asked you: ‘Do you feel you defile yourselves when you read the Bible?’ You would answer me: ‘No, not at all, rather we feel we read and assimilate pure and holy words’. Why would you answer in this way? ‘Because the Bible is the Word of God, and the Word of God is very pure: “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”’ (Psalm 12:6 – NKJV), says David; that’s why you don’t run the risk of defiling yourselves in reading them, because they are pure. However, if I asked you: ‘Do you feel you defile yourselves in reading the articles which are in the newspapers and the magazines?’ In other words, ‘Do you feel as you feel when you read the Bible?’ What would you answer me? Certainly, if you are honest and examine carefully the reaction of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, you will have to say: ‘As a matter of fact, in reading the articles in the newspaper we defile ourselves in a certain measure, also because our eyes see certain bad photos which are in it, it is as if we get dirty and we immediately want to cleanse ourselves’.

Let me tell you now something about the photos which are on the newspapers and magazines. It must be said that no matter what kind of photos they are, they help to sell more newspapers and magazines or to draw people’s attention to the article which is on the newspaper, this is
something that the subeditors know very well. However, there are certain disturbing photos; photos of wizards while they practice their occult arts, photos of dead and wounded people, and seducing photos of women dressed indecently; it must be said that all these things defile our spirit and our flesh in a certain measure. In addition to this, we must consider the fact that the money spent to buy these newspapers and magazines is wasted money and we, as believers, must not waste our money but we must spend it wisely.

Beloved, let us spend our free time on reading the Word of God because it is truth, it lives and abides forever: let us say together with the Psalmist: “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things .... Incline my heart to Your testimonies ....” (Psalm 119:37,36), so that our delight may be in the Word of God till the end, and the love of the Word of God might not be chocked by the deceitful love of newspapers and magazines and novels which is so widespread all over the world.

We live in this world and we don’t pray that God should take us out of the world, but that He should keep us from the evil one because we know that our enemy walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and we need God’s protection to stand.

We know that all the world lies under the sway of the wicked one and that the devil uses also the newspapers and magazines to turn away the believers’ eyes from reading the Word of God and to corrupt them by causing them to conform to the pattern of this world. So let us watch and pray without ceasing, lest we buy newspapers and magazines and read them with the same passion the children of this age have.

The Christmas tree

As time went by, people began to make the Christmas tree on the day which was supposed to be the day on which Jesus was born (that is, on the 25th of December).

The custom of celebrating Christmas with a tree dates back to the period of time during which Martin Luther (1483-1546) lived. Historians say that this custom spread along the Rhine first, then all over Germany; in the end, the custom crossed the borders of Germany and spread all over Europe.

Since the ancient times trees have meant something to peoples; I remind you that the fig tree and the oak tree were considered holy trees by the Romans, that the Assyrians and the Phoenicians worshiped certain trees and that in the course of the centuries many savage tribes have worshiped certain trees.

As for trees, we have to say that the Scripture contains some references to them because it often compares men to trees. The following passages of the Scriptures confirm this:

- “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psalm 1:1-3).
- “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Psalm 92:12).
- “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

As you can see, the righteous who does the will of God is compared to a tree whose leaves are always green and which never fails to bring fruit.

However, according to Wisdom, the tree symbolizes both Wisdom itself and a longing fulfilled, for it is written that Wisdom is “a tree of life to those who take hold of her” (Proverbs 3:18 – NKJV) and that “a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12 – NIV).
Furthermore, if we add those scriptures which say that in the middle of the street of the heavenly Jerusalem is the tree of life (Revelation 22:2), we will see that it was not by chance that some began to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the 25th of December with an evergreen tree, because according to them it represented the life which was manifested. However, many people buy the Christmas tree, deck it with lights, and put the Christmas gifts under it, just because it is a custom followed by most people; as a matter of fact to them the Christmas tree means nothing. As far as we are concerned, since we don’t celebrate the birth of Jesus, we don’t accept the custom of making the Christmas tree. However, we know that unfortunately, and I say it again, unfortunately, this custom has been accepted by many Christians, for when Christmas comes you can see the Christmas tree in their houses and even in many places of worship: they don’t care if what they do is not written in the Bible, because they don’t want to look different from the Roman Catholics even in this matter. However, what a contradiction; they are willing to accept a custom which was not followed by the early Churches but they are not willing to accept a custom which the early Churches of God had, such as that of the veil for a woman when she prays or prophesies!! That shows us that to many believers it is more important to conform to strange and pagan customs, than to customs which are Biblical and Christian. Judge for yourselves what I say, brothers.

The Christmas crib

Many of those who celebrate Christmas are in the habit of making the crib, which is a model of the nativity of Christ. The Roman Catholic Catechism says the following things about the origins of the Christmas crib: ‘Saint Francis of Assisi was very much devoted to the mystery of the birth of the Saviour. He would often wake up at midnight to worship Jesus in the hour in which he was born. Later, in 1220, he asked and obtained from pope Onorius III permission to make the crib during the midnight Mass at Christmas in the middle of a wood which was next to the monastery of Greccio. He took some stones, some moss and some branches of trees and made a sort of cave in which he put a manger, a ox and a donkey, and an altar to celebrate Mass. A big crowd came to the church ceremony illuminating the wood with torches. Later the crib was made of statuettes, first in the territory round Naples towards the fifteenth century, then in Sicily and in some other Italian regions and in some regions abroad’ (Giuseppe Perardi, Il Nuovo Manuale del Catechista [The New Catechist Handbook], pages 143-144).

Making the Christmas crib may seem to many people a sign of great devotion towards the Saviour, the crib may seem even very beautiful, yet it is something which opposes the Scripture, for a Christian by making it breaks the commandment of God which forbids us to make for ourselves a carved image (Exodus 20:4). That’s why this custom must be rejected. Beloved, remember the birth of Jesus Christ, but remember it often and not only once a year, and remember it in the simplicity of your heart meditating on all those passages of the Scripture which speak of it. For if the Holy Spirit moved Matthew and Luke to write various things about the birth of Jesus that means that God wants us to remember all the events that marked His birth. However, more than His birth you should remember His death and His resurrection which took place for our justification. And speak about these two events to one another and to those who don’t know God, so that they might believe on them with all their heart and thus might be delivered from sin.
Destroying the environment

As believers, we must see to it that we do not destroy the environment just to see things destroyed, because the environment was made by God and thus must be respected. Woe to those who take pleasure in destroying the earth, for the Scripture says that the hour is coming in which God will destroy “those who destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18 – NKJV). Therefore when we are in the countryside and we eat or drink something, we must not throw the plastic bags or the bottles in the grass. Neither must we set the woods on fire, nor throw into the rivers and the sea substances that would destroy fishes and so on. On the contrary, if we need to destroy certain things of the nature out of necessity (to build a house, or a bridge, or a road) then we are allowed to destroy them.

Killing animals for fun

We don’t have the right to kill animals just for the fun of killing them or seeing them suffer, but we can kill animals to feed on them. Wisdom says: “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10 - NKJV), but the tender mercies of the just are not cruel nor should they become cruel for they love God’s creation and they use it within the limits set by God. That’s why hunting or fishing just to pass the time and to throw away the wild fowl or the fish is an unrighteousness. We must never forget that the tender mercies of God “are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9 - NKJV), that is to say, over all the beasts of the earth, the birds of the air and the fish in the seas, lakes and rivers, for God gives them their food in due season. And since we must be imitators of God, our tender mercies must be over all the beasts, the birds and the fish created by God, so we must not molest them, nor ill-treat them, nor behave unjustly towards them, nor kill them without a good reason. On the other hand, even the law of God contains some precepts in favour of animals. For instance, the law says: “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together” (Deuteronomy 22:10 – NKJV), and again: “If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7 – NKJV).

I would like to make it clear that this must be done to respect the works of God, but also that this respect has some precise limits and that must not turn into a fight against those who destroy the environment or the animals, lest we waste money and time and fall into one of the traps of the devil. Why do I call it a trap of the devil? Because the devil would like us to spend our time fighting on behalf of the plants and animals rather than fighting against him and all his demons to snatch as many souls as possible out of their hands. Our fight must be only one: that on behalf of the faith and the Gospel, so that sinners may hear the Gospel and believe and believers may stand firm in the faith till the end to inherit the crown of life. Bear in mind these things continually, brothers.

Making journeys of pleasure

In our society we are continually bombarded with alluring advertisements through which we are invited to go on pleasure journeys (at favourable prices) in many countries of the world to find out the beauties and the wonderful things of those places. And since here in Italy people are well-off many go on these journeys.
I exhort you not to make these journeys of pleasure because they are a waste of time and money. Paul says that “all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23 - NKJV) and these journeys are not helpful to your spiritual life.

If you really want to make useful journeys in African countries or in South American countries or Asian countries, then you can go to visit some poor Churches of those countries to meet their needs, that is, to help the widows, the orphans and the poor among the saints of those Churches by bringing some money to them or doing some other good works for the sake of those needy people.

By so doing, your journey will be helpful to you and to the needy believers living in those places. Be wise, brothers, and see that you use your abundance (which God has given you in this period of great plenty for this country) in order to glorify God. Take heed to yourselves because the pleasures of life are able to choke the Word planted in you.

Presenting the Gospel through mimes, rock music, etc.

Many believers present the Gospel through mimes, theatrical scenes, puppets, and so called Christian concerts where contemporary music (such as rock music, disco music, etc.) is played. These means are used to attract people in order to evangelize them. So they think that in the Kingdom of God the end justifies the means.

Beloved, I exhort you to evangelize, but I exhort you not to use these means to attract people to you because they are human means, they are carnal and worldly means, which neither Jesus first nor the apostles then ever used when they evangelized people. They did not need these tricks because they were full of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Lord was present with them to work miracles and to heal the sick, and people, hearing or seeing the miracles and the healings which they did, felt attracted to their meetings, and when there were no miracles or healings, people felt attracted to Jesus and to the apostles by their authority. Even John the Baptist, who, unlike Jesus and the apostles, performed no miraculous sign, did not resort to these tricks to attract people to him because he was a man full of the Holy Spirit. Read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the Acts of the apostles and you will notice that both in the ministry of Jesus and in the ministry of the apostles there were no carnal means.

However, what happens when there is no manifestation of the Holy Spirit? What happens when the Gospel is not preached with the power of God? It happens what we see with our eyes and we hear with our ears, that is, it happens that believers become actors, they paint their faces, they play the music of which young people are fond, in order to attract the world, not realizing unfortunately that by so doing the world has attracted them and trapped them.

Paul says: “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:5 – NKJV). As you can see, we must run the race (which is set before us) according to the divine laws (and the apostles are an example of people who ran the race according to the divine laws), thus refusing to conform ourselves to this present evil age. Therefore, we must not imitate those who want to bring the Gospel to the world through puppets, mimes, theatrical scenes, diabolical music, and other improper things, for these people have conformed themselves to this world.

Let no one deceive you with his sophisms: the Gospel must be preached in the Holy Spirit, in power and in much assurance. We must follow the example of the apostles, and we must not rely on the lust of the flesh or on the lust of the eyes or on the pride of life. Expose with boldness these worldly things, and if your Church encourages them I exhort you not to have fellowship with these things.
Taking part in politics

Brothers, abstain from taking part in politics, as it is fitting for strangers and pilgrims. Do not spread the political views of this or that political party, nor vote for this or that political party. Perhaps someone will ask: ‘Why?’ Because even though we live in this world, we are not of this world (John 17:11,14) and we must not entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life, such as politics.

It is the children of this age who should take part in politics; while we, who are sons of God, should do what the children of this age don’t do, that is, we should pray for all the governing authorities, who are appointed by God, so that God may save them, may give them wisdom to rule, may keep them and bless them; and furthermore, we should thank God for all the good we receive through the governing authorities, and we should abstain from speaking evil of them (as you know, the children of this age take pleasure in speaking evil of the governing authorities).

You will ask then: ‘What should we do then when there is the general election or there are local elections?’ Abstain from voting. That does not mean that you can’t go to the voting station, for you can go there if you want (in order to void the voting paper, obviously).

I remind you brothers that voting for a political party or a political candidate that is in favour of freedom of religion but, at the same time, is in favour of the homosexuals, the wizards, the astrologers, in favour of abortion, divorce, and many other perverse things, means having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness because it is as if you say to that political party or that political candidate that you agree with it or him and you want it or him to support and spread those views.

Let no one deceive you with his sophisms; politics, even though God uses politicians, lies under the sway of the wicked one and those who begin to take part in politics somehow defile their consciences.

Neither the apostles nor the early Church took part in politics, because they knew that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, as Jesus said to Pilate: ‘My kingdom is not of this world …” (John 18:36 – NKJV). However, it seems that many believers don’t remember or don’t want to remember this. So much the worse for them.

Having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness

The apostle Paul said to the Ephesians: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them …” (Ephesians 5:11 - NKJV).

Therefore, you brothers must not have fellowship with all those works which don’t bear fruit to God for they are works which bear fruit to death. What are the unfruitful works of darkness? The most evident are the following ones; consenting to tell a lie or to steal or to murder someone or to attend a spiritualist séance.

But there are other works of darkness which are less evident and which apparently don’t seem to be unfruitful works of darkness, such as attending the religious ceremony for a wedding in a Roman Catholic basilica or in a hall of the Jehovah’s Witnesses or of some other sects; buying cigarettes for someone who asks you to buy them; selling Bibles and Christian books on behalf of your Church; helping a drug addict to buy drugs, supporting the soccer team of one’s nation or town; taking someone to the cinema or the stadium; helping a tailor to make a miniskirt or helping a goldsmith to make jewelry for women or men, and many other things.

I exhort you in the Lord to be wise and not to consent to do anyone certain ‘favours,’ which are harmful and vain things that don’t glorify God at all.
Tolerating evil

Unfortunately many believers tolerate both evil things and the wicked. What do I mean by that? I mean that they allow some people to do evil things and to teach things contrary to the sound doctrine. Let me give you some examples, so that you may understand what I mean.

If a believer, who is a divorcee, remarries; if a believer commits fornication; if a believer steals; if a believer smokes cigarettes; if a believer goes to the beach to amuse himself; if some sisters come to the place of worship dressed indecently; if a believer plays the clown; if anyone teaches that hell does not exist, or that man does not have a soul, or that we can’t eat pork or rabbit, or that we are allowed to eat blood, things offered to idols, and things strangled, or that young people can have sex before marriage, or that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is the new birth, or that a woman can teach the Word of God, those who tolerate all these things react saying: ‘Let no one say a word, let no one rebuke, let each of us mind his own business and keep his opinions; let us avoid any discussion and strife. God accepts us as we are, who are you to judge your brother? Do you think you are holier than him?’ and so on.

Brothers in the Lord, let no one of these people deceive you, because they have ceased to love righteousness and truth for a long time and they don’t know any longer what is the difference between enduring the evil things which people do against us and tolerating the evil things, between rebuking one’s brother and judging one’s brother. I warn you in the Lord not to tolerate any sin nor any heresy because God does not take pleasure in such a conduct. In other words, God wants evil things to be exposed and those who do evil things to be rebuked, God wants heresies to be refuted and those who teach them to be rebuked. When someone sins or teaches a false doctrine, God does not want you to keep silent, in order to avoid discussions and being persecuted by those who are self seeking and walk disorderly, but rather He wants you to open your mouth and raise your voice against what is contrary to the sound doctrine. That’s what the Scripture teaches us. I will give you some examples.

The Lord rebuked the angel of the church in Thyatira because he tolerated Jezebel, as it is written: “Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2:20 – NIV). Notice that in that Church the pastor allowed that woman to teach heresies and to commit fornication and he said nothing against her. What did the Lord do? Did He close His eyes, as that pastor had done? No, for He rebuked that pastor because of his tolerance. However, the Lord Jesus, on the other hand, commended the angel of the Church in Ephesus because he could not tolerate the false apostles, as He said to him: “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false” (Revelation 2:2 – NIV). Therefore, those who sin and teach false doctrines must be rebuked and not tolerated; on the contrary, those who have a different opinion from ours about a day or a food must be tolerated, as it is written: “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1 – NKJV – Read all the fourteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans).

Paul says to Timothy: “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20 - NKJV) and: “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2 – NKJV), and again: “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies …” (1 Timothy 1:3-4). As you can see, a servant of God must not tolerate those who sin and teach false doctrines, nor must he pretend nothing happened, nor must he allow believers to behave as they like or teach what they like in the midst of the Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. He must take a clear position against every form of evil, so that the Church may be kept pure and blameless and believers may know that they are not free to do evil things and to teach strange doctrines.

A believer must be so zealous for the House of God that when he sees that someone is trying to introduce bad habits or strange doctrines, his zeal moves him to raise his voice against such
things and against those who are doing this work of the devil in the midst of the flock of the Lord, to keep these people from spreading these evil things.

Now I am going to cite some examples taken from the Scriptures, which show how the zeal for the House of God, and thus for righteousness and truth, manifests itself.

When Jesus saw that the House of His Father had become a den of thieves, He made a whip of cords and He drove those who sold oxen and sheep out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned their tables and He said to those who sold doves: 'Take these things away!' (John 2:13-17 - NKJV).

When Paul at Antioch saw that Cephas compelled the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs, he rebuked him saying to him: “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews” (Galatians 2:14 – NKJV) and some other things.

And I could cite also the examples of the prophets who were persecuted and killed because they exposed the wickedness, the injustice and the lies of the people, but I stop here because I think you have understood that in the house of God both evil and those who do evil things, both lies and those who tell them, must not be tolerated at all. Beware of all those who tolerate evil things and of those who do evil things.

Ecumenism

The Roman Catholic Church and various Evangelical Churches (among which there are even some Pentecostal Churches) are in favour of ecumenism. That’s why the Roman Catholics say to us: ‘Let us join together because we are all brothers, let us not remain divided because such a division is a scandal!’ and more and more Evangelicals say: ‘Why should we refuse to join the Roman Catholics in evangelization and prayer, when they also worship the same God and believe in the same Lord? Let us get rid of the old prejudices against the Roman Catholics, because the modern Roman Catholic Church is different from the ancient one’.

I exhort you, brothers, to flee this ecumenism because it is nothing but a device of the devil, who wants you to ally with those who hate the Word of God, that is, the Roman Catholics, in order to induce you to stop exposing the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church and winning the Catholics to Christ.

It is clearly written: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Therefore, ecumenism is not a yoke fitting for us, because through it we would associate with people with whom there is no fellowship and there can be no fellowship and no accord, because they walk in darkness, being carried away to their dumb idols, and hold to all kinds of commandments of men who turn from the truth; I refer to the Roman Catholics.

I have widely demonstrated all this in my book against the Roman Catholic Church (at the moment the whole book is only in Italian; however I have translated the confutations of some Roman Catholic heresies, which you can read on line).

Therefore, you can’t say to the Roman Catholics: ‘Brothers, let’s pray together, and let’s work together to evangelize the pagans, etc.’, but you must continue to say to them: ‘Repent of your dead works and believe in the Gospel and come out from among the Roman Catholic Church without hesitation’ for your good and for their good as well. Stand firm in the faith; let no one deceive you with his sophisms.
The hierarchical and denominational organization

The hierarchical organization system is contrary to the Word of God and thus, like all the things which are contrary to the Word of God, it has harmful effects on those Churches which accept it. Therefore I exhort you to expose it.

Obviously, I exhort both those who have already accepted it and those who would like to accept it because they also would like to join a religious association legally recognized by the Italian Government in order to enjoy some privileges and facilities, which they don’t enjoy yet and which they can enjoy only by joining an existing religious association.

Why is this system contrary to the Word of God? Because it compels the Churches to accept human rules, which cause the Churches to be led astray from the simplicity and the purity that are in Christ and promote arrogance and all sorts of wrong behaviours.

Therefore the Churches of God must not form a confederation (or a denomination) with a Statute, a General Council, a Secretary, and a President. Such an organization is oligarchic and pyramidal and is very similar to the papacy, and it gives the President so much power over the Churches and the ministers that the President is a sort of ‘pope’.

Churches must be ruled by a pastor helped by a body of elders and must remain self-governing and independent, just as they were self-governing and independent in the days of the apostles. Obviously, this does not exclude some kinds of collaboration and the fellowship between Churches, but they must make every effort to keep their independence.

Brothers, if anyone among you wants to join a denomination do not listen to him. For now what I have said is enough; however, God willing, I will return to this subject in another book.

The decrees which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem

In the book of the Acts of the apostles it is written: “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcision them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved [we are saved], even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God
at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the
words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of
David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the
residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,
saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning
of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the
Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of
idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time
hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Then
pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own
company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas,
chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles
and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch
and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have
troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the
law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with
one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have
hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and
Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost,
and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from
meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from
which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they
came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:
Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being
prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them” (Acts
15:1-32)
Therefore, since we also are Gentiles who have believed in Jesus Christ, we also must abstain
from fornication, that is, from any sexual intercourse outside marriage; from blood (that is, from
any blood-based food, such as the blood sausage and the blood pudding, and from flesh with its
blood); from things strangled (that is, the flesh of those animals which have been choked to
death or strangled; and from things offered to idols or polluted by idols, such as meats,
focaccias, sweets, and anything else which is offered to idols, thus we ought to abstain also from
all those foods which are prepared by the Roman Catholics to celebrate this or that ‘saint’ of
theirs.

I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone

We must pray for those who are perishing and for those who persecute us

Paul wrote to Timothy: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions,
and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may
lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in
the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the
knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).
Brothers, we who have known God through Jesus Christ are bound to pray for those who don’t
know the truth, so that God might save them by His grace. The apostle Paul, speaking of those
who were Jews by birth, said to the saints who were in Rome: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and
prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1 – NKJV). From these words
we learn clearly that Paul’s desire for the Jews was a good desire, for he wanted the Jews to be saved. The Scripture says that “the desire of the righteous is only good” (Proverbs 11:23 – NKJV), and in fact all those who have been justified by the grace of God want sinners to be saved; they have in their heart the same desire Paul had for the Jews. However, Paul said also that he prayed to God for the Jews, so that they might be saved. Now, the Jews for whom Paul prayed were those Jews who had “the form of knowledge and truth in the law” (Romans 2:20 – NKJV), yet they had a veil on their heart that prevented them from recognizing that Jesus of Nazareth was the one of whom Moses and the prophets spoke, that is, the Christ. For those Jews who were perishing, the Gospel was veiled because the god of this age had blinded their minds; Paul knew very well all this, and since he knew also that when they would turn to the Lord that veil would be taken away, he earnestly prayed for them that God might reveal His Son to them as well. Paul left us an example so that we also should pray for unbelievers, that is, for those who are perishing, so that they might be delivered from the power of Satan. Let us lift up this prayer on behalf of those who are perishing: ‘Lord, save them!’

Jesus Christ said: “Pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 – NIV). Who are those who persecute us? They are all those who don’t know God and in ignorance revile us and do harm to us because of the noble name of the One to whom we belong, that is, Jesus Christ. Now, first of all I want to tell you that it is impossible for those who believe not to be persecuted by those who are perishing because Jesus said: “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20 – NKJV) and Paul said to Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12 – NKJV). I said before that our persecutors persecute us in ignorance for this reason: because Jesus said: “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me” (John 16:2-3 – NKJV). Is it not true that Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, persecuted the saints who lived in Jerusalem and in foreign cities because at that time he did not know the Father nor His Son? Is it not true that he shut up in prison many of the saints and when they were put to death he cast his vote against them for he thought that he was offering God service? Listen to what He himself said to Timothy: “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13 – NKJV). This means that before the Lord appeared to him on the way to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus was an unbelieving person and thus he did not know God. Even though he was a Pharisee, who was blameless concerning the righteousness which is in the law and exceedingly zealous for the cause of God, he was blind and without life because he did not believe in the name of the Son of God; but one day it came to pass that He who had separated him from his mother’s womb called him through His grace and justified him. I am convinced that while Saul of Tarsus was still a persecutor of the Church and an insolent man, there were believers who prayed for him so that the Lord might save him. Here is the reason why I say this. Before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He said to the apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20); therefore, the apostles had to teach the believers to pray for those who persecuted them, and since they did it, I have come to the conclusion that the believers who continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship obeyed also that order of the Lord. Now, here is what happened after Saul turned to the Lord: “They [the Churches of Judea] only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’. And they praised God because of me” (Galatians 1:23-24 – NIV). As you can see, the conversion of Saul overflowed in many expressions of thanks to God on the part of many believers. Likewise, today when believers pray for someone who persecutes the Church and God answers their prayer, the name of God is glorified by them; therefore let us pray for our persecutors so that the name of God may be glorified when they are converted. Jesus Christ prayed for those who persecuted Him to the death (thus He left us an example), for while He was hanging on the cross He said: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34 – NKJV). Jesus asked God to forgive those who persecuted
Him and put Him to death in ignorance (that is, without knowing what they were doing). Sometimes, some of us are tempted to think that the Jews knew what they were doing against Jesus, however we know that’s not true because Peter confirmed the words of Jesus when he said to the Jews: “But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead …. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:14-15,17 - NKJV). As you can see, both the words of Jesus and those of Peter confirm that our enemies persecute us because of the ignorance which is in them.

We, as sons of God, must pray to God for our enemies who persecute us so that God might give them life and not that God might put them to death. Someone may say: ‘Why then under the law were there some men (such as David) who prayed to God that He might destroy their enemies?’ Because under the law was in force the commandment which said: ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. Jesus confirmed that when He said: ‘You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43 – NKJV; Leviticus 19:18). Therefore no wonder that David, even though he was a man after God’s heart, asked God to destroy his enemies, as he said to God: “May ruin overtake them by surprise …. Pour out your wrath on them ….. Let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave” (Psalms 35:8; 69:24; 31:17 - NIV).

But now, under grace, is in force the commandment which says: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 – NIV), therefore a son of God can’t ask God to put to death his enemies.

However, even under the law there were some men who prayed for their enemies; one of them was Moses. The Scripture says that after the twelve spies sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan returned to the camp, when the Israelites heard ten of the spies say: “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight ….We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” (Numbers 13:32-33,31 – NKJV), they complained against Moses and Aaron and wanted to stone them with stones. When God heard their grumblings, He said to Moses: “I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them ….” (Numbers 14:12 – NKJV), but Moses prayed for them, who wanted to stone him, (as it is written: “Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them” - Psalm 106:23 – NKJV); Moses prayed for the Israelites in this way: “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (Numbers 14:19 – NKJV), and God answered the prayer of Moses for He said to Moses: “I have pardoned, according to your word” (Numbers 14:20 – NKJV). The answer of God shows the effectiveness of the prayer on behalf of those who persecute us. Those who don’t know God say: ‘What would we gain by praying to Him’, but we who know God know that it is useful to pray for those who persecute us, for it is written: “He who respects a command (in this case the command which says: “Pray for those who persecute you”) is rewarded” (Proverbs 13:13 – NIV).

We must pray for the governing authorities, who are appointed by God

Among those for whom we must pray are even the governing authorities, that are appointed by God. God said to the Israelites who had been carried away captive to Babylon: “Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7 – NKJV). From these words we learn that we must seek the peace of the nation in which we live by the will of God. Someone may ask: ‘How can we seek its peace?’ By submitting ourselves to the governing authorities (God has appointed in the nation where we live) and by praying to God for them. We want to live a
peaceful and quite life in this nation, and we want the governing authorities to introduce good and righteous reforms in this country (from which we, even though we are strangers and pilgrims, may benefit), but in order to see this desire fulfilled we must pray for the governing authorities.

In the book of Ezra we read that king Darius commanded the governor of the region beyond the River and his companions certain things concerning their way of acting toward the elders of the Jews who were building the temple in Jerusalem. Among other things He commanded them the following things: “And whatever they need – young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem – let it be given them day by day without fail, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons” (Ezra 6:9-10 – NKJV).

As you can see, that king wanted the priests to pray for his life and the life of his sons, and I am persuaded that today the kings and all the governing authorities still need our prayers. Through our prayers we can help the governing authorities to rule righteously; therefore let us pray for them that God might save them and that He might keep them and give them wisdom to rule.

Let us pray for one another

Besides praying for those who are still slaves of sin, and for those who persecute us, and for the kings and the governing authorities, we must also pray to God for our brothers because this is the will of God for us. Someone will ask: ‘What should I ask God to do for my brothers?’ Let’s turn to the Holy Scripture, which is God-breathed, because it teaches us how to pray also for our brothers.

On the night our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed, He prayed to God for His disciples (that is, His brothers, as it is written: “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” Hebrews 2:11). Among the words of that prayer we find the following requests: “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ….. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one …. Sanctify them by Your truth” (John 17:11,15,17 – NKJV). Jesus pleaded with God to do certain things, which were according to the will of God for His brethren. Now, the above mentioned things which Jesus pleaded with God to do are still according to the will of God for His brethren, for God still wants to keep us from the evil one, He still wants to sanctify us by His truth, and He still wants to keep us through His name so that we may be one, speaking the same thing and being perfectly joined together in the same judgement. Therefore we should ask God to do these things for our brothers. The Scripture says that “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14 – NKJV) and the prayer for the unity of the brethren is according to the will of God and thus it is answered, and in order to confirm this I remind you that the prayer Jesus made for those who would believe in Him through the word of the apostles, so that they all might be one (as it is written: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” John 17:20-21 – NKJV) was answered, because in the book of the Acts of the apostles we read that “the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32 – NKJV).

The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, said to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31-32). The Lord knew what would happen within a short time, He knew that when the Shepherd would be struck the sheep of the flock would be scattered, He knew that His disciples would be tested, so He prayed for Simon Peter that his faith might not fail. Was that prayer answered? Of course, it was, for even though Peter denied the Lord three times, his faith did not fail because he was converted and he
was able to strengthen his brethren. We also must pray for our brothers who are tested in the furnace of affliction so that their faith should not fail.

Now, let's see how the apostles prayed for the Churches, because they left us an example in this also. Paul wrote to the saints who were in Ephesus: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:15-19 – NIV). As you can see, Paul prayed that God might give the saints of that city a spirit of wisdom and revelation through which they could grow in the knowledge of God, that He might enlighten the eyes of their heart (our heart has spiritual eyes and when they are enlightened by God, our knowledge of His eternal purpose, which He accomplished in the fullness of the time, and our knowledge of the things which God has prepared for those who love Him increase) in order that they might know these three things: the hope to which God had called them, the riches of His glorious inheritance which He had prepared for them and which was kept in heaven for them also, and His incomparably great power for them who believed.

Paul wrote in the same epistle: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19). As you can see, Paul prayed God that He might strengthen those saints in their inner man (besides having an outward man, each of us has an inner man), and that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. Why did Paul pray to God in that way? That those saints, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all saints how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. Brothers, we'd better pay attention to all these sentences beginning with 'that,' which are present in the prayers of Paul, because they show us the things Paul wanted the brethren to know and to do.

The desire of Paul was to present every man perfect in Christ, and that earnest desire led him to say those prayers to God on behalf of the believers. Nowadays it is a very rare thing to hear believers pray for one another in the way Paul did; the reason is that many believers prefer to read and study these prayers rather than say them; I believe that if Paul considered those prayers useful, we also must consider them useful and thus we also should pray in that way.

Paul wrote to the saints in Colosse: “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:9-12). Brothers, know this, that we also need to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God so that we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord; therefore let us pray for one another in this way. Now, with regard to the knowledge of the will of God, I tell you this; Jesus Christ said: “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40 – NKJV), and we, having believed in the Son of God, have done the will of God, but the will of God for us consists of many other things which we have to do in order to please God. However, in order to do them we must know them first, and to know them we need to pray to God; that’s why we must ask God to fill us and our brothers with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Someone may ask: ‘Is it really necessary?’ Yes, brother, it is; if it were
not necessary, Paul and his fellow workers would not have prayed for those brothers in that way. Someone else may ask: ‘Why should I be filled with the knowledge of the Will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding?’ Well, the reason is that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and thus please Him in everything. The Scripture states that we must please God rather than men, therefore we must see that we walk as wise, that is, in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, causing no offenses, so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified and His doctrine may be adorned. Instead, if we walk as fools – that is, if we live in a manner unworthy of the Gospel, being devoid of the knowledge of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, the children of this age will say to us, ‘After all, you are not different from us’ or ‘You claim to be Christians, yet you are worse than us!’ and thus the name of the Lord and His doctrine will be blasphemed because of us. Therefore, in order to please God, we need to understand what His will for us is; but if we don’t understand what His will is and we are not able to distinguish between good and evil, and we have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, how shall we be able to please God? Brothers, know this, that if you walk according to the flesh you will not be able to please God for it is written: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8 – NKJV). If we become friends of the world and lovers of the world, we can’t please God. On the contrary, if we are ready to do every good work, if we grow in the knowledge of God, if we are strong in the grace of God, if we show the meekness of Christ to all men, if we are patient in tribulation, giving always thanks to God for He has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light, then we will please God and His name will be glorified in us.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians these words also: “I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3 - NIV). Therefore, according to these words, when we pray for our brothers we struggle for them, and we must pray also for those brothers who have not met us personally. Why did Paul struggle for the saints in his prayers? He struggled for them so that their heart might be encouraged and comforted, in order that they might know the mystery of God (notice that in this prayer also Paul asked God to do something for the saints that they might know a certain thing).

Epaphras also, who was one of the fellow workers of Paul, prayed for the Colossians, as Paul said to the Colossians: “He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Colossians 4:12 – NIV). These words confirm that when we pray for our brothers we wrestle for them. For Epaphras wrestled in his prayers that the saints in Colosse might stand firm in all the will of God. He left us an example; therefore, let us follow it wrestling in our prayers for the saints.

Paul said to the Corinthians: “Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong” (2 Corinthians 13:7 - NIV). What we learn from this prayer is this, that the apostle Paul and his fellow workers wanted the saints to perfect holiness and to abstain from every form (or appearance) of evil. Here is how Paul prayed for the saints in Philippi: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11 - NKJV). Brothers, our love must abound in knowledge and all discernment in order to be able to discern what is best and to be pure and blameless at the coming of the Lord. Now, if we consider carefully this prayer of Paul we will come to the conclusion that we also need to pray for our brothers in this way. Why do I say this? Because, today, the love of many believers lacks knowledge and discernment. For when we speak of love with these believers, we perceive that their love doesn’t abound in knowledge nor in discernment, and consequently it is necessary for us to pray for them so that it may abound in knowledge and discernment. They think that to
rebuke a brother when he sins means not to love him as one should do, or that tolerating the evil workers and their evil deeds is a manifestation of love toward them and the Church. However, the Scripture does not teach such things, for it teaches that “love … does not rejoice in iniquity” (1 Corinthians 13:6 – NKJV) and that God, who is love, rebukes and chastens those who sin, and does not tolerate evil workers. So true love rebukes the brethren who sin against us, and does not tolerate evil workers.

Paul wrote to the saints in Thessalonica: “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). Brothers, let us pray for our brothers so that God may fulfill every good purpose of theirs and the work of faith with power.

Paul wrote to the saints in Galatia, who were troubled by some who wanted them to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses, the following things: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. ….. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you” (Galatians 4:9-11,19-20). The believers in Galatia had been begotten in Jesus Christ by the apostle Paul, but while Paul was absent they began to observe the days and the months and the seasons and the years of which the law of Moses speaks, which are all “a shadow of the things that were to come” (Colossians 2:17 – NIV), for some imposed these things on them saying that in order to be saved they had to be circumcised and to keep the law. When Paul heard that the Galatians had been troubled, he began to pray for them that they might come to their senses and obey the truth of the Gospel. The apostle Paul told them that he labored in birth for them again until Christ was formed in them; that is to say, he was wrestling in prayer for them that they might come to their senses and know the truth, from which they had strayed. Just as a woman is in labour before giving birth to a child, so Paul also, when he heard that the Galatians had been bewitched, was again in the pains of childbirth, and he began to pray for them with groanings which cannot be uttered (in other words, he prayed in the Holy Spirit), and his pains would end when Christ was formed in them. Brothers, Paul showed us what we must do if some of our brothers are bewitched like the Galatians.

What the apostles exhorted the saints to ask of God

Let us now look at some exhortations of the apostles concerning prayer, which show us what we must ask of God.

Paul, in speaking about the whole armor of God which we must put on in order to fight against our enemies, said: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:18-20). The apostle exhorted the saints to pray always in the Holy Spirit (I remind you that to pray in the Spirit means to pray in other tongues), and to be watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and for him as well, that God might enable him to preach the Gospel with boldness. Paul knew how the Gospel must be preached and thus he exhorted the saints to pray for him, for he was persuaded that the saints, through their prayers, could help him to preach the Gospel as he ought to preach it. Someone will ask: ‘How should the Gospel be preached?’ The Gospel should be preached with power, with the Holy Spirit and with much assurance, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. You may say: ‘Can the cross of Christ be made of no effect then?’ Yes, it is made of no effect (because it is
emptied of its power) when it is preached with words of human wisdom. Know this, that all those who have been called by God to preach need our prayers, therefore let us pray for the servants of the Lord who proclaim the way of salvation, so that God may enable them to proclaim the Word of the grace of God with all boldness.

Paul wrote to the saints in Colosse: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (Colossians 4:2-3 – NKJV). Now, when the apostle wrote these words he was in prison and exhorted the saints to ask God to open a door to him and to his fellow workers for the Word; this teaches us that God can open a door for the Word even in prison, because the Word cannot be chained; the ministers of the Word can be chained, but the Word cannot be chained. As you know, the Word of God bears fruit when those who hear it understand it, but it is necessary for God to open their hearts that they may understand the Word. Remember Lydia, who was a seller of purple; Luke says that “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14 – NKJV); that’s why Lydia understood the Word of God and thus she bore fruit. We still need the Lord to open the hearts of those who hear the Gospel, so that they may understand the Word of grace and be saved by it. Now let me explain to you what ‘a door open for the Word’ means according to the Scripture. While Paul was at Ephesus he wrote to the Corinthians: “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:8-9 – NKJV). To understand what that ‘great and effective open door’ was, it is necessary to tell what Luke wrote about the work of Paul in the city of Ephesus. When the apostle Paul came to Ephesus to preach the Gospel, it came to pass that he met some disciples whom he baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and on whom he laid his hands so that they might receive the Holy Spirit and “the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6 – NKJV). Then “he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them …. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts [who had practiced sorcery] brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” (Acts 19:8-12, 18-20). So all those who dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord, but not all of them turned to the Lord; however, many accepted the word preached by Paul; even one of those who rejected the Word, whose name was Demetrius (a silversmith who made silver shrines of Diana), recognized this when he said to the craftsmen: “Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26 – NKJV). Therefore, at Ephesus, by the ministry of Paul, many people accepted the Gospel of the grace of God, and many of them came and openly confessed their evil deeds; there were believers who received the Holy Spirit and also the gift of prophecy, there were many who were healed and delivered from demons in the name of the Lord Jesus; that’s the reason why Paul wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus: “A great and effective door has opened to me” (1 Corinthians 16:9 – NKJV). Obviously, not always the door which is opened for the Word is so great, however we can say that whenever in a country or in a town some people turn to the Lord, even if they are not many, the Lord has opened a door to his servants for the Word. At this point it must be said that every time the Lord opens to His servants a door for His Word, there are people who oppose the Word of God and thus believers are persecuted by their adversaries (persecution can be just a verbal persecution but also a physical persecution with imprisonments, beatings, etc). In this regard I remind you that Paul said that at
Ephesus there were many adversaries, which means that the Gospel met with strong opposition in that city, and this is confirmed by the following words of Luke: “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way” (Acts 19:23 – NKJV), and also by the following words which Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many” (2 Corinthians 1:8-11 – NKJV). At this point, I would like to dwell upon the following words of Paul “you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many” (2 Corinthians 1:11), so that you may understand how much our prayers for those who preach the Gospel can avail and what they produce. First of all, you must understand that the ministers of the Gospel have many enemies, among whom there are wicked and unreasonable men who don’t have faith, therefore we must pray for the ministers of the Word that God may deliver them from these evil men. Paul exhorted the saints to pray for him and his fellow workers that the Word of God might run swiftly and be glorified (as it was at Antioch in Pisidia, as it is written: “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord” Acts 13:48 – NKJV), but also that they might be delivered from the wicked, as he wrote to the saints in Thessalonica: “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 – NKJV). In this regard, I remind you of these words of exhortations Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, while he was going to Jerusalem to bring a relief offering for the poor among the saints who were in Jerusalem: “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe ….” (Romans 15:30-31 – NKJV). These exhortations of Paul show us that Paul thought that the prayers of the saints to God for him and his fellow workers were useful. Paul, too, believed that “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16 – NKJV), and not only did he believe that but also saw it with his eyes on many occasions. One of the occasions in which he saw God deliver him from wicked men, in answer to the prayers of the saints, was after he returned to Jerusalem (after he wrote the above mentioned exhortation to the saints in Rome), for in Jerusalem Paul was seized by some unbelieving Jews who tried to kill him but God delivered him from their hands.

Here are some other passages of the Scripture which confirm that the apostles believed that the saints could help them through their prayers (keep in mind that the following words were written from prison):

● “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ ….. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly” (Philippians 1:19; 2:24 – NKJV). Paul, while he was in prison, wrote to the Philippians that through their prayers and the supplication of the Spirit of Jesus (who helps the saints in that He makes intercession for them according to the will of God) he would be delivered from prison, and he expressed his confidence with the following words: “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith” (Philippians 1:25 – NKJV).

● “But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you” (Philemon 22 - NKJV). Paul, while in prison, told Philemon to prepare a guest room for him, because he was confident in the Lord that he would be granted to him in answer to his prayers (that is, the prayers of Philemon).

● “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner”
(Hebrews 13:18 – NKJV). As you can see, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews told them that through their prayers they would hasten his deliverance from prison.

In addition to this, brothers, I want you to know that because of the answer of God to the prayers you make for the ministers of the Gospel, many believers will give thanks to God. Therefore your prayers on their behalf produce many expressions of thanks to the glory of God. Is it not amazing to know that we, through our prayers, cooperate in spreading the Word of God because we help the ministers of the Word to preach the Gospel with all boldness and we cause them to be delivered from wicked and unreasonable men?

It is written: “And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:15 – NKJV). Brothers, that the Word of God may be spread all over the world, it is necessary for God to send some men to preach the Gospel in those places where the name of Christ has not yet been preached. Therefore we must ask God to send out labourers into His harvest. Jesus Christ commanded us to do this, for He said: “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38 – NKJV).

The apostle John wrote: “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that” (1 John 5:16 - NIV). After a believer has sinned, he is troubled and unhappy, and it cannot be otherwise because James says that sin “when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15 – NKJV). Notwithstanding this, if he confesses his sin to the Lord he will be forgiven and made alive. Now, if we see a brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, we must pray to God that He may give him life, and God, in His faithfulness, will give him life (granting him repentance that leads to life). However, you must understand that if a brother commits the sin that leads to death (that is, the sin which leads the person who has committed it to the second death), we must not pray for that brother, because he has committed a sin which cannot be forgiven him.

The apostle James, the Lord’s brother, wrote: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (James 5:13 – NKJV). Now, when we suffer because of righteousness we must pray, because that’s what we are commanded to do. Peter says: “Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19 – NKJV), and these words of Peter agree with those of James because when one prays to God in the midst of his tribulations he commits his soul to God. In the Scripture we have several examples of men who in the midst of their tribulations prayed to God: I will cite the example of Jeremiah, and that of our Lord Jesus. On one occasion Jeremiah prayed: “O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?” (Jeremiah 15:15-18). Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, before He was arrested, “began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed” (Matthew 26:37 – NKJV) and said to His disciples: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38 – NKJV), and while in that mood He fell on His face and prayed “that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him” (Mark 14:35 – NKJV). Here is how Jesus prayed in the Gethsemane: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Mark 14:36 – NKJV). Brothers, indeed, the best thing to do when we suffer is to pray, because through prayer we pour out our heart before the Lord confessing to Him our anguish and perplexities, having confidence that He hears us and helps us with His powerful consolations.

James commanded the elders of the Church to pray over the sick, for he wrote: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15). Note
that it is the sick person who has to call for the elders, and not the contrary, and furthermore that the elders of the Church must pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick” (James 5:15), says James. Therefore, the elders of the Church must pray over the sick in faith, with no doubting, in order to see the sick raised up by the Lord.

The Lord’s brother says also: “Pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16 – NKJV). Therefore, we must pray for those brothers who are sick, that God may heal them. When Mary, Moses’ sister, together with Aaron spoke against Moses, it came to pass that God struck her with leprosy, but Moses prayed to God for her, as it is written: “So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying: Please heal her, O God, I pray!” (Numbers 12:13 – NKJV), and God heard that prayer for after seven days, during which Mary was shut out of the camp, she was brought back because leprosy had left her. We can see how much the prayer of a righteous man for the sick avails in the story of Abraham also, for the Scripture says: “So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife” (Genesis 20:17-18 – NKJV). There is another example in the Scripture which shows us how much the prayer of a righteous man for a sick person avails, it’s the example of the son of Abraham, as it is written: “Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren, and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (Genesis 25:21 – NKJV).

Some of the circumstances on which the apostles prayed

Let us see now some of the circumstances on which the apostles prayed in order to understand how much important was prayer to them.

- The apostles, together with other brothers, prayed to God when they chose a successor to Judas Iscariot. With regard to this, Luke says that (after Peter said to the brothers that of those men who had accompanied them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from them, one of them had to become a witness with them of His resurrection) they “proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said: ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place’. And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:23-26 – NKJV).

- In Jerusalem, after the whole multitude of the disciples chose the seven (that is, Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas) “they presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6 – NIV). In this case, the apostles prayed for those seven men who had been chosen to wait on tables.

- Paul and Barnabas founded some churches during their missionary journey, and “having appointed to them by vote elders in every assembly, having prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23 -YLT). The apostles attached much importance to the election of the elders, for before having elders elected they prayed and fasted. (Remember that Jesus, before choosing the twelve apostles, prayed, as it is written: “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself, and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” Luke 6:12-13 – NKJV).

- Peter and John prayed for the Samaritan believers “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15 – NKJV). Therefore, it is scriptural to pray for believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

- Peter prayed before raising Tabitha from the dead, as it is written: “But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said: ‘Tabitha, arise’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up” (Acts 9:40 – NKJV).
• Paul prayed before healing the father of Publius, as it is written: “Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him” (Acts 28:8 – NKJV).
• At Philippi, after Paul and Silas were beaten with rods they were thrown into prison, and there they prayed as it is written: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25 – NKJV. What they did is the fulfilment of what James says in his epistle: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” James 5:13 – NKJV).
• At Miletus, Paul prayed with the elders of the Church of Ephesus before he left them, as it is written: “He knelt down and prayed with them all …. And they accompanied him to the ship” (Acts 20:36,38 – NKJV). The apostles prayed with the believers before departing from Tyre, as it is written: “And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again” (Acts 21:5-6). We also do a good thing when we pray before going on a journey. Know this, that to ask God for a safe journey is scriptural for Ezra wrote: “There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions” (Ezra 8:21 – NIV).

How the early Church prayed on two particular occasions

Let’s turn again to the Holy Scripture to see how the early Church prayed on two particular occasions.

Luke wrote: “And being let go, they [Peter and John] went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child [servant] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child [servant] Jesus” (Acts 4:23-30; Psalm 2:1-2).

In this prayer we can notice that those believers first of all reminded God who He was (it is a right thing to remind God who He is, for God says: “Put me in remembrance: let us plead together” Isaiah 43:26 – so let’s follow the example of those believers), then they reminded God of what He had said through David about His Anointed One and how what He had said was fulfilled (therefore, it is correct, when we pray, to quote some passages of the Scripture). After that, they asked God to enable His servants to speak His Word with great boldness and to stretch out His hand to heal and to confirm His Word by signs and wonders. Someone will ask: ‘Was that prayer answered by God?’ Yes, it was, for it is written: “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31), and also: “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (Acts 5:12) and again: “There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:16). Brothers, today we must ask God for the same things, for His Word still needs to be spoken with great boldness and the testimony of Christ needs to be confirmed by healings, signs and wonders. In order to see people converted to the Lord, the Word of God needs to be preached with boldness and there must be the manifestation of the Holy Spirit; therefore, let us
raise our voice and pray to God that He might bear witness to His Word both with signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our desire is to see the Gospel preached with boldness as in the days of old, and also to see our great God confirm the Good News of the peace of God. Today, in this country, as well as in many others, the faith of many people is based on human wisdom and not on the power of God, for the Gospel is not preached with that power which marked the preaching of the apostles, but with words of human wisdom. This, beloved, should lead us to ask God to enable His servants to preach His Word with boldness.

I want to say another thing, which is this: the reason why many don’t fear God and don’t tremble before His Word is that they have never seen the true manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Someone may say: ‘Why do you call it the true manifestation of the Spirit?’ Because among the people of God certain things which are nothing but a counterfeit manifestation of the Spirit are passed off as the true manifestation of the Spirit in the eyes of the simple and of those who are unstable in all their ways; many mistake suggestion for the manifestation of the Spirit, and the manifestation of physical strength (displayed by some who preach the Gospel) for the power of God. Many preachers of the Gospel say to the crowds: ‘Concentrate, imagine now that you are healed and no more sick!’ as if a sick person can be healed by an intense mental concentration or the power of suggestion that they are able to exert on the simple. And many other preachers push the sick down on the floor and then they claim that it was the power of God who caused them to fall to the ground!!! And the time would fail me to speak of all those evangelistic meetings where the Gospel is preached with words only, without power and deep conviction, and where the deafening amplification gives the impression that the preacher is preaching with power. And I want to say also that there are many preachers who proclaim that God has healed many sick people (after they prayed for them), but afterwards, when one goes to talk with those who claimed that they were healed by God he finds out that most of them, or even all of them, are still sick. We are tired of hearing about healings which have never occurred, which are told by many unscrupulous preachers to attract people to their meetings and to become famous and rich. We long to see the sick healed, the blind see, the dumb speak, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead raised, the demon possessed delivered from the power of demons, the lepers cured, so that, seeing the mighty works of our God, sinners might believe and the faithful might fear God. Luke speaks of another circumstance on which the church prayed to God and that prayer was answered; I refer to the imprisonment of Peter. He says: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:1-5 – NKJV). As you can see, when Peter was put in prison the Church did not forget him, rather the Church began to pray for Peter. Now, even though Luke does not say what the Church asked God to do on behalf of Peter, we can deduce it from some words Paul wrote to the saints while he was in prison, which are these: “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supplication of the Spirit of Jesus Christ ….” (Philippians 1:19 – NKJV); “…. I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you” (Philemon 22 – NKJV). Therefore, we think that the Church of Jerusalem prayed to God that He might deliver Peter from prison. Those constant prayers were heard because God sent an angel to deliver Peter from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people. I would like to underline something we read in this story, which is this: when Luke says that constant prayer was offered to God for Peter by the Church, he means that the saints prayed for Peter. This is confirmed by the Scripture which says that in the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, “many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12 – NKJV), therefore we can say that the Church which was gathered in the house of Mary was praying for Peter. Thus, the building where we gather together to worship God cannot be called ‘church’ because this is not confirmed by the Word of God. We are the
house of God, as it is written: “We are his house” (Hebrews 3:6 – NIV); the place of worship or the house where we gather to pray is not the house of God.

Brothers, we are the Church of the Living God and we must pray for our brothers who are in prison (and treated as criminals) so that God may comfort them, establish them in Christ, and deliver them from prison. Of course, it is true that some of those who are put in prison because of the Gospel die in prison, however this happens because God wants them to die in prison and not because God cannot deliver them from prison. One day we will know why God did not deliver them from prison, but in the meantime (while we are waiting for the hidden things to be revealed to us) let us continue to remember the prisoners, offering constant prayers to God for them because God wants us to pray for them, as it is written: “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them ….” (Hebrews 13:3 – NKJV).

**On what conditions our prayers will be answered**

Our God has promised to answer our prayers on the following conditions:

- **If we pray in faith.** Jesus said: “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:22 – NIV. The NKJV reads: “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive”). Now, “faith is being sure of what we hope for” (Hebrews 11:1 – NIV), therefore when we pray believing (or in faith) we are sure we will receive what we have asked of God. Jesus said: “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24 – NIV); as you can see, these words also confirm that in order to be heard we must believe. What must we believe? We must believe that we have received what we asked for in prayer, for it is written first “Believe that you have received it” (Mark 11:24 - NIV) and then: “It will be yours” (Mark 11:24 - NIV) or “You will have it” (NKJV).

James, the Lord’s brother, confirmed the words of Jesus by saying: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8). Note that first it is written: “Let him ask of God” (James 1:5) in faith, and then: “It shall be given him” (James 1:5). As you can see, in order to receive wisdom from God, we must ask for it in faith, with no doubting. For, while on the one hand he who prays to God in faith is heard; on the other hand he who prays doubting is not heard. He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind, and that man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. The words of James are hard, yet true.

One day Jesus said to His disciples: “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says” (Mark 11:22-23 – NKJV). I would like to dwell upon these words of Jesus in order to explain to you what it means to pray in faith with no doubting. Note that Jesus said: “And does not doubt in his heart” (Mark 11:23); now, out of our heart spring the issues of life, therefore we need to keep it with all diligence, because if we pray to God not believing with our heart that we will receive what we have asked of Him (because we say in our heart that what we have asked is too hard for the Lord and He can’t give it to us), we will not receive anything from the Lord, we will get nothing but reproaches. When we pray, our heart must be firm, it must trust in the Lord; then we will receive what we have asked of God. When we pray, we must believe not only that God can do what we ask Him to do, but also that He will do it, for it is written: “Believe that you have received it” (Mark 11:24 – NIV) and also: “[Whoever] Does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done” (Mark 11:23 – NKJV). To explain to you what it means to believe that those things we say will be done, I will mention an event which happened in the days of Jesus, at Capernaum. It is written: “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the
palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour” (Matthew 8:5-13). As you can see, when that roman centurion heard about Jesus, he came to Jesus and pleaded with Him to come and heal his servant who was lying at home paralyzed, and Jesus told him that He would come and heal his servant, but the centurion answered and told Jesus not to trouble Himself because he was not worthy that He should enter under his roof. He asked Jesus to speak the word and his servant would be healed. The faith of that man was amazing, because he believed not only that Jesus could heal his servant, but also that when Jesus would speak the word his servant would be healed. Jesus saw the faith which was in that man and granted his request. Note the expression of the centurion: “But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8), for it shows that he did not doubt at all in his heart, but believed that the Lord would heal his servant through the word only. But note also the answer of Jesus, for it shows that it was done for him as he had believed. Is it not written that if he “does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says” (Mark 11:23 – NKJV)? Our enemy does not like the prayer of the righteous made in faith, thus when we pray it is necessary to resist the devil, standing firm in the faith. Know this, that the devil tries to make us doubt the Lord’s promises, so that we might not see their fulfilment in our life. I assure you that when we kneel down before the Almighty God and we pray in faith our enemies don’t remain indifferent. The devil tries through them to frighten us and lead us to think that God can’t hear us, or that what we ask of God is not for us today, and other harmful things; but you, beloved, don’t be afraid, because Jesus said: “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do” (John 14:13 – NKJV): have faith in these words spoken by our Lord and at God’s appointed time you will receive from the Lord what you have prayed for.

- **If we keep His commandments.** Jesus said: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7 – NKJV). Also in these words of Jesus we find a ‘if’ to which we need to pay much attention, because it shows on what condition God will give us what we have asked of Him. Now, what does it mean to abide in Christ? To abide in Christ means to keep His commandments, as it is written: “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (1 John 3:24 – NKJV). However, Jesus said also: ‘If My words abide in you”, therefore it is necessary for His words to abide in us so that we may be heard by God. With regard to this, I remind you that we are commanded to let the Word of Christ abide in us, for Paul wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly .....” (Colossians 3:16 - NKJV), therefore anyone who does not want to let the word of Christ abide in him does not keep the divine commandment, and thus when he prays he will not be heard. Some affirm that in order to be heard by God we just need to pray in faith; however, the Scripture teaches that in order to receive what we have asked of God, we need also to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel, for John wrote: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22 – NKJV). Anyone who thinks that his prayers will be heard even if he conducts himself wickedly is deceiving himself.

Many teach that God will hear our prayers even if our conduct is not holy; however I will show you from the Scriptures that the prayers of those who walk according to the stubbornness of their heart and don’t want to listen to the Lord are not heard by God, and thus these teachers are deceiving themselves and others.
The apostle Peter says: “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [your wives] with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7 – NKJV). This means that if a believing husband despises his wife, he is unfaithful to her, and hates her, mistreating her and beating her, God will not hear his prayers because of his shameful behaviour. Beloved, God is holy and righteous, and thus He cannot tolerate evil.

Remember what happened to Saul, king of Israel; the Scripture says that when the Philistines came and encamped at Shunem to fight with Israel and he saw the army of the Philistines he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly “and when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets” (1 Samuel 28:6 - NKJV). Do you know why God did not answer him? Because Saul had not kept the commandments that God had given him through the prophet Samuel; God became an enemy of Saul and when he found himself in a distress and he inquired of God, He did not answer him.

Now, listen to the words God spoke to the rulers of the house of Israel through the prophet Micah: “Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot, like flesh in the caldron. Then they will cry to the LORD, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds” (Micah 3:1-4 – NKJV). From these words also it is very evident that God does not answer those who do evil works and cry out to Him in the day of trouble.

Here is what Wisdom says to the scoffers: “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke” (Proverbs 1:28-30 – NKJV). Beloved, I say it again, if we don’t heed God’s voice, God will not hear us when we pray to Him.

Do you know how the Israelites conducted themselves in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel? In this way: they treated father and mother with contempt, they oppressed the stranger, they mistreated the fatherless and the widow and the poor, they slandered, they committed abomination with their neighbour’s wife, they lewdly defiled their daughters-in-law and violated their sisters, they took usury and increase, they lied, they stole, they knelt down before idols and offered sacrifices and burned incense to them; yet, they had the cheek to come to appear before God in His courts to pray to Him. But God said to them: “Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear …. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity” (Isaiah 1:15; 59:3 – NKJV). The Israelites thought that God would hear their prayers even though they walked according to the stubbornness of their heart, but their thought was futile. And today there are some among the people of God who think the same thing, but they deceive themselves. Here is what happens among the Church of God: some who claim to be believers mistreat the fatherless, the widow and the poor, they take advantage and defraud their brothers, they have set up all kinds of idols in their hearts, they strike with the fist of wickedness, they tell lies to their neighbour, they expose their nakedness on the beach during summer, they commit adultery and they fornicate, they stay many hours before their television set to watch vanities and obscenities, they go to the amusement parks, they go to dance, they go to the cinema, to spend their money for what does not satisfy, and they serve mammon, and then they go to the place of worship to pray to God saying to Him: ‘Lord, we love You, hear us, and we will give You the glory due to Your name’. Listen to me, do you think that God can deny Himself? Do you think that God is unjust and He answers people who with their mouth show much love but their hearts pursue their own gain? The Scripture says: “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9 – NKJV) and also: “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard” (Proverbs 21:13 – NKJV). Do not let these words depart from your eyes, lest anyone deceive you with empty words.
When the Scripture says that “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man, avails much” (James 5:16 – NKJV), it means that the prayer of faith made by a person who keeps God’s commandments avails much, because a righteous man is not only a person who has been justified by the grace of God, but also a person who does what is right in the sight of God, keeping His commandments. Listen to what God said through the prophet Ezekiel: “But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour’s wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 18:5-9). In reading these words, we have come to the conclusion that a righteous man is a person who abides in Christ, and in whom the words of Christ dwell, therefore the following words of James: “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16 – NKJV) confirm fully the following words of Jesus: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7 – NKJV). Of course, if on the one hand we must proclaim that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man, avails much, on the other hand we must proclaim that the prayer of those who refuse to obey God’s commandments avails nothing.

Brothers, let us examine carefully our ways and “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1 – NKJV). Let us speak truthfully to our neighbour, let us do good clinging to it, let us help the poor sharing our material things with them and let us love one another sincerely, let us rid ourselves of all hypocrisy, and then we will have the assurance that God will hear us and will give us all the things we have asked of Him.

**If we ask what is according to God’s will for us.** John says: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired [have asked] of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Brothers, when Jesus said: “You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7 – NKJV), He did not mean that no matter what kind of things we ask or no matter why we ask certain things, we will surely receive them. For you must understand that in order to receive the things we have asked of God they need to be according to the will of God for us.

James says to those who are not heard by God because they cherish sin in their heart: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3 – NKJV). As you can see, when our requests made known to God are not according to His will, they are not heard. Now, God wants us to ask good things, but if He sees that we ask amiss (that is, if He sees that we ask certain things with wrong motives), then He will not hear us. I am sure that if you fear God and tremble before His word, and you make all efforts to rule your own house well, bringing your children up in the training and admonition of the Lord, and one day one of your children comes to you and says to you: ‘Dad, give me some money because I want to go to the cinema’ you will not give him what he asks, rather you will rebuke him severely. Why will you not give him the money he wants? Because he asks amiss, that he may spend it on his pleasures. Let us suppose now that while you and your wife are walking near a jeweller’s shop your wife says to you: ‘My dear, I want to wear some jewellery to please you more; please, buy me a golden necklace and some golden earrings’, what will you do, if you who are a God-fearing man and know that God does not want your wife to wear those things? Surely you will not grant your wife her wish, not because you hate her, but because you love her as Christ loved the Church. Now, if you who fear God don’t grant the members of your household certain wishes, why should God, who is holy and just, grant some members of His household certain wishes, which are not according to His will? Those who ask and don’t receive because they ask amiss that they spend it on their pleasures, are those who love the world and the things in the world,
who have become enemies of God because they follow the lusts of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and have become proud but God resists them.

It must be said also that there are some prayers which are not heard because God has decided to work differently, and thus those prayers are not according to His will (even though they are made in faith and sincerely), and not because he who prays is unjust, lover of pleasures and haughty. The Scripture teaches us that Jesus Christ, while He was in the Gethsemane, before being arrested, prayed to His Father saying: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Mark 14:36 – NKJV). Luke says that Jesus prayed saying: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42 – NKJV). How could God take that cup away from Jesus, when He had decided before the foundation of the world that His Anointed one had to suffer and be crucified? You should recognize, brothers, that Jesus’ request in the Gethsemane was not according to God’s will for Him. Praise God because whatever His will for us is, it is a will for our good and for the good of other people; it is true that we suffer when God does not answer one of our prayers because we ask something that is not according to His will, but in the end we must always recognize that if God did not hear us when or how we desired, and if He did not give us that particular thing but another thing, He has done this exclusively for our good.

The apostle Paul wrote: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). In this case also, since Paul asked God to do something that God did not want to do, he was not heard by God; however, God acted in that way for his good, so that he might remain humble and might not become conceited. Dear brothers, when we say: ‘The Lord’s will be done’ we mean that we are willing to do the will of God even if it does not agree with our will. Therefore when we receive from the Lord a ‘negative’ answer or an answer that does not come up to our expectations, let us not complain; rather let us accept it with thankfulness and submission, knowing that God is wiser than us and He knows perfectly what is the best for us.

One day, Moses, while he was reminding the Israelites of the things which had happened during the journey in the wilderness, said: “And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan” (Deuteronomy 3:23-27).

Now, God had said to Moses and Aaron at the water of Meribah (after Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded him to do): “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12 – NKJV). Therefore Moses knew the decision of God, yet he pleaded with the Lord to allow him to cross over and see the land of Canaan. However, God did not grant his request; even though Moses was a humble man, a man with whom God spoke face to face, a man of whom God said: “He is faithful in all My house” (Numbers 12:7 – NKJV).

The prophet Elijah was not heard by God on one occasion, for it is written: “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his
servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:1-4), but God did not take away his life, because God had decided to take him to heaven without death, and also because Elijah had to accomplish other things for the Lord, for (forty days later) God said to him at Horeb: “Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room” (1 Kings 19:13-16).

King David on one occasion was not heard by God. The Scripture says that after David had committed adultery with Bath-sheba and killed her husband with the sword of the people of Ammon, God sent Nathan to David to announce to him His judgments against David and his house. Among other things, Nathan said to David: “The child also who is born to you shall surely die” (2 Samuel 12:14 – NKJV) and “the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground” (2 Samuel 12:15-16 - NKJV). However, God did not answer David’s prayer, for “on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died” (2 Samuel 12:18 – NKJV). As you can see, God could have answered the prayer of David, but He refused to grant his request. What shall we say then after citing these examples of prayers which were not answered by God? Shall we say that God is unjust and merciless? Certainly not. We know and proclaim that God is righteous and full of compassion not only when He grants us our request but also when He doesn’t grant us our request.

God wants to give us good things, we are sure about this; however, He wants also us to ask them of Him, for Jesus said: “Ask ….” (Matthew 7:7 – NKJV) and also: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11 – NKJV). You see, brothers, the fact that God knows the things we need before we ask Him, does not mean at all that we don’t need to ask them of Him, otherwise Jesus would not have commanded us to ask. Therefore, to ask is a command and not optional. The Lord commanded us to ask and promised that it will be given to us, for Jesus said: “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24 – NKJV). We attest the truthfulness of these words, because we have seen their fulfilment in our life many times; when we were in need of something our heart was faint in us, however after we asked God to meet our need and we received what we had asked of Him, our heart was filled with a great joy, with such a joy that we were bound to say to God: “You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased” (Psalm 4:7 – NKJV). Yes, the Lord is faithful, and He is still ready to perform His word. Someone will say: ‘What can and should I ask of God?’ Whatever you need, because it is written: “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 – NKJV), and also: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7 - NKJV). Beloved, know that God not only knows what you need, but also wants to meet all your needs (according to His riches in glory), because He cares for you. Do not think that God is far from you or that He is not interested in you or that there is something that He cannot do for you. The God we serve is great “and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3 – NKJV); He is “mighty in power” (Psalm 147:5 – NKJV), therefore, come to the throne of God in full assurance of faith, keeping in mind that He is the One who formed man’s ear (therefore He is able to hear you when you pray to Him), and that He is the One who created the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them (therefore there is nothing too hard for Him). Paul wrote that God is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20 – NKJV); ah! – may God enlighten the eyes of our heart that we may know “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Ephesians 1:19 – NKJV). Now I am going to tell you what many have asked of God and have received from Him.
Some have asked God for the Holy Spirit and received Him and thus in them it was fulfilled what Jesus said: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13 – NKJV); some, after receiving the Holy Spirit, have prayed to God that they might interpret the words they spoke in other tongues (as it is written: “Therefore, let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret” 1 Corinthians 14:13 – NKJV) and God granted their request; some have asked for other gifts of the Holy Spirit and God heard them giving them the desire of their heart; some asked God for wisdom and God gave it to them, as it is written: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5 – NKJV); some who were sick prayed to God that He might heal them (as Jeremiah did when he said: “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed” Jeremiah 17:14 – NKJV) and they were healed by God through their faith, and it was fulfilled in them the Scripture which says: “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” (Psalm 107:19-20 – NKJV) and also the Scripture which says: “By His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5 – NKJV); some wanted to get married and so they asked God for a prudent wife and God granted their request and thus it was fulfilled in them the Scripture which says: “God maketh the solitary into families” Psalm 68:6 - Darby). Beloved, know that a “a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Proverbs 19:14 – NKJV) and those who asked God for her and received her are still rejoicing and giving thanks to God for her. Some, being unable to have children, asked God to give them some children, knowing that “children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3 – NKJV) and at God’s appointed time they received them; some, having received notice to quit, asked God for a new house and God heard them: some asked God to reveal them the ministry they had to fulfill and God heard them, and afterward He confirmed before the saints and through the saints that He had called them to fulfill that ministry: some asked God to reveal them the specific place, such as the country, the region, the town where to go to preach the Gospel (the region, the town) and God heard them and it was fulfilled in them the word that God spoke to Jeremiah: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3 – NKJV). There are many more examples which I could cite to confirm that God is faithful and “all the promises of God in Him are Yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20 – NKJV), however, I think that those above mentioned are sufficient for the moment. Brothers, I exhort you to kneel down before God and to pray to Him in faith, asking Him for what you or other people need. Over the centuries, all those who have asked God for something which was according to His will for them were heard. Those who have obeyed the Word of God and have been blessed by obeying to it are a great many. However, also those who, knowing that God gives good things to those who ask Him, don’t ask and thus don't have are a great many; in them it is fulfilled what James wrote: “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2 – NKJV).
was passing by, he began to cry out and say: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47 – NKJV), but the multitude warned him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more. Do you know what happened then? It happened that Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called and when he came to Jesus He gave him the sight, that is, the desire of his heart. A blind man wanted Jesus to have mercy on him; he did not want Jesus to give him costly garments, he did not want Jesus to give him riches nor did he want to become famous, but he wanted to receive his sight; it was a lawful desire for a blind person, yet there were many who, when they heard him crying out ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ warned him to be quiet. Brother, know this, that when you begin to cry out to God that He may perform signs and wonders to make sinners obedient, or when you begin to covet earnestly the spiritual gifts as the disciples of old did, you also will be rebuked by some, who will warn you to be quiet because you are disturbing the Church. But know this, that you are not disturbing God, rather you are disturbing some believers who are asleep and don’t want to wake up, or maybe you are disturbing someone like Diotrephes, who wants to have the preeminence among the brethren. I know by experience that if you humble yourself before God and you seek His face, and you begin to ask God for spiritual things, which are for the edifying of the Church, all those who live according to the worldly lusts will rise up against you, they will sadden you by their bitter words and their indifference toward spiritual things; however you must not give up, you must not resign yourself to their will, remember that there is nothing too hard for our God and that you are not the first believer who has asked God for these things because some other believers you don’t know have asked God for the same things and at His appointed time their prayer was answered. You, who fear and love God and seek His face with all your heart without ceasing, must understand that there are some who don’t want to know the power of God nor the power of His works and since they don’t desire the gifts of the Spirit or the Lord to reveal them certain useful things, don’t want others to desire those things either, and consequently those who don’t have because they have not asked despise and want to put to silence those who want to receive the things “which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 - NKJV)

Now let us consider some prayers made by those of old, which might have seemed ‘not according to the will of God’ to someone, yet they were answered by God because they were made in full assurance of faith and were according to the will of God.

It is written: “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17). Someone may say: ‘What! A man prayed that it might not rain and God answered his prayer? How could such a thing be? Obviously it is easier to hear that someone prayed that it might rain than it might not rain; yet, Elijah, who was a man of God, made that prayer. In order to understand why he made that prayer, we need to see what the Scripture says about the conduct of the King of Israel as well as of the people of Israel at the time. The Scripture teaches us that in the days of Elijah, the people of Israel forsook God, bowed the knee to Baal and kissed him, except seven thousand men. In addition to this, the children of Israel torn down the altars of God and killed the prophets of God. Ahab and his wife also behaved in the vilest manner, for it is written: “But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel” (1 Kings 21:25-26 – NKJV). As you can see, the sins committed by the children of Israel were serious and deserved to be punished. God had warned the Israelites through the law, saying to them: “But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant …. I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heavens as iron, and your earth as brass” (Leviticus 26:14-15,19). Elijah knew that warning of God, therefore no wonder that he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and God answered his prayer. Be careful, I am not urging you to pray that it may not rain on the wicked, but I am just saying that for some particular reasons and needs, still
today one can be moved by the Spirit to pray that it may not rain for a certain period of time on a certain place and God answers his prayer. There was another prophet who asked God to do some particular things on a specific occasion; his name was Elisha. The Scripture says that when the king of Syria knew that Elisha told the king of Israel the words that he spoke in his bedroom, he sent a great army to get Elisha. The king of Syria sent horses and chariots and a great army to Dothan, and they came by night and surrounded the city. “And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria” (2 Kings 6:15-20). Then the prophet Elisha told the king of Israel to set food and water before those men, and after they ate and drank, the king of Israel “sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel” (2 Kings 6:23). As you can see, Elisha asked God to do a particular thing towards both his servant and the Syrians. Someone may ask: ‘What was the good of those prayers of Elisha?’ Well, those prayers were useful because when his servant saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire he was reassured, while what happened to the Syrians persuaded the Syrians to come no more into the land of Israel (2 Kings 6:23). We, on our part, have to recognize once more that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Now let us see what Gideon asked of God. The Scripture says: “And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground” (Judges 6:36-40). Someone may say: ‘God had already spoken to Gideon saying: “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? …. Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (Judges 6:14,16), why then did Gideon asked God for those signs?’ Well, Gideon was convinced that he needed to ask God for those signs, and I don’t feel like criticizing his behaviour. However, I want to remind you that Gideon had to go to fight against an army of about 135,000 Midianites with only three hundred men. Realize that the hands of Gideon had to be strong and through those sings they were strengthened. No one can affirm that Gideon, by asking God for those signs, tempted God, because he did not ask for those signs in order to tempt God but that God might confirm His call to him to lead the children of Israel in victory against the Midianites. Some believers have called the example of Gideon ‘a poor example of faith’, however I wonder: ‘What would these people have done, who criticize even Gideon’s behaviour, in seeing all that multitude of Midianites?’ You see, some teach that we must have faith in God, and then, instead of asking God for the money they need in their bedroom, waiting for God to provide, they extort the money from the saints by their craftiness (they know how to extort it), and then we hear them saying that asking God for signs is not fitting for us who have believed in Christ because it is a lack of faith in God. But God granted Gideon’s requests, and we know that Gideon’s requests and what he did for Israel were written for our
learning. Moreover, I would like you to note that God, after He gave those signs to Gideon, told Gideon to go down to the camp of Midian to hear the telling of a dream had by a Midianite and its interpretation. Why did God want Gideon to hear the telling of that dream and its interpretation, which foretold the defeat of the Midianites? Because He wanted to strengthen Gideon’s hands, as God said to him: “And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host” (Judges 7:11). And what else can I say? In the epistle to the Hebrews, Gideon is numbered among those who “obtained a good testimony through faith” (Hebrews 11:39 – NKJV) and among those who “became valiant in battle” (Hebrews 11:34 – NKJV) and “turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Hebrews 11:34 – NKJV). I would to God that there might be more courageous men like Gideon in the midst of the Church, who are willing (even after asking God for some signs) to serve him with pure conscience, renouncing the hidden things of shame; yes, right those things about which the men of corrupt minds boast, about whom the Scripture says that their glory is in their shame.

Brothers, it is not a sin to ask God for some signs in order to be strengthened in a particular work we are going to do to the glory of God. Some who teach the word of God speak in a way which is not clear and furthermore it reveals their unbelief in certain things and their dislike for these things. They don’t want to talk about visions, dreams, and signs, as if the Scripture called these things ‘useless things’ or ‘things which we should not dare to ask of God’ or ‘evil things of which we should beware’.

The truth is that many believers have never experienced certain things, also because they have never attached importance to these important things: that’s why they speak against these things and want to deceive the other believers into believing that these things were useful to the ancients but they are no longer useful to us, who are ‘modern’. Many judge wrongly the particular prayers of some faithful and sincere brothers and sisters because they don’t have the same measure of faith as they have or because they think that God is not able to grant them their request or because they think that God has ceased working certain things He did in ancient times. But God in due season has showed some of them that He has not changed and that “the desire of the righteous will be granted” (Proverbs 10:24 – NKJV) and that “His ways are everlasting” (Habakkuk 3:6 - NKJV). For there are some believers who once thought that God has ceased giving the gift of the Holy Spirit and then they repented; there are some believers who once thought that God does not heal the sick any longer and then they repented; there are some believers who once thought that with the death of the apostles the Holy Spirit ceased giving His gifts but then they repented: there are some believers who once thought that God ceased speaking to men in a vision or in a dream and then they repented; there are some believers who once thought that asking God for a sign, as the early saints did, is not for us and then they repented. As a result those believers who once were regarded by them as ‘believers who had gone out of their mind’ (because of their faith in God) or ‘dreamers and visionaries’ (because of the things God had revealed to them), then were judged to be sound of mind and sound in the faith (even though they were already sound of mind and sound in the faith).

Beloved, believe in the holy and faithful promises of God, and not in the empty words of some who don’t walk in the Spirit.

How Jesus taught to pray

Let us see now how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. He said to them: “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:7-8 - NKJV).

First of all, Jesus has commanded us not to use excessive words (that is, vain repetitions) when we pray, as those who don’t know God do. One of the characteristics of the prayers of those who don’t know God, is their excessive length; they pray for many hours repeating mechanically the various prayers which are written in their books, and we can see this in this country also.
What induces so many people to pray in this way? The conviction that they will be heard because of their many words. Now, Jesus said: “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:22 – NIV), and not ‘if you use many words when you pray, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’; I say this so that no one among you may think that the more words he says to God the more possibilities of being heard he has. “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8 – NIV), said Jesus; therefore we don’t need to use excessive words when we pray to God in the midst of our distresses. David said to God: “For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether” (Psalm 139:4 – NKJV), which shows that our God knows perfectly what we are going to ask of Him, even before we speak to Him. Whereas on the one hand Jesus told us how we should not pray, on the other hand He said to us how we should pray, as He said: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9-13). Brothers, keep in mind that this prayer was taught by Him who was with the Father in heaven before He came into this world. We know that the Son spoke to us the things which He had heard from His Father, therefore these words also are Word of God. Do not underestimate this prayer because its efficacy, when it is said to God with a pure heart and in faith, has not decreased over the centuries.

I want to comment briefly on this prayer. First of all, when we pray to God we must call Him ‘Father’ and not ‘Daddy’. I say this because some call Him ‘Daddy,’ not showing the proper fear of God and the proper reverence toward His Holy Name. You see, some think that since we are sons of God we have the right to call God ‘Daddy’. However, I think that we should not call Him in this way, that is to say, in this familiar way, even though He is our Heavenly Father, the One who gave us birth through His word. On the night Jesus was betrayed, when He prayed to the Father, He called God ‘Holy Father’ and ‘Righteous Father’. It grieves my heart to see some Christians using this improper familiarity with God. However we are not surprised to see this, for we know that many have forgotten who God is as well as the Scripture which says: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29 – NIV). Jacob called God “the Fear of Isaac” (Genesis 31:42 - NKJV; Asaph called God “Him who ought to be feared” (Psalm 76:11 – NKJV); while some call Him ‘Daddy’! I think that these people with the passing of time will become like those children who call their father ‘little daddy’ and they play with him thinking that they can mock their father! They call God ‘daddy’ and in the meantime they are dressed in a odd and indecent way; not only this, when they pray, some of them pray with their hands in their pockets, and some of them refuse to kneel down before God. I ask you this question: ‘Why do they behave in that way?’ Is it not because they don’t want to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling? I am sick at heart in seeing that the heathen who bow down before their dumb idols show more reverence and fear toward their dead works than some believers toward the living and true God. Judge for yourselves what I say.

We, as sons of God, want the name of God to be hallowed through us. For God said in the law: “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Leviticus 10:3). Now, so that the name of God may be sanctified, we who are near Him (we once were far from God, but now in Christ Jesus we have been brought near God by the blood of Jesus Christ) must keep His commandments. Therefore, if we say to God: ‘Hallowed be your name’, but at the same time we refuse to obey Him, we lie to God.

According to the Scripture, one day the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and we will reign on the earth. All this has not yet taken place; however we know that day is coming quickly; yes, we want the Kingdom of God to come, that’s why we say to God: ‘Your Kingdom come’.

In addition to this, we want the will of God to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. What do the holy angels of God do in heaven? What do the righteous do in heaven? They do the will of
God, for they praise and serve God. Are not they doing what we must do on earth? We say to
God: ‘Your will be done’ because we want Him to accomplish His will in us.
“Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of
the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3 – NKJV); this means that we need to feed on bread as well as the
Word of God, and we feed on the Word of God by hearing it and keeping it. Now, we need to eat
bread to live; God knows that, and He wants us to ask Him for it. Jesus said: “Ask, and it will be
given to you” (Matthew 7:7 – NKJV), therefore when we ask for our daily bread God hears us
and He gives it to us. The Psalmist says to God: “These all wait for You, that You may give them
their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are
filled with good” (Psalm 104:27-28 – NKJV). Consider the goodness of God! He cares for all the
birds and the fish giving them the food they need. If God does not neglect animals, how could
we think that He will neglect us who are His sons? We are “of more value than many sparrows”
(Matthew 10:31 – NKJV), and of more value than any other animal that God made, therefore we
firmly believe that God will make sure that we don't lack our daily bread.
Beloved, “we all stumble in many things” (James 3:2 - NKJV), that’s why we are bound to ask
God to remit our debts. The sins we commit are called debts because to break the word of God
is to get into debt toward God. But thanks be to God because when we come to Him and
confess our debts to Him asking Him to forgive us our debts, we obtain the remission of them.
Isn’t this a clear manifestation of the faithfulness of God? However, besides being faithful, God is
also righteous for if we don’t forgive our debtors (that is to say, if we don’t forgive men their sins),
neither will God forgive our debts, therefore let us take heed to ourselves and let us forgive men
their sins, otherwise God will cause us to pay all our debts!
We know that the devil is the tempter and as he tempted the Son of God in the days of His flesh,
so he tempts us. It is impossible for us not to be tempted by the devil, however, we can bear the
temptation, that's why we need to ask God to lead us not into temptation but to deliver us from
the evil one. You should keep in mind that God allows us to be tempted (consider that God
allowed His own Son to be tempted also), but He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we
can bear, for Paul says: “But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what
you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to
bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13 – NKJV). Therefore, God has promised that when we are tempted
He will provide the way of escape that we may not fall into temptation. Bear in mind, however,
that the fact that God will provide the way of escape so that we may bear the temptation does
not mean that God does not require any effort from us lest we fall into temptation, otherwise
Jesus would not have said: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Mark 14:38
– NIV), and again: “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40 – NKJV). We often
forget that in order not to fall into temptation, we must not only watch but also pray.

Let us pray instead of being anxious

Brothers, if we want to live a tranquil life we must pay attention to the following exhortation
delivered by Paul to the saints in Philippi: “The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in
everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to
God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and
minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7 – NKJV).
Let me comment briefly on these words. First of all, our Lord is near to us and not far from us,
this is something which comforts us in the midst of every distress and affliction. David says that
the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart” (Psalm 34:18 – NKJV) and also that “the
Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18 – NKJV);
therefore, beloved, in the midst of all your distresses remember these words, because they
comfort the afflicted soul. Now, since the Lord is near to us, we must not be anxious; why should
we worry about the future when we know that God is with us and for us? You see, when we
become anxious for something our soul is filled with anguish and agitation, which take away
from us the peace of God, which is the result of our firm and unshakeable faith in God; that’s why the devil tries to cause us to disobey the command of God which says: “Be anxious for nothing”. However, we are not ignorant of the devices of Satan; therefore, beloved let us not become anxious for anything lest we give place to fear and doubt, which would destroy us. Whereas on the one hand we must be anxious for nothing, on the other hand we must present all our requests to God, for Paul says: “Let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 – NKJV). Therefore there is not a single need in which God is not interested or about which it is useless to pray to God. No matter what we need, God wants us to cast all our care upon Him, and not just a part of it. How must we make known to God our requests? “By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving” (Philippians 4:6 – NKJV), says Paul; this means that as we pray to God about our needs we must thank Him for everything, yes, because we must be vigilant in prayer with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2). If we obey this exhortation, we will be greatly blessed because God will cause His peace to reign in our hearts and in our minds, and this peace will protect our hearts and minds from all the wiles of the devil while we wait for the divine answer.

Praying with one accord

Brothers, when we pray to God together we must be with one accord in order to be heard by God, for Jesus said: “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20 – NKJV). Therefore, Jesus said that His Father will hear those who agree concerning anything that they ask; as you can see, that ‘if’ indicates the condition on which the prayer made with other brothers will be answered by God.

In the book of the Acts of the apostles there is an example of prayer which was made with one accord; it’s the prayer that the early disciples said to God when Peter and John came to their own companions after they were threatened by the Sanhedrin, for it is written that “they raised their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24 – NKJV). In that prayer they asked God that He might grant to His servants that with all boldness they might speak the Word of God and He might stretch out His hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done through the name of His Holy Servant Jesus Christ, and that prayer was answered.

When we pray to God together with other brothers (as well as when we pray alone) we must pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ. The following verses of the Scriptures attest this:

- “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24);
- “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16);
- “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13);
- “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

Remember that Jesus Christ is the High Priest of our confession and that He is at the right hand of God and He makes intercession for us. Jesus prays to God for us because He is the mediator between God and us, that’s why we must pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ. If we prayed to God in the name of Paul or Peter we would not be heard by God, because Paul and Peter, even though they are with the Lord in heaven, cannot mediate between God and us. They cannot hear our prayers and pass them on to God, therefore it is absurd and vain to rely upon their mediation. Many people all over the world believe that Mary, the mother of Jesus, makes intercession for them before God; the devil has deceived them into believing a lie. Mary cannot hear men’s prayers and thus she cannot pass them on to God nor to Jesus because it is written: “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).
2:5 – NKJV). By the grace of God we have the privilege to come to God, the Almighty, in the name of His Son, and we have the confidence that He hears our prayers. To God be the glory forever. Amen.

Praying in the Spirit

There are some passages of the Scripture which speak of a particular prayer, which is the prayer made in the Spirit. Here are these passages:

- “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ….” (Ephesians 6:18)
- “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20-21).

He who prays in the Spirit prays to God in an unknown language (which he never learnt, thus he does not know the verbs nor the words, nor the syntax nor the phonetic of that language). The following Scriptures attest what I have just said to you:

- “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27 – NKJV)
- “For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:14-15).

Now, one of the things a man does not know is what he should pray for, as Paul says that “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26). Why does Paul make this statement? Because we, as human beings, when we pray, are not able to express ourselves adequately with our own words (that is to say, we run out of words). Is it not true that many times we would like to say to God many things we feel inside we should ask of Him, but because of our weakness (remember that our body is weak) we are not able to say these things to God? That’s why we often say to God in prayer: ‘Lord, I don’t know how to say it to You!’ In addition to this, we don’t know what our brothers (those brothers we don’t know) need urgently at a certain time and in a particular place. But God, knowing the limits of our body and our mind (that is to say, knowing our weaknesses), has sent the Holy Spirit to help in our human weaknesses. How does the Spirit supplement our lack of knowledge and adequate and exhaustive expressions? By prompting us to pray in tongues, that is to say, by praying through us. The Spirit knows everything (thus all the needs of every saint who lives on the earth) and thus He knows what to pray for. While we do not know everything and we do not know how to totally express our hearts’ worship to God when we speak to God because our language is inadequate, the Holy Spirit, having an infinite knowledge and not running out of words, is able to pray for all the saints. Oh, how marvellous are the ways of God! The Holy Spirit enables us to pray beyond our understanding, and thus God uses us to work His purposes in the lives of others.

Praying and fasting

Several times in the Scriptures of the Old Testament prayer is mentioned together with fasting (I remember you that to fast means to abstain from food and drink for a certain period of time).

- In the book of Ezra, with regard to the return of the Israelites from Babylon, it is written: “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions …. So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer” (Ezra 8:21,23 - NKJV).
- It is written in the book of Nehemiah that when Nehemiah heard that the survivors who were left from the captivity in the province were there in great distress and reproach and the wall of
Jerusalem was also broken down and its gates were burned with fire, he prayed and fasted: “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4 - NIV). God answered the prayer of Nehemiah, for King Artaxerxes, whom he served at the time, granted him to return to Jerusalem for a certain period of time to rebuild the walls of the holy city.

These are some examples taken from the Scriptures of the Old Testament which show how under the law, on some occasions, prayer was accompanied by fasting. Under grace also it is right to pray and fast. The Scriptures which confirm this are the following ones:

- In the book of the Acts of the apostles it is written: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).
- The Scripture says that Paul and Barnabas “had elders elected for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23 – NIV).
- Paul, before receiving his sight and the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hands of Ananias, did not eat or drink anything for three days, and when he had that vision in which he saw a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight he was praying (Acts 9:1-13).
- When Cornelius had that vision in which an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him to send men to Joppa and call for Simon Peter, he was praying and fasting. Here is what he said to Peter: “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing” (Acts 10:30 – NKJV).
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer ….” (1 Corinthians 7:5 – NKJV).

As you can see, there are several Scriptures which attest that under grace it is right to fast and pray before God.

One can have a vision while he is praying

Brothers, know this, that while one is praying God may visit him and give him a heavenly vision. For the Scripture teaches us that in ancient times various men had visions while they were praying to God.

- The prophet Daniel says: “And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision” (Daniel 9:20-23). In this case, while the prophet Daniel was praying he saw the angel Gabriel, whom God sent to him to teach him certain things.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had a vision in the garden of Gethsemane while he was praying, as it is written: “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:41-43). In this case Jesus was comforted by God through a vision in which He saw an angel of God.
Saul of Tarsus had a vision while he was praying in the house of Judas located in the street called Straight at Damascus. Here is what the Scripture says: “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” (Acts 9:10-12). God showed Saul what it would happen within a short time; note that when Saul had that vision he was not yet able to see with his physical eyes, and that he had that vision before he was baptized in water and with the Holy Spirit.

Paul had another vision while praying (while he was praying in the temple of Jerusalem). He told this vision to the Jews. He said: “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him [Jesus] saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” (Acts 22:17-18).

The apostle Peter also had a vision while he was praying; he told that vision to those of the circumcision who contended with him for he had gone into the house of the uncircumcised men and eaten with them. He said: “I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven” (Acts 11:5-10).

Cornelius, who was a roman centurion, before he got saved, had a vision while he was praying. For he said to Simon Peter: “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee” (Acts 10:30-32).

Praying on one’s knees

What posture should we take when we pray? According to the example left to us by Jesus, the apostles and the prophets of old, the best posture to take when we pray and seek God is that on our knees. Here are some passages of the Scripture which show us in which position prayed the prophets of old, our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early disciples.

- The prophet Elijah, when “he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:18 – NKJV), prayed on his knees, as it is written: “Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42 – NKJV).

- The prophet Daniel used to pray on his knees, for it is written: “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Daniel 6:10).

- As Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, “He knelt down and prayed” (Luke 22:41 - NKJV). Mark says that Jesus “fell on the ground and prayed …” (Mark 14:35 – NKJV), and Matthew says that Jesus “fell on His face and prayed …” (Matthew 26:39 – NKJV).
● The apostle Peter, before raising Tabitha from the dead, prayed on his knees, as it is written: “But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (Acts 9:40).

● The apostle Paul prayed for the saints on his knees, for he wrote to the Ephesians: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:14-16); at Miletus, after he spoke to the elders of the church of Ephesus, “he kneeled down, and prayed with them all” (Acts 20:36); at Tyre, before boarding the ship together with his fellow workers, he and all those who were with him knelt down and prayed, as it is written: “….we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home” (Acts 21:5-6 – NKJV).

As you can see, God willed that the posture the saints of old took when they prayed should be written in the Scripture. I know that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4 – NKJV), and that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 – NKJV), therefore even those passages of the Scripture concerning the posture that the saints of old took when they prayed are useful to our spiritual growth. Can you affirm the opposite? As for me, I don’t dare to affirm it.

Some, not wanting to kneel down to pray together with the Church for they think that it is a useless and humiliating thing for them, defend and cover their haughtiness with empty and deceptive words. Here are their words: ‘We should bow the knees of our heart rather than the knees of our legs!’ and, ‘God listens to us even if we pray on our feet or while we are sitting!’

As for the former expression, I tell you that if these people bowed ‘the knees of their heart’ (as they call them) they would bow also the knees of their legs; however, since they don’t bow the knees of their heart they don’t bow the knees of their legs either. I am convinced that those who are humble in heart have no difficulty in bowing their knees before God. Those who don’t want to humble themselves before God – bowing their knees - take the following words which God spoke to Samuel: “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7 – NKJV). Now do you think that Jesus and the apostles did not know those words? Of course, they knew them, however they did not interpret them wrongly as some do today. Know this, that these words do not mean that God does not care about the posture we take when we pray to Him; if that were the meaning of these words, why then did the Holy Spirit say: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:6 – NKJV)? As you can see, God wants us to kneel before Him, there is no doubt about it. Consider this for a moment: the Son of God, who was in heaven with His Father before the foundation of the world, in the days of His flesh (that is, when He lived on the earth) prayed to His Father on His knees. John the Baptist, speaking of Christ, said: “He who comes from above is above all” (John 3:31 – NKJV); now, if He who is above all prayed on His knees, who are we, who are of the earth and are under Him, not to pray on our knees? I have come to the conclusion that in order to reveal the haughtiness that is in the heart of some who appear humble outwardly, God wanted several things to be written (which give the impression of being of little importance), among which that of praying on one’s knees. Today, in many Churches if you say that you want to have a luxurious mansion with a swimming-pool and a special-body car, and that you are praying to God so that He might give them to you (this means to ask amiss in order to spend it on your pleasures), you are considered a humble person, full of faith in God, holy and just, and you are even respected; on the contrary, if you say that you want to pray on your knees and it is a good thing to pray on one’s knees when the saints come together as a church, then you are contradicted and grieved with all kinds of empty and counterfeit words, you are looked on unfavourably and regarded as a person who causes divisions in the Church. Ah! I am sick at heart when I hear the proud speaking from the pulpit, who want to deceive believers into believing that praying on one’s knees is something which is
fitting only for ‘bigoted’ believers (that’s how they call those believers who fear God and tremble before His word). Sooner or later those who are haughty in their heart will reveal themselves; they are not able to keep their haughtiness hidden in their heart, in due time their haughtiness shows itself. Their empty speeches are applauded by crowds of believers who have lost discernment and don’t want to humble themselves. We are not surprised at seeing that these idle talkers have a hold over crowds of people, because we know that many believers (most of them) don’t want to bow their knees before God. However, I want to say that many of those who refuse to bow their knees before God, have bowed ‘the knees of their heart’ (as they call them) before Mammon and before that idol called ‘television’ which they have in their house.

As for the latter expression, of course God hears us even when we pray on our feet or when we are seated (we have experienced this, for sometimes we also pray on our feet or while we are seated) and we can’t affirm the opposite; but if it is a person without legs and feet (or unable to kneel down because of a serious illness) who says to me that God hears him even when he prays to God while he is seated I fully understand him and I have nothing to say against it; but when these words are spoken to me by a haughty person who has two strong and tough legs but does not want to bow his knees before God in the presence of the faithful then I am sad because of his haughtiness and I cannot but rebuke him.

I tell you another thing: there are many people who don’t know God who are not ashamed to kneel down before a statue and to pray to it, while there are some who know God who are ashamed to kneel down before the Living and True God. I remind those who don’t want to bow their knees when they pray that it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me” (Romans 14:11; Isaiah 45:23 - NKJV), and that “the allies of the proud lie prostrate beneath Him” (Job 9:13 – NKJV), therefore, do not deceive yourselves, because the day is coming when God will cause you to bow your knees before Him.

Brothers, let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, also by taking this posture before Him when we pray to Him, He is worthy of this.

Where to pray

As for the place where to pray, it is necessary to say that we are allowed to pray everywhere for it is written: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8 – NKJV). However, let us see that we are not like the hypocrites because Jesus said: “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:5 – NKJV). As you can see, the hypocrites also pray in the places of worship and outside them, but only for one purpose, that is, to be seen and honoured by men. What is their reward? Their reward is that they are seen by men.

In our private life, we should pray in our room for Jesus said: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:6 – NKJV). Our God is in the secret place and sees in secret, thus we know that in order that our prayer may be answered it suffices to be seen and heard by God alone. Many times we have experienced the truthfulness of the words of Christ because after we have prayed to God secretly (without making known to anybody else our specific request), we have been rewarded by God openly obtaining before others what we asked before Him alone.

Here is what the Scripture says about the places where the prophets of old, Jesus and the apostles and the early disciples prayed.

- The prophet Elijah prayed on a mountain.
- Moses prayed on Mount Sinai and in the wilderness.
- Daniel prayed to God in “in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem” (Daniel 6:10 - NKJV).
Jesus “often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16 - NKJV); on one occasion “He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28 – NKJV).

- The apostles and the disciples, while they were waiting for the promise of the Father, prayed in the upper room; and they prayed also in the temple which was in Jerusalem.
- While Peter was in prison, the brethren were praying to God in the house of Mary.
- Peter, while in Joppa, prayed on the housetop of the house of Simon, a tanner.
- Paul and Silas prayed in the prison of Philippi. Paul often prayed in prison for the saints.
- Paul and his fellow workers prayed together with the disciples of Tyre on the shore.
- The prophet Jonah prayed to God from a fish’s belly, as it is written: “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish’s belly” (Jonah 2:1 – NKJV).

Brothers, all the above mentioned examples confirm that “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12 – NKJV), wherever they are. Therefore, we believers will continue to pray to God everywhere (knowing that He is everywhere, as God says: “Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? ….Do I not fill heaven and earth?” Jeremiah 23:24), lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting, because this is what God wants us to do.

**Man must pray with his head uncovered, while the woman must pray with her head covered**

Paul says to the Corinthians: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power [a sign of authority] on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:3-16).

Now, Paul says that the head of every man is Christ and that if a man prays with his head covered he dishonours Christ, which means that he deprives Christ of the honour He is worthy to receive from us. The angels who are in heaven say with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12 – NKJV). As you can see, among the things Christ is worthy to receive there is honor, therefore if a man prays to God with his head covered with a hat or a veil, he does not give to Christ, who is his head, the honor which is due to Him. The reason why a man must not cover his head is that he is the image and glory of God. Note that Paul does not say that even if a man prays with his head covered he does nothing wrong, because as a matter of fact he does something wrong, for who can affirm that to dishonour Christ is not a wrong thing? Only a man without discernment and full of self-seeking could affirm such a thing. As for the woman, on the contrary, she must cover her head because she is the glory of man for she came from man. Remember that when God made the woman and brought her to the man, Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23 – NKJV). Now, the head of woman (unmarried woman as well as married woman, and widow) is man; and if she prays with her head uncovered she
dishonours her head. If a woman does not want to cover her head with a veil she should have her hair cut or shaved off. However, since in our judgement it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, we tell her to cover her head with a veil. What does the veil symbolize? It is “a symbol of authority” (1 Corinthians 11:10 – NKJV) which she ought to have on her head because of the angels. For the angels of God watches us and need to see a symbol or sign of authority on the woman’s head (that is, a sign that shows them that she is under man’s authority). Therefore if a woman prays without a veil on her head she dishonours the man before the angels of God because she does not give to man the honour which is due to him.

Love does not delight in evil, therefore, any man whose heart is full of true love will not pray with his head covered lest he dishonour Christ; while any woman whose heart is full of the love of God will pray with her head covered lest she dishonour her head, that is, man. Obviously, if the heart of a woman is full of self-seeking instead of the love of God, she will refuse to cover her head with this symbol of authority.

Today, in the Church, some women, instead of being subject to man and respectful to him, are rebellious and disrespectful toward him, therefore no wonder that they don’t want to cover their head when they pray. They are willing to have their hair dyed, to change their hairstyle, to smooth their hair with gel, to spray their eccentric hairstyle with hairspray to keep it in place, but they are not willing to cover their head with a veil. Why? Because of the pride of being a woman (that’s how the children of this age call it) by which they were deceived. Today, in this country, we see many policewomen and many traffic policewomen, who wear a hat. That hat is weightier than a veil, and they are not ashamed to wear it, and if you ask them why they wear it, they will tell you that they wear it because they obey an order, that is to say, they are ordered to wear it. On the contrary, in some Churches some women are ashamed to cover their head with a veil and they say with much haughtiness that they are not willing to cover their head with a veil. Why? Because of the pride of being a woman (that’s how the children of this age call it) by which they were deceived. Today, in this country, we see many policewomen and many traffic policewomen, who wear a hat. That hat is weightier than a veil, and they are not ashamed to wear it, and if you ask them why they wear it, they will tell you that they wear it because they obey an order, that is to say, they are ordered to wear it.

Some sisters affirm: ‘I have long hair, therefore I don’t need to cover my head with a veil, for my hair is my veil’. Sisters listen to me, ‘Surely if you have long hair, it is a glory for you, but your hair is not the veil with which you ought to cover your head, because your long hair is given to you for a covering (1 Corinthians 11:15) but it is not the veil you must wear.’ Therefore, long hair is certainly a glory to the woman (for it adorns her as an ornament and its appearance contributes to her beauty), but long hair is not the sign of authority on her head which must be seen by the angels of God, because her hair is given to her “as a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15 – NIV), that is to say, it serves as a shawl for her, thus her hair is not the veil she must wear. This is confirmed by what Paul says in verse 6: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off,” (NIV) for if we were to substitute ‘hair’ for ‘covering’ this statement of Paul would be ludicrous. Listen how it would read, ‘If a woman does not have her hair, she should have her hair cut off!!! My question is: ‘But if her hair is already off, how can she have her hair cut off?’ That’s why to the question of Paul: “Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:13 – NKJV), we answer that it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered (even if she has long hair).

Some say that the commandment about the veil divides the Church; however, if this were true then we should mutilate the epistles of Paul! But as far as I know, the commandments given by the apostles are for the edifying of the Church and not for the destruction of the Church, therefore the reason why these so called ‘divisions’ arise in the midst of the Churches is not the veil but rather what is in the heart of some men and women.

I mean that the reason why in the midst of the Churches some accept this commandment while others are opposed to it, is that the former are willing to obey God while the latter are not willing to obey God for there is self-seeking in their heart. Know this, that the sharp discussions which arise about the commandment concerning the veil are caused by the envy and self-seeking which dwell in the heart of those who don’t want to keep this commandment. The fact is that in talking with these people one realizes that they boast and lie not only against this commandment
but also against other commandments of God. “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (James 3:16 – NKJV) says James, that’s why the life of these people is a disorderly life, full of evil deeds, because they are self-seeking and oppose the truth. The commandment about the veil is just one of the commandments they don’t want to keep, for they object to all the sound doctrine of God. They object to everything: according to them, the apostles should not have written certain things!

Of course, this commandment is not one of the most important commandments, yet it is still one of the commandments given by the same man who spoke with other tongues more than all the Corinthians, by whom God did extraordinary miracles, and who wrote most of the epistles of the New Testament.

I exhort you, daughters of Sarah, to pray with your head covered with a veil (both inside and outside the place of worship), and not to be contentious, because that would be unprofitable for you. Does anyone want to be contentious? Let that person know that “we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16 – NKJV).

It is lawful to weep as we pray

When we weep during our prayers (this happens sometimes and not always) we don’t do something which God dislikes. I am forced to write even about this subject, for some among us affirm that God does not want us to weep as we pray. The Scripture says that in ancient times some prayed to God weeping.

- Ann (when she asked God for a child) “prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish” (1 Samuel 1:10 – NKJV).
- When Ezra heard that some of the children of Israel had taken some foreign women as wives for themselves and their sons, prayed to God, wept, and confessed the sins of the people before God. Here is what the Scripture says about that circumstance: “Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly” (Ezra 10:1 – NKJV).
- Hezekiah king of Judah prayed and wept before God. The Scripture says: “In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. …. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD” (Isaiah 38:1-3; 2 Kings 20:4-5). As you can see, God told Hezekiah that He had heard his prayer and seen his tears.
- In the days of His flesh, Jesus prayed to God with tears, as it is written: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared [or for his piety]; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:7-8).

Brothers, it is a good thing to pour out one’s heart before God, weeping. There are moments, while we pray, in which the Spirit of God reminds us that we are nothing, and that all the things we are able to do for the sake of the Lord can be done by the grace of God, which is with us, and not by our own abilities; as we pray, the Spirit of God reminds us of the sins we have committed so that we may confess them to the Lord; and in the day of trouble He reminds us that only God can deliver us from our troubles; that’s why, sometimes we as newborn little babes weep before God. God sees even the tears we shed in His presence, as it is written: “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle” (Psalm 56:8 - NKJV).
I want to say something else about this subject: many believers tell jokes and take delight in laughing hysterically during the worship service; it is a rare thing to see believers praying and weeping before God for they acknowledge their sins and confess them to God, and those few believers who, prompted by the Spirit, weep before the Lord are mocked. Why does this happen? Because we live in a country where there are so many material goods, and where there is so much freedom to profess one’s faith, that many, having become rich and puffed up with pride, have forgotten the Lord. They think that they don’t need to humble themselves before God, because they have everything and have need of nothing; they have become friends of the world. James says to these people: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

Beloved, it is time for you to seek the Lord with all your heart, it is time for you to lay aside your false joy and your so called ‘holy laughter’ and to humble before God. You should be grieved for the corruption, the worldliness and the falsehood which are in the midst of the Church, you should weep before God; let us confess our sins to God and let us forsake them, let us call on God in truth, and He will cause His glory to appear upon us, as He did in ancient times toward the children of Israel when they humbled themselves before God.

Praying with perseverance

Paul told the saints of Rome to continue “steadfastly in prayer” (Romans 12:12 – NKJV); to the saints of Colosse: “Continue earnestly in prayer” (Colossians 4:2 – NKJV), and to the saints of Thessalonica: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 – NKJV).

Paul himself left us an example for he prayed day and night and he remembered the saints in all his prayers. The passages of the Scripture which confirm this are the following ones:

● To the saints of Rome he wrote: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Romans 1:9)

● To the saints of Ephesus he wrote: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Ephesians 1:15-16)

● To the saints of Colosse, who had not seen his face in the flesh, he wrote: “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you …” (Colossians 1:3)

● To the saints of Thessalonica he wrote: “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power …” (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

● To Timothy he wrote: “I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3).

It is evident from the exhortations of the apostle Paul and from his example that we need to pray always for the saints, thus let’s do it for the edifying of the Church of God.

Jesus Christ exhorted His disciples to pray without ceasing and not lose heart, speaking to them the following parable: “There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:2-8). As you can see, even though that widow had the right to obtain justice against her adversary, she did not obtain justice for a while, for it is written that the judge “would not for a while”. Now, if that judge had granted her justice against her
adversary on the first day she went to him, that widow would not have continued to go to him and say: ‘Avenge me of mine adversary”; however because the answer of the judge did not come immediately she kept going to him till she obtained justice. You see, brothers, even though we who are the elect of God pray to God, who “loves righteousness” (Psalm 33:5 – NKJV) and hates wickedness, the answer to some of our prayers comes only after many days or many months or many years. The fact that God does not answer some of our prayers immediately or within a short period of time it is not a strange thing. Therefore, do not be surprised if some of your prayers have not yet been answered. Know this, that God will answer your prayer at His appointed time, which we know by experience is always the right time. The Scripture says: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 – NIV), which means that God will meet all our needs at His set time, and thus we are sure His help will never come late or in advance. Our God is not an absent-minded God, and no earthly event can distract Him; He rules the universe, thus He is in control of all the things which happen to us, including all the distresses in which we find ourselves. Sometimes we, seeing that time is passing by, are tempted to think that God is no longer in control of the situation in which we are, but this thought is vain and harmful and is absolutely wrong. We can affirm from experience that right in those moments when the enemy tries to make us doubt the faithfulness of God, yes, right in those moments, God is caring for us (as always) by not answering our prayer. Someone will say: ‘What are you saying? Do you mean that the fact that God does not answer our prayer when we want shows us that He cares for us? Exactly! For I tell you from experience that till now God has manifested His love toward me by not answering my prayers when I wanted or I thought He would answer them. I don’t blame God for compelling me to wait for Him patiently (with many tears), rather I praise Him for this. If God answered our prayer when we desire, that would mean that God is at our beck and call and also an unwise God. If God answered our prayers when we wish, He would spoil His work with His own hands, but thanks be to His glorious name because He has not changed over the centuries; He continues to say to us: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways … for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9 – NKJV). God knows the minute, the hour, the day, the month and the year in which we will receive from Him what we have asked of Him. The fact is that while on the one hand He knows all these things, on the other hand we don’t know them, and every time we think that God will answer our prayer on our time we are mistaken. Remember that Jesus said that we must ask, but He did not say when we will receive what we have asked; He simply said: “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7 – NKJV). What we must do is to ask, then God will answer our prayer; He knows how and when to answer our prayers, better than what we can imagine. One thing is sure: what we have asked of Him will be given to us if we have prayed in faith, with no doubting in our heart. When will it be given to us? When God wills; thus I am not worried when I see that God has not yet answered some of my prayers.

Here are some examples taken from the Scripture which show us that God answers our prayers when He wills.

● The Scripture says: “Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived …. So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb …. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them” (Genesis 25:20-21, 24, 26 – NKJV).

After her marriage to Isaac, Rebekah was barren so Isaac prayed to God, and he prayed insistently, and God answered his prayer by giving them two twin sons. When did Rebekah give birth to the two twin sons? When Isaac was sixty years old, that is to say, twenty years after Isaac married Rebekah. Someone may ask: ‘Why did God not answer before? Because it was not His will; He wanted Rebekah to give birth to her children twenty years after her marriage. And who dares to say to God: ‘What have you done?’
After Jerusalem was given by God into the hand of the Babylonian army, and many Jews were carried away captive to Babylon, it happened that "all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you" (Jeremiah 42:1-4). Jeremiah prayed to God for the people and "it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah" (Jeremiah 42:7). So Jeremiah called the people and told them what God had said to Him. In this case, the prayer of Jeremiah was answered by God after ten days. God had said to Jeremiah: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3 – NKJV), and Jeremiah called to God and He answered him at His appointed time.

In the book of the prophet Daniel we read the following incident which shows that on one occasion a prayer of Daniel was answered by God only after a certain number of days. It is written: "In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and beheld a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. …. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days” (Daniel 10:2-6; 11-14). As you can see, the man clothed in linen, who appeared to Daniel, came to Daniel twenty-one days after Daniel had began to pray and mourn before God. God heard his words from the first day that he had set his heart to understand, and to humble himself before His God, but his prayer was answered after twenty-one days. Why? We find the answer to this question in the following words which the man of God said to Daniel: “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days” (Daniel 10:13). Who was the prince of the kingdom of Persia? He was not Cyrus the king who reigned over the kingdom of Persia at the time, but an evil spiritual being who lived in the heavenly places and who ruled over the kingdom of Persia. Brothers, remember that when we pray, the holy and mighty angels of God fight with all those heavenly beings which are under the power of Satan, which are our enemies (that try to prevent God from answering our prayers). Paul says to the Ephesians that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12), these spiritual beings mentioned by Paul are different categories of evil beings which have an evil influence on the inhabitants of the earth. Satan has set some of his ministers over the nations of the earth in order to exercise authority over them and to prevent the saints of God from doing the will of God. Satan is the prince of this world and he rules it everywhere through these evil spirits mentioned by Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians; that’s why men give themselves over to evil things and the Gospel and those who preach it meet with a strong opposition in this world. As for Daniel, as we saw before, the prince of the kingdom of Persia had withstood a messenger of God, whom God sent to bring
a particular message to Daniel, but Michael (the archangel, the great prince who protects the children of Israel) came to help the messenger of God and thus the evil being did not manage to prevent the messenger of God from coming to Daniel. When we pray to God, His ears are open to our prayers, but we must not ignore the fact that our enemies also hear us when we talk to God, and they don’t want God to answer our prayers nor do they want us to continue earnestly in prayer, thus they try somehow to hinder us and God. However God said: “I work, and who will reverse it?” (Isaiah 43:13 – NKJV). Beloved, the devil and all his angels cannot prevent God from accomplishing His purpose and answering our fervent prayers, so I urge you to continue in prayer.

Now let me mention one of the prayers of Paul in order to show you that God answers some of our prayers even after several years. Paul wrote to the saints of Rome: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established” (Romans 1:9-11 – NKJV). Now, Paul did not specify how long he had been praying to God, however we know that he had been praying to God that he might find a way in the will of God to come to the saints of Rome for many years because Paul wrote to the saints of Rome that he had been longing for many years to see them (Romans 15:23). When was that prayer answered? It was answered more than two years after Paul wrote those words. We say this because when Paul came to Jerusalem he was arrested and put in prison by the Roman authorities, and he was kept in prison for about two years, and after that period of time he was sent to Rome to appear before Caesar. According to what Luke says about these things, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem while Felix was governor of Judea - about two years before Porcius Festus succeeded Felix – and he was kept in prison for a certain period of time even by Porcius Festus (the successor of Felix) and afterward he was sent to Rome. This is the passage of the Scripture which confirms this: “But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound” (Acts 24:27 – NKJV). After Paul appeared before king Agrippa in Caesarea, he was sent to Rome with other prisoners, and after a journey which lasted several months he arrived at Rome, and when the brethren heard about Paul and his fellow workers, they came to meet them as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns and “when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage” (Acts 28:15 – NKJV). After he had prayed to God for many years that he might see the saints of Rome, his prayer was answered at last and thus he thanked God.

Brothers, continue steadfastly in prayer, even if you have been praying to God for days, months or years so that He might give you a certain thing, do not lose heart, do not think that God did not hear your cry because He heard it from the first day you decided to call on His name; He will answer your prayer at His appointed time. “You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest ….” (Isaiah 62:6-7 – NKJV), till He answers your prayer; yes, brother, keep coming to the throne of God, do not become weary, for He, because of your persistence, will surely rise and give you what you have asked of Him. To God be the glory forever. Amen.

The thanksgivings due to God

Brothers, when we pray we must not forget to give thanks to our God. The apostle Paul in his epistles exhorted the saints to pray to God and to thank Him:

● He wrote to the Philippians: “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 – NKJV)

● To the Colossians he wrote: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2 – NKJV)
To the Thessalonians, after saying: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 – NKJV), he said: “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

To Timothy he wrote that he exhorted first of all that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Timothy 2:1 – NKJV).

I find it necessary to mention something which is written about the prophet Daniel in order to confirm that prayers and thanksgivings are well pleasing to God: “And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10 – NKJV).

As for giving thanks to God, we need to know the things for which we must thank God. First of all I want to tell you that each of us has many things to thank God for and that no one of us can say that he does not know what to thank God for; and furthermore that Paul and his fellow workers left us an example so that we may learn from them. In reading the epistles of Paul we realize that he and his fellow workers used to thank God without ceasing for many things; now I am going to mention their thanksgivings which were written for our learning;

- Paul wrote to the Romans: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8), and also: “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18).
- He wrote to the Corinthians: “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you …… But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ….. Now thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place …. But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. ….. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (1 Corinthians 1:4-6; 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 8:16; 9:15).
- To the Ephesians he wrote: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Ephesians 1:15-16).
- To the Philippians he wrote: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3).
- To the Colossians he wrote: “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1:3).
- To the Thessalonians he wrote: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers … We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth …. But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth …. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

To Philemon he wrote: “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints” (Philemon 4-5).

Reading all the above mentioned thanksgivings made by Paul and his fellow workers we realize that they thanked God always and not only when they prayed to God.

Now, brothers, we ought to thank God always as the apostles did, therefore we have to thank God when we pray as well as when we do not pray. Furthermore we must thank God for the same things for which the apostles did give thanks to God; sometimes, while we are praying we restrict ourselves to say to God: ‘Lord, thank you for everything!’; of course, it is a right thing to
say these words to God, however according to the example of the apostles we should thank God specifying both the people and the things for which we thank God. Do we not have time to specify them perhaps? Not at all, for we have the time to do it. You see, brothers, sometimes what we lack is not the time but the will to do it, because we often underestimate the giving of thanks or because we spend the time we have on talking about things that do not edify. Paul said: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:3-4 – NKJV); if we consider this exhortation of Paul we have to admit that (it is a sad thing to say it and to realize it) we often hear believers speak of things which should not even be named while we rarely hear believers give thanks to God in everything.

The lack of giving thanks indicates a lack of gratefulness toward God; many take for granted many things and think that those things are due to them, but that’s not true because all the things we possess come from God, as it is written: “For all things come from You” (1 Chronicles 29:14 – NKJV). Let us not behave like those nine lepers who were healed by Jesus and did not come back to thank Him for healing them through the word. Instead let us imitate that Samaritan who, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, “and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks” (Luke 17:16 – NKJV).

We, as sons of God, must thank God for everything; now I will mention some of the things for which we are bound to thank God:

● We must thank Him for His indescribable gift, that is, eternal life, which God gave us freely
● We must thank Him for He has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light, let us thank Him with joy
● We must thank Him for all His benefits, which are worthy to be mentioned
● We must thank Him for the food, before we eat it, because this is a right thing. Jesus thanked God for the food, as it is written: “And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes” (Matthew 14:19 – NKJV). Paul (when he was on the ship) also thanked God for the food in the presence of other people, as it is written: “He took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat” (Acts 27:35 – NKJV).

Some men, who are destitute of the truth and disapproved concerning the faith, think that they must not thank God for the daily bread, because they say: ‘It is not God who gives me my daily bread, for I earn it by the sweat of my brow!’ Now, it is true that God said to Adam: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:19 – NKJV), but it is also true that God “makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth; wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart” (Psalm 104:14-15 – NIV), and that: “The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season” (Psalm 145:15 - NKJV). Paul says: “Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5 – NKJV), these words confirm that before we eat our daily food it is a good thing to thank God for it and that what we eat is sanctified not only by the word of God but also by prayer. Are not these words another confirmation of the power and utility of prayer?

● We must thank God for our brothers; for He from the beginning chose them for salvation; for when they received the word of Christ as well as the word of the apostles they welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God; we must thank God for the zeal that He has put into their hearts for the sake of the Gospel; for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the ministry gifts He gives to the saints; for both their faith in the Lord and their love toward the saints increase; for their liberal sharing with the poor among the saints; for all the benefits they receive from the hand of God, among which are the powerful deliverances they experience after they call on God.

I conclude by thanking God through our Lord Jesus Christ for giving me the grace and the wisdom I needed in order to write this teaching. To Him be the glory now and forever. Amen.
A word of exhortation to women

How a Christian woman should dress and conduct herself

Sisters, you also believed in our Lord by the grace of God and obtained through faith the remission of your sins. You are daughters of God for you also received Christ and came out from among the sons of this age and God received you in Christ Jesus, therefore you also are members of the household of God and together we are the body of Christ. “There is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28 – NKJV) for we are all one in Christ Jesus. However, you must understand that the fact that in Christ there is neither male nor female does not mean that you can conduct yourselves in the house of God as you like, rather it means that the fact that you are women is not a middle wall of separation among us, who are believers.

You must understand also that God has never showed partiality, therefore do not think that God despises you because Eve, the first woman, was deceived by the old serpent and fell into transgression, because that’s not true. Neither is it true that you are useless in the house of God nor that you can’t contribute to the spread of Gospel, because the Scripture affirms the opposite, therefore do not believe these harmful and vain things, which the old serpent tries by his craftiness to make you believe in order to stir up bitter envy in your hearts and to make you become haughty and conceited.

After this brief introduction, I want to tell you first of all how you should dress so that the doctrine of God may be honoured through you.

Paul wrote: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:9-10 – NIV).

Sisters, you must wear dresses which are appropriate for you, who were sanctified in Christ. The dresses which are fitting for you are those dresses which are modest and not those dresses which are expensive and which are loved by women of corrupt minds, who are haughty. Therefore do not set your mind on those extravagant and expensive dresses which attract man’s attention and which are a waste of money. Know this, that the women’s fashion of this present evil age leads those women who follow it to be haughty and to walk with outstretched necks and to look humble women up and down; this is something which can be seen by everyone, so do not be fascinated by it; be humble and do not give place to what the haughty women call ‘the pride of being a woman’.

Besides being modest, your dresses must be decent; they should cover your legs, your arms, and your breast, that is to say, all those parts of the body which are not fully covered by indecent dresses. This means that you must avoid miniskirts, and those skirts which reach the knee or the part just below the knee: I exhort you to wear long skirts, which should be without vents and without those strange drawings which are stamped on many skirts to attract men’s attention.

As for your blouses, they should not be see-through nor close-fitting, nor low-necked.

As to the colour of your dresses, avoid wearing gaudy dresses (that is to say, avoid colours such as blood red, lemon yellow and scarlet), lest men be induced to cast longing glances at you.

As for your shoes, I tell you to wear modest shoes and not those shoes with stiletto heels, which don’t permit your feet to breathe well and cause you to have pain in your feet; not only this, they compel you to walk in an abnormal and shameful way, and with much more difficulty. Do not wear gold/silver shoes, lest you attract men’s attention.

As for your stockings, you, as is fitting for holy women, should wear modest stockings and not fishnet stockings nor any other kind of stockings invented to make the woman seductive and provocative.
When you go to buy a skirt or a blouse or a pair of shoes or some material to make a skirt or a blouse out of it remember that the Scripture says: “Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble” (Romans 12:16 – NKJV).

Paul says: “We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels …. And for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:8-9, 10 - NIV); and – as far as women are concerned - wearing trousers is one of the things which are contrary to the sound doctrine, for it is written: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 22:5 – NKJV). The so called trousers for women are still trousers, thus a Christian woman should not wear them.

Those who like to be contentious and to suppress the truth by their lies, say all kinds of things to nullify what is written so clearly. They say: ‘This commandment of God applies only to those women who exchanged the natural use for what is against nature, and to those men who have left the natural use of the women, and to the effeminate!’ Now, it is true that God abhors those women who dress up as a man, and those men who dress up as a woman, that is, the transvestites; however I ask you the following question; ‘Do we not live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, without self-control, which puts darkness for light, and light for darkness? Don’t you think that the trends of the fashion of this age oppose the above mentioned words of God? Today, more than ever we have to proclaim the above mentioned words so that everybody may see that we reject and dislike both the men and the women fashion, which tend to feminize men and to masculinize women.

Brothers, we live in towns and villages where there are many sodomites and also many women who exchanged the natural use for what is against nature, who are encouraged in every way to do evil things; in this country immorality is called cultural tradition, perverse people are called respectable people, and do you know what many believers do? They tolerate and respect the tastes and habits of this sinful generation, and are ashamed of the words of the apostles, which they consider antiquated and old-fashioned and inadequate. If today sometimes from a distance it is difficult to tell a girl from a boy, the reason is because girls dress up as a boy. They begin to be corrupt from youth. The women fashion, which tends to make the woman look stronger and more self-confident, is the fruit of the woman’s desire not to look different from man even in the way she dresses.

Sisters, you who are always ready to oppose the sound doctrine, you have conformed so well to this present evil age that even some women who are outside, such as the nuns of the Roman Catholic Church, can teach you by their example how you should dress. I tell you this because I have seen that the way they dress (it is a sad thing to say it and to see it) is better than the way you dress. Of course, you can tell them that praying to Mary, praying to the dead, making statues and worshiping them, are all things which are an abomination to God; however, on their part they can tell you that you are not dressed with modesty and decency.

Therefore, we would not be surprised at hearing that some unbelieving women have taught some of you, who follow the women fashion, how a Christian woman should dress! What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for some daughters of this age, who are dressed with decency and modesty, to tell you that you must dress with modesty and decency? Are you waiting for some women, who are dressed indecently like you, to reply to you, after you tell them that you are the light of the world, ‘Where is the light in you? We don’t see it, in that you dress the way we also dress!’? Sisters, you must look different also in the way you dress, in the midst of the daughters of this age, and not only in the way you talk; thus examine carefully your wardrobe and get rid of your trousers and of all those indecent skirts and blouses you are still wearing.

The Word of God states also that you must not braid your hair and that you must not wear jewelry.

Some of you plat your hair because you know that plaits make you more attractive and provocative; sisters, stop plating your hair.

Some others among you wear gold jewelry; earrings, necklaces made of pearls, bracelets and rings; I exhort you not to persist in this evil thing, and to throw away all your jewelry. You may
say: ‘What harm is there in wearing jewelry? Why do you tell us to throw them away?’ There is harm in it, but you can’t see it because your eyes were blinded by darkness; anoint your eyes with eye salve, that the Lord is willing to give you, that you may see. Why should you throw your gold jewelry away? Because it is written: “If you remove wickedness far from your tent and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you” (Job. 22:23-25 – NIV)

Some of you say: ‘Even the Israelites when they came out of Egypt wore earrings!’ That’s true, however after the Israelites made the golden calf and Moses destroyed it, the Lord God said to Moses: “Say to the children of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.’ So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb” (Exodus 33:5-6 - NKJV). Sister, if you still wear jewelry, know that God says also to you: ‘Take off your ornaments’, thus you would do well to take them off in order to walk in a manner worthy of God.

You say: ‘Gold was made by God!’ Yes, it is true that gold was made by God, but it is also true that the jewelry you wear were not made by God but by men. Silver also was made by God, however the silver shrines of Diana were made by a certain man named Demetrius who lived in Ephesus (Acts 19:24). Do not try to justify your rebellion with vain words, for “there is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord” (Proverbs 21:30 - NKJV). Take off your dead works which you are still wearing; do not be contentious.

I want you to know that the apostle Peter confirmed what Paul wrote to Timothy, saying to you: “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:3-4). Therefore, both the apostle to the Gentiles (who was unmarried) and the apostle to the circumcised (who was married) exhorted women not to wear gold or costly clothing, and not to braid their hair.

Sisters, here is now what you should adorn with. Paul says that the women must adorn themselves “with good works” (1 Timothy 2:10 – NKJV) appropriate for women who profess godliness. Now, Jesus said: “Ye are the light of the world. …. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14,16). The light which is in you, that must shine in the midst of this world of darkness, consists in your good works because it is written that “the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:9 – NIV). Therefore, as the Church of God, which is the wife of the Lamb, wears works of righteousness (as it is written: “His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints” Revelation 19:7-8 – NIV), so you also must adorn yourselves with all kinds of good deeds so that the name of God may be glorified in you; yes, because then will the name of God be glorified through you for men will see that you are not corrupt or haughty, but good, merciful and humble. Tabitha was a disciple of Christ, “this woman was full of good works [she made tunics and garments] and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36 – NKJV), imitate her.

However, if you dress and adorn yourselves like the women who do not fear God, how can people see the light in you? How can the name of God be glorified if you let yourselves be deceived by the prince of this world? Do you think perhaps that the prince of this world wants the name of God to be glorified in you?

Let no one deceive you with empty words, which unfortunately many brethren have ready on their lips, such as: ‘A little vanity won’t do any harm!’ Have you never read in the Scriptures: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6 – NKJV)? Do you not know that “a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (Ecclesiastes 10:1 – NIV)? Do you not know that “dead flies give perfume a bad smell” (Ecclesiastes 10:1 - NIV)? The Scripture cannot be broken because it
is given by inspiration of God, and that little vanity, which does not do any harm according to some, harms both you and the Church of God.

Some pastors and teachers say to you: ‘Sisters, do not dress like bigoted women (they call those women who dress modestly and decently ‘bigoted women’), or else the children of this age will not come into the place of worship nor will they accept Christ; do not give heed to their words, and beware of them for they are poisonous snakes, men of corrupt minds. Do not accept what they say, because they want to use you to attract men with the lusts of the flesh. They don’t have the wisdom of God nor the power of God, and in order to draw people to their meetings, are willing to trample the sound doctrine underfoot and to lead believers to walk in crooked paths. They say to you: ‘You can make up, you can follow the fashion, do not be too austere (the say ‘too austere’ in order to make you think that you exaggerate), lest you cause unbelievers to stumble!’ Know this, that if you obey what the apostles wrote, you will never cause anyone to sin and you will never cause anyone to stumble, but know also that if you obey what these idle talkers teach, you will cause many people to stumble. It is written: “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak” (Romans 14:21 – NKJV) and also: “Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32 – NKJV), therefore, sisters, please your neighbour for his good, and not for his evil (as these rebels would like you to do).

Some of you say also: ‘I want to please my husband!’. Listen; first of all, if your husband really loves you and fears God, he does not want you to dress like a prostitute. Have you ever read how Babylon, the mother of prostitutes, was dressed when John saw her in the vision he had on the island called Patmos? John says that “the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4 - NKJV). Of course, she was dressed in a very attractive manner, but “on her forehead a name was written: Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth” (Revelation 17:4-5 – NKJV). Do you not know that ‘like mother, like daughter’? Do you not see in the market places and in the streets how prostitutes are dressed in order to allure men? Have you not noticed that many prostitutes are still dressed in purple and scarlet and wear gold jewelry and pearls?

You are now daughters of Sarah, “if you do good and are not afraid with any terror” (1 Peter 3:6 – NKJV), therefore you must imitate Sarah, your mother. Peter tells you in his first epistle not to let your adornment be outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel - “rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4 – NKJV), and he says that “in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Peter 3:5-6 – NKJV). Sisters, you must adorn your heart with a gentle and quiet spirit, which means that you must be gentle and quiet, and not rude or quarrelsome. This is an adornment of great value in the sight of God, and in this manner the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, and among those holy women was Sarah your mother.

Sarah was a beautiful woman, but also a gentle and quiet woman, and she was the wife of Abraham the patriarch, and she did not braid her hair nor did she wear gold jewelry or costly clothing, because she was a holy woman, who obeyed Abraham.

Abraham was a very rich man who had gold and silver (Eliezer, the oldest servant of Abraham’s house, said to Laban and Bethuel: “The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys” Genesis 24:35 – NKJV) but Sarah his wife did not adorn herself with gold. Someone will say: ‘Abraham did not have god jewelry!’ Have you never read that when Eliezer left for Mesopotamia to take a wife for Isaac, “all his master’s goods were in his hand” (Genesis 24:10 - NKJV), and that among those goods there were “a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels of gold” (Genesis 24:22 - NKJV), which he gave to Rebekah? Therefore Abraham possessed also gold jewelry, but Sarah did not wear them.
Furthermore, I tell you that if your husband is not a believer, it is not by wearing provocative and costly clothing that you will win him to Christ, because Peter says: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2 – NKJV). On the contrary, some of you are seeking to win to Christ your husbands only by words, not taking heed to your conduct, which is blameworthy, and then you pray to God and weep in His presence so that He may save your husband! I ask you the following questions: ‘Is it not time for you to throw away all your gold jewelry? Is it not time for you to stop dressing in a seductive manner and exercising authority over your husband?’

Sisters, besides this, I exhort you to be reverent in behaviour as is fitting for holy women; thus, when you are seated don’t cross your legs and don’t part them, lest you provoke sexual attraction or reaction.

Some of you, during the worship service, put the chewing gum in your mouth and chew it, so you move your mouth in a shameful manner; stop doing such a thing.

Be wise, do not pluck part of your eyebrows, do not make up as Jezebel did, the wife of Ahab who practiced occult arts, as it is written: “She put paint on her eyes” (2 Kings 9:30 – NKJV); do not change the colour of your face and of your lips painting them with all those harmful cosmetics which are on the market. Do not put varnish on your nails, keep yourselves pure.

Do not put on those perfumes which are so strong and provocative that distract those who are near you and leave a trail of perfume wherever you go; I assure you that these perfumes are made to make you seductive and to enable you to attract attention from men, and you can realize this by observing the way they are advertised and by reading the name of some of these perfumes (‘Malice’, ‘Temptation’, etc.).

Furthermore, I exhort you to flee all those odd modern hairstyles which are in fashion, such as ‘the perm’. Do not have your hair dyed: why do you want to change the colour of your hair? Are you no longer happy with the way God made your hair?

Now I want to say something to you women who are no longer young and try to look younger by dying your white hair: ‘Why are you ashamed of being old, and do you make all efforts (in vain) to look younger, spending so much money for things which are vain? Have you never read in the Scripture: “The splendour of old men is their gray head” (Proverbs 20:29 – NKJV) and also: “The silver-haired head is a crown of glory” (Proverbs 16:31 – NKJV)?

Wisdom says: “Favour [grace] is deceitful, and beauty is vain” (Proverbs 31:30), because with the passing of time they disappear, therefore do not try to embellish what is perishing day by day before your eyes. God says to the woman who continues to harden her heart: “Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair” (Jeremiah 4:30 – NKJV).

You older women, let your conduct be holy, do not be slanderers, do not be gossips, do not meddle in other people’s business, and do not say things you ought not to; do not be given to much wine because when one gets drunk he loses his wits and begins to say and do perverse things; be teachers of good things, so that you may train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, homemakers, good and obedient to their own husbands.

A woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head

It is written: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the
woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power [a sign of authority] on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:3-15).

Sister, man is your head, that is, the one who has authority over you is the man. Whether you are unmarried or married or even a widow, you must understand that man is your head. Therefore, because of the angels, when you pray or prophesy, you ought to have a sign of authority on your head, and this sign is the veil. In other words, because the angels are being taught through the Church that the woman is under man’s authority, you ought to have a veil on your head. If your head is not veiled, when you pray or prophesy, you dishonor your head, that is, man (in other words, you don’t give him the honour he is worthy to receive from you). I remind you that you must cover your head with a veil not only when you are gathered together with the saints in the worship place but also when you pray or prophesy anywhere else, because man is your head and the angels observe you even outside the place of worship. Furthermore I advise you to tie your veil to prevent it from falling on your shoulders.

To those sisters who say: ‘Since I have long hair I don’t need to cover my head with a veil for my hair is my veil!’ I say this: ‘Listen, if you have long hair, it is certainly a glory to you, however long hair is not the sign of authority you ought to have on your head, because long hair is given to you “as a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15 – NIV); that is to say, it serves as a shawl for you, thus your hair is not the veil you must wear.’ This is confirmed by what Paul says in verse 6: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off,” (NIV) for if we were to substitute ‘hair’ for ‘covering’ this statement of Paul would be ludicrous. Listen how it would read, ‘If a woman does not have her hair, she should have her hair cut off’!!! My question is: ‘But if her hair is already off, how can she have her hair cut off?’ That you may understand what I mean, I will tell you this: as you know the apostle Paul says that “every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head “ (1 Corinthians 11:4 – NIV), that is Christ; and that “if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him” (1 Corinthians 11:14 – NIV), however, if a man has long hair and prays or prophesies he does not dishonor his head, because his head is not covered with a veil or a hat or something else.

In the light of all this, to the question asked by Paul: “Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:13 – NIV), we answer that it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered.

With regard to this subject, I conclude with these words of Paul: “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16 – NKJV).

A woman is not allowed to teach or to exercise authority over a man

Sisters in the Lord, you must learn in silence with all submission; therefore without grumbling and without interrupting him who is teaching the Word of God. So, when the Church comes together in one place (that is, during the worship service) you must not talk with anybody, rather you must keep silent “for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:35 - NKJV), says Paul; and if you want to learn something, do not ask the pastor (while the church Is gathered together in one place), but ask your husbands at home, as it is written: “And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home” (1 Corinthians 14:35 – NKJV). You ought to keep silent in the churches, for women “are to be submissive, as the law also says” (1 Corinthians 14:34 - NKJV).
Therefore, since you, sisters, must learn in silence, you are not allowed to teach the doctrine of God, that is, the same doctrine that Paul, Peter and the other apostles taught to the saints and which Paul commanded Timothy and Titus to teach. Neither are you allowed to exercise authority over your husband because he is your head and you are to submit to him. To sum up, therefore, what I have just said: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:11-12 – NKJV).

A woman is not permitted to teach

With regard to the fact that a woman is not permitted to teach, the law also confirms it, and we know that the law is made for whatever is contrary to the sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10). For, when God chose the Levites, under the law of Moses, to entrust them with the service of the tabernacle and that they might teach His laws to the Israelites, as it is written: “They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law” (Deuteronomy 33:10 – NKJV) he chose men and not women.

I can confirm this also by what we read in the book of Nehemiah, for in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, after the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, when the law of God was read and explained publicly before the people, that was done by some men from among the Levites, as it is written: “Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused [helped] the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused [helped] them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:7-8). On the basis of these passages, nowadays among the Jews (the Orthodox Jews) the woman is not permitted to read the law publicly in the synagogue nor to explain any passage of the law to the congregation.

Obviously, the New Testament’s writings confirm that a woman is not permitted to teach, for the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus, whom He sent to preach (Matthew 10:1-8; Luke 6:12-16) were all men, as well as the seventy disciples whom He appointed afterward and sent before His face (Luke 10:1).

There were of course some women who followed Jesus, but they did not teach the Word of God, for they ministered to Jesus and His disciples, as Luke says: “The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means” (Luke 8:1-3 - NIV). As you can see, the women who were with Jesus and His disciples did not preach nor teach the Word of God, but they provided for Jesus and His disciples from their substance. Is it not written: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Galatians 6:6 – NKJV)?

Replies to the main objections

Let us now reply to the main objections raised by some sisters and brothers.

● ‘Since a woman can prophesy, she can teach because he who prophesies teaches’.

That’s not true, because the gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching are two different gifts, they are not the same gift. That is confirmed by Paul when he says: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching” (Romans 12:6-7 – NKJV). Bear in mind this, that Paul did not say: ‘I do not permit a woman to prophesy’ because such a statement would have contradicted the Scripture which says: “Your daughters shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28 – NKJV), but he said a different thing, that is, “I do not permit a woman to teach” (1 Timothy 2:12 - NKJV).
According to the Scripture, a woman can serve as a deaconess, which means that she can also teach. That's not true; now I am going to explain why. The Word declares that in the Church of Cenchrea there was a deaconess, for Paul wrote to the Romans: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [or deaconess] of the Church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me” (Romans 16:1-2 – NIV). Therefore, a woman can be ordained as a deaconess in the Church, if she has the necessary qualifications. But the deacons are not appointed to teach the doctrine of God, but to minister to the saints; that’s why among the qualifications a believer must have to serve as a deacon we don’t find this one ‘able to teach’. Therefore, it is evident that since deacons do not need to be able to teach the doctrine of God because their job is not to teach the Word, those sisters who are appointed deaconesses are not called to teach the doctrine of God.

A woman can teach because in ancient times God appointed some women prophetesses. That’s not true, for the ministry of prophet is different from the ministry of teacher, and the fact that one is a prophet does not necessarily mean that he is able to teach. Deborah (who lived in the days of the judges), Huldah (who lived in the days of king Josiah) and Anna (who lived in the days of Jesus), were all prophetesses, but they were not appointed by God to teach the law to the people because according to the law of Moses the precepts of the law had to be taught by the Levites, as God said: “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth” (Malachi 2:7 – NKJV). The prophet Micah also made a distinction between the office of a priest and the office of a prophet, for when God rebuked the people of Israel through him He said: “Her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money” (Micah 3:11 – NKJV). As you can see, it was the priests and not the prophets who were appointed to teach.

A woman, under grace, can be appointed by God prophetess, but to be a prophet does not mean to be enabled by God to teach the Word; a woman who is a prophetess prophesies by the Spirit when the Spirit comes upon her, and tells the visions and the revelations God gives to her, but this does not mean at all that God has appointed her to teach the doctrine of God. In order to be able to teach, a prophetess needs to possess also the ability to teach, but that’s an ability which she can’t receive from God.

A woman can teach because when Jesus rose from the dead He appeared first to a woman, that is, Mary Magdalene, to whom He said: “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17)

Now, according to the Scripture, “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her” (John 20:18 - NKJV), but she did not go to teach the doctrine of God to the disciples of the Lord. Nor from that day on did she teach, because Jesus had not given her authority to teach. Jesus gave that authority to the eleven disciples, for when He appeared to them on one of the mountains in Galilee He said to them: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20). To confirm this I remind you that the Scripture says that (after the Spirit was poured out upon the Church) the early believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). As you can see, the Scripture does not say that some of the women to whom Jesus had appeared were teaching together with the apostles.

A woman can teach because Anna was a prophetess. Now, Anna was a prophetess who “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37). Therefore that godly woman was always in the temple, which was a holy place where the Jews always met. But Anna did not teach the law of Moses to the Jews in the temple, but she served God with fastings and prayers. Then, when the Child Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord, Anna was there and “spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38 - NKJV). Does this mean that
she taught the doctrine of God? How could we say such a thing when the Scripture states only
that she spoke of the Child Jesus? I am convinced that if those women who want at all costs to
 teach began to serve God in the same way Anna served God, that is to say, with prayers and
fastings, and stopped teaching, they would do something well pleasing to God.

● ‘A woman can teach because some of the women who helped Paul taught the Word of God’.
These women, according to this objection, were Priscilla, Euodias, and Syntyche, for it is written:
“And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had
heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly’ (Acts
18:26), and again: “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in
the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in
the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book
of life” (Philippians 4:2-3).
Now, if the above mentioned passages meant that Priscilla, Euodias and Syntyche did teach the
Word, that would mean that Paul permitted them to teach. Then, if it were so, Paul told a lie to
Timothy, because He told him that he did not permit a woman to teach. So, who says the truth?
Those who say that these passages mean that those women taught or Paul? Perhaps we might
say that Paul permitted some women to teach while he did not permit other women to teach! But
if it were so, how could Paul say to Timothy: “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus
Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before
another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21)? The truth is that Priscilla, Euodia and
Syntyche did not teach. At most, we can say that Priscilla and her husband Aquila told Apollos
something about the new Way privately, but certainly we cannot say that Priscilla taught the
brethren publicly as Paul and the other apostles did.

A woman is not permitted to exercise authority over her husband

I am convinced that you, sisters, ought to follow the example of Mary, Martha’s sister, who “sat
at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (Luke 10:39 – NKJV). Jesus said that Mary had chosen that
good part, which would not be taken away from her. However, what happens in many
Churches? It happens that many sisters have not chosen that good part, that is, they have not
decided to teach!

I said before that a woman is not permitted to exercise authority over her husband, let us see
therefore how a woman must behave towards her own husband. Paul wrote: “Wives, submit
yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife,
even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the
church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing”
(Ephesians 5:22-24), and again: “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians
5:33 – NKJV).
Now, the Church is the Lamb’s wife and she must submit to Her head, that is, Christ Jesus,
therefore just as the Church submits to Christ with all reverence and doesn’t dare to exercise
authority over the Christ of God, so, in the same manner, the wife must submit to her husband.
Sarah is an example of a woman who submitted to her husband, for the Scripture says that
“Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Peter 3:6 - NKJV). I would like to point out that
even though she was submissive to her own husband, she was not a slave of her husband but a
free woman, as it is written that “Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by
a free-woman” (Galatians 4:22). Why do I say this? Because some women think that in ancient
times the wives of the patriarchs were treated and regarded as bondwomen. Consider this: the
holy women who trusted in God were submissive to their own husbands, and because of their
respectful behaviour they are called ‘bondwomen’! The reason why today many women think
that those holy women were bondwomen is that they think that in this modern age for women to
submit to their husbands, as did those holy women, is absurd. Today, what should be a normal
thing for a woman, is considered outdated and inadequate; therefore, no wonder that many
women do not want to submit to their husbands. Those women who call the obedience and the submission of Sarah towards Abraham ‘bondage’ are nothing but women who have become slaves of a perverse way of thinking, and if they want to escape the snare of the devil into which they have fallen they must repent and obey the truth.

We live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation which has perverted the straight ways of the Lord, and we see with our eyes that many so called ‘feminist movements’ have risen and these movements are fighting against God, for their purpose is contrary to the sound doctrine of God. The fight which is called ‘the fight in favour of the emancipation of women’ is nothing but a device used by Satan to destroy the family. Furthermore, there are some women who do not know what the verb ‘to emancipate’ means. Now, to emancipate means ‘to set free from slavery’ and when a married woman says that she wants to become an emancipated woman she means that she wants to stop obeying her husband and submitting to him, and if she is unmarried she means that she doesn’t want to submit to man. After the woman was deceived and fell into transgression, God said to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16 – NKJV); these words were spoken by God, the Creator of all things, and the woman, who is just a creature, has decided to nullify the Word of God. Will she manage to nullify it? No, she won’t. Did her struggle improve our society? No, it didn’t, rather things in this world are going from bad to worse, and we see that what the woman is doing in order to emancipate herself is hastening the destruction of the family. Am I wrong in saying that divorces and separations are increasing in number because of the perverse ideas displayed by the feminists, who are under the leadership of the devil? Am I wrong in saying that today a woman who is obedient and submissive to her own husband is considered by the feminists (who are filled with hate for the Word of God because it reduces their claims to silence) a crazy and ignorant woman, and thus they encourage her to rebel against her husband to claim her ‘rights’? Today that old serpent, that is, Satan, is still deceiving the woman: he began in the Garden of Eden and is actively prosecuting his diabolical work to this day. Satan knows how to deceive the woman; he knows that it is sufficient to make her believe that God is a liar in order to cause her to fall into transgression. What did God say to Adam? He said: “In the day that you eat of it [that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17 – NKJV); but what did the serpent say to Eve: “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), and she believed the serpent and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thinking that she would not die, and the baleful consequences of that disobedience can be still clearly seen today.

Sisters, I exhort you to obey the Word of God and not to deceive yourselves (by thinking that the freedom proclaimed by the feminist movements is useful to you and to your families). The true freedom is in the Lord, for it is written: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17 – NKJV). On the contrary, where the spirit of this world is, there is no liberty but only slavery to sin. Sisters, do you want to be really free? Well, then, continue in the Word of Christ, for Jesus said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

Daughters of Zion, be homemakers, so that your husbands, when they come home from work, may find the house clean and in perfect order and their clothes washed and ironed ready to be put on. Let them find savoury food, so that their spirit may be refreshed after a tiring day; do them good and not evil, they need you, you are the helper suitable that God made and gave to man; respect them and do not despise them (do not behave like Michal, David’s wife, who despised David in her heart when she saw David leaping and whirling before the Lord, and for this reason she “had no children to the day of her death” 2 Samuel 6:23 - NKJV); show them in deed and in truth that you love them; be faithful to your husbands, do not be quarrelsome, do not raise your voice against them; when they are tested by God stand by them to give them strength and do not behave like Job’s wife who, when she saw her husband’s sufferings, said to Job: “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9 – NKJV); bear children and bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord because this is one of the good works with which you must adorn yourselves.
The reasons of these prohibitions

Now, let us see why the woman is not permitted to teach nor to exercise authority over her husband but she must keep silent. Paul says that it is because “Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:13-14 – NKJV).

Therefore the reasons of this prohibitions to women are these.

First, because man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man (1 Corinthians 11:9), as it is written that after God formed Adam, He said: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18), and He took one of his ribs and made it into a woman. So man was formed before the woman. Being created first, the man has the creational priority, he is the head; and creational priority entails functional authority.

Second, because in the Garden of Eden it was not Adam who was deceived but Eve. Paul confirms this by saying to the Corinthians: “The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Corinthians 11:3 - NKJV). Why is it not written that the serpent deceived Adam by his craftiness? Because it is not true that the serpent deceived Adam. Of course, when Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he sinned, as it is written: “Like Adam they have broken the covenant – they were unfaithful to me there” (Hosea 6:7 – NIV), and again: “By the one man’s offense many died” (Romans 5:15 – NKJV). But we need to say all the truth about what happened in the garden of Eden, by saying that the serpent deceived Eve and not Adam. The woman herself recognized that she was deceived, for – after both she and her husband had sinned - when God said to her: “What is this you have done?” (Genesis 3:13 - NKJV), she said: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13 – NKJV). And that is what the old serpent is still doing, for he is still deceiving the woman. Why do many women refuse to submit to their husbands in everything? Why do they refuse to be homemakers? Why do they refuse to bear children, and if they want to have children, they say arrogantly: ’Just one or at the most two’? Why do they refuse to do what God commands them to do, but they want to do what they are not allowed to do? Because the serpent has deceived them by his craftiness, and through them he induces many men to sin. Yes, I am fully convinced that in the Church of God, many men are deceived into disobeying some commandments of God by these women, who, having been deceived by that old serpent, through smooth and flattering words, induce them to take crooked paths, and the consequence of their disobedience is confusion.

Therefore, women, submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord, and do not have the presumption to teach. Be humble and respectful and you will be honored by God and by all those who love God and fear Him. Do not think about the so called emancipation of women, because you have already obtained the true freedom, and this freedom is in the Lord.

Women will be saved in child-bearing, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with self-control

Paul says to Timothy: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” (1 Timothy 2:14-15 – NKJV).

What does Paul mean when he states that the woman will be saved in childbearing? He means that she will be saved after bearing children. Be careful, Paul does not mean that a woman who can’t bear children (for she is barren) will go to hell! Nor does he mean that if a woman dies immediately after the wedding ceremony she will go to hell! If childbearing were necessary for the woman’s salvation, that would be tantamount to saying that all believing women must get married. However we know that there are some women who remain unmarried for all their life because their fathers have determined in their heart that they will keep their virgins unmarried (as Paul says to the Corinthians – 1 Corinthians 7:37), and their fathers are not blameworthy at all for doing so for they do a good thing in the sight of God. What shall we say about these
women then? Shall we say that they will not be saved for they did not bear children? Certainly not, for Paul did not say that the woman will be saved if she bears children, but if she continues "in faith, love and holiness, with self-control" (1 Timothy 2:15 – NKJV).

"She will be saved in childbearing" (1 Timothy 2:15 – NKJV) means that God wants every married woman to bear children, for Paul says: "I will therefore that the younger women [widows] marry, bear children ...." (1 Timothy 5:14). So a woman who gets married must desire to bear children, I say ’she must desire to bear children’ because there are some women who don’t want to bear children. I say it again: ‘God wants the woman to bear children,’ for God said to man and woman at the beginning: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Now, someone may say to me: ‘Brother, you have quoted some words which don’t apply to the modern couple, for they were spoken by God a long time ago when the earth needed to be filled; today man and woman don’t need to multiply to fill the earth because the earth is already too full according to the calculations which have been made!’ First of all, I say that you are wrong, because the word of God is a living and enduring word, and then I tell you that if it were as you say I don’t understand why you don’t accept the above mentioned words of God and at the same time you accept the following words of God: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24 – NKJV) which were spoken by God after He made the woman.

I want to tell you something else. We are not under the law but under grace. However, this does not mean that the law is useless because Paul says to Timothy: “But we know that the law is good if one uses It lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:8-10 – NKJV). Now, if someone asks you: ‘Can a man have sexual relations with another man?’, you answer him: ‘No, he can’t, because it is written in the law: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22 - NKJV), and you do well to give him that answer quoting the law. If someone else asks you: ‘Can a man have sexual relations with a woman who is not his wife?’, you answer him saying: ‘No, he can’t, because it is written in the law: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24 – NKJV), and in this case also you do well to answer him in that way quoting the law. Now, I ask you: ‘If someone asks you if it is right to prevent conception in order not to have children or to limit the number of births, what do you answer him?’ If the practice of preventing conception is contrary to the sound doctrine, the law must state or show that it is not right to prevent conception in the eyes of God. I do not use the law to command you to keep the sabbath day, or new moons, or the Jewish feasts, nor do I use the law to command you to pay tithe or to abstain from the so called unclean foods, because if I used the law in this way I would use it unlawfully and my conscience would rebuke me, but I use the law to show you that the practice of preventing conception is contrary to the sound doctrine of God. I remind you that Paul in his epistles to the Gentiles in Christ used the law of Moses, but he used it lawfully and wisely to confirm the sound doctrine; he did not use the law to bring the Gentile believers into bondage to the law of Moses. For instance, in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, in order to confirm that “the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14 – NKJV), he quoted the law, saying: “For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (1 Corinthians 9:9; Deuteronomy 25:4 – NKJV). I want to remind you also that when the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason, Jesus answered them quoting the law, as He said to them: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall live his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?”’ (Matthew 19:4-5 – NKJV). Then when the Pharisees asked Jesus why then Moses commanded to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away, Jesus said to them: “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8
As you can see, in order to show the Pharisees that he who sends away his wife for any reason except fornication causes her to commit adultery, Jesus quoted some words God spoke at the beginning. Therefore, if Jesus cited those words spoken by God at the beginning in order to show that at the beginning man was not allowed to give a certificate of divorce to his wife and to send her away, I think that in order to show that he who prevents conception transgresses the law of God, thus he commits a sin, we must cite the words that God spoke at the beginning. He said to man and woman: “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Notice that God gave that order to both man and woman, therefore if they disobey they will provoke God to anger. Yes, brothers, the law is made for anything that is contrary to the sound doctrine, and the practice of preventing conception is contrary to the sound doctrine.

The Scripture tells an incident that occurred in the days of Jacob (remember that the law had not yet been given to the children of Israel), which was written for our learning. It is written: “And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. And Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother’s wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother’s wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also” (Genesis 38:6-10). Note that it is clearly written that Onan prevented conception (in the IBRV instead of ‘it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother’s wife, that he spilled it on the ground’ we read ‘quando s’accostava alla moglie del suo fratello, faceva in modo d’impedire il concepimento,’ that is, ‘it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother’s wife, that he prevented conception’), for he did not want to give children to Tamar, so God killed him. Paul, after speaking of those who did not like to retain the knowledge of God, says about them that “although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32 – NIV). Therefore, if according to God, Onan was deserving of death because of what he did, that means that his transgression was serious in God’s sight. Don’t you think? Note also these words: “The thing which he did displeased the LORD” (Genesis 38:10), for they are very similar to these other words: “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27), which are written in the story of the adultery committed by David with Bath-Sheba and of the murder he committed putting to death the husband of Bath-Sheba. I think that this should lead you to reflect upon the seriousness of the sin of preventing conception.

It is written in the Psalms: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5 – NKJV). What are children then? They are an inheritance from the Lord; while “houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers” (Proverbs 19:14 – NKJV), children are an inheritance from the Lord because they are given by God. To have children does not mean to be unfortunate, rather it means to receive a precious inheritance from God. Many people are happy and willing to receive an inheritance from their parents or from their grandparents, such as houses, lands and riches, but they are not willing to receive some children by inheritance; some of them because they don’t want to have children at all, some others because they don’t want to exceed the limit, yet not the limit fixed by the law of this nation or by the law of the Lord (such a limit does not exist), but the limit fixed by their pride and their selfishness.

“The fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3 – NKJV) or a prize (the IBRV) Do you know what a reward is? A reward is a thing given in recognition of service, effort or achievement. Do you know what a prize is? A prize is a thing given as a reward to a winner in recognition of an outstanding achievement. For example some people are given a prize for they have done a courageous deed, some others are given a prize because they have won a race or a game and so on. Do you think that a prize is a bad thing? Do you not know that in this world those who are given a prize are honoured, praised and respected by their neighbour? Do you not know that
those who distinguish themselves during a war by their heroism, and those who obtain the best results in sports competitions, are given a prize? And do you not know that when they are given a prize they are moved and some of them even weep for joy before all those who are present? On the contrary, many women, when they get pregnant they weep with rage and begin to curse their husband and the day on which they got married, instead of blessing God and rejoicing with exceedingly great joy. Do you not realize that such a behaviour is wrong and perverse? The children of one’s youth are like arrows in the hand of a warrior; do you know what arrows are? Do you know what a warrior uses arrows for? Arrows are weapons which are used by a warrior against his enemies during a war or a battle. When an archer goes to fight against his enemies he makes sure his quiver is full of arrows, because how could he fight against his enemies without arrows? Arrows are important for a warrior, they are of great value, and the more arrows he has the safer he feels. Brothers, children are like arrows in the hand of a warrior, therefore they are useful and precious, not only when they are few but also when they are many (“Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” Psalm 127:5).

Of course, it is God who chooses how many children to give to a couple, however on the part of the husband and the wife there must be no opposition to God who is the one who gives children. Furthermore, know this, that the fact that a woman gets pregnant means that she has been visited by God, for the Scripture says that “the Lord visited Sarah” (Genesis 21:1 – NKJV) and “the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters” (1 Samuel 2:21 – NKJV). To be visited by God is a wonderful thing, while not to be visited by God is a sad, very sad thing for a woman.

An awful thing is being done in the midst of the people of God; some men as well as some women undergo sterilization in order to limit the number of children and – as they say – ‘to feel secure’. Listen, what is the fatal danger you want to escape? What is the tragedy you want to escape? How is it possible that some believers put themselves on a level with those men and women who prostitute themselves? Those who act in this way have been deceived by the old serpent and are not safe at all because only the righteous are secure (Proverbs 28:1). You are asleep; awake and expose these unfruitful works of darkness.

To you who say: ‘Life is very expensive, children are expensive and we cannot afford many children!’, I say this: ‘It is true that you need money to bring up your children, however, do you think that God does not know it? Do you think that God is not able to meet all the needs of a large family? Is the Lord’s arm shortened? Listen carefully to what I am going to say: ‘God increased His people greatly in Egypt (Psalm 105:24), afterwards He brought it out of Egypt and He (for forty years) guided them in the wilderness in which were fiery serpents and scorpions. Do you know how many Israelites were in the wilderness? According to a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel taken in the wilderness, all who were numbered of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and above, were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty (Numbers 1:45-46). Now, the Scripture teaches us that God met all the needs of that large congregation in the midst of a wilderness and the children of Israel lacked nothing during those forty years spent in the wilderness, for Moses said to Israel (before Israel entered the land of Canaan): “These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing” (Deuteronomy 2:7 – NKJV). Therefore, if God by His power supplied all the needs of a whole nation in the midst of a wilderness for forty years, we believe that today He is able to meet all the needs of a large family. Paul wrote to the Philippians: “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19 – NIV); therefore, have faith in God and in all His faithful promises, do not doubt His faithfulness. Remember that in the wilderness, during those forty years, not one of the children of Israel died of hunger or thirst because God “rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven” (Psalm 78:24 – NIV), and “he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers” (Psalm 78:16 – NIV). Remember what king Asa in his distress said to God: “Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power” (2 Chronicles 14:11 – NKJV) in order to realize that it is nothing for our God to help, whether a large family or a little family. Let us take Job as an example, who had seven sons and three daughters, of whom
God said to Satan: “There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8 - NKJV). Some people say that Job had many children because he could afford them being a very rich man. However, this is not true, because Job begot many children because he feared God and dreaded destruction from God (Job 31:23). Today there are people who are very rich and do not fear God, who don’t want to have children or they want to have only one child, while there are poor people who fear God and have many children. Furthermore, brothers, what is the cause of these economic problems some Christian families have? The Scripture says that “he who loves pleasure will be a poor man” (Proverbs 21:17 – NKJV); of course, if one spends his income for useless things, in that he loves the world and the pleasures of life, rather than for useful and necessary things, he will become poor and will have serious economic problems ..., however it is his fault. Whereas if one works honestly and uses his income wisely, he and his family will have abundant food. If you began to abstain from the worldly lusts you do not want to forsake and the pleasures of life you like so much, you would realize that you have got more than what you have. If you ceased to set your mind on high things and began to set your mind on humble things, I am convinced that you would have much more money, which you could use to meet both your needs and the needs of the poor among the saints.

To you who say: ‘If we have many children, many people will say that we behave like beasts!’ I say: ‘First of all, you must not be afraid of the possible insults some people will hurl at you, rather if you are insulted for this reason, you are blessed!’ Peter said: “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters ...” (1 Peter 4:15 – NKJV), therefore since having many children is not a crime which deserves to be punished by God or by the laws of this country, I do not see what you should be afraid of. You see, the Scripture says that on the earth there are “righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve” (Ecclesiastes 8:14 – NIV). However I remind you that the righteous are treated badly by men filled with every kind of wickedness and not by God.

One thing is sure; the Scripture says that those who have many children “shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:5 – NKJV).

If you think that it is a bad thing to beget many children according to the flesh, then you think that it is a bad thing also to beget many children in Christ Jesus through the Gospel!! I hope that in reading these words of mine you will be persuaded by God and you will acknowledge the truth. You know that, from the spiritual point of view, we believers in Christ Jesus, who have been begotten by God the Father through the Word of truth, have a mother, who is the Jerusalem above, as it is written: “But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26 – NKJV). When we repented of our sins and believed in the Gospel we were brought forth by our mother, who is free. We are her children because we have been set free from sin and we are free in the Lord. How many children does our mother have, who was barren for a long time and at God’s appointed time she bore children? They are many because the Scripture says: “The desolate has many more children than she who has a husband” (Galatians 4:27 – NKJV. Isaiah 54:1). That’s why it is written: “Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor!” (Galatians 4:27 – NKJV. Isaiah 54:1). Do you know what happened in heaven when our mother brought us forth and by the grace of God we were born of God? It came to pass that the angels of God rejoiced (for Jesus said: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” Luke 15:10 – NKJV), our mother rejoiced, and God also rejoiced as it is written: “He will rejoice over you with gladness ... He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17 – NKJV). Someone will say: ‘What do you mean by that?’ I mean: ‘Let us rejoice when we see the Christian families multiply, for it is written that God “makes their families like a flock. The righteous see it and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth” (Psalm 107:41-42 – NKJV). As you can see, iniquity also speaks, but it stops its mouth, while the wisdom that is from above speaks and cries out and nobody is able to silence her for she tells the truth.
Sisters in Christ, I conclude by urging you to continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control, till the end, "for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11 – NKJV). To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

**A word to you who want to emancipate yourself**

I speak to you, sister, who want to emancipate yourself (as the haughty women have advised you to do). You have looked for and found a job you did not need at all, because you do not want your husband to buy to you the things you need with the money he earns, because you consider such a thing a dishonour for you who are a woman and you also want to have an account with a bank so that you may handle your money as you like and nobody may open his mouth, and thus you may say: ‘That money is mine!’. Furthermore, you found a job because you have set your mind on designer dresses, on provocative and costly dresses, which make you feel ‘more woman’ (as you also say now). You have been deceived, for you say: ‘I want to fulfil myself’, but you have not yet realized that you are seeking your self-fulfilment by rebelling against God. You now do things which are not necessary and neglect the things which are necessary, which you must do for your good, for the good of your husband, and for the good of your family; when you come back from work you are tired, angry and knowing that you have to cook, to do your washing, to iron, and to do other useful things, you murmur, you do not do these things joyfully any longer, but half-heartedly and you dare to tell your husband that he must do housework. The rhythm of your life has become frenetic, you have got too many things to do; you are overloaded with work, you do not want to think of bearing children, and when you hear someone speak of children and see other women bear children you try to pretend nothing happened; you have become haughty, you walk along with outstretched necks, tripping along with mincing steps, you have shoes with stiletto heels on.

You neglect your husband, your children and your house because you decided to do things which are not necessary; perhaps your husband had said to you many times: ‘I go to work, you stay at home and do housework, you do not need to find a job, my income suffices to cover all our expenses’, yet you did not want to live a humble life; you began to read fashion magazines, you began to wish to spend your holidays in famous summer resorts, you wanted to have a modern villa with a modern and costly furniture because you envied your haughty neighbours and girlfriends, and in order to afford all these things the money earned by your husband was not enough. Repent, obey God, and you will be blessed and you will make your husband happy.

**The governing authorities**

**The submission to the governing authorities**

It is written: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves ....” (Romans 13:1-2 – NKJV).

Brothers, the governing authorities which exist in this country (as well as in the other countries) are appointed by God, and we must be subject to them; no matter what political party they belong to, we must honour them and show all good fidelity and respect them. Peter says: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men ....” (1 Peter 2:13
– NIV), which means that he who loves the Lord must be subject to the governing authorities, lest the name of the Lord (which he loves) be blasphemed because of him.

Paul said: “Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:7 – NKJV). So every governing authority must be honored and feared, in that it is appointed by God. As far as we are concerned, as citizenship of this country, we must honour the President, the Prime Minister, the deputies, the senators, the ministers of the Government, the policemen, the Carabiniers, the Revenue Guard Corps, the judges, the public prosecutors, the mayors, town councillors, district councillors, and any other authority appointed by God.

The governing authorities command to pay taxes and they must be paid to the authority because it is written that we must render “taxes to whom taxes are due” (Romans 13:7) and because Jesus said: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Luke 20:25 – NKJV). We must also render customs to whom customs are due (customs are the duties levied by a government on imported goods).

When Jesus began His ministry, the people of Israel was under the rule of Rome: the emperor of the Roman empire was Tiberius Caesar, the governor of Judea was Pontius Pilate, and the tetrarch of Galilee was Herod (who had married his brother Philip’s wife), yet Jesus (who was a Jew according to the flesh) did not incite the crowds to rebel against the Roman governing authorities, He never forbade to pay taxes to Caesar (even though He knew that part of the taxes would be used to maintain the roman army), He did not head any revolt against the roman authorities which ruled at that time, and when He was before Pontius Pilate and Herod He did not dare to insult them, nor was He disrespectful toward them; Jesus Christ left us an example in everything, that we should follow His steps, therefore we will do well to be subject to the governing authorities, to honour them and to pray for them so that God may save them, help them to rule over men in righteousness, and protect them, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:2 – NKJV).

Brothers, I want you to know that no one of us has the right to make fun of the governing authorities; he who thinks that he has this right is devoid of understanding. Why do I say this? Because in the midst of the people of God there are some who take delight in making fun of the governing authorities, by telling jokes about them! Some so called pastors tell these jokes to the children of the Sunday School; yes, even this abominable thing happens in the midst of the saints. Whereas Jesus took up the children in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them; these men of corrupt minds take up the children in their arms and tell them jokes against the governing authorities. These people, as ungodly mockers at feasts, open their mouth to vomit the rubbish they have put in their heart. They like ‘the newspaper cartoons making fun of politicians’, they say this openly and they are not ashamed to say such a thing; they take delight in speaking evil of the governing authorities as the children of this age do, and the people like them because they entertain them with funny jokes. In hearing these people, we mourn because these men lead astray the people of God.

I want to tell you this also: you must not take part in politics. In other words, you must not vote this or that political party. Taking part in politics is not fitting for the saints: politics lies under the sway of the wicked one and anyone who takes part in it becomes corrupted. Today in many places of worship, during the election campaign, one can witness real electoral meetings because the pastors of these churches are not ashamed to urge believers to vote for a particular political party or a particular candidate; and when they don’t say it openly they make believers understand it. Why does this disgraceful thing happen among the saints? Because these pastors, instead of praying for those who are in authority and urging the flock to do the same, seek their favor endorsing their candidacy in order to obtain important privileges from them. And thus they are involved in politics. No wonder, therefore, that today during the electoral campaign we hear from some pulpits the same ‘election slogans’ we hear in the streets and in the market places.

But there is something else that these pastors do in order to obtain important privileges from the governing authorities: they bribe them. Let me give you an example. We know that the word and
the signature of the local authorities are necessary in order to build a place of worship; now, there is no harm in asking the local authority for the permission to build a place of worship, but the fact is that in some cases this permission is not granted because at that particular time certain laws do not allow believers to build a place of worship in that place. What happens then? It happens that those pastors who fear God accept the decision of the local authority, while those who do not fear God make all efforts to obtain the planning permission anyway. So they go to the local authority which is appointed to grant the planning permission, but they don’t go to it empty-handed but with ‘their donkeys and camels loaded with gold and silver’ and thus they obtain the long-desired planning permission. Have you understood how they got the planning permission? They got it by bribing the local authority.

What does God say about those who act in this way? God says: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help …..and have not asked My advice, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt” (Isaiah 31:1; 30:2-3 – NKJV).

Brothers, know this, that God punishes all those who carry out plans that are not His, forming an alliance but not by His Spirit. Therefore, those who bribe the governing authorities in order to obtain what it is not lawful for them to obtain will be punished and put to shame by the Lord at His appointed time. However, there is something else which must be said: when the place of worship is dedicated to God, those who have acted in this perverse way make moving speeches and they say: ‘Let us thank God for giving us this place of worship!’ But it was not God who gave them that place of worship, but Mammon, because they obtained the planning permission by relying on money (in that they paid a backhander) and not on God (that is, not on His holy ways). However, who knows how things went? Of course those believers who stay with that church on that day as well as many believers who belong to that church do not know anything about the backhander paid for the release of the planning permission. Does God like this way of acting? No, He doesn’t, for paying a backhander is a crime even when the backhander is paid in order to build a place of worship or to obtain a permission for the spread of the Gospel. I say this so that no one may deceive you by saying: ‘Brother, the end justifies the means!' Know that God does not justify the unlawful means some believers use to spread the Gospel of Christ. Do you know why? Because He loves righteousness.

When Christians must disobey the governing authorities

Now let us see when we must disobey the governing authorities, which are appointed by God, in order to please God. If the governing authority commands us to do things which we as believers are not allowed to do, then we must not obey that command, even though we will be persecuted by the governing authority.

In the Scriptures are recorded some incidents which show clearly how those who fear God must behave when the governing authorities issue a wicked order.

● Here is what happened in Egypt when the children of Israel were still slaves of the Egyptians: “And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive” (Exodus 1:15-17). As you can see, those midwives disobeyed Pharaoh in order to obey God, and God blessed them, as it is written that “God dealt well with the midwives …. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them” (Exodus 1:20-21 – NKJV).

● During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the following incident happened: “Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to
come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso faileth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso faileth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any
thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon” (Daniel 3:1-30).

Brothers, as you can see, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego disobeyed the order of Nebuchadnezzar, for according to that order they would have to disobey the Word of God, which states that we must not worship idols. So they refused to worship that statue made by king Nebuchadnezzar and because of their refusal they brought the judgement of the king on them, but God gained glory and praise through king Nebuchadnezzar.

● When the apostles Peter and John were brought before the High Priest, the rulers, elders and teachers of the law, they were commanded “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20 – NIV). Some time later, Peter and the other apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name’, he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood’. But Peter and the other apostles replied: We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:27-29 – NIV).

Now, before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He gave the apostles the following order: “Go and make disciples of all nations …. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20 – NIV), but the members of the Sanhedrin gave them an order which opposed the order of Christ, for they warned the apostles not to teach the Word of God, but the apostles preferred to obey God rather than men, even though because of their refusal they were persecuted by the Sanhedrin. That’s how we must behave when the governing authorities command us to do something which is contrary to the will of the Lord.

Rulers are God’s ministers

The apostle Paul says: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing” (Romans 13:3-6 – NKJV).

It is clearly written that rulers are God’s ministers, who serve God by punishing those who practice evil, and that’s exactly what we see for both the judges and the magistrates (the Weymouth New Testament reads Romans 13:3 as follows: “For judges and magistrates are to be feared not by right-doers but by wrong-doers. You desire—do you not?—to have no reason to fear your ruler. Well, do the thing that is right, and then he will commend you”), who are among the rulers Paul speaks of, defend the cause of those who are offended and damaged and grant them justice against their adversaries. According to the law of Moses, the children of Israel had to appoint judges and officers whose task was to acquit the innocent and to condemn the guilty, as it is written: “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgement” (Deuteronomy 16:18 – NKJV), therefore God wants judges and magistrates to be appointed in every nation and He wants them to judge people fairly. If we do evil, we will be punished by the authority, but if we do what is good we will have praise from the same, we will live safely and quietly and our conscience will not rebuke us. For we believers must submit to the governing authorities not only because of possible punishment but also for conscience’ sake (that is to say, in order not to defile our conscience). Now, we believers must strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men, that we may
please God; therefore, lest we defile our conscience we must obey the governing authorities. Some do not want to have a clean conscience, I am not surprised, for I know that even in the days of the apostles there were some people who rejected a good conscience. But do you know what happened to them? They shipwrecked their faith. Luke wrote the following incident which happened at Philippi, while he, Paul, Silas and Timothy were in that city to preach the Gospel: “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks” (Acts 16:16-24). On that occasion, the magistrates acted with precipitation and unjustly toward Paul and Silas because the apostles did not deserve to be punished. However, this does not mean that those magistrates were not God’s ministers, nor does it mean that from that day on Paul ceased to consider the magistrates God’s ministers, for some time later the apostle Paul wrote to the saints in Rome that the magistrate “is God’s minister to you for good” (Romans 13:4 – NKJV). What happened to Paul, therefore, teaches us that even if a magistrate acts unjustly toward us, we must still consider him a servant of God for our good. Let us see that we do not curse him because if we curse him, we also will be found guilty, for it is written. “Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14 – NKJV).

However, it must be said that after the great earthquake which shook the foundations of the prison, and after the keeper of the prison and his household believed in the Lord, when the magistrates (the same magistrates who had torn off the clothes of Paul and Silas and had commanded them to be beaten with rods) heard that Paul and Silas were Romans, they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. Furthermore, I remind you that God turned the harm that the magistrates had done to the apostles into good, for while they were in prison the keeper of the prison believed in the Lord Jesus with all his household. Paul himself said: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God …..” (Romans 8:28 - NKJV); is it not true that even that imprisonment suffered unjustly worked for good to Paul and Silas and worked for the salvation of a whole household?

Brothers, know this, that no matter what injustice or violence or persecution those who love God suffer from the governing authorities, God will turn it into good. The Scripture cannot be broken; if the persecution against the Church did not work for good to those who love God, that would mean that God is no longer able to turn evil into good and that He has lied. However our God is sitting on His throne and He reigns and He controls every circumstance of our life and at His appointed time He turns evil into good. God cannot lie, He is not a man like us; in His great faithfulness He will turn our mourning to joy and many in seeing this will fear the name of God and will acknowledge that the Word of God is truth.

**God judges the governing authorities who rebel against Him**

On the Day of judgement God will judge the governing authorities according to their deeds because it is written: “God will bring to judgement both the righteous and the wicked, for there
will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed” (Ecclesiastes 3:17 – NIV), so on that day they will receive the punishment of their evil deeds.

However, let no one think that only in the Day of Judgement will God punish the governing authorities for their evil deeds, and thus before that day the rod of the wrath of God will not strike them, for it is also written: “If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner” (Proverbs 11:31 – NKJV).

Therefore, brothers, let no one deceive you with empty words, for God judges the governing authorities on the earth. He inflicts His punishments on those governing authorities who practice evil, for He is no respecter of persons.

● Saul was appointed king of Israel by God, but because of his rebellion God put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David, as it is written: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the Lord; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse” (1 Chronicles 10:13-14 - NKJV). God “breaks in pieces mighty men without inquiry, and sets others in their place. Therefore He knows their works; He overthrows them in the night, and they are crushed. He strikes them as wicked men in the open sight of others, because they turned back from Him, and would not consider any of His ways” (Job 34:24-27 – NKJV). That’s what the Judge of all the earth does.

● The prophet Daniel said to Belshazzar the following things about Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon: “O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will” (Daniel 5:18-21).

Daniel recognized that God had made Nebuchadnezzar king over Babylon, but he said that when the heart of Nebuchadnezzar was lifted up, God punished him because of the haughtiness of his heart. Is it not written: “God resists the proud” (James 4:6 – NKJV. Proverbs 3:34)?

● In the days of the apostles it came to pass that “Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also" (Acts 12:1-3 – NKJV) and he arrested Peter and put him in prison. But God delivered Peter through one of His angels. After these things, the following incident happened: “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:20-23 – NKJV).

That king was punished by God for he had not given glory to God; and we have to recognize once again that God shows no partiality, not even toward the kings He sets over the kingdoms of the world.

God uses the governing authorities to accomplish His purpose on the earth

Let us see now how some roman authorities helped Paul when he was seized by the Jews in Jerusalem and also afterward while he was in prison. Paul, a few days after he had returned to Jerusalem from his missionary journey in Asia, Macedonia and Greece, was seized by the Jews
in the temple of Jerusalem, who began to beat Paul in order to kill him, but when Claudius Lysias, the commander of the garrison, heard that all Jerusalem was in an uproar, he took soldiers and centurions and went to rescue Paul from the hands of the Jews. Afterward, while Paul was in prison, the commander of the garrison was informed of a plot to be carried out against Paul, and thus he sent Paul to Felix the governor. The commander of the garrison sent also a letter to Felix. Here is the letter he wrote to Felix: “Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell” (Acts 23:26-30). Is it not true that Claudius Lysias in those circumstances showed firmness and came to Paul’s defense vindicating Paul’s rights, who was a Roman? Was it not Claudius Lysias who rescued Paul from the hands of the Jews and prevented them from killing Paul? Was it not Claudius Lysias who, when he heard that the Jews lay in wait for Paul, sent Paul to the governor in Caesarea? Brothers, let us not forget that God uses also the authorities in order to accomplish His purpose on the earth. God had determined to send Paul to Rome to preach the Gospel, and He used the roman authorities to send Paul to Rome. God, through the roman authorities, rescued Paul from the hands of the Jews first, and afterwards, while Paul was on the ship, He, through the centurion, prevented the soldiers from killing Paul (Acts 27:42-43).

The hearts of kings are in God’s hand

Wisdom says: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1 – NKJV). Let us see now how God in ancient times turned the hearts of some powerful kings so that it might be fulfilled what He had said through His prophets.

In order to punish the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem for their wickedness, God called the army of the Chaldeans which destroyed the cities of Judah and Jerusalem and carried the inhabitants of those cities away captive to Babylon. But God, in His faithfulness and goodness, through Isaiah and Jeremiah, promised that He would not leave the Jews in Babylon but He would cause them to return to the land of Israel.

Here is what God said through the prophet Isaiah: “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; …I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1,13). The prophet Isaiah spoke in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (at the time the kingdom of Assyria ruled over the nations).

Here is what God said through the prophet Jeremiah: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; … after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:4,10). Jeremiah spoke in the days of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, kings of Judah (at the time it was the kingdom of Assyria which ruled over the nations).

Therefore, to sum up, God foretold the length of the Babylonian captivity, and predicted which king would let His exiles go free and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple.

At the set time of which God had spoken, was fulfilled what God had foretold through His prophets a long time before, for it is written in the book of Ezra: “Now in the first year of Cyrus
king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-3). The exiles that Cyrus let go returned to Jerusalem, and they built the altar of the God of Israel first, to offer burnt offerings on it; then, in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, they laid the foundations of the temple of the Lord. However, in the days of Artaxerxes king of Persia the work of the house of God ceased and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia, when God spoke through the prophet Haggai and the prophet Zechariah commanding the people of Israel to rebuild the temple. The Jews began to build the house of God and even though the enemies of Judah (among whom there were Tattenai governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai and their companions) opposed the rebuilding of the house of God and discouraged the people of Judah, the building of the house of God went on because king Darius issued a decree according to which the house had to be built (not only this, for King Darius commanded that the cost had to be paid at the king’s expense from taxes on the region beyond the River). So the Jews built the house of God and the temple was finished in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Do you know what the Scripture says about this, after the Jews had finished the temple and they had celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy? It says: “And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22 – NKJV). As you can see, God turned the heart of Cyrus as well as the heart of Darius toward the Jews, so that His words might be fulfilled. However, in ancient times there was a king whose heart was hardened by God so that he might oppose the order of God to let His people go free, I refer to Pharaoh king of Egypt. In the Psalms it is written: “Israel also came into Egypt, and Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham. He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants” (Psalm 105:23-25 – NKJV). So the Egyptians mistreated the children of Israel. The Scripture says that “the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites, and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly” (Exodus 1:12-14 – NIV), and also that the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives: “When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live” (Exodus 1:16 – NIV). Someone will ask then: ‘Why did all those things happen? They happened because God turned the hearts of the Egyptians against the Israelites. I admit that it is hard to accept all this, however we cannot do otherwise. Then God sent Moses and Aaron to deliver His people out of the hand of the Egyptians, and He said to Moses: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:3 - NKJV). Pharaoh also had been made king by God, but, unlike Cyrus king of Persia, he refused to let the Israelites go out of Egypt. Only after God struck Egypt with terrible judgements, Pharaoh let the Israelites go. However, all this happened because God had determined to act in that way with Pharaoh, and nobody could prevent God from fulfilling His purpose. “The Scripture says to the Pharaoh: For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (Romans 9:17 – NKJV. Exodus 9:16). Now, I ask you the following questions: ‘Don’t you think that God could have caused the Israelites to come out of Egypt without hardening the heart of Pharaoh? Don’t you think that God could have stirred up the spirit of Pharaoh, as He did several centuries later with Cyrus king of Persia, so that Pharaoh might issue a decree according to which the Israelites had to go out of Egypt to go to the land which God had promised to them? Of course, God could have acted in that way, however it is clear that He did not want to act in that way because He
does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth. Paul says that God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11 – NKJV). Therefore, what, if God wanted to act in that way with Pharaoh and all his servants? Should God have taken counsel with someone, perhaps, before hardening the heart of Pharaoh? Let us not quarrel with God, for it is written: “Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground” (Isaiah 45:9 – NIV). Let us not judge the ways of God unjustly, as the wicked do, otherwise God will bring His judgements upon us, and let us remember more often that “He does not answer for any of his actions” (Job 33:13 – NIV. That is to say, God does not account for any of His actions)
I have written these things so that you may understand that the authorities which exist are appointed by God, and God uses them in order to perform His wonderful purposes. To the Most High God, who is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, be the glory forever. Amen.

Our good fight

Introduction

We believers in Jesus Christ are soldiers of the Lord and as soldiers we are continually at war. We must fight what the Scripture calls “the good fight” (1 Timothy 1:18 – NIV). We must fight against our numerous and merciless enemies, but I do not refer to our enemies made of flesh and bones (whom we must love, as it is written: “Love your enemies” Luke 6:27 - NKJV) because our struggle is not against them. The enemies against whom we children of God must fight are wicked spiritual beings that plot against us. However God, knowing this, has provided us with an armor; the weapons are His, they are not carnal because – as I said before - our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but they are “mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4 - NKJV).
Now Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:11-13). The devil is our adversary and he is the prince of this world, which he rules through many spiritual beings which obey his commands, and which are principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.
Now, know this, that all these spiritual beings are our enemies; they do not love us, they do not pursue what is good for us, they don’t want us to be edified, they don’t protect us, they do not show any mercy toward us because they are merciless. Here is what they desire: they desire us to deny the Lord, so that we may be again entangled in the pollutions of the world from which Jesus Christ has delivered us by His precious blood, and thus we may go to perdition. Through their schemes they try to cause us to wander from the faith and from the truth. Here is how they try to achieve their evil aim: they try to keep us from reading and searching the Word of God, and from meeting the saints; they try to induce us to believe destructive heresies; they try to induce us not to pray to God; they try to induce us not to pursue holiness, for they know that it is written that without holiness no one will see the Lord; they try to induce us not to forgive those who wrong us and must be forgiven; they try to induce us to doubt the faithfulness of God; they try to induce us to forget the poor among the saints (for they don’t want us to meet their needs). In other words, they try to keep us from knowing and doing the will of God. They are indeed our enemies, because they do not want us to do what is good, rather they want us to practice evil (while the Scripture commands us to abhor what is evil - Romans 12:9).
However, know this also, that God knows all the wiles of Satan and his servants, and He enables us to stand against them. This is why He has provided us with His armor and commanded us to put it on, so that we may stand against the wiles of Satan.

How Jesus was tempted by the devil and how He resisted the tempter

Before I speak in detail about the armor of God, I want to dwell upon the temptation that our Lord had to face; yes, because Jesus Christ “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15 – NKJV). Reflect upon this: Satan tried to induce Jesus, the Son of God, to sin so that He might not be able to save us! The devil did not want Jesus to die on the cross bearing all our sins in His own body because he knew that in so doing Jesus would condemn sin in the flesh and would rescue many men and women from the hands of the devil through His precious blood. That’s why the devil tried to induce Jesus to sin, because he knew that if Jesus sinned, He would not be able to die for men’s sins and thus men would continue to be under the power of the devil.

Satan tempts us in the same manner he tempted Jesus, thus we must know how Satan tempted Jesus, but above all we must know how Jesus resisted the devil so that we also, following His steps, may resist the devil and put him to flight. Yes, because we must resist the devil without giving place to him and without treating him with familiarity. For this is what the apostles wrote to us: James wrote: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 – NKJV); Paul wrote: “Do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27 – NIV); and Peter wrote: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith ….” (1 Peter 5:8-9 – NKJV).

Let us see now how Jesus was tempted by the devil and how Jesus resisted the devil. After Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan river, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then He was led up by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (it was necessary for Jesus to be tempted in all points as we are tempted so that He might be able to aid us when we are tempted, as it is written: “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” Hebrews 2:18 – NKJV).

● It is written: “And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:2-4). Note that the devil tempted Jesus when He had fasted forty days and forty nights; he came to Jesus when He was hungry, that is to say, when He needed something to eat. Now, in the wilderness there was no bread but there were some stones and the devil tempted Jesus to command stones to become bread. The fact that Satan began to tempt Jesus by saying: “If thou be the Son of God …” (Matthew 4:3), indicates that the devil knew that Jesus Christ was the Son of God but by his words he tried to deceive the Lord into believing that since He claimed to be the Son of God He could, because of His authority, turn stones into bread, and also that if he had seen Jesus turn those stones into bread he would have believed that He was the Son of God. Also when Jesus was crucified, He was tempted in a similar way, for while He was on the cross, those who passed by “blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’” (Matthew 27:39-40 – NKJV), and the scribes and the chief priests said: “If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him” (Matthew 27:42 – NKJV). As you can see, even on the cross Jesus was tempted to rebel against God because his enemies wanted Him to show them that He was the Son of God by coming down from the cross; however, Jesus showed them that He was the Son of God not by coming down from the cross but by rising again because that was the command He had received from His Father. Let us go back to the temptation in the wilderness; the devil tempted Jesus to command those stones to become bread not because he wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle and to believe that Jesus
was the Son of God but because he wanted Jesus to fall into transgression, for he knew that if Jesus had obeyed him He would have disobeyed God; nor because he wanted Jesus to eat some food and be strengthened, for the enemy did not care about the needs of Jesus or His physical weakness ("he was a murderer from the beginning" John 8:44 – NKJV, therefore if the devil could have killed Jesus he would have killed Him on that occasion), but the devil used His desire to eat some bread in order to induce Jesus to do things His own way and not according to the will of God. Jesus resisted the devil by the Word of God, quoting that passage of the Scripture which states that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. By those words Jesus meant not only that it was not yet time for Him to eat some bread but also that in order to come out of that distress He did not have to command stones to become bread because God had decided to deliver Him from that distress in another way. The adversary still tempts in the same way, for he tries to induce us to believe that the end justifies the unlawful and dishonest means. However, let us take heed to ourselves, because the fact that we need something must never lead us to do things our own way or by fraud or by craftiness in order to obtain what we have the right to have. On the contrary, we must make every effort to obtain what we need by observing the divine laws, that is to say, by walking in righteousness and holiness. It is true that in acting in this way we suffer, but it is better to suffer, wrestling according to God’s laws, than to lose our patience and thus fall into temptation (remember that "he sins who hastens with his feet" Proverbs 19:2 - NKJV). Know that in the midst of all our distresses and afflictions, Satan tries to cause us to fall into temptation because he sees our weakness, he sees our need and he ‘advises’ us to come out of our distresses and afflictions by disobeying God; he never advises us to obey God in everything. Jesus, the One who turned the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, could have turned those stones into bread because He was able to perform that miracle; but Jesus did not do what the devil tempted Him to do because even when Jesus was hungry His main food was to do the will of Him who had sent Him and to finish His work. For us also, when we are hungry and thirsty, our favourite food must always be to do the will of God. “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them” (1 Corinthians 6:13 – NKJV), therefore both the bread we eat to live and the stomach we have in our body will pass away. While he who does the will of God will never pass away, as it is written: “He who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17 – NKJV). Therefore, in the midst of all our needs we must see that we do the will of God (fearing God and keeping His commandments), because man shall not live by bread alone. Of course, bread also is given to us by God for our own good, but we must not think that in order to be happy we only need to have the necessary material things, for such a thought is untrue, for Jesus affirmed that those who are happy are not those who are full but those who hear the word of God and keep it, as it is written: “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28 – NKJV). On the contrary, those who think that they can live by bread alone and affirm that they do not need to keep the commandments of God are unhappy and in addition to this they cannot please God because they live according to the flesh, as it is written: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8 – NKJV) even though they have their daily bread and all the necessary material things. Just as after Jesus had resisted Satan and Satan had departed from Him the angels of God came and ministered to Him, so we also, after we have suffered a while, will be helped by the angels of God whom God will send forth to meet all our needs (as it is written that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” Hebrews 1:14 – NKJV); yes, because if in the midst our distresses we submit to God and resist the devil we also will see the powerful deliverances that God grants to the upright men; great deliverances which the Lord performs for His elect by His angels.

● “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:5-7). After Jesus told the devil those words of the law of the Lord,
the devil tried to cause Jesus to sin in the following manner. He took Jesus up into Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down if He was the Son of God, for it was written that God would command His angels to bear Him up in their hands lest He dashed His foot against a stone. Seemingly there was no harm in those words the tempter spoke to Jesus, because the tempter quoted one of the faithful promises made by God, ‘believing’ that if Jesus had thrown down God would have helped Jesus and He would not have hurt Himself. However, all this is just a vain appearance because behind those words of the devil there was a cunning scheme of the devil, who wanted to wreck the plan of salvation made by God before the foundation of the world. Brothers, you must always bear in mind that no matter how the devil acts and no matter what he says, he never wants to do good to us. Furthermore, the devil wants people to blaspheme the name of God, he does not want the name of God to be praised. Do not be deceived by the fact that every now and then he quotes even the Word of God, because his purpose is always a wicked purpose. In that specific temptation against Jesus, the devil quoted a promise of God, however he did not quote all the promise but only part of it, for the devil did not say: “For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12 – NKJV), but he said: “He shall give His angels charge over you and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6 – NKJV). As you can see, the tempter did not quote the following words “to keep you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11). Did the devil forget to quote them? Not at all, rather we affirm that he did not want to quote them. Why did he decide not to quote them? Because every time the devil quotes the Word of God he quotes it incorrectly or omitting some words or adding some words of his; therefore we must know very well the Scripture lest we be deceived by the devil. Also in the Garden of Eden the old serpent did not quote correctly the Word of God when he spoke to the woman, for God had said to the man: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17 – NKJV), while the serpent said to Eve: “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1 – NKJV). In that case, however, the woman did not resist the serpent as she ought to have resisted him, and thus she was deceived and fell into transgression. Jesus knew that His Father had promised to keep Him in all His ways on condition that all His ways were holy and righteous, but He knew also that if He had thrown down from the temple He would not have walked a holy way. Therefore, how could God have kept Him in all His ways if among His ways there had been a wicked way? If Jesus had walked that wicked way He would have sinned and His Father would have got angry with Him. Yes, God commanded His angels to keep His Son in all His ways in the days of His flesh. However, remember that all His ways were righteous. Jesus knew that if He had done what the devil suggested, He would have sinned against God, that’s why He answered the devil saying: “It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Matthew 4:7 - NKJV).

What happened to Jesus teaches us that sometimes the devil wants to induce us to tempt God by quoting the Word of God incorrectly or misinterpreting it; but it teaches also that every time the devil quotes a passage of the Word of God there is always another passage in the Scripture which can be quoted to him in order to put him to flight.

Brothers, we must watch, because the fact that God promised to keep us and to protect us from the evil one must not lead us to think that no matter what we say or what we do or where we go, God will protect us; let us not tempt God, but let us walk in His holy ways and then we will be sure that God will preserve us from all evil.

Let us see now how the children of Israel tempted God in the wilderness because their behaviour helps us to understand what it means to tempt God. After God brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers, the Israelites “sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this,
and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel;
Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation" (Psalm 78:17-22). After the
children of Israel saw God bring streams out of the rock and they quenched their thirst, they
tempted God by asking food for their lust. How did they ask for that food? They asked for that
food, speaking against God, doubting the power of God as well as the faithfulness of God which
they had clearly seen. Did God like their words? No, He didn’t, because that stiff-necked people
tested Him. He was very angry and “gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease
upon them” (Psalm 106:15 – NIV), says the Scripture. Remember that Paul says to the
Corinthians that these things happened to the Israelites as examples, to the intent that we
should not tempt the Lord “as some of them also tempted” (1 Corinthians 10:9 – NKJV).
Therefore, brothers, let us not follow the same example of disobedience; let us not tempt God,
lest we provoke God to wrath and be punished by Him.
Now, through the Word of God I am going to give you a practical example so that you may
understand what it means to tempt God. In Isaiah it is written: “When you walk through the fire,
you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isaiah 43:2 – NKJV). However, if a
believer, tempted by the devil, decides to walk on living coals or through the fire in order to show
off his faith, for sure he will tempt God even though God made the above mentioned promise.
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not go into the burning fiery furnace voluntarily to show
off their faith in God or to become famous, because they were cast into the fiery furnace against
their will. In this case we cannot affirm that they tempted God, for they were cast into the burning
fiery furnace by their enemies because they had obeyed God and so God delivered them. God
fulfilled His promise toward His servants who had put their trust in Him, for they walked through
the fire (King Nebuchadnezzar saw them walking in the midst of the fire) and they were not
burned, as it is written: “Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery
furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high
God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the
midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being
gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of
their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them”
(Daniel 3:26-27). We see in that powerful deliverance worked by God the fulfilment of the above
mentioned words of Isaiah. In the prophet Isaiah we read also the following promise: “When you
pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you”
(Isaiah 43:2 – NKJV), however, it is evident that if a believer, tempted by the devil, decides to
pass through a swollen river in order to show off his faith, he surely will tempt God.
● “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the
kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give You,
if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is
written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil
leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (Matthew 4:8-11). In this
temptation, the tempter showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and told
Jesus that if He fell down and worshiped him he would give all those things to Him. From that
temptation we learn the following things.
The devil, as the Lord Jesus said, “is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44 – NKJV), because
when he said to Jesus: “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been
delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6 – NKJV), he lied. Now, it is true that
the devil is the prince of this world but it is not true at all that he can give the kingdoms of the
world and their glory to whomever he wishes because it is written in the book of Daniel that “the
Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest
of men” (Daniel 4:17 – NKJV), and because when God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah (while
Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon) He said: “I have made the earth, the man and the beast
that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to
whom it seemed proper to Me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of
Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and the beasts of the field I have also given
him to serve him” (Jeremiah 27:5-6 – NKJV); and also because in the book of Psalms David said: “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1 – NKJV). Beloved, it is God, the Almighty, that gives the kingdoms of men and their glory to whomever He wishes and not the devil, that’s what the Scripture states. The devil lied to Jesus, for he promised to give to Jesus what God alone could give to Jesus and - we’d better remember this – what God had already promised to give to Jesus. For the Father had said to the Son: “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psalm 2:8-9 - NKJV), and the Son received this authority from His Father after He made atonement for our sins, in that after Jesus was raised from the dead He said to His disciples: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18 – NKJV), and when Jesus appeared to John on the island called Patmos He said to John: “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ – as I also have received from My Father” (Revelation 2:26-27 – NKJV). Remember that during the millennial reign Jesus Christ will rule over all the nations of the earth.

In order to cause us to fall into temptation, the devil plays on the lust of the eyes, for he tried to cause Jesus to fall into sin showing Him all the kingdoms of the earth; therefore we must watch out lest we be overcome by the lust of the eyes, which is of the world, and as you know the world lies under the sway of the devil.

Jesus did not desire to have an earthly kingdom on the earth in the days of His flesh, even though He was a king, because His kingdom was not of this world. Therefore, we must not desire to become powerful and rich according to the flesh because we are not of the world, just as Jesus was not of the world. We must continually desire to inherit the Kingdom of heaven, and we must not desire to have a high social position or to create an earthly kingdom.

The devil gives nothing freely because he always wants something; when he gives some supernatural powers or some material things to some people, he wants them to worship him. Even though he is not worthy to be worshiped, he induces many people to worship him as God in exchange for supernatural powers and ‘commercial successes’. On the one hand all those who accept to do what he wants them to do manage to become famous and rich, but on the other hand they lose their soul; for this is the purpose of the devil, to send to perdition as many people as possible blinding their minds through worthless idols and distracting them so that they might not seek the Lord. Jesus Christ refused to fall down before the devil and to worship him, and once again He quoted the Scripture to resist the devil. It is written: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him …. He is your praise” (Deuteronomy 10:20,21 - NKJV); therefore God alone is worthy to be worshiped.

From the temptation Jesus had to face and the way He resisted the devil we learn the following things.

First of all, we learn that the devil is a real spiritual being and not a myth as some people think (thus these people in thinking such a thing deceive themselves). The Holy Scripture speaks also of the devil and his works and the destiny which awaits him and we accept all the things it tells us about the devil because we believe that the Word of God is truth and does not lie to us.

Secondly, we learn that the devil uses the lust of the flesh, the pride of life and the lust of the eyes in order to cause the sons of God to fall into transgression, for he tried to induce Jesus to sin through the wish to eat first, then he tempted Him trying to induce Him to exalt Himself by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and in the end he tried to seduce Him showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory in the hope that He might desire to possess them. As I said before, the tempter uses the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life in order to cause us to forsake the Lord; all these things are of the world and since the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one, these things lie under the sway of the devil. That’s why we are commanded not to love the world or the things in the world, because he who loves them, loves what lies under the sway of the devil. The world and the things which are in the world oppose the Word of God and the Holy Spirit for they lie under the
sway of the one who is the enemy of God and thus those believers who love the worldly lusts and the pride of life are enemies of God, as it is written: "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4 – NKJV). Therefore, since we children of God live in this world and we are surrounded by the things of this world, we must watch and pray without ceasing lest we be overcome by the worldly lusts and the pride of life that Satan uses to cause us to fall into his trap. Know that if there is someone who wants us children of God to walk according to the flesh, well, that 'someone' is Satan who knows perfectly that the Word of God says to us: “If you live according to the flesh you will die” (Romans 8:13 – NKJV), and thus he tries to deceive us by his craftiness saying to us the same thing he said to Eve, that is, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4 – NKJV). He tries, by the outward beauty of the pleasures of life, riches, corrupted women, the fashion of this age, philosophy, modern music and many other things, to induce us to love them and to be overcome by them, because he knows that once a believer has been deceived and overcome by these evil lusts, he ceases to keep the commandments of God and to bear fruit to the glory of God, and thus he dies spiritually.

But we are not ignorant of his devices and we know how to resist him when he attacks us because Jesus left us an example. We must use the Word of God to resist the devil, for Jesus answered the devil quoting the Scripture. Brothers, know that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35 – NKJV), and that when we resist the tempter quoting the Scripture he cannot break the Word of God and he cannot demonstrate that it is false and thus he is forced to leave us.

However, there is another thing that must be said: when we answer the devil we must answer him in the right way because he is still one of the dignitaries, in that he is the prince of this world. When Jesus answered the devil, He said to him: “Get thee hence, Satan” (Matthew 4:10). Now Satan means ‘adversary’, and Jesus called him by name. Jesus did not ridicule or insult him, even though He knew the character and the works of the devil. Therefore, we are not allowed to make fun of the devil calling him ‘slewfoot’ or ‘monkey of God’ and so on, nor are we allowed to insult him. Unfortunately, some preachers whose minds are corrupt take pleasure in ridiculing the devil and insulting him. Let us not follow their bad examples, rather let us follow the example Jesus left us.

The armor of God

We believers don’t have of ourselves any efficacious weapons by which we can resist the devil, we are fully aware of this because we know that in us (that is, in our flesh) nothing good dwells. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ because in His goodness and wisdom He has provided us with a complete and mighty armor. It is complete because it protects believers from every attack of the devil and so it does not allow the devil to open a breach in them; it is mighty because it is so powerful that through it we are able to resist the devil, to pull down his strongholds and to cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

The armor of God helps us both to defend ourselves and to attack our enemies, therefore we will do well to put it on in order to live a victorious life on the earth, while we wait for the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said that we must put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The apostle said ‘in the evil day’ because he knew that the day on which the devil tries to cause us to fall into temptation is an evil day.

Therefore, bearing in mind the reason why we need to put on the armor of God, let us examine the weapons that God has brought out of His armory to equip His soldiers, who are in this world of darkness.
“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth” (Ephesians 6:14). As good soldiers of the Lord we must gird our waist with truth, which means that we must speak truthfully and we must not love nor practice falsehood, for it is written: “Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25 – NKJV). Beloved, speak the truth; lie gives a temporary and weak shelter to those who have decided to make lie their city of refuge and fortress, because God at His appointed time destroys their fortress in a moment and confounds them to show them that He cannot be mocked by anybody. Jesus said that “there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2 – NKJV), thus even those lies which are told in order to cover evil actions, hypocrisy and fraud, in due season will be revealed by God. I will cite an incident happened to Abraham to show that even though one hides the truth cunningly, in due season it will be known. It is written: “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way” (Genesis 12:10-19). Now, Abraham had married Sarai, who was the daughter of his father but not the daughter of his mother, therefore it was true that Sarai was his sister but it was also true that she was her wife. When Abraham was about to enter the land of Egypt, he was afraid for he thought that the Egyptians, seeing the beauty of Sarai, would kill him and take away his wife, so he told his wife to say that she was his sister and he was her brother so that he might live. Obviously, when Pharaoh heard Abraham say that Sarai was his sister he took her to be his wife because he believed the words of Abraham. However, the fact that Pharaoh took Sarai to be his wife displeased the Lord, and He plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues to force him to give Sarai back to Abraham. We don't know how Pharaoh came to know that Sarai was the wife of Abraham, one thing is sure, that is, he came to know it. And when he knew that Sarai was the wife of Abraham he rebuked Abraham for he had said to him that she was his sister and not his wife. As you can see, what Abraham tried to hide from Pharaoh could not be kept secret for a long time because within a short time God brought the truth to light.

The following examples show that God confounds and punishes those who lie.

► Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, lied to Elisha, for when Elisha asked him: “Where did you go, Gehazi?” (2 Kings 5:25 – NKJV), Gehazi answered: “Your servant did not go anywhere” (2 Kings 5:25 – NKJV), while a short time before Gehazi, driven by his covetousness, had hurried after Naaman and had asked him for a talent of silver and two changes of garments and stored them away in the house. Elisha came to know that Gehazi had lied to him because God revealed to him what Gehazi had done, and he foretold him the judgement of God upon him saying: “Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever” (2 Kings 5:27 – NKJV). In this case Gehazi told a lie to cover an evil deed, but God confounded him through a revelation and struck him with leprosy.

► Ananias, one of the early Christians, lied to the apostles of the Lord and God put him to death. It is written: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a
possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things" (Acts 5:1-5). Ananias was a believer and he lied to the apostles about that sum of money he had laid at the apostle's feet after he had sold a possession, and God put him to death because he had lied to God. Note that in this case also, a man of God (an apostle and not a prophet as in the above mentioned incident) came to know in a supernatural way that a person had told a lie.

► The false prophets who were in the midst of the people of Israel practiced falsehood, for they said to those who walked according to the stubbornness of their evil heart: "The Lord has said: You shall have peace" (Jeremiah 23:17 – NKJV), while God had promised no peace to them. God heard all the lies that those prophets told and He said that He would uncover their lies before those to whom they had prophesied peace. For He said to Ezekiel: "Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!', when there is no peace – and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar – say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down. Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?" (Ezekiel 13:10-12 – NKJV) – the vain visions those prophets had told were the untempered mortar -. And what God had foretold came to pass while the army of the Chaldeans was besieging Jerusalem and was about to conquer it, for the Scripture says that the prophet Jeremiah said to king Zedekiah, who had believed the lies of those prophets: “Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?” (Jeremiah 37:19 – NKJV). As you can see, those prophets who told lies to the people were put to shame by God in that God did not fulfill their false predictions. However, God not only put them to shame, but He also punished them. For instance, the Scripture says that God put to death the prophet Hananiah for he had persuaded the people to trust in lies (Jeremiah 28:1-17).

You must always bear in mind that the father of lies is the devil, therefore every lie comes from the devil and not from God; and we as believers must not tell lies. If we tell lies, we will give place to the devil, and we will make God angry and surely He will punish us and put us to shame. Lie is lie, and a lie which is told to uphold the truth is always a lie, even though it is told to 'defend and honor' the Gospel. Know this, that the Gospel does not need any lie in order to be defended and to be believed. I say this because I know that there are some preachers who urge some believers to testify that they have been healed by the Lord while they are still sick; they behave in this way to show that Jesus still heals; however sooner or later what they have testified will prove to be a lie. Many believers who had testified before many people that God had healed them of a certain sickness, after a short time died of that very sickness. Unfortunately, these scandals happens in the midst of the brotherhood, and because of these lies the doctrine of God and the way of truth are blasphemed among those who are outside. Why does this happen? Because since the true miracles and the true healings are missing, some preachers, in order to draw large crowds of people to their meetings, use lies in order to arouse great interest. However, there is another horrible thing which happens in the midst of the people of God: some believers slander other believers so that they may be destroyed morally and may have a bad testimony among the Church. To spread a false accusation against someone means to spread a groundless charge thus an invented charge. Today many believers take pleasure in slandering their neighbour, and they wilfully forget that "whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him" (Proverbs 26:27 – NKJV).

Brothers, first of all I remind you that it is written: “Do not spread false reports” (Exodus 23:1 – NIV), and secondly that in order to receive an accusation against someone the accusation must be confirmed by two or three witnesses (trustworthy witnesses and not false ones) for one
witness is not enough. Therefore if you hear an accusation against Tom wait for that accusation to be confirmed or investigate in order to find out whether that accusation is true. I tell you these things because some believers spread false accusations in order to ruin their neighbour. I say it again: for the sake of truth, do not spread false accusations and do not give heed to false lips. Beloved, those who speak the truth are secure as a young lion and are not afraid to be put to shame because truth does not confound those who love it and speak it. To face our enemies we must tell the truth, lest we be put to shame in their presence; yes, because if a child of God resorts to a lie, which is nothing but a weapon of the enemy whom we fight, he will surely be put to shame before the enemy, who will throw the lie into his face. What I have learned over the years is that it is better to confess our trespasses to one another telling the truth than to cover our transgressions telling lies.

Righteousness

“Having on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14). We believers must pursue righteousness because it is written: “Seek righteousness” (Zephaniah 2:3 – NKJV). Let us see now how we must seek the righteousness of God.

We as sons of God must show no favouritism because James says: “If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9 – NKJV). Therefore we must not consider white people superior to black people or to yellow or red people; we must not consider the rich more important than the poor, nor the wise after the flesh (those who have a degree or are holder of a diploma) superior to those who are illiterate or have not studied much at school. Furthermore, since many people tend to justify or tolerate the evil actions committed by their friends or loved ones while they hate and condemn the evil actions committed by their enemies, we must not behave like them. God shows no partiality and we as sons of God must imitate Him. It is not easy, however, it is not impossible either. May God help us to imitate Him, so that we may conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

In addition to this, we must not cheat people out of their goods and we must heed the wisdom of God, which says: “Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice” (Proverbs 16:8 – NKJV). According to what the Scripture teaches, we must not practice usury or lend money on interest to our brethren, as it is written: “You shall not charge interest to your brother – interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest” (Deuteronomy 23:19 – NKJV).

We must not forge scales nor do any injustice in measurement of length, weight or volume, for it is written: “You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin ....” (Leviticus 19:35-36 – NKJV). The Scripture teaches that those who think that it is better to have vast revenues without justice (that is, by cheating their neighbour) than to have a little with righteousness are fool people who receive the due penalty for their injustice.

In the book of the prophet Amos we read about the injustices which the Israelites did in those days, and we can read also that God rebuked them and foretold them that if they did not turn from their evil ways He would punish them. The children of Israel laid righteousness to rest in the earth, for they oppressed the humble, they afflicted the just and took bribes, they trod down the poor and took grain taxes from him; they said: “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (Amos 8:5-6) However, even though they conducted themselves in that abominable way, they went to the house of the Lord to offer Him incense, burnt offerings and sacrifices; and they gathered together and sang songs to God accompanied by the music of their stringed instruments. But God did not like the worship of those rebels and said to them: “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the
noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as
waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:21-24). Brothers, Wisdom says that “to
do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Proverbs 21:3 –
NKJV), therefore let us not think that even if we refuse to seek righteousness our worship will be
acceptable to God, lest we deceive ourselves and be punished by God as those Israelites, who
refused to heed the prophet Amos, were punished. God foretold the Israelites the punishments
He would inflict on them, and among other things He said to them: “Shall not the land tremble for
this, and every one moum that dwellieth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall
be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. …. And I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness
upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a
bitter day” (Amos 8:8,10). And that is exactly what happened, for God sent a strong earthquake
first and then He sent the Assyrian army against Israel, which destroyed the land of Israel and
carried away captive the Israelites. The Divine longsuffering waited for many years, then God
poured out His fury on those Israelites who hated righteousness. Brothers, God does not tolerate
unrighteousness and He still pours out His fury on those who hate righteousness for He does not
change; so let us search and examine our ways carefully.

If any of us has a dispute with another, he must take it before the saints for judgement and not
before the ungodly. For I remind you that in the Church of Corinth there were some disputes and
Paul rebuked those who, having a matter against others, went to law before the unrighteous.
Here is how Paul rebuked them: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law
before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the
world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?
Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then
ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in
the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one
that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that
before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law
one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be
defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the
unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Corinthians 6:1-9) We know that going to
law against a brother before the unrighteous is wrong and that those who act in this way conduct
themselves unrighteously. When a brother has a dispute with another brother about the things of
this life, the dispute must be judged by the saints and not by the unrighteous. If a believer goes
to law against another brother before the unbelievers he wrongs his brother. Brothers, keep in
mind that one day we will judge the world for it is written in the Psalms: “Let the saints be joyful
in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a
twoedged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon
the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon
them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints” (Psalm 149:5-9). Therefore, when we
need to judge things of this life we must judge them without the help of those who do not know
God. We will judge also the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own
abode to fomite with the daughters of men, whom God has reserved in everlasting chains
under darkness for the judgement of the great day. Therefore, since we have the power and the
wisdom to judge in justice the disputes between believers, for the sake of righteousness we
must not go to law against other brothers before the unbelievers.

We must share our material things with those who are in need, as it is written: “But do not forget
to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16 – NKJV).
We must do this so that there may be equality, as it is written: “He who gathered much had
nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack” (2 Corinthians 8:15 – NKJV). Jesus left
us an example, for though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His
poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).
Remember that “righteousness guards him whose way is blameless” (Proverbs 13:6 – NKJV), just as the breastplate protects a soldier, and also that God “loves the righteous” (Psalm 146:8 - NKJV)

The preparation of the Gospel of peace

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). We, as it is fitting for the saints, must always be ready to do every good work and furthermore we must be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear, having a good conscience (1 Peter 3:15-16). According to the Wisdom of God, there are some people whose feet “are swift in running to evil” (Proverbs 6:18 – NKJV), that is, who are ready to do evil things, and these people are an abomination to God. On the contrary, a good soldier of Jesus Christ is always ready to do good because his feet are fitted “with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15 – NIV). He is not unprepared, rather he is prepared to do any good work and to evangelize. He does not say to his neighbour: ‘I will help you another time, not now’ nor does he say to him: ‘At the moment I don’t know how to answer your question about my hope’.

Faith

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16). “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1 – NIV), and every believer has a measure of faith God has given him. Now, faith is compared to the shield that the roman soldier used to protect himself from the arrows of the enemy; and this comparison is appropriate because for us faith in God is indeed the shield with which we can extinguish all the fiery arrows of the devil. Yes, because our adversary shoots fiery arrows at us which we can quench only by the shield of faith. One of the fiery darts of the devil is doubt; doubt seems to be an insignificant thing, yet anyone who doubts in his heart cannot see the fulfillment of the faithful promises of God in his life. If we doubt, we will receive nothing from God, while if we believe we will see the fullfilment of God’s promises in our life. In the midst of our distresses, in the midst of our various tribulations through which our faith is tested, we must trust in God and in His Word, then the glory of God will be seen upon us. Now, let us see some examples of men who, by the shield of faith, obtained what was promised to them and quenched the fiery darts of the devil.

► God promised Abraham that his wife would give birth to a child (Genesis 17:19; 18:10) and He would multiply his descendants as the stars of the heaven. The Scripture says: “And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Romans 4:19-21 – NKJV).

As you can see, Abraham was old and even though he was not able to beget a child, he did not doubt the faithfulness of God nor His power. Of course, his faith was tested, but he obtained what God had promised to him because he firmly believed that God would cause Sarah to conceive and bear a child, even though Sarah’s womb was dead. What happened to Abraham teaches us that nothing is too hard for the Lord: He can do whatever He has promised; our God can deliver us from any distress and meet all our needs; however on our part we must trust in Him with all our heart.

► The Scripture says that king Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. He sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which king Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Those people came to the dedication of the image, and when the herald of the king commanded all the nations to fall down and worship the gold image, all the people – except
Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego - fell down and worshiped it. So when the king came to know that those men had not obeyed his order, he gave command to bring them before him. So they brought those men before him. Nebuchadnezzar said to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Daniel 3:14-15), and they answered and said to the king: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Daniel 3:16-17). So they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. But through faith they “quenched the violence of fire” (Hebrews 11:34 – NKJV), and they survived the burning fiery furnace without a burn. This is another biblical example which shows that through faith we can face any distress, being sure that the deliverance of the Lord is at hand. In the midst of a distress, against all hope, the righteous in hope believes; he sees that all circumstances are contrary to him and he knows that no man can deliver him from his trouble for the help of man is useless, however he has the promises of God in which he trusts with all his heart and he calls on God so that He may deliver him. And God, in His faithfulness, delivers him and shows everybody that He is indeed “a God of deliverances” (Psalm 68:20 - ASV) and that he who puts his trust in God will not be put to shame.

Let us see now how Daniel and his three companions through faith “escaped the edge of the sword” (Hebrews 11:34 – NIV). The Scripture says: “And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation thereof. The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it. The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof. The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requirith, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel
answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter. Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation. Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart. Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then
Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king’ (Daniel 2:1-49).

As you can see, not only did Daniel believe that God would reveal him that secret, but he also declared it with his mouth, as it is written that “Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation” (Daniel 2:16 – NKJV). Daniel also had the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke” (2 Corinthians 4:13 – NKJV), for he believed and he spoke even before God made known to him that secret. From the way Daniel spoke to king Nebuchadnezzar, we learn what the Scripture means when it says that “faith is being sure of what we hope for” (Hebrews 11:1 – NIV). After Daniel spoke to the king, he went to his house and made known the decision to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning that secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon (Daniel 2:17-18). They prayed to God and God revealed the secret to Daniel. So Daniel went to Arioch, who brought Daniel before the king, and Daniel told the king the dream and its interpretation, and thus Daniel and his companions and all the wise men of Babylon were not put to death.

Our God is a God who reveals secrets; we firmly believe and proclaim that. Any child of God can call to Him concerning a secret, for He says: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3 – NKJV). Beloved, what do you need to know about the will of God for you? Do you want to know the ministry God wants you to fulfil? Do you want to know where to go to preach the Gospel? Do you want to know the person you must marry or some other things? There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, call upon Him and you will receive the revelation you need. However, call upon Him in faith, with no doubting, otherwise you will receive nothing from the Lord. I myself have called upon God several times concerning certain things about the will of God for me and God has answered my prayers; He has not disappointed me, because He is faithful.

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Here is what happened in the days of king Hezekiah: “After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself. And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem, (but he himself laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him;) unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem? Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his
people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah. He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven” (2 Chronicles 32:1-20). Here is the prayer of Hezekiah: “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only” (Isaiah 37:16-20). The Lord answered the prayer of Hezekiah, for it is written: “And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth” (2 Chronicles 32:21-23).

In this case also, a man experienced a great deliverance through his faith; simply because he trusted in God with all his heart. We can experience powerful deliverances through the faith God has given us, I have said ‘we can’ because we have to exercise faith in the midst of our trouble in order to see God perform mighty things for us. A soldier can have a shield, however, the fact still remains that if he does not use his shield when the enemy shoots his arrows at him that shield will be useless to him. Likewise, if we prefer to trust in man we cannot affirm that we are fighting the devil with the shield of faith because we refuse to put our trust in God; we can say with our mouth that we trust in God, but the fact is that men, seeing our behaviour which attests the opposite, will not affirm that we are of those who trust in God with all their heart. If we proclaim that we trust in God, we must also show through our life that we trust in God; the children of this age hear many insincere words from many people, so let us see that we speak sincere words, so that they might not affirm that we are of those who speak insincere words.

►Another example of faith, which in my opinion is a great example of faith, is that of the woman who had a flow of blood whom was healed of that affliction through her faith in the Lord after twelve years of sufferings. It is written: “And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Mark 5:25-34).
In this case, a woman who was in need of healing and could not be helped by any physician, put her trust in the Lord and through her faith she obtained what she desired. That woman did not doubt, not even for a moment; she had heard about Jesus and His mighty healings and she was convinced that if only she might touch His clothes she would be healed. She came behind Jesus in the crowd and touched His garment and she was healed at once; in this case, therefore, the shield of faith turned out to be a powerful weapon against sickness. Faith in the Lord has always been an invincible weapon, which has always quenched the fiery darts of the devil, so that when a person takes the shield of faith the devil will not manage to prevent him from receiving the fulfillment of the promises of God.

►The greatest example of faith we find in the Scripture is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture says: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2). In the book of the prophet Isaiah it is written: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:10-11).

Now, the Lord knew that in order to justify many He had to offer Himself for our iniquities first, therefore He had to suffer first and then to rise again (as Paul says that Christ “was raised because of our justification” – Romans 4:25 NKJV). By faith Jesus, knowing this beforehand, that is to say, knowing that through His sufferings many would be brought to glory (that was the joy that was set before Him), endured the cross despising the shame. Our Lord did not draw back in the face of death, but He faced it by faith, being sure that His Father would not leave His soul in Hades and would not allow Him to see corruption. Remember that even Jesus had to put His trust in God in order to fulfill the will of the Father, and that if we rejoice in the Lord for we have been set free from our sins we owe our great joy to the unshakeable faith the Son of God, in the days of His flesh, had in God His Father. God is a great God, brothers, when you are in a distress have faith in Him; do not give place to doubt, which the devil tries to put in your mind, for it would destroy you.

To show you that if we doubt, the promises of God will turn out to be useless, I remind you of an incident which happened on the sea of Galilee in the days of Jesus. It is written: “But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:24-31). As you can see, the Lord Jesus commanded Peter to come to Him on the water, as He said to Peter: “Come” (Matthew 14:29), and so Peter came down out of the boat and walked on the water to go to Jesus. But what happened a few moments later? It happened that Peter, seeing that the wind was boisterous, was afraid and that fear led him to doubt the command of Christ, and because of his doubt he began to sink and he cried out to the Lord ‘Save me!’ As you can see, when Jesus said to Peter “Come!”, Peter believed and by his faith he walked on the water, but a few moments later he doubted and began to sink. The wind was blowing even when he began to walk on the water, therefore the fact that at a certain point he began to sink indicates that he did not continue in faith. From this incident happened to Peter we learn that we must always hold the shield of faith in our hands so that we may use it against our enemies when they try to make
us doubt the promises of God through fear. Yes, because it is fear that leads us to doubt the faithfulness and the power of God; the fear of being unsuccessful, the fear of being put to shame or the fear of being left alone against all. Do you remember the Israelites in the wilderness? Was it not because of the fear of the giants that they rebelled against God and did not have faith in His name and thus they could not inherit the promised land? Remember these incidents continually because they teach us that the devil seeks to stir up doubt in our heart in order to make void our confidence in God.

Beloved, when you are in trouble, stand firm in the faith (do not worry if everybody will forsake you) and you will experience the great deliverances of God, that He will perform to the glory of His name; yes, because God delivers you out of all your distresses so that you may glorify His name, as it is written: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15 – NKJV).

The hope of salvation

“And take the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:17). Since a soldier puts the helmet on his head, and Paul says that we must put on “as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8 – NKJV), we must arm ourselves with this thought: we are saved by hope (Romans 8:24). Now, we have been saved from our sins and we have eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ, however the fact still remains that we have not yet obtained “the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:24 – NKJV). That’s why we affirm that we are waiting for what Paul calls “the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:14 - NKJV. The IBRV reads ‘la piena redenzione’ that is, ‘the full redemption’), which God will manifest when Jesus is revealed from heaven. That’s why we sons of God “groan inwardly” (Romans 8:23 – NIV) while we are in this tent (our body), that is, our earthly house, because we wish “to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:4 – NIV). And we know that our wish will be fulfilled at the resurrection of the righteous, that is, when at the trumpet of God the dead in Christ rise and the saints who are alive and remain are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. That is the day of our salvation, which is drawing near and for which we are eagerly waiting. When we speak of our salvation, we speak of something we do not yet see, for it is written: “Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees” (Romans 8:24 - NKJV), however, by the faith that God gave to us, which “is being sure of what we hope for” (Hebrews 11:1 – NIV), and through the patience produced by our afflictions and through the comfort of Scriptures, we are waiting for what we do not see, being sure that the Lord Jesus will save us from the wrath to come when he comes, in that day, with His mighty angels to take us and bring us to heaven. In order to enter heaven with a body, we must have an immortal and incorruptible body for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50 – NKJV), and we will obtain it in that day, for this is the purpose of God. Therefore let us keep waiting for the return of the Lord because for sure, at the time set by God, He will be revealed from heaven “to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28 – NIV) and He will give us a glorious and mighty body, with which we will be able to inherit the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of God

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). The Word of God is called “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17) because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, as Peter says: “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21 - NIV); Paul confirms this when he says: “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16 – NIV).

You must understand that through this sword we frighten our enemies because by it we pull down their strongholds, that is to say, all the arguments which exalt themselves against the
knowledge of God. It is by the Word of God that we refute all the false doctrines that the devil has introduced into the world and even into the Church; we are glad to see that the devil is unable to overcome us who use this mighty sword against him. The devil is defeated when he tries to induce us to accept doctrines which are contrary to the Scripture for the Scripture cannot be broken; the devil opposes the Scripture but he does not manage to destroy it.

Brothers, we need to know the Holy Scriptures in order to fight efficaciously against our enemies, for they try by their craftiness to pass off false doctrines as true doctrines, and to pass off true doctrines as false doctrines. Therefore we have to draw the sword of the Spirit and destroy their arguments lest we be deceived and led astray from the truth. We can see a clear demonstration of the efficacy of the Word of God in the temptation that the Lord had to face, because three times Jesus Christ answered the devil saying: "It is written" (Matthew 4:4,7,10). Jesus quoted the law in order to defend Himself against the attacks of Satan; He did not try to show the devil that he was wrong by words of human wisdom, but He quoted the Word of God. This teaches us that we must resist the devil with the unadulterated Word of God, lest he take advantage of us. I have said 'with the unadulterated Word of God' because the example of Eve in the Garden of Eden teaches us that it is no good resisting the devil with the Word of God mixed with lies. When the serpent said to Eve: “Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1 – NKJV), the woman said to the serpent: “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Genesis 3:2-3 – NKJV). The woman told the serpent some words that God had not said to the man, for God had not commanded the man, ‘Don’t touch the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’, but He had commanded him not to eat of that tree, while the woman told the serpent that God had also commanded them not to touch it. Even the fact that the woman said to the serpent: ‘Lest you die” (Genesis 3:3) rather than: “You shall surely die” shows us that the woman made the warning of the Lord weaker.

The words of God are powerful and pure, but if we adapt them in order not to offend people we will deprive them of their power and purity, thus we must see that we quote the words of God just as they are written without trying to soften what both the flesh and the rebels do not like because it is hard to accept. Considering those specific temptations Jesus had to face, we can see that the law of Moses also is a powerful weapon if one uses it lawfully, and that reminds us of what Paul wrote to the Romans: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31 – NKJV), and of what he wrote to Timothy: “The law is good if one uses it lawfully” (1 Timothy 1:8 – NKJV).

I say this to affirm that the law is the Word of God, just as the words of Jesus and the words of the apostles are the Word of God, and we must not despise the law rather we must know it in order to destroy all the things which are contrary to the sound doctrine. There are many men of corrupt minds and disapproved concerning the faith who affirm that the commandments God gave to Moses are outdated.

When I say ‘the commandments God gave to Moses’ I do not refer to the commandments concerning Jewish feasts or the sabbath day or circumcision or foods, but to the commandments which condemn unbelief, adultery, fraud, lying, the sins against nature, blasphemy, witchcraft (no matter if it is called white or black magic), and many other sins, which they call useful and good things. Brothers, take the word of truth and proclaim it to refute the perverse doctrines taught by those who are outside; defend the Gospel showing from the law and the prophets that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the One of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...” (Colossians 3:16 – NKJV), let it be fixed upon your lips, so that you may exhort and refute those who oppose the truth. Keep it within you and edify the Church through it; yes, because you also can edify the Church, but you can edify the Church through the truth and not through the lies. The devil uses lies to destroy the saints, but we resist him with the truth to pull down his strongholds and to edify, to teach, to correct and to comfort the redeemed of the Lord.
Prayer

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:18-20). According to these words, both the prayer made with the Spirit and the prayer made with the understanding are efficacious weapons against our enemies. Prayer is a weapon, this is why we say that we wrestle in prayer for the saints, for we are aware that when we pray for them we are fighting on their behalf. When we pray to God for our brothers we ask God to do, in one way or another, always good to the saints; while the devil does not want the saints to be helped and blessed by God.

Beloved, do not underestimate prayer because through prayer the saints are helped, comforted, corrected and blessed by the Lord. In order to realize that you also, in your room, secretly, can fight the good fight, consider the fact that with your prayers you can do good to some brothers whom you don’t know or who are not present with you in your room. You must understand that the good fight is fought not only by those who proclaim the way of salvation to the unbelievers in the remote places of the earth, or by those who preach the Word in the place of worship, but also by those who pray earnestly for all the saints; be among them for the Lord’s sake and the sake of His people. Know this, that we show love toward the brothers by praying for them.

Now I want to dwell upon the things Paul exhorted the saints to ask of God. Paul wished to preach the Gospel with all boldness and was convinced that the saints, through their prayers, could help him to preach with boldness. We too are convinced that we need your prayers in order to preach the Word as we ought to preach it, that is, with all boldness. Yes, because this is the way the Gospel must be preached. The Gospel must not be preached with words of human wisdom nor with excellence of speech, lest the Word of God be emptied of its power. Yes, the Word is emptied of its power when it is preached with words of human wisdom or with excellence of speech because Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Corinthians 1:17 – NIV). Therefore the devil makes every effort to make believers preach the word of Christ with words of human wisdom. He has deceived many preachers into introducing into their preaching those things which empty the cross of its power, and these things are the words of human wisdom and the excellence of speech. When I speak of excellence of speech I refer to all those verbs and words whose meaning is unknown to most people and which are used in their speeches by politicians, scientists, economists, professors, philosophers, and unfortunately even by some of those who preach the Word, and that grieves me because in this way the cross of Christ is emptied of its power. So that you may understand how the Gospel ought to be preached, read how Christ evangelized and how the apostles preached (in the book of the Acts of the apostles are recorded some sermons preached by Peter and Paul to unbelieving people). After reading the sermons of the apostles one cannot but conclude that today many preachers don’t preach the Word with the same boldness and seriousness which characterized the apostles’ sermons. Many preach the Gospel with jokes and quips, mixing the sacred with the profane; it grieves me to see that some false prophets are more serious than these preachers of the Gospel. It is a shame and a scandal to see preachers entertaining the hearers with jokes and quips, and they even laugh their head off when they tell those things which do not edify at all! In addition to this, many deliver long speeches without saying with all boldness what they ought to say because they stuff their speeches with their beloved words of human wisdom, and that also grieves me. God said to Jerusalem: “Your choice wine is diluted with water” (Isaiah 1:22 – NIV), and we know that if wine is diluted with water it loses its original flavour and the more water you put in wine the less strong wine becomes. Is it not what we see? Is it not true that very often the Word of God is preached with words of human wisdom rather than with the Spirit? Is it not true that some sermons are almost tasteless because they are stuffed with improper things? The Word these people preach is less powerful
than the Word which was preached by the apostles, sometimes it is unrecognizable because they have stuffed it with words of human wisdom, for they prefer form to substance and replace substance with form. Almost all soften what we must not soften and almost all speak only of smooth things so that the listeners may not be shaken, so that the hearers may not weep and cry out: What must I do to be saved? The message of the Gospel which is being preached is much different from the message of the Gospel which was preached by the apostles also because many have taken away some strong expressions from their sermons and they have softened them (also with the aid of some Biblical translators). It is a rare thing to hear preachers speak of Christ and of Him crucified, and of His glorious resurrection, the way the apostles spoke of Christ, of His crucifixion and of His resurrection, because unfortunately in the midst of the people of God many have decided to preach the Gospel in a way that does not edify and which is clearly different from the way of preaching of the apostles. On the other hand, in order to grant the wish of most people, who want to hear smooth things and not things which arouse fear and terror, a preacher must preach in this way! From what we see, we conclude that sinners must feel at their ease in the congregation of the righteous, or, as some say, they must feel at home; the wicked should not be seized with fear, the wicked should not be afraid of the eternal fire nor should they feel so much sinful in the sight of our God!! Some preachers even exhort the saints to clap their hands in order to welcome the wicked who are in their midst warmly! But there is something else which must be said. These preachers speak of sin their own way, for they induce the hearers not to consider sin a thing so much serious or so much burdensome for those who are slaves of it. They often say to the wicked: 'Come to Jesus and He will solve all your problems and you will find in Him a great friend!', but they never say to them: "Turn, turn from your evil ways!" (Ezekiel 33:11 – NKJV) or: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40 – NIV) or: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15 – NKJV). The reason is that they do not want to appear 'too serious' or 'exaggerated' or 'out-of-date' (that's how are called those who exhort sinners to repent) to most people, and they are afraid of making sinners feel in danger and guilty. I ask you: ‘How should sinners feel?’ Should they feel only persons full of troubles and sorrows because they do not heed the voice of God? Or should they feel also persons slaves of sin and of Satan, who can be set free by the Lord if they repent and believe in Jesus Christ? Repentance?!! The children of this age must not repent of any sin because they are holy, upright and blameless!! They are at most people with many problems, but not people with many sins!!! The word ‘repentance’ is an obsolete word. The verb ‘to repent’ was so much used by both Jesus and the apostles, while today it is so much neglected by many preachers because they are afraid to frighten sinners. According to some preachers, after all sinners should not come to the conclusion that if they repent they will inherit eternal life but if they refuse to repent they will be tormented for ever and ever, for they think that they can win sinners to Christ without speaking to them of repentance. How can they think such a thing when we know that Jesus said: “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3 – NKJV), and the Scripture says that if the wicked does not repent, God will sharpen His sword and will bend and string His bow (Psalm 7:12)?

Beloved, we must not flatter sinners, lest we spread a net for their feet and we deceive them; they are on the way which leads to the unquenchable fire, they are not on the way which leads to the paradise of God. We must urge them to forsake the way on which they are and we must make every effort to make them feel insecure on that way. I am convinced that it is necessary for every preacher to return to preach repentance from dead works with all boldness, and that he must not be afraid of anybody and anything. What do we want sinners to think? Do we want them to think that to join us means to change religion or just to change some rites? Listen, we must want them to think that to join us means to join the people of God, which He purchased with His own blood, and that they can join us only by repenting of their dead works and believing on our Lord Jesus Christ. It is time to raise our voice and to preach repentance in order to see people really turn to the Lord. Jude tells all of us to snatch them from the fire and to save them (Jude 23), however, some believers do not want to snatch sinners from the fire because they want them to laugh and to be at their ease in the congregation of the righteous. They don't want
sinners to hear that if they don’t repent they will go to hell, they do not want to see sinners weep and become sad in hearing of the place where they will go after death if they don’t repent. On the other hand, the saying of many is ‘the more, the better!’ because they only think of swelling their own denomination so that it may appear big and more and more prestigious to the society and to the other denominations; the more they are and the more secure and powerful they feel, they don’t care if those who go to listen to them don’t repent because what matters is having the place of worship full of people on Sunday so that the name of their denomination may be honoured. Consider this: these people think that it is better not to speak of repentance in order to collect the offerings of the rebels, than to speak of repentance and see the offerings decrease. What shall we say then about the lake which burns with fire and brimstone? We hear about it so rarely that it seems that it does not exist. Yet the fire is still burning in that place; yet it was prepared by the Lord for the devil and his angels and all those who refuse to obey the Gospel will be cast into it in the day of judgment. Why do many preachers avoid speaking about it then? Brothers, all those who preach the Gospel must preach it with the Spirit, with power, and with deep conviction so that sinners may repent of their sins and believe in the Gospel; therefore pray to God for His servants so that He may enable them to preach with great boldness.

I want to say another thing; if the apostles were still alive, they would preach as they preached in the first century after Christ, they would not change their way of speaking to please their listeners or some denominations. Some preachers, in order to win the support of some denominations, do not declare any longer the whole counsel of God, but they declare only a little part of it, lest they annoy those who refuse to accept the rest of it. As things are, let us make friends with sinners, drunkards, sodomites, thieves, fornicators, saying to them just these words: ‘Jesus loved you and gave Himself for you also’, and let us not say to them: ‘Repent of your dead works, or else you will be cast into the everlasting fire!’ because these words might annoy them!!! Far be it from us to do such a thing, for we want to please God rather than men! Paul said to the Galatians: “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10 – NKJV), therefore those who seek to please God do not shun to declare the whole counsel of God for they do not care about the approval of men at all; instead, those who shun to declare the whole counsel of God show that for them the approval of men is more important than the approval of God and they are greatly mistaken.

John the Baptist rebuked Herod the tetrarch concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, (and for all the evils which Herod had done), for John said to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her” (Matthew 14:4 – NKJV). John did not say to Herod: ‘Herod, listen, it is lawful for you to have Herodias if she left her husband for he was unfaithful to her!’ or: ‘It is lawful for you to have her if Herodias and Philip decided to divorce by mutual consent!’, but he said to Herod: ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18 – NKJV), and that’s that. That’s why Herodias hated John and wanted to kill him. Of course, if John had sought to please men or Herod who lived in adultery, he would not have rebuked Herod in that way.

If Jesus had sought to please men, He would not have called God His Father nor would He have rebuked the scribes and the Pharisees for all their wickedness and hypocrisy. The apostle Paul knew that the Greek philosophers did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, yet when at Athens in the Areopagus he had an opportunity to speak he did not try to avoid speaking of the resurrection of the dead for fear of the reaction of the Athenians and the foreigners who were hearing him.

When Paul appeared before Felix the governor, he spoke with boldness about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, and Felix was afraid and sent him away. Paul did not flatter Felix because Paul was not afraid to become an enemy of Felix or to spend more time in prison. At Caesarea, in the auditorium when Paul appeared before king Agrippa and Bernice and the commanders and the prominent men of the city, Paul told them with all boldness the story of his conversion, how he turned to the Lord and how the Lord Jesus had appeared to him in a vision and he had spoken to him; he did not care about the reaction of his listeners.
The time would fail me to tell of the prophets, that is to say, of the way the prophets of God spoke to the Israelites, to their princes, and their priests, to their shepherds who had forsaken the Lord and His law. Do you know why the prophets were mocked, scourged, imprisoned, chained, and many of them were killed with the sword and stoned? Because they spoke with boldness from God, without omitting any of the words God commanded them to speak to the obstinate and rebel people. If you want to know what it means to speak with boldness read the messages of the prophets. Read what the prophets of old told to the rebels and you will realize that they risked their life because with all boldness they told the people what they had to do and what they had to stop doing in order to please God. What sort of quips did the prophets tell to the rebels to make them laugh?
THE CHURCH

The Church

What is the Church

The word ‘Church’ derives from the Greek *ekklesia* which means ‘a called-out body of people’ or ‘assembly’ and it refers to all those people who have been delivered from this present evil age and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of God, that is to say, to all those ‘called out from the world and belonging to the Lord.’

Obviously this term indicates both the universal Church, which is comprised of the redeemed of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, and the local Church, such as the Church in a town or in a village, which is comprised of the redeemed who are in that town or village (of course, this does not exclude that a local Church can be comprised of people of different races and ethnic groups). Therefore the universal Church is comprised of all the local Churches.

In the Scripture the term Church is used in an universal sense in the following passages: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church ….” (Matthew 16:18 – NKJV); “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her ….” (Ephesians 5:25 – NKJV); “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21). Instead, the same term is used in a local sense in these other passages: “Greet the church that is in their house” (Romans 16:5 – NKJV); “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia” (2 Corinthians 1:1 – NKJV).

Being this the meaning of the word ‘church’, therefore, it is wrong to call the place of worship ‘church’. Reflect upon this: ‘How can we call a place of worship ‘church’ when Paul said to the saints in Rome to greet the church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-5)?

Who is the head of the Church

The supreme head of the Church is Christ: the apostle Paul affirms clearly and in various ways that the head of the Church, both in heaven and on earth, is Jesus Christ.

- He says to the Ephesians: “[God] raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:20-23), and also: “But speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15), and: “The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). Therefore, as the head of the wife is one, that is, her husband, so the head of the Church (which is the wife of the Lamb) is one, that is, Christ, Her bridegroom.

- Paul says to the Colossians: “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all
things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:17-18). Therefore the Church of God does not have two heads, one in heaven and the other on earth, or one invisible and the other visible, but only one, namely Jesus Christ, who is in heaven at the right hand of God and through faith He dwells in the heart of all those who have accepted Him as their personal Saviour and Lord.

When one becomes a member of the Church

One becomes a member of the Church when he is set free from sin, of which men are slaves. For it is sin that keeps men under the power of this present evil age, and thus when one is saved from sin he becomes a member of the Church. How is man saved from sin? By believing with his heart in Jesus Christ, because salvation is obtained by faith in Christ. As Paul says: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9), and also: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8 -NKJV). We can also say that one becomes a member of the Church when he experiences the new birth, because through the new birth he ceases to be spiritually dead in that God makes him alive through the Word and His Spirit.

The entry of a man into the Church is symbolized and confirmed by water baptism, through which the new saved person or the newborn babe proclaims that through his faith in the Christ of God he died to sin.

The names of the Church

The Scripture provides several metaphors to define and describe the Church. These metaphors apply both to the universal church and to the local church. Let us look closely at these metaphors.

**The Body of Christ.** The Church of God is the body of Christ, for Paul wrote to the Church of God which was in Corinth: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27 – NKJV). And since one becomes a member of the body of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, as it is written: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13 – NKJV), for it is the Holy Spirit who convicts a man of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, first, and then makes him alive, we cannot affirm that those who have not yet been made alive by the Holy Spirit are members of the body of Christ.

Since the Church is the Body of Christ, we who are members of this body feel that we are members of one another; that’s why Paul affirms that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26 – NKJV). It happens something which is similar to what happens when one member of your physical body suffers, for all the other members suffer with it for they are all members of the same body, and to what happens when you are complimented on a member of your body. For instance if someone says to you: ‘Your eyes are beautiful!’, your whole body feels flooded with joy; in other words the fact that you are complimented on a member of your body induces the other members to rejoice.

Since the Church is compared to the human body all its members need one another; no matter what is the function of a member in the body of Christ, he can’t affirm that he has no need of another member. For instance, just as the eye cannot say to the feet: ‘I have no need of you!’, so he who has received the power to perform miracles and healings can’t say to a brother who has received the gift of the interpretation of tongues or the gift of prophecy: ‘I have no need of you!’, and so on. Anyone who thinks that he has no need of another member of the body of Christ conducts himself in a foolish way. Therefore, thanks be to God for composing the body in this
way, so that each member of it may not say that he has no need of another member. Our God is a wise God and knowing that pride lies always at the door, He composed the Church in such a way as to force believers to have need of one another. Therefore the way God has composed His Church is a demonstration of the infinite wisdom of God, who has entrusted the saints with different tasks; thus each member – whether male or female – has his own function in the Body of Christ. There is not a single believer who possesses all the gifts; if such a believer existed, he could say that he has no need of the other members of the body of Christ; but each believer is qualified to do what the Lord wants him to do; thus each believer seeks those believers who are qualified to do those things he is not qualified to do. Therefore, for instance, the prophet, when his wife is sick, will look for a believer who has received gifts of healings; and he who has gifts of healings will look for a prophet when he needs to receive a revelation from God in the hope that God will use the prophet to reveal to him what he needs to know. I could give you many more examples like the above mentioned ones but I stop here for I have confidence in the Lord that you have understood what I mean.

The Lamb’s wife. The apostle Paul wrote to the saints of Corinth: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2 - NKJV), which means that the Church has been betrothed to Christ or rather the Church has been pledged to be married to Jesus Christ. And in fact the day is coming when the Lamb will marry the Church; here is what John saw in a vision while he was on the island that is called Patmos: “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:6-8). Obviously, just as a bridegroom wants his bride to be chaste and pure, so Christ wants to present the Church to Himself as a holy and blameless Church; for Paul says to the Ephesians that Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27 – NKJV). When the Church allies herself with the enemies of Christ, or she begins to love the world, she commits spiritual adultery because she becomes infatuated with strangers and she betrays her husband. That’s why James calls those believers who love the world “adulterous people” (James 4:4 – NIV).

The flock of God. The apostle Peter wrote to the elders of the Church: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2 – NKJV). As you can see, the Church of God is called also ‘the flock of God’. Therefore, those who belong to the Church of God are compared to sheep (which are meek animals, but also easily influenced). This is confirmed by the fact that Jesus said that He is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11 – NKJV) and called His followers ‘His sheep,’ as He said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. …..And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:27-29,16). Therefore Jesus Christ is the shepherd of His sheep (which are the sheep of His Father as well), as Peter says: “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25 – NKJV), or as still Peter calls Him “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4 – NKJV), to whom every pastor appointed by God one day will give account of his work.

The household of God. The apostle Paul said to the Ephesians: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God ....” (Ephesians 2:19 – NKJV). The Church, therefore, is the household of
God, that’s why all the members of this household call one another ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, because they are aware that they belong to this large family. Jesus Himself called His disciples ‘brothers,’ as He said to the women (after He rose from the dead): “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Matthew 28:10 – NKJV), in that He is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29 – NKJV). The apostle Paul called the saints also brothers, for instance he said to the saints of Corinth: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing ....” (1 Corinthians 1:10 – NKJV).

**Spiritual house (or temple of God).** The Church is a spiritual house, which is comprised of living stones, that is, of men and women who were once dead in their sins and at God’s appointed time they were made alive by the Holy Spirit, and we, by the grace of God, are counted among these living stones. This is what Paul teaches when he says to the Ephesians: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins .... Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:1, 19-22), and to the Corinthians: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16 – NIV). The apostle Peter confirms this concept in his first epistle, for he says to the elect first: “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever .... As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby ....” (1 Peter 1:23; 2:2 – NKJV), and then he says: “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house ....” (1 Peter 2:5 – NKJV).

As things are, it is wrong to call the place of worship ‘the house of God.’ Unfortunately many brothers call it in this way. Many pastors say clearly from the pulpit that the place where the saints are gathered is the house of God; one of their most frequent expressions is ‘welcome to the house of God!’ I want to ask them, ‘Have you never read in the Scripture: “We are his house” (Hebrews 3:6 – NIV)?

The chief cornerstone of this spiritual building (which is the house of God) is Jesus Christ, for the Scripture states: “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone” (Matthew 21:42 - NKJV), and also: “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20 - NKJV). Jesus Christ Himself made it clear that He is the chief cornerstone, when He said to Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18), for ‘this rock’ is Jesus Himself. The foundation of this building is made up of the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

**The vine with the branches.** Jesus Christ compared the Church to a vine; for He said to His disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:1-5).

Now, when we repented of our sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we united ourselves with the Lord and became one spirit with Him; that’s why we affirm that we are part of the vine, that is, the household of God. Therefore, those who have not yet repented and believed in the Son of God are not one with us in Christ Jesus: no matter what is Church they claim to belong to, they are not among the branches of the vine. How do we know then if a person is a branch of this vine? First of all, we know it by the fact that he is sure he has received the remission of sins (for he repented and believed in Christ); and then by the fruits worthy of repentance that he bears by keeping the commandments of Christ, that is to say, by the fact that he abides in Christ and Christ abides in him.
A chosen generation. The Church, according to the apostle Peter, is “a chosen generation” (1 Peter 2:9 – NKJV), that is, a group of people who were chosen for salvation through belief in the truth. Read my teaching about the purpose of God according to election. Therefore, those who belong to the Church of God are sure that they are saved. So all those people who claim to be Christians but admit openly that they are not saved for they are still sinners, or it is evident that they are still slaves of the lusts of the flesh and of all forms of idolatry and superstition, these people are not members of the Church of God.

A royal priesthood. The Church, according to Peter, is “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9 – NKJV), that is, a group of people who are kings and priests who are called to offer up spiritual sacrifices (praises, prayers and thanksgivings) acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Read my teaching ‘Now we are a royal priesthood’

A holy nation. The Church, according to the apostle Peter, is “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9 – NKJV), that is, a group of people who were sanctified by Christ through the Holy Spirit and who pursue holiness. In that Christ sanctified the members of the Church of God, they are called ‘saints’. Here are some of the passages which confirm that all believers are saints or holy:

- Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus …” (1 Corinthians 1:1-2 – NKJV), and again: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
- Paul wrote to the Philippians: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1 – NKJV).
- Paul wrote to the Colossians: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Colossians 1:1-2).
- Paul wrote to the Romans: “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27), and also: “But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints” (Romans 15:25).

Therefore, the saints are not a particular group of believers who stand out for their pity or righteousness, but all believers. However, it is true that not all believers attain the same degree of sanctification.

The pillar and ground of the truth. Paul calls the Church of the living God “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15 – NKJV), for the Church upholds the truth which is in Christ Jesus, that is, the Word of God, as it is written: “Your word is truth” (John 17:17 – NKJV), and it defends the truth from the attacks of the enemies of Christ.

Church organization

The Church of God is a well-structured organism, it could not be otherwise since it was established by Christ, by whom all things were created that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

In the Church Christ has appointed pastors to shepherd His sheep; each Church has a pastor, who is called also ‘the angel of the church’, who is assisted by a group of elders (or bishops), and by some deacons whose function is to assist the pastor and the elders in the temporal matters of business and administration (among other things, the deacons tend to the needs of
the poor, widows, and orphans). It must be said, however, that some Churches are governed only by a body of elders (thus, they do not have a pastor), who are assisted by some deacons. Christ has appointed also apostles, who are those whom the Lord sends to preach the Gospel in unevangelized regions and to found churches in those places; prophets, who are those who have received the gift of prophecy and gifts of revelation; evangelists, who go from one place to another proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God; and teachers, who are qualified to teach accurately the doctrine of God.

Later I will speak in detail about the above mentioned offices, so that you may understand very well the differences existing between the various offices. Read the following teachings: Bishops and deacons – The ministry gifts

**Church’s activities**

The members of the Church of God are called to do the following things:
- to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1), so that they may appear before God holy and blameless; thus they must abstain from what is able to defile them spiritually and carnally. Read the Bible teaching on practical holiness.
- to do good works and to be zealous for good works (that is to say, to give alms, to meet the needs of the poor, widows and orphans, etc. – Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14). Read the Bible teaching on good works.
- to pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16), and for the lost so that God may save them (Romans 10:1; 1 Timothy 2:1-4). Read the Bible teaching on prayer.
- to desire earnestly spiritual gifts, which are distributed by God for the profit of all (1 Corinthians 12:1-12). Read the Bible teaching on spiritual gifts.

The saints who are on earth are also called to evangelize, that is, to bring men the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Acts 8:4; 11:20). The Gospel is the message through which we have been saved and we believe it can save others, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes; that’s why we preach it to men. We preach it even though we know that not all those who hear it will be saved, since only those who were appointed to eternal life will believe it. We must evangelize men, whether they listen or not, because all men must hear the Gospel; the end will not come until the Gospel is preached in all the world as a witness to all nations (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10). Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us preach the Christ of God to all those who do not know Him, urging them to repent and believe in Him so that they may receive the remission of sins.
- to attend the worship services, during which the Word of God is taught by those who have been called to teach the Word, the saints pray and sing together to God, and they pray for one another so that they may be healed. During the worship service the saints partake of the Lord’s Supper, with which they remember and proclaim the atoning death of Christ until He comes. There are some meetings held by the Church which are called ‘love feasts’ during which the saints eat together; it is a good thing for the saints to eat together so that they may strengthen their fellowship. To gather together with the brethren at one’s home to eat together or to talk about the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God or to pray and sing to the Lord is a good thing.

The discovery of mutual defects is inevitable when the saints are together, sometimes some misunderstandings arise, various problems arise; these are things which happen in every family and which happen even in the midst of the household of God. Nothing strange and nothing new under the sun: according to the Acts of the apostles and the epistles, even among the early Christians there were problems. However, the saints know how to deal with all these things because they have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit that are infallible guides. The love they must have for one another helps them to bear with one another and to forgive one another.
Beloved, we are called to bear with one another in love, and to forgive one another as Christ forgave us. To love one another, however, does not mean to tolerate injustices, heresies, falsehood, hypocrisies, because all these things must be rejected and exposed with all boldness no matter who is the one who is accused of these bad things. Tolerating the wicked who are in the midst of the Church, the false ministers of Christ who are running around in the Churches, heresies, falsehoods, hypocrisies, selfish ambitions, and anything else which harms the flock of the Lord, is not the will of God for us in Christ Jesus. Both Jesus and the apostles left us an example and told us how we must deal with the false ministers and the injustices, the hypocrisies and the falsehoods committed among the brethren.

**Bishops and deacons**

According to the Scripture, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good thing in the sight of God. However, both he who desires the position of a bishop and the Church must know the qualifications which those who desire the office of a bishop must have in order to be ordained bishops. Here is what Paul says to Timothy: “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

From these words the apostle Paul spoke to the elders of the Church of Ephesus: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [bishops], to shepherd the church of God ….” (Acts 20:28 – NKJV). We learn these things:

- a bishop must take care of the sheep of the Lord, keeping watch over them (that is, protecting them from the savage wolves which, in sheep’s clothing, come in among the sheep) and giving them the spiritual nourishment they need that they may be strengthened
- it is the Holy Spirit that makes a man bishop so that he may do these things
- since Paul called the elders of the church ‘overseers’ or ‘bishops’, the terms ‘elder’ and ‘bishop’ are synonymous. The term elder (which comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*) indicates the age of the believer who holds the office of bishop; while the term bishop indicates the function of the elder, which is to oversee the flock of the Lord, for the Greek term translated ‘bishop’ is *episkopos* which means ‘overseer’.

Now let us look closely at the qualifications which a man must fit in order to be ordained bishop in the Church of the living God.

A bishop must be: ‘blameless’, that is, above reproach, irreproachable; ‘the husband of one wife’, this means that he must be a married man (with regard to this, I remind you that Simon Peter, who was an elder, was married), and also that neither a man who was called by God while he was remarried (and his former wife is still alive) nor a Muslim or a Jew who has more than one wife can be ordained bishops; ‘vigilant’, that is, temperate, therefore he must not be a glutton nor a heavy eater (nor a sleepy-head); ‘sober’, that is, self-controlled, a person who conducts himself wisely toward both believers and unbelievers; ‘of good behaviour’, that is, respectable, therefore he must not be a man who entertains the saints with buffooneries and scurrilous jokes; ‘given to hospitality’, that is, ready to entertain strangers and the brothers of the church he shepherds; ‘apt to teach’, that is, he must be able to teach the things which are proper for sound doctrine and, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict; ‘not given to wine’, that is, he must not be a drunkard; ‘no striker’, that is, not violent, therefore he must not be a person who beats other persons but he must be gentle to all, meek and slow to wrath; ‘not greedy of filthy lucre’, that is, not a lover of money, therefore he must not teach for
the sake of dishonest gain nor must he sell himself or the truth to the merchandisers of the Kingdom of God, who live by extorting money from the saints, but he must be content with what he has; ‘not a brawler’, that is, not quarrelsome, he must not be a person who takes pleasure in quarrelling; ‘not covetous’, that is, he must not yeer for the things belonging to someone else; ‘one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity’, that is, he must have faithful children not accused of being disobedient to their parents or fornicators or drunkards, for if he does not know how to rule his family he will not be able to take care of the church of God as he ought to; ‘not a novice’, that is, he must not be a recent convert, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil; ‘moreover he must have a good report of them which are without’, that is to say, he must have a good testimony among those who do not belong to the household of God, lest he fall into reproach (a deserved reproach because of his evil conduct) and the snare of the devil.

I want to remind you that it is written: “Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?” (1 Corinthians 9:7 – NKJV). This means that the elder who shepherds the Church of God has the right to refrain from working so that he may devote himself exclusively to preaching and teaching the Word, thus he has the right to reap the material things of those whom he teaches, as it is written: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Galatians 6:6 – NKJV) and again: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and the laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Timothy 5:17-18 – NKJV; Deuteronomy 25:4; Luke 10:7).

As for deacons, they are appointed in the church to tend to the needs of widows, orphans, of the poor, of strangers, and also of the minister of the Gospel and of all those who need to be helped among the saints. Also those who desire the office of deacon must have certain qualifications, which are these.

Deacons must be: “grave” (1 Timothy 3:8), that is, they must conduct themselves seriously and properly; “not doubletongued” (1 Timothy 3:8), that is, they must be sincere (they must not be like those people who first tell you one thing and then they tell you a completely different thing); “not given to much wine” (1 Timothy 3:8), that is, they must not be inclined to drink too much wine; “not greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Timothy 3:8), that is, they must not be lovers of money; “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9), that is to say, they must keep the faith with a conscience which is to be pure before God and before men. “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Timothy 3:12), which means that neither a man who divorced and remarried before his conversion (and his former wife is still alive) nor a Jew or a Muslim who has more than one wife can be a deacon; in addition to this, a deacon must rule his children and his own house well, therefore he must have faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination and also a faithful and godly wife.

“And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless” (1 Timothy 3:10); this means that both the candidates for the office of deacon and those for the office of bishop must be first tested and then if they are found blameless they are allowed to serve as deacons and bishops.

The wives of the elders and of the deacons must be grave, not slanderers, sober, and faithful in all things (1 Timothy 3:11).

It is written: “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13); this means that when the Lord of glory, who is the Master of the house, appears, those who have served well as deacons in the house of God, will be praised and rewarded by the Lord Himself for their faithful work on behalf of the saints.

According to what the Scripture teaches, a woman also can serve as a deacon in the Church of God, if she is blameless, grave, sober and faithful in all things. Paul commended to the saints of Rome a certain Phoebe, who was a deaconess of the Church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1-2). I
find it necessary to remind you that in order to serve as a deacon a believing person does not need to be able to teach (in other words, the ability to teach is a requirement for an elder but not for a deacon). The reason is that deacons are not appointed to teach the Word of the Lord but to minister to the pastor, the elders and all the saints. Therefore, a woman is allowed to minister to the saints; that’s why she can be ordained as a deaconess.

In addition to this, I want you to know that it is right that both the elders and the deacons should be elected by the congregation of the saints, because this is confirmed by the Word of God which says that after the apostles Paul and Barnabas had elders elected for the disciples in each church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23. – Both in the NIV [in a footnote] and the IBRV we read ‘had elders elected’. In the KJV we read “when they had ordained them elders in every church”; however the word ‘ordained”, used for the selection of elders, literally means ‘to raise the hand’ or ‘to be a voter by raising the hand’ and thus it indicates the congregation’s participation in electing an elder); as you can see, in ancient times, the elders were elected after prayer with fasting because it was considered a very important thing which had to be taken seriously. As for the election of the deacons there is an example in the Word of God which shows not only that they were elected by the congregation of the saints but also that they had to have certain qualifications. Here is what the Holy Scripture says about the election of the deacons which took place in Jerusalem: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6).

I conclude by saying this: as we have seen, according to the Bible, those who are to be appointed elders must be upright, holy and blameless men. However, today many Churches don’t consider at all these qualifications. For their elders must hold a diploma or a degree, have a ‘prestigious’ social status, and an elegant and expensive wardrobe. In other words, they must be apt to preach with words of human wisdom, and dressed in fancy clothes, that they may appear ‘presentable’ in contemporary society. These are the qualifications that a believer must have in these Churches to be ordained elder!! That’s why in many Churches there are elders who are free with their hands, violent, haughty, lovers of money, not apt to teach and who have children who commit all kinds of sins. These Churches have appointed elders who are ready and willing to satisfy all their cupidity and lusts, that’s why they are at the mercy of merciless predacious men who act out of self-interest and whose glory is in their shame. Thus they are to be rebuked, as the children of Israel were rebuked by the prophet Hosea for having set up kings, but not by the Lord, and for having made princes, and the Lord knew it not (Hosea 8:4). They say with their mouth that they want a revival, yet at the same time they do not want to submit themselves to the commandments given by the apostles; they want to elect an elder who has the qualifications they want him to have, rather than the qualifications that God wants him to have; they say to God: ‘Your will be done’, but they lie to Him because in their heart they have already decided that the elder must be corrupt like them, he must not be holy and righteous because they are ashamed to have an elder who is holy and righteous. Brothers, let no one deceive you; hold fast the sound words of the apostle Paul and you will prosper.
The obedience and the submission to those who rule over the saints

It is written: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

God has appointed some men over the sheep, which He purchased with His own blood, that they may shepherd His sheep. These men are the elders, who are called also ‘those who have the rule over the saints’, because their job is to rule over the flock of the Lord. The elders are men like us to whom God has given power to shepherd His Church; therefore, the sheep must obey them and be subject to them. They watch out for the souls of the faithful and if they see that the sheep do not heed their teachings and exhortations, they begin to do their job with grief, they no longer do it with joy. However, it must be clear that those who disobey their leaders do not do what is right in the sight of God.

Paul, Silas and Timothy said to the saints of Thessalonica: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Therefore the elders who rule well, who labor in word and doctrine, and are diligent to convict those who contradict and warn those who are unruuly, who clearly show that they care for the flock of the Lord, must be respected and held in the highest regard in love because of their work on behalf of the sheep of the Lord. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “I urge you, brothers, to submit … to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it” (1 Corinthians 16:15,16 - NIV), and since those who rule over the saints devote themselves to the service of the saints, using the authority and the ability they have received from God to minister to the saints, the saints must submit to them. Brothers, you must understand that those who grumble against those who have been appointed by God over His people grumble against God; and also that the wrath of God comes upon those who envy and rebel against the leaders appointed by God to shepherd His flock. I am going to show you from the Scripture what I have just stated.

During the journey of the children of Israel across the wilderness, it came to pass that the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron and rebelled against them. Before speaking of their grumblings and rebellion, however, I find it necessary to remind you who Moses and Aaron were and how they became the leaders of the children of Israel. Moses and Aaron were brothers and they descended from Levi. When Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, he went to the land of Midian where he married one of the daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian. There, in the land of Midian, Moses tended the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. And when forty years had passed, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses and sent him to Egypt together with Aaron that he might bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. In the Psalms it is written: “He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen” (Psalm 105:26). Therefore, Aaron was chosen by God. However Moses also was chosen by God, for he is called “His chosen one” (Psalm 106:23 – NKJV). Therefore, both Moses and Aaron were chosen by God and appointed over the congregation of Israel, they did not appoint themselves leaders of the children of Israel, it was God who appointed them leaders of the children of Israel (consider also that God said these words to Moses: “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh” Exodus 7:1 - NKJV). Now, after God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt by signs and wonders and the children of Israel had gone on dry ground through the midst of the Red Sea, the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin. Then “the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. And Moses
and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD” (Exodus 16:2-8). As you can see, brothers, those words that the children of Israel spoke against Moses and Aaron were spoken against God and not against men.

Let us look now at another incident which happened in the wilderness some time later; it is written: “Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?“ (Numbers 16:1-3). Why did those men rebel against Moses and Aaron? Because they envied Moses and Aaron, as it is written: “In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the Lord” (Psalm 106:16 – NIV). Now, those rebels thought that Moses and Aaron exalted themselves above the Lord’s assembly, therefore they no longer recognized that Moses and Aaron had been appointed over the children of Israel by God. In addition to this, they thought that all the congregation was holy because God was among them, whereas actually only Aaron was holy, for on the plate of pure gold which God commanded to make for the High Priest, that is, Aaron, were engraved the following words: “Holy to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36 – NIV). God had given the priesthood to Aaron, but for those rebels from among the sons of Levi it was no longer enough that God had separated them from the rest of the Israelites and brought them near Himself to do the work of the Lord’s tabernacle. They envied Aaron, they wanted to get the priesthood too. When Moses heard the words of those rebels, he said to Korah and all those who were with him: “Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him…. For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?” (Numbers 16:5,11). And the next day God punished the rebels, as it is written: “The ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (Numbers 16:31-35). Furthermore, after a few days, God showed that He had chosen Aaron the Levite, to fulfill the priesthood, by causing the rod of Levi (on which Aaron’s name was written) to blossom. This incident also was written for our learning, therefore let us take heed to ourselves, keeping our heart with all diligence. “Envy is rottenness to the bones” (Proverbs 14:30 – NKJV) and those who envy those who have been appointed by God to shepherd His Church, in due season will reap the fruit of their rebellion as Korah and his companions did reap the fruit of their rebellion. I say it again in these terms, those who rebel against the elders appointed by the Holy Spirit and murmur against them and despise them, resist God, who appointed them and speak through them, and thus they become enemies of God.

However, let no one of you think that the elders, who were appointed by the Holy Spirit, are free to do evil things and to teach whatever they want, and let no one of you think that when the elders sin nobody has the right to rebuke them, for the Word of God does not teach such things. For Paul says to Timothy: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19 – NKJV). Timothy was a man of God, and although he was still
a young men he was a minister of the Gospel by the will of God, and Paul did not write to him that he could not receive any accusation against an elder, but he wrote to him not to receive any accusation against an elder from one witness; this because the law says: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15). And if an accusation against an elder was confirmed by two or three faithful witnesses, then Timothy had to rebuke him, for Paul commanded Timothy: “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20 – NKJV). Paul did not say to Timothy: ‘Forget it!', or: ‘Pretend nothing happened!', or: ‘Skip it, even if the accusation is true!', but: ‘Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all…".

In order to confirm this, I remind you of what happened at Antioch according to what Paul wrote to the Galatians: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Galatians 2:11-14). As you can see, what Paul commanded Timothy to do toward those elders who were sinning, was done by Paul himself toward the apostle Peter when Paul saw that Peter did not walk uprightly according to the truth, for he says that Peter was to be blamed, and he, by the authority he had received from God, rebuked him in the presence of all (I want to remind you that besides being an apostle, Simon Peter was also an elder for he wrote in his first epistle: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed” - 1 Peter 5:1).

As for those who were appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, I find it necessary to say this: when they speak from God, if the saints reject their words and they despise them, they do not reject men, but God. To confirm this, I remind you of what Paul wrote to the saints of Thessalonica, after he gave them some commandments through the Lord Jesus: “Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 4:8 - NKJV). Paul was a man just like us, but by the grace, and the wisdom, and the authority he had received from God, he was what he was, and he wrote the above mentioned faithful words and we will do well to heed them. We accept the word of the apostles not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, and if those who despise their word think that they are despising men, let them know that they deceive themselves for they actually despise God.

Remember that when Jesus appointed the seventy disciples and sent them two by two ahead of Him, he said to them: “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me, but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16 – NIV).

There is another incident recorded in the Bible which shows us that those who resist the leaders among the brothers resist God. Here is what we read in the book of the Acts of the apostles: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things! (Acts 5:1-5). Note that Peter said to Ananias that he had not lied to men, but to God.

Finally, I want to say the following things: the saints are called to obey their leaders in the Lord. It is evident, therefore, that if a leader urges them to do or to believe something which is contrary
to the sound doctrine they are called to refuse to do or to believe that thing. How can the saints
know whether what their leaders teach is true or false? They can know it by searching the Holy
Scriptures, therefore they are called to search the Scripture as the Bereans did, as it is written:
“They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to
see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11 – NIV). Take heed to yourselves, brethren, for there
are many leaders who teach many things which are contrary to the sound doctrine. Let no one of
them deceive you with empty words.
Brothers, I conclude by urging you to love those who teach you for your own good.

The ministry gifts

Introduction

It is written: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all,
and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).
Brothers in the Lord, when you believed in the name of the Son of God you united yourselves
with the Lord and you became one spirit with Him, thus you became members of the body of
Christ.
We, as believers in the Lord, are one body, we have one hope, that is, the hope of glory to which
God called us through Christ Jesus; we have one faith; we have one Spirit, that is, the Spirit of
adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’; we have received one baptism, that is, the water
baptism ministered to us by immersion in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit; we have one Lord, that is, Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead; and we have
one Father, that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
We have nothing to boast about before God, because we have been saved by the grace of God,
and not by good works which we have done, “but to each one of us grace was given according
to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7 - NKJV), which means that each one of us has his
own gift from God and thus, since we have different gifts, we do not all have the same function in
the house of God.
It is written: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and
some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the
edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of
the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of
doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But
speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ”
(Ephesians 4:11-15).
The first thing I want to say about the ministry gifts is that “there are differences of ministries, but
the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:5 - NKJV), therefore the ministries which God has appointed in
His Church are different from one another. However, though their function is different from one
another, they are given by the same Lord to those who have been called by God to the ministry.
The ministers of God know that they have received from the Lord different gifts and that to each
one of them grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. As you can see, the
Scripture calls it ‘the measure of Christ’s gift’, this because each ministry gift is given by Christ
Jesus, as it is written: “When He ascended on high …. He gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8 –
NKJV. Psalm 68:18). The ministry gifts too are from above, as it is written: “Every good gift and
every perfect gift is from above …. ” (James 1:17 – NKJV). No Bible School can give you a
ministry because it is God the one who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure, and because it is God Himself, and not men, who appoints a believer as an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher. Listen, brother in the Lord: 'If you have received from the Lord one of the ministry gifts, the other brothers will surely know that you have received a ministry gift from the Lord, and they will know that God has worked in you for that particular ministry; they may encourage you to go on, and they may give you good advices, which you will do well to follow if they are according to the will of God for you; you may even be taught by another minister of God, but the fact still remains that it is God who works in a man to make him complete so that he may fulfil a certain ministry. The training of a Bible School is not indispensable and I exhort you not to consider it indispensable; those who think that in order to receive a ministry gift from God and to fulfil it they must attend a Bible School are not sound in the faith because they show that for them a ministry gift is not a supernatural gift, nor an ability that Christ gives to his servant but an ability which can be obtained by attending a school as any other human ability, and this is a mistake. So what induces many people to attend a Bible School? It is evident that many of those who attend a Bible School were not called by God to fulfil a particular ministry, however the fact is that they attend it in order to take the diploma of that school. Why do these people consider this piece of paper, which is called diploma, so important and long for it? Because in every self-respecting religious organization, the titles and the acknowledgements given by men to other men (even if those titles and acknowledgements are not according to the truth of the gospel) are important. Therefore, it is evident that if the leaders of a denomination affirm: ‘If you want to become a pastor, you must have the diploma of the Bible School of our denomination’, many will be led (not by the Lord but by their envy and vainglory) to attend that school. Today, in many cases if one has a diploma and a certain number of followers he is considered a pastor. No matter if he is a hireling, who does not care about the sheep, surely he is a pastor because the leaders of the religious organization ordained him a pastor! Some people want to become pastors because to be a pastor means to have a ‘prestigious’ position in the midst of the organization they belong to and of which they are so proud. There is no doubt that many unscrupulous men, who are corrupt of minds, through the Bible School have received the title of pastor (the title, not the ministry because they have never received this ministry) by all unrighteous deception, and they have infiltrated the Church. They have their diploma, they have studied, they have passed their examinations, they have done their training, and thus they are in order, they are behind the pulpit, in that place so much envied for many years; now they are free to show their covetousness because they know that they are unlikely to be expelled from their organization.

Paul said of himself and of his fellow workers, who were ministers of the Gospel: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). As you can see, Paul and his fellow workers had been made able ministers of the New Covenant by God and not by other men, therefore it is wrong to think that a Bible School can enable you to preach or teach the Word of the Lord. We have come to the conclusion, also from experience, that if God does not give the ability to preach and teach to one of His sons, even if he attends a Bible School he will continue to be devoid of that ability.

Now let us examine the way God worked in Paul, so that we may understand that it is God who works in those whom He has chosen to fulfil a ministry or more than one ministry (as in the case of Paul).

Paul of Tarsus, according to the flesh, had lived a Pharisee and had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of his fathers’ law. Now one day it came to pass that while he was going to Damascus to persecute the disciples of the Lord, he had a vision in which Jesus appeared to him and, among other things, He said to him: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you" (Acts 26:16 – NKJV). Before Jesus appeared to
Paul on that road, Paul persecuted the Church, but through that vision he turned to the Lord. In that vision which Paul had, Jesus said to him: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister...." (Acts 26:26), this means that Paul was made a minister of the Gospel by the Lord and not by men. Several years later Paul confirmed that he had received the ministry from the Lord when he said to the elders of the Church of Ephesus: "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24 – NKJV). After the Lord appeared and spoke to Paul, the men who journeyed with him led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus where, after three days - during which he was without sight and did not eat or drink - God sent to him a certain disciple named Ananias so that Paul might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. “Then Saul [Paul] spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:19-20 – NKJV). At that time Saul had not yet known the apostles of the Lord, yet he preached with boldness in the synagogues at Damascus; God had begun His work in Paul. At this point I need to say two things. The first thing is this: when God revealed His Son in Paul, Paul did not consult any man and did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him, for he wrote to the Galatians: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus” (Galatians 1:15-17). The second thing is this: Paul was not taught the Gospel which he preached, for he said to the Galatians: “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12 – NKJV). All this may seem strange and incomprehensible, yet it is true, and it shows that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. Pay attention to this, the fact that Paul did not receive the Gospel from any man does not mean that teachers are useless in the Church or that all those who have been called by God to preach the Gospel have received the Gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ; I tell you this so that no one may deceive you.

Paul went up to Jerusalem only after three years to see Peter and remained with him fifteen days, but He saw “none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19 – NKJV). Also at Jerusalem Paul “spoke boldly in the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:29 - NKJV), and since the Hellenists attempted to kill him, “when the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus” (Acts 9:30 – NKJV).

Paul stayed at Tarsus for a certain period of time, then “Barnabas (who had been sent to Antioch) went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people” (Acts 11:25-26 - NIV). Christ made Paul a teacher of the Gentiles, and a few years after his conversion Paul, together with Barnabas, already taught the saints at Antioch. After a long time, Paul went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with him, and he went up by revelation. When he went up to Jerusalem, He was already preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. There he met the apostles of the Lord. James, Cephas and John, whom Paul calls “those who seemed to be important” (Galatians 2:6 – NIV), added nothing to Paul’s message, “but on the contrary – Paul says – when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Galatians 2:7-9 – NKJV). I want you to note that James, Cephas and John, recognized that God had worked in Paul to make him an apostle to the Gentiles and they saw the grace of God which was with Paul, so they gave Paul
and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; those wise and holy apostles could not do otherwise. What happened to Paul on that occasion, when he met James, Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, shows us that the wise and sincere ministers of God recognize another minister of God, even if the Lord has worked in him in a different way, they receive him (even if he does not have letters of recommendation nor the 'identification card') because they see the grace of God with him. Reflect upon this: Paul had not been with Jesus for those three years, no man had taught him anything about the Gospel, yet the other apostles received him and recognized that God had made him an apostle!

God still acts in a particular way (which may seem strange to some and incomprehensible to others) in some people to make them ministers; do you know why? Because He wants to show the proud and the vainglorious persons (such as those who think that unless one attends a Bible School, which is recognized by his denomination or even by the Government, he can't receive a ministry from the Lord nor fulfill it) that He has not changed but He is the same. God knows how to humble and to put to shame those who exalt themselves and at His appointed time He humbles them and puts them to shame. Thanks be to God for all those brothers who are poor, who are called ‘uneducated and untrained men’ by those who are wise according to the flesh, who don’t know what the word ‘homiletics’ means, perhaps the only Greek words they know are Christos and Paracletos and the only Hebrew word they know is Mashiach, but they have been appointed ministers of the Gospel by God, they have been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and filled with the wisdom of God. They are an example to the believers in conduct, and when they speak they speak from God with sincerity; they do not speak like the philosophers, nor do they speak like those people who expound the things pertaining to the kingdom of God with words of human wisdom.

Some people are called pastors, teachers and evangelists, but unless they have some sheets of paper before their face or in the midst of their Bible or unless they have learned by heart their speech to recite it in public, they are not able to speak about the doctrine of God or to preach the Gospel: only in this way they manage to deliver a speech, they are so devoid of the Word of God that if you take away from them their notes they are no longer able to preach; this, because the word of Christ does not dwell in them richly; they have a heart trained in covetous practices, their heart is not trained to receive with meekness the Word. When the Jews heard Jesus they marvelled, saying: “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” (John 7:15 – NKJV); instead, when we hear and see many so called ministers of the Gospel we marvel, saying: ‘How is it that these men do not know the Scriptures, having studied so much?’

A man who had worked as a carpenter turned Israel upside down for three years. He had never been taught by any teacher of the law, rather when He was twelve years old He asked them questions and “all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47 – NKJV); by contrast we hear many who have been believers for many years who astonish us for they have no knowledge or little knowledge of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Yes, brothers, that’s the way things are, and this shameful spectacle produced by the proud and vainglorious persons is before our eyes; the people who are responsible for this are those persons who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from God; who want to be wise according to the flesh but refuse to be wise according to God; they are wise by the standards of this age, for they know philosophy, they know both the Greek and the Hebrew language, they know the laws of physics and the laws of economics, but they do not know the Scriptures, they do not know the power of God, they do not know the holy ways of God. These people lord it over the Church of God by their social status and their eloquence, but they are impostors and idle talkers; they are not able to speak with boldness for they speak with words of human wisdom or with excellence of speech they love so much and seek in order to appear intelligent and spiritual to men. Ah! what miserable people: they think that the more complicated their sermon is, the more artful their speech is, and the more edifying it will be, but they are greatly mistaken, they deceive themselves. The churches they shepherd want to hear the Word of God preached with boldness for they hear from the pulpit only speeches which are...
full of excellent words and which are incomprehensible on many points to those who are not educated; don't you see these things? Their speeches are in order, they are subdivided into several points which are called according to the words they want to comment on (the three A’s, the three B’s and so on), their speeches are well prepared indeed! But they do not edify the church. May the Lord work powerfully also in this country as He worked in ancient times in Israel by the apostles. My prayer and my desire is that He may work powerfully soon, raising up faithful and holy men full of the Spirit and wisdom, and stretching out His hand to confirm His word through signs and wonders, so that His Word may be glorified and anyone who thinks he is wise may become 'a fool' to the glory of God.

Do you remember what the people of Nazareth said about Jesus? It is written: “He began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?” (Mark 6:2) Jesus got those things from God; the wisdom He had was given to Him by God and the mighty works wrought by His hands were the manifestation of the Spirit of God. Did He have any diploma? Did He hold any flapping sheets of paper while He preached to the people? No, He did not have any of these things, but He had the things a minister of God must have, that is, the power of God and the wisdom of God, so that he may edify the Church of God.

God made men like Peter, Andrew, James and John, who were fishermen, apostles, ministers of the Gospel; they were not wise according to the world, for when the chief priests and the elders saw the boldness of Peter and John they “perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13 – NKJV); notwithstanding this the Holy Spirit spoke through them and performed mighty works through them. Consider this: when we read the epistles of Simon Peter and of John, we read the words written by two fishermen. They were not engineers or professors who could show their ‘degrees’ but simple fishermen; yet we are edified when we read their epistles, whereas we are not edified at all when we hear those persons who are very educated expound the things of God with words taught by man’s wisdom.

Brothers, remember these things: Noah was a farmer but also “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5 – NKJV); Amos, who was appointed as a prophet by God, “was among the sheep breeders of Tekoa” (Amos 1:1 – NKJV) and he himself confirmed this when he said: “I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me: ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel” (Amos 7:14-15 – NKJV); when the prophet Elijah found Elisha (whom Elijah anointed as prophet in his place) he “was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth” (1 Kings 19:19 – NKJV); when Jeremiah was set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant, he was only a child.

In this generation also, God has chosen some farmers, some fishermen, some carpenters, and even some manurers, some shoemakers, and many others who haven’t had much schooling (some were even illiterate) and made them ministers of the Gospel and enabled them to preach with boldness, with power and with deep conviction (to some of them God gave gifts of healings and the working of miracles), and this in order to put to shame those who think they are wise and powerful, so that they cannot boast before God.

Apostle

The apostle is one who is sent forth by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word of God to a nation (or to unevangelized regions).

Let us take for example the twelve disciples of Jesus, who were appointed apostles and sent forth to preach the Kingdom of God to Israel. Luke says: “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was
day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:12-16).

As you can see, the twelve did not become apostles by their own will, for it was Christ Jesus who appointed them as apostles. Note also that not all those who had become disciples of Jesus were appointed apostles because this confirms that not all believers can be called apostles, but only those who have received this ministry from the Lord. Jesus appointed the twelve apostles to send them to preach the Kingdom of God, to heal all kinds of sickness and to cast out demons, as it is written: “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2 – NKJV).

After the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, other men were appointed as apostles by the Lord; among them were Paul and Barnabas. Here is how they became apostles. It is written: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:1-4). As you can see, Paul and Barnabas were already fulfilling a ministry in the Church that was at Antioch, that of teacher, and this is confirmed also by the Scripture which says that they “taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26 – NKJV). But one day, as Barnabas, and Simeon, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, and Saul, ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said to those who were gathered together with Barnabas and Saul: “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2 – NKJV), and they obeyed that order by separating Barnabas and Saul to the Holy Spirit. So from among those ministers of God, the Holy Spirit chose only Barnabas and Saul for that specific work, even though all those men were ministers of God, and that shows us that the Lord makes His choices according to the counsel of His will, thus He entrusts whom He wills with a specific task to accomplish. I would like you to note also that Barnabas and Saul are called apostles (as it is written: “The apostles Barnabas and Paul ....” Acts 14:14) because they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:4 – NKJV) to preach the Gospel. As far as Paul is concerned, it must be said that when Jesus some time before appeared to him in a vision, while he was praying in the temple, He had said to him: “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21 – NKJV); so it was while Paul was at Antioch that those words, which the Lord had said to Paul some time before, were fulfilled, for the Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles through that revelation given by the Holy Spirit at Antioch. The apostles Paul and Barnabas founded various churches during that journey (and had elders elected in every church), many people were saved, many believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit and God bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. After a long time they returned to Antioch and when they had gathered the church together “they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27 – NKJV). That journey made by Paul and Barnabas, as it was reported by Luke, shows what kind of work an apostle does.

Among the other apostles mentioned by the Scripture are also Silvanus and Timothy, who were fellow-workers of Paul. We learn that they also were apostles of Christ from the following words of Paul to the Thessalonians: “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ ....” (1 Thessalonians 2:6 – NKJV), for when Paul wrote ‘we’ he referred to Him, Silvanus and Timothy, as it is written: “Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1 – NKJV).
Paul wrote to the saints who were in Rome: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (Romans 16:7 - NKJV), therefore those brothers also were apostles.

God “has appointed these in the church: first apostles …..” (1 Corinthians 12:28 – NKJV), therefore we must recognize the ministry of apostle.

I conclude by saying that just as there are apostles of Christ so there are also false apostles, who transform themselves into apostles of Christ. Some false apostles came in among the Corinthians, for Paul said to the Corinthians about some: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The false apostles are not bondservants of Christ but they are servants of Satan, therefore they hate righteousness; notwithstanding this, they outwardly appear righteous to the believers because they transform themselves into ministers of righteousness. However, their works, being evil works, witness against them. Know this, that when the false apostles are tested they are found liars and that the Lord will repay them according to their works.

Prophet

As for the ministry of prophet, Paul wrote that God has appointed in the church: “….. second prophets ….” (1 Corinthians 12:28 – NKJV).

Brothers, know this, that God still appoints some believers as prophets and it could not be otherwise in that the ministry of prophet also is among the ministry gifts.

Now, how do we know if one was appointed as a prophet by God? He who has received the ministry of prophet has received the gift of prophecy and some gifts of revelation as well.

According to the Scripture, the gifts of revelation are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge and the ability to distinguish among spirits (or the gift of discerning of spirits).

A prophet is one who often has visions and revelations.

God said to Aaron and Mary: “Here now my words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream” (Numbers 12:6 – NKJV). These words show that a prophet receives visions and dreams from God; bear in mind this thing because it is one of the things that characterize a prophet.

Under the Old Covenant there were many prophets and if we examine carefully their ministry we clearly see that besides prophesying when the Holy Spirit came upon them they often received visions and revelations from God, through which God revealed His word to them.

Samuel and Elisha

Let us take for example Samuel; it is written: “And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD” (1 Samuel 3:20-21). The Israelites recognized that Samuel, even though was still a young man, had been established as a prophet by God because what Samuel said in the name of the Lord came to pass. Samuel grew up and since all the things that he foretold came true he was mightily respected by the Israelites.

Let us see what the Scripture says about the encounter of Saul with Samuel in order to understand how the gifts of revelation were present in the prophetic ministry of Samuel. It is written: “And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the
Benjamites, but they found them not. And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us. And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go. Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way. (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.) Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was. And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place: As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him. And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place. Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found…. " (1 Samuel 9:3-20). Now, the people of Israel had asked for a king, so God sent Saul to the prophet Samuel so that Samuel might anoint him commander over the people of Israel. And God used the donkeys of Saul's father first and secondly one of his servants to cause Saul to come to Samuel. The donkeys of Kish were lost by the will of God, and Kish sent Saul and one of his servants to look for the donkeys. They looked for them but they did not find them because God did not permit them to find them; seeing this, Saul thought of returning to his house, but his servant advised him to go to the man of God for he was convinced that he could show them the way that they had to go. Saul accepted the advice of his servant and he and his servants went to the city where Samuel was. The day before Saul came, God had given Samuel a word of wisdom (the word of wisdom is the revelation of a fact which will happen) telling him that the following day (about the time he had received the revelation) He would send him a man from the land of Benjamin whom he had to anoint commander over the people of Israel. The following day, at the time appointed by God, Samuel saw Saul coming toward him and before Saul asked Samuel where the seer's house was God said to Samuel: “There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people” (1 Samuel 9:17 – NKJV). When Samuel met Saul, Samuel told him that the donkeys had been found; in this case, Samuel received from God a word of knowledge (the word of knowledge is the revelation of a fact which has taken place or which is happening while the prophet is speaking). The day after, very early in the morning, Samuel anointed Saul with oil, kissed him, and foretold him certain things which would happen to him on that very day; in this case, Samuel had another word of wisdom. For he said to Saul: “When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?
Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man" (1 Samuel 10:2-6). That word of wisdom was fulfilled on that same day, as it is written: “And all those signs came to pass that day” (1 Samuel 10:9).

It is evident from the above mentioned Scriptures that the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge were operating in the ministry of Samuel. However, besides these gifts, Samuel had also the gift of prophecy (thus he prophesied, and I remind you that “he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” 1 Corinthians 14:3 - NKJV). Samuel stood as leader over the group of prophets for when Saul sent messengers to take David, who was at Nainoth in Ramah, “they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them” (1 Samuel 19:20 - NKJV). This confirms that the prophet Samuel had the gift of prophecy. To sum up, through the Spirit, Samuel prophesied and often received a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. Someone may say: ‘Were the gifts of the Spirit distributed also under the Old Covenant then?’ Yes, of course, because the Spirit of God manifested Himself even under the Old Covenant. However I’d like to make it clear that the gift of different kinds of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues were not operating at that time because they have been distributed from the day of Pentecost on (on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church of God).

So that you may understand that the gifts of revelation are present in the prophetic ministry, I will speak to you about the prophet Elisha as well.

After Naaman the Syrian was healed of leprosy, it came to pass that Naaman urged Elisha to take a gift but the prophet refused to take a gift from Naaman. However, after Naaman departed from Elisha, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, pursued Naaman and asked him for silver and garments. So he secretly took gifts from Naaman. But God revealed Gehazi’s sin to Elisha through a word of knowledge. Here is what the Scripture says: “But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow” (2 Kings 5:20-27).

Now, in order to show you that Elisha was able to know some incidents which had happened to other people only if and when God wanted him to know them, I want to remind you of the following incident. “And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is
an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way; if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out." (2 Kings 4:8-37). As you can see, the fact that Elisha told his servant to ask the Shunammite woman if it was well with her child, shows that Elisha did not know that the child had died, and that is confirmed by the fact that a short time later he said to Gehazi: “The Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me” (2 Kings 4:27 – NKJV). So Elisha came to know hidden facts in a supernatural way by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, unless the Lord gave him a word of knowledge, he could not know a certain thing a man had done or said secretly or what had happened to him at his home or somewhere else.

Here is now a revelation concerning a future event (that is, a word of wisdom) which Elisha received from the Lord while there was a great famine in Samaria because the Syrian army was besieging Samaria. Elisha said in the presence of the elders: “Hear ye the word of the LORD;
Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (2 Kings 7:1). That prediction was fulfilled the following day (2 Kings 7:16).

The word of knowledge and of wisdom in the Lord Jesus

Let us see now a word of knowledge that Jesus (who was a prophet) spoke while He was talking with a Samaritan woman. John says: “He [Jesus] left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit [or God is Spirit]: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he. And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him. In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours. And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did” (John 4:3-39). How did Jesus know that woman had had five husbands and the one she had at that time was not her husband? By the Spirit, through a word of knowledge. Do not forget that Jesus was a man who fulfilled His
prophetic ministry by the Holy Spirit. Note that when Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly”, she said to Jesus: “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet”; reflect upon these words. That woman perceived by those words of Jesus that Jesus was a prophet. She was not mistaken; that woman knew that only a prophet could tell her all that she had done. After Jesus said to her those words concerning her former five husbands and the man whom she had (and other words concerning the worship of God and His messiahship), it came to pass that she left her waterpot, went her way into the city and said to the men: “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29). As you can see, that word of knowledge had a positive effect because it led that woman and many Samaritans to believe in Jesus, for it is written that “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did” (John 4:39). Here is now a word of wisdom which Jesus spoke on the night He was betrayed. He said to Peter: “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” (Matthew 26:34 - NKJV). The word of wisdom in the prophet Agabus

In the book of the Acts of the apostles Luke speaks of a certain prophet named Agabus, who foretold two different events on two different occasions. Let us look at them. First prediction; it is written: “During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius)” (Acts 11:27-28 – NIV). Agabus was a prophet and received a word of wisdom concerning a severe famine which would spread over the entire Roman world. The words “through the Spirit predicted” show clearly that it is not through the spirit of man or through a natural knowledge or by intuition that a prophet predicts what will happen, but through the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit wills, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:8 – NKJV). Someone may ask, ‘Was that word of wisdom profitable? Of course, it was, for all the things revealed by the Holy Spirit are profitable to the Church, as it is written: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7 – NIV). As for the prediction of the severe famine, it is written that “the disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30 – NIV). As you can see, that revelation led the disciples of Antioch to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. Second prediction: while Paul was at Caesarea, the prophet Agabus predicted through the Spirit what would happen to Paul at Jerusalem. Luke wrote: “And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:10-11). Through the prophet Agabus God revealed to Paul that the Jews would seize him and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Therefore, when the Jews seized Paul in the temple and began to beat him in order to kill him, Paul already knew that the Jews on that occasion would not kill him for they would deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

How God speaks to the prophets

The prophets of old often received the word of God in vision; the following expressions: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:1 – NKJV. The IBRV reads “Parola che Isaia, figliuolo d’Amots, ebbe in visione, relativamente a Giuda e a Gerusalemme,” that is, “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz received in a vision concerning
Judah and Jerusalem”); “The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received” (Habakkuk 1:1 – NIV. The IBRV reads, “Oracolo che il profeta Habacuc ebbe per visione,” that is, “The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received through a vision”); “The word of the Lord given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah – the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem” (Micah 1:1 – NIV), and many other expressions concerning other prophets show that the prophets had visions, through which the Word of God was revealed to them.

However, many times God revealed His word to His prophets even without visions, that is, by making them hear His voice. The passages of the Scripture which indicate this way of revealing the word on the part of God are the following ones: “The word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying ….” (1 Kings 18:1 – NKJV); “Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back” (1 Kings 13:20 – NKJV). Please note in the latter passage that although the prophet was with other people he alone heard the voice of the Lord.

God, through His prophets, still reveals things to the Church and to men individually. This means that even today, when God wills, He sends a prophet to bring a specific word to a Church or to a man.

The gift of prophecy

As I said before, in the prophet are operating the gift of prophecy together with at least two gifts of revelation (the gifts of revelation are three). In the manifestation of the gift of prophecy there is no revelation of future events for “he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” (1 Corinthians 14:3 – NKJV). I will give you some examples taken from the Scripture to show you what the gift of prophecy consists of.

Isaiah, who was a prophet of God, through the Spirit, by the gift of prophecy spoke to men the following words of edification: “Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working” (Isaiah 28:23-29).

Here is an example of exhortation spoken to men by Isaiah through the gift of prophecy: “Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. … Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ….. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 46:8; 8:13; 1:16-17).

Let us see now an example of comfort spoken to men by Isaiah through the gift of prophecy: “I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; ….. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. ….. But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither
shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 51:12; 51:7-8; 43:1-2). Have you noticed that in the above mentioned prophecies there is not any prediction of a future event, such as a famine, a war, the birth of someone and the death of someone?

Warnings

Know this, that when God exhorts a man through a prophet, if he accepts the words that the prophet has spoken in the name of the Lord and he submits to the will of God, he will prosper; but if he rejects the words of the prophet he will bear the consequences of his rebellion.

I want you to know also that God punishes those prophets who presume to speak in His name anything He has not commanded them to speak; our God is holy, and thus falsehood, even if it is practiced by one of His prophets, is an abomination in His sight. God says in the law: “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:20 – NKJV).

These words written in the law show us clearly how much serious is the sin of the prophet who uses his tongue and says: ‘Thus says the Lord’.

How do we know if the thing predicted by a prophet in the name of the Lord is a word which God has not spoken? We must wait for its fulfilment because when the prediction of the prophet does not happen that means that his word was not the word of God but just a word spoken presumptuously. For God says also: “And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ – ‘when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:21-22 – NKJV).

Testing prophecies and revelations

The things which are spoken by a prophet of God in the name of the Lord must be tested and judged, as it is written: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge” (1 Corinthians 14:29 – NKJV), and also: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22 – NKJV). Someone will ask: ‘Why?’ Because the prophet could say untrue things by following his own spirit. So prophecies (both the prophecies spoken by the prophets and the prophecies spoken by those who are not prophets but they have only the gift of prophecy) must be tested and if they are scriptural or agree with what the Scripture teaches must be accepted, but if they contradict the truth (that is, the Holy Scripture) they must be rejected without hesitation. Know this, that many among the Churches of God speak prophecies (or tell the brethren that they have received visions and revelations from God) which are inconsistent with the Word of God, and those who accept their words are deceived by their lies. Therefore, brothers, as Paul said: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 – NKJV), but as for what is evil, reject and expose it.

Here is an incident which happened in the days of Jeremiah which teaches us that a prophet can speak presumptuously. It is written in the book of Jeremiah: “And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD, Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the
LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place. Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him. Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way. Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month” (Jeremiah 28:1-17). Now the prophet Hananiah prophesied to the people that God would shortly cause the vessels of the temple to be brought again from Babylon and he prophesied other nice things; but he spoke those words presumptuously and thus made the people trust in a lie. Had not God, some time before, in the same year, said to the people through Jeremiah: “Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you” (Jeremiah 27:16)? So God punished Hananiah by putting him to death for his presumptuousness. This story teaches us that God cannot deny Himself; He does not change the Word which has come out of His mouth nor His plans for any purpose because “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent” (Numbers 23:19 – NKJV). God does not go against His plans or His own Words, rather He confirms them. But the rash people oppose them, and they do this using His name. For not only do they make false predictions (just a few examples: they predict the healing of some who are seriously ill, but the sick die a short time later, and they predict even some marriages but the man or the woman who should have got married dies a short time after the prediction or God wants those people to marry different people, and so on), but also confirm false teachings through their prophecies, for they prophesy the following things:

- a woman can teach, while the Word of God says: “I do not permit a woman to teach” (1 Timothy 2:12 – NKJV)
- if a woman prays to God with her head uncovered she does nothing wrong, while the Scripture says: “But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved” (1 Corinthians 11:5 - NKJV)
- if a woman wears jewelry or expensive dresses she does nothing wrong because God 'looks at the heart,' while the Scripture states: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (1 Timothy 2:8-10 - NKJV)
- divorced people can remarry, while the Scripture states: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Luke 16:18 - NKJV), and also: “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the
law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be
called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no
adulteress, though she has married another man” (Romans 7:2-3 - NKJV).
We reject all these prophecies because they contradict the Word of God and thus they do not
proceed from the mouth of God. It is not the Spirit of truth who speaks these prophecies but the
spirit of error. These things are nice in themselves, yet at the same time they are untrue.
There is another biblical story which shows that God cannot contradict His own Word, it is the
story of that prophet who came from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, as Jeroboam, king
of Israel, was standing by the altar to burn incense to the golden calf he had set up in Bethel.
Here is what the Scripture says: “And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the
word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried
against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold,
a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the
priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon
thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken;
Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. And it came to
pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar
in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which
he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was
rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had
given by the word of the LORD. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat
now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again.
And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and
became as it was before. And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and
refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt
give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this
place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water,
nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. So he went another way, and returned not by
the way that he came to Bethel. Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel; and his sons came
and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel: the words which he
had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. And their father said unto them,
What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from
Judah. And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode
thereon, And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto
him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. Then he said unto
him, Come home with me, and eat bread. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with
thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: For it was said to me by
the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the
way that thou camest. He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake
unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he
may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word
of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: And he cried unto the man of God
that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the
mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded
thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the
LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the
sepulchre of thy fathers. And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk,
that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he
was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and
the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase” (1 Kings 13:1-24). As you can see,
brothers, that man of God refused to go to eat at the king's house because he did not want to
disobey God; and afterward, at first he refused also to go to eat at the house of the old prophet for the same reason. However, when the old prophet saw that the man of God was not willing to turn back and go with him, he resorted to a lie, and said to the man of God: “An angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water” (1 Kings 13:18). Then the man of God returned with the old prophet and ate and drank in his house. In other words, he believed that lie and thus disobeyed God. You see, when Satan sees that he can’t deceive the sons of God by unbelieving people, he tries to deceive them through believers. Here is what happens: when certain believers see that you hold fast the Word of God and you refuse to come to a compromise because you want to hold fast the Holy Scriptures, they try to induce you to reject some of the commandments of God, which are true and righteous like all the others (but they do not like them), by false prophesies, that is, lies, using the name of the Lord. In other words, they act just like that old prophet. Some say to you: ‘I too am a minister of the Gospel, as you are, and God has spoken to me, saying that this commandment was only for the believers of that time and not for us today’; some others say: ‘God told me in a dream that you are mistaken because God wants us to move with the times.’ All these words are lies, which these people tell to you to induce you to disbelieve what Jesus said or what Paul and the other apostles commanded us to do, but since these people do not want to say to you clearly: ‘Disobey God and His Word’, they say it to you by using lies, and words such as ‘vision’, ‘dream’, ‘prophecy’, ‘revelation’, which are words that arouse interest and also a certain fear of God. However, since those words are used to induce you to forsake the commandments of God, I urge you to say to these people with boldness: ‘What you say is false because it contradicts the Word of God’. Beloved, know this, that God has not changed His doctrine in these last days; with the passing of time He has not changed His mind on any of His commandments He gave through His Son and through His apostles. Let no one deceive you, take heed to yourselves, the times are hard and evil; Paul said to Timothy: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4 – NKJV), and we live right in this time. The teachers who have turned their ears away from the truth and walk according to their own lusts, are continually increasing in number and many people follow them. Beware of them.

Some prophets, by their false prophecies, are trying to induce those teachers who hold fast to the truth to turn their ears away from the truth. In order to induce the simple to reject the sound doctrine, they try to deceive them into believing that the doctrine of God is out-of-date, that the doctrine of God needs to be revised, but the doctrine of God is not to be revised at all, and woe to those who try to revise it, they will bear the consequences of their rebellion, no matter who they are.

Some false teachings on the prophetic ministry

It is not true that the pastor is also a prophet in that he speaks of the things to come written in the Word of God, such as the coming of the Lord and other events which are to take place. A pastor is also a prophet if God has given him also the prophetic ministry, otherwise, no matter how much he speaks about the things to come which are written in the Bible, the fact that he speaks of these things does not make him a prophet.

Neither is it true that we are all prophets in the Church because when we speak of the Lord to other people, we speak to them from God as did the prophets of old. The fact that one evangelizes and proclaims the Word of God in the name of the Lord does not mean that he is a prophet, for in order to be considered a prophet a believer must have received the gift of prophecy and gifts of revelation.

Even the fact that one has the gift of prophecy does not mean that he is a prophet, because a prophet – I say it again - besides the gift of prophecy, has also some gifts of revelation. “Are all
prophets?” (1 Corinthians 12:29 – NKJV). Of course the answer is ‘no’, because the body of Christ is not comprised of one member but of many; the prophet is one of the ministries appointed by God in the Church for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Some teach that since the Holy Spirit has been poured out, and He guides every Christian into all truth, today we do not need prophets any longer, as the Israelites needed them under the Old Covenant. However, this cannot be proved by the Scripture, thus we do not accept it.

In the early Church there were some prophets; the Scripture says that Judas and Silas were prophets (Acts 15:32); in the Church that was at Antioch there were some prophets (Acts 13:1); the ministry of prophet is mentioned among the ministry gifts Paul speaks of in his epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4:11), and it is also mentioned in one of his letters to the Corinthians, as Paul wrote to them: “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. … And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:29-30, 32-33). These are commandments of the Lord.

Paul recognized the ministry of prophet and if he said: “Let the prophets speak two or three”, no one has the right to say: ‘Prophets no longer exist’, or: ‘Those who claim to be prophets must not speak when the saints are gathered together’. Anyone who tries to prevent a prophet of God from fulfilling his ministry, becomes an enemy of God, as the Israelites became enemies of God when they forbade the prophets to prophesy. As God said to the Israelites: “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying: ‘Do not prophesy! ”Behold, I am weighed down by you, As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, The strong shall not strengthen his power, Nor shall the mighty deliver himself; He shall not stand who handles the bow, The swift of foot shall not escape, Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. The most courageous men of might Shall flee naked in that day,” (Amos 2:12-16 – NKJV); God said these words to a people who said: “The prophets become wind, for the word is not in them” (Jeremiah 5:13 – NKJV), to a people who had a stubborn heart and who opposed the prophets who spoke from Him.

Of course, Paul said that what is spoken by the prophets must be judged, but he did not forbid the prophets to speak in the church: the apostle said also that if anything is revealed to another (that is, one of the prophets) who sits by, the first must keep silent, therefore Paul did not believe that God had ceased giving revelations for the Church. Why then should we believe that God has ceased giving revelations? Note that when Paul says: “If a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop” (1 Corinthians 14:30 – NIV), the word ‘revelation’ does not refer to ‘a teaching of the Word of God’ (as some say for lack of knowledge) because a short time before Paul says: “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Corinthians 14:26 – NKJV), making it clear that teaching and revelation are not the same thing. Know this, that when God wills, He gives some visions for the church as the saints are gathered together, and by these visions the saints are edified, comforted, strengthened, and rebuked when they need to be rebuked. Paul said: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40 – NKJV). Therefore the prophets also must fulfill their ministry decently in order not to create confusion in the midst of the Church; this is the reason why Paul says: “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:32-33 – NKJV). As for the prophetic ministry under the Old Covenant, I want to say this. As you know, under the Old Covenant the Spirit had not yet been poured out upon all flesh, however I remind you that at that time God anointed some kings with the Holy Spirit and those kings were guided by God also through some revelations, that God gave them by the prophets. David, for instance, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was in him, yet on certain occasions God spoke to him through the prophets. While Saul was persecuting David, and David was in Mizpah of Moab, the prophet Gad said to David: “Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land
of Judah” (1 Samuel 22:5 – NKJV). When David became king and he wanted to build a house for the name of God, God prevented him from building the temple through a revelation given to Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7:1-29); after David committed adultery with the wife of Uriah and he had Uriah killed, God sent to him Nathan the prophet to rebuke him and to foretell him the punishment He would inflict upon David for his sins (2 Samuel chapters 11-12); when David had the people of Israel counted (which thing displeased the Lord), God sent to him the prophet Gad who said to David: “Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me” (2 Samuel 24:13)

I have mentioned these incidents of the life of David so that you may understand that although the Spirit was upon David and in David, for the Holy Spirit spoke through him, God spoke to David through His prophets as well. From this point of view, things have not changed, because even though the saints have the Holy Spirit in them (those who are filled with the Holy Spirit have a greater measure of the Holy Spirit than those who have not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit), and the Spirit guides them, on some occasions God speaks to them through the prophets (by a prophecy or by some visions), just as He did under the Old Covenant. On the other hand, the prophet Agabus received from God a personal message for Paul, while Paul was at Caesarea (Acts 21:10-11), therefore no wonder that God sometimes guides, comforts, strengthens, and rebukes His sons, through some revelations given to the prophets. I do not understand why we should say: ‘The ministry of prophet is no longer necessary!, and at the same time: ‘However, the ministry of pastor is necessary!’. All the ministry gifts are profitable to the Church, no one of them is useless. I say to you who affirm that the prophetic ministry is no longer necessary because the Spirit who is in us guides us into all truth: ‘As things are, according to your argument, if you say that the Spirit of truth guides you into all truth, you should have no need of the pastors either, who shepherd you, nor of the teachers, who teach you. Why then do you recognize these ministries but you do not recognize the ministry of prophet? Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary ....” (1 Corinthians 12:21-22 – NKJV). Listen to me, you who say that the ministry of prophet is not necessary in the Church: if one of your eyes could speak and you heard it say to your right foot: ‘Listen, I don't need you!’, would you be happy? Would you not say that something is wrong with one of your eyes? Would you not see a division in your body? Do you think then that by saying such a thing about the prophetic ministry you make the Lord glad, who is the Head of the Church? No, brother, the Lord does not like at all these words of yours; come to your senses, acknowledge that the prophetic ministry is still profitable; be wise for the Lord says: “My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice – indeed, I myself ....” (Proverbs 23:15 – NKJV).

The false prophets

I want to say something about the false prophets, so that you may not ignore their existence and you may beware of them.

The apostle Peter said that in ancient times there were some holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, but he said also that there were also false prophets among the people. That is clearly confirmed by the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which teach that on the one hand there were prophets who spoke by the Holy Spirit, and on the other hand there were some false prophets who used their tongues and said: ‘The Lord says’, when the Lord had not spoken to them.

Before speaking about the false prophets, their false prophesies, and their wicked conduct, I want to speak to you about the conduct of the people of Israel and I want to tell you how the prophets exhorted the people of God to repent.
The Israelites forsook the Rock of their salvation and turned to the idols of the nations surrounding Israel, they played the harlot after those idols, for they made for themselves idols and put them on the high places and they offered incense and sacrifices to their idols (they even caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to their gods). In addition to this, the Israelites stole, murdered, lied to one another, were lovers of money; according to what the Scripture teaches, the Israelites forsook the commandments of God. God saw their iniquities and was grieved in His heart; however, He was not indifferent and so He sent the prophets to the Israelites and commanded them to make known to the Israelites their sins and to exhort them to repent. The holy prophets of God obeyed God and spoke the words of God to the rebellious people; now I will quote some of the warnings the prophets gave to the people of Israel, that you may know that the holy prophets did not flatter the wicked.

Jeremiah said: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jeremiah 4:4), and again: “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion” (Jeremiah 3:12-14).

Ezekiel said: “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Isaiah said: “Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. … Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 46:8; 1:16-17)

God said to the people of Israel that if they turned from their evil ways He would forgive them, but He said to them also that if they refused to turn from their evil ways He would punish them. The prophets foretold the punishments God would inflict on the Israelites if they kept walking according to the stubbornness of their heart: here are some words spoken by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Isaiah said: “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:19-20).

Jeremiah said: “But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched. … For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:27; 8:17), and again: “Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword” (Jeremiah 5:15-17).

How did the rebels react to the warnings of the holy prophets? They persecuted, slandered, beat, put in prison, and killed the prophets.

However, there were also false prophets in the midst of the people of Israel; they claimed that they had received visions and dreams from God, but all the things they told to the people contradicted the law and the words of the holy prophets. The false prophets conducted themselves in a wicked way, prophesying lies and doing other evil things. Here is what God said about the conduct of the false prophets: “I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an
horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. ..... There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. ..... Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. ..... They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word [yet they hope that the word may be confirmed – NKJV] ... They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. ..... Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. ... the prophets thereof divine for money .... I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jeremiah 23:14-15; Ezekiel 22:25; Jeremiah 23:16; Ezekiel 13:6; Jeremiah 23:17; Micah 3:5,11; Jeremiah 23:21).

Therefore, from the Word of God we learn the following things about the false prophets:
● they are greedy for money, for they prophesy for money, and thus if one gives them something to eat they proclaim ‘peace’, but if one puts nothing in their pockets they prepare to wage war against him
● they commit adultery (or other sexual sins) for they are sensual persons
● they love and practice falsehood because they speak about things which they have not seen and which they have not heard from God, thus their predictions fail
● they are unjust because with lies they make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God does not make sad; and they strengthen the hands of the wicked, so that they do not turn from their wicked way
● the rebellious people speak very well of them because the false prophets flatter them by telling them that they will have peace and no evil will come upon them

Therefore, we conclude that the false prophets are really bad trees, which bear bad fruit. However, just as the Lord did not leave the false prophets of old unpunished, so the Lord will not leave the modern false prophets unpunished. Jesus said that “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19 – NKJV), therefore we know that the false prophets will be surely cast into the furnace of fire and God will bring a perpetual shame upon them.

Brothers, there are many false prophets. Beware of them, lest you be torn by their teeth. Remember that inwardly they are ravenous wolves even though they come to you in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15), and their purpose is to harm you.

**Evangelist**

The evangelist is one who goes from one town and village to another, evangelizing, that is, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. To evangelize means to proclaim the Gospel.

Philip was an evangelist, for the Scripture calls him “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8 - NIV). Philip had been appointed to wait on tables together with other six brothers, for he is also called “one of the seven” (Acts 21:8 - NKJV). Here is what Luke says about the choosing of the seven: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the
Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6). At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsy, and that were lame, were healed” (Acts 8:5-7). Many Samaritans believed the Good News and were baptized by Philip, as it is written: “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Therefore, the evangelist, according to the example we have in Philip, preaches the Gospel, heals the sick (thus he has received gifts of healings), and he has power to baptize in water those who repent and believe in the Lord.

Someone will say: ‘What is the difference between the apostle and the evangelist, since both of them preach the Gospel to the unbelievers?’ Here is the answer. The apostle is sent by God to preach in another nation, while the evangelist, in most cases, preaches in his own nation; furthermore, the apostle goes to preach in unevangelized regions (that is, where there are no churches), there he founds some churches and has elders elected for them in each church, while the evangelist, in most cases, goes to preach in regions where there are already some churches, he preaches the Gospel and then he goes away.

According to what is written in the book of the Acts of the apostles, there is another difference between the apostle and the evangelist; the apostle possesses the power to lay hands on believers that they may receive the Holy Spirit (that is, he possesses the power of imparting the Holy Spirit), while the evangelist does not have this gift. This is what we infer from the following facts, which happened in Samaria after many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized by Philip: “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14-17). As you can see, if Philip had possessed the same authority as the apostles Peter and John possessed, it would not have been necessary for Peter and John to come down to Samaria to pray for those believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit; while it was necessary for them to come down to Samaria because Philip did not have power to lay hands on believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit, even though Philip was a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul also had power to lay hands on believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for Luke says about some disciples Paul met at Ephesus: “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve” (Acts 19:5-7).
A pastor is one who has been appointed by God to shepherd and to keep watch over the flock of the Lord.

As for this ministry, it must be said that the ministry of pastor is mentioned only in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. There is not even a single passage in the Scriptures of the New Covenant which clearly affirms that someone was the pastor of a certain church. According to the Scriptures of the New Covenant, in the days of the apostles the Churches were shepherded and watched by the elders, that is to say, every church was governed by some elders (or bishops) who took care of the flock of the Lord. The passages of the Scriptures which show that the churches were led by some elders (or bishops), equal to one another in power, function and rank, are the following ones.

- Book of the Acts of the apostles: “And from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, .... Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:17,18,28); Paul and Barnabas “had elders elected for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23 – NIV); “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren” (Acts 15:22); “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30); “And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:18).
- Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philémon 1:1).
- First epistle of Paul to Timothy: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. .... Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17. The NKJV reads 'eldership' instead of 'presbytery').
- Epistle of James: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15).
- First epistle of Peter: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder .... Shepherd the flock of God which is among you .... Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders” (1 Peter 5:1,2,5 - NKJV).
- Epistle to the Hebrews: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (Hebrews 13:17 – NKJV).

As you can see, all the above mentioned passages speaks of the elders of the church but they do not mention the pastor of the church. However, we have to say also this: the fact that the ministry of pastor in mentioned only once in the New Testament and that the New Testament never speaks of the pastor of a church, does not mean that it is wrong for a church to have a pastor who is helped by a group of elders. Someone will say: ‘Does the Scripture somehow teach that a church can have a pastor and a body of elders then?’ Yes, it does. Now I will show you from the Scriptures that a church can have a pastor.

When Jesus appeared to John, who was on the island that is called Patmos, He told him to write to the angels of the seven churches which were in Asia. Who were those angels? Of course, they were not spirits or spiritual beings, because according to the words the Lord told them they were men with a nature like ours who were fulfilling a ministry among those churches. That they were fulfilling a ministry is confirmed by the following words Jesus said to the angel of the church in Thyatira: “I know your … service” (Revelation 2:19 – NKJV. The IBRV reads ‘ministerio’ that
is, ‘ministry’). I would like you to note the following thing; the Scripture says that from Miletus Paul “sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church” (Acts 20:17 – NKJV), however the Scripture shows that while the apostle John was still alive there was the angel of the Church of Ephesus, for the Lord commanded to write to the angel of the Church of Ephesus too (and not to the angels of the Church of Ephesus). The Lord did not tell John to write to the elders of that church, but to the angel of that church: this shows us that angel was the pastor of that church.

In addition to this, when the Lord appeared to John, “He had in His right hand seven stars” (Revelation 1:16 – NKJV), those stars were the angels of the seven churches which were in Asia, as Jesus said to him: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20 – NKJV). The fact that the pastor of a church is a star (or symbolized by a star) should not be underestimated. Jesus, who is the Chief Shepherd, is the bright morning star; while the pastors He has appointed over the Churches are the stars which He has in His right hand. The stars which God set in the firmament of the heavens give light on the earth and guide people, for they are a sure point of reference for those people who are without a compass in the midst of a wilderness or a sea. Likewise the pastors who have been set by God in the Church illuminate the faithful and lead them in the paths of righteousness. Do you remember what that star which appeared to the wise men in the East did? The Scripture says that “the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was” (Matthew 2:9 – NKJV). Now, is it not true that the pastor too goes before the sheep? That star led the wise men to the King of the Jews; take this expression “till it came and stood over where the young Child was” and compare it with the following words of Paul to the Ephesians: “And he gave .... some, pastors .... Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11,13), and you will realize that the stars of the Churches (the pastors of the Churches) have been set by God in His Church to lead the saints to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

To sum up, we say that all the Churches of God have a body of elders. However, while some of them are ruled only by elders, equal to one another in rank, power and function (no one of them is called pastor, but actually all of them do the work of a pastor), some others are ruled by some elders and a pastor as well, who is the president of the body of elders, the spokesman for the elders, and the one who, as a matter of fact, has a greater power than the elders. One thing is sure: in both cases, the faithful are not left to themselves because they are watched by people who have been appointed to shepherd the flock of God.

Let us see now how the pastors must shepherd the flock of the Lord. The apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, before He ascended to heaven, had said: “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17), wrote to those who have been called to shepherd the flock of God: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).

First of all, I want to say that the flock belongs to God, that is to say, the sheep belong to God; He has bought them at a price, and this was confirmed by Paul also when he said to the elders of the Church of Ephesus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). I have said this because there are some pastors who call the church of God ‘their church’, ‘their sheep’ and this is not true because the sheep which the pastors are called to shepherd belong to the Lord, for the Lord Jesus said to Peter: “Feed my sheep” (John 21:18), and not: ‘Feed your sheep’.

The pastor must shepherd the flock of God not because he must, but because he is willing, as God wants him to be; he must not consider his ministry an unpleasant and useless work, rather he must consider his ministry a wonderful and useful work, thus he must fulfill it joyfully. The pastor must shepherd the flock of God not for dishonest gain (that is to say, he must not take
advantage of the generosity of the sheep of God), therefore he must not be moved by
greediness but he must shepherd the flock sincerely with a good conscience. The pastor must
not lord it over the sheep entrusted to him by the Lord, that is to say, he must not rule the flock
with violence and harshness, but he must be humble. Jesus said: “If anyone desires to be first,
he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35 – NKJV); thus, the Lord does not condemn
those who want to be first or great among His people, but at the same time He tells them what
they must do in order to be first, that is, they must be last of all and servants of all. However,
many pastors want to be served, but they refuse to serve; they want to be first and great by
walking according to the stubbornness of their heart, refusing to humble themselves and to
serve the flock of God; how can such people think they are great? Of course, they may be
considered great by people who are arrogant like them, but certainly they are not considered
great by those sheep who are meek and God-fearing, and who are still waiting for their pastor –
who does not care about them and acts out of self-interest - to take care of them.

Someone will say: ‘Could you tell me what the work of a pastor consist of?’ Well, his work
consists in feeding the sheep of the Lord, in protecting them from the savage wolves, in
strengthening the weak sheep, in healing the sick sheep, in binding up the broken, in seeking
the lost sheep, in rebuking those who need to be rebuked. If a pastor takes heed to himself and
to the flock of the Lord, when the Lord appears, he will receive glory and honor from Him.

Someone will say then: ‘What will happen to those pastors who act out of self-interest, who lord
it over the sheep of the Lord, who do not take heed to themselves nor to the Church of God?’
God will cut them to pieces, that’s what will happen to those pastors who have fed themselves
rather than the Church of God.

Here is what God said about these pastors through the prophet Ezekiel: “Thus saith the Lord
GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not
the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that
are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye
healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye
brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with
force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no
shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered”
(Ezekiel 34:2-5).

Jesus Christ spoke of the hireling, who is the one who keeps watch over the sheep only for
money. Here is what He said: “But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own
the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the
sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the
sheep” (John 10:12-13 – NKJV). The difference between the shepherd and the hireling is that
the former shepherds the sheep and takes care of them willingly and wholeheartedly and he
does not act out of self-interest but he fears God, knowing that on that day he will have to give
account to the Lord of every sheep which was entrusted to him; whereas the latter keeps watch
over the sheep only for wages, but he does not care about the sheep. Unlike the shepherd, he
takes no interest in the sheep, and when the savage wolf comes he does not fight against the
wolf to put it to flight rather he leaves the sheep and flees, so the wolf can kill, devour, and
scatter the sheep.

Here is what God said about the shepherds who lived in the days of the prophet Isaiah: “His
watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping,
lying down, loving to slumber. Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they
are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, everyone for his own gain,
from his own territory. ‘Come’ one says, ‘ I will bring wine, and we will fill ourselves with
intoxicating drink; tomorrow will be as today, and much more abundant” (Isaiah 56:10-12 -
NKJV). Here is how the Scripture describes all the pastors who do not care about the sheep of
the Lord; they are blind, thus they are unable to recognize good and evil and to lead the church
in the paths of righteousness; they are ignorant, thus they are without spiritual understanding
because they refuse to heed the Wisdom of God and to follow His advices; they are like dumb dogs which are unable to bark, which love to slumber, therefore they do not watch over the sheep because when they see the danger they do not bark. What is the use of a watchdog which does not bark? The evil workers comes in among the sheep to introduce their false doctrines and to draw away the sheep of the Lord after themselves, but these pastors are sleeping, they are very busy looking for their own gain.

These people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, “and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:18 – NKJV); the sheep which were entrusted to them are scattered, they fall prey to the false prophets and the false teachers, who catch the sheep for their pastor is sleeping. Jeremiah said: “For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the Lord; therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered” (Jeremiah 10:21 – NKJV), and again: “Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness” (Jeremiah 12:10). What happened in Israel in the days of the prophets, is happening today; there are many pastors who destroy the sheep of God, because they are greedy for money; these pastors loses the sheep because they want to be rich and famous; they curse and cast out those sheep who put nothing or little in their insatiable belly; they resort to every kind of deception to achieve their evil aims.

If the sheep of the Lord do not pursue holiness, these pastors do not care about it at all; these pastors are not grieved when they see the corruption and the worldliness spreading among the flock of the Lord; they are not grieved when they see the sheep going astray on the mountains of unfaithfulness, and they do not have compassion on those sheep which are weak and downhearted because they are merciless; they do not defend the truth because they do not love it; they do not take heed to themselves, and if the name of God and the doctrine of God are blasphemed because of their frequent scandals they do not care about it at all because they have become famous and – according to their opinion - they can take the liberty of causing offenses because they will always find many naive believers who are willing to follow them and to support them; they are adulterers (or fornicators or even homosexuals), they are lovers of money, they play the fool in the presence of all, they amuse themselves in vanities, they are friends of adulterers and of thieves and they take pleasure in walking with them; the commandments of God and the fear of God are not before their eyes, but behind their back; they are haughty and unable to humble themselves, “yet they lean on the Lord, and say: Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us” (Micaiah 3:11 – NKJV), but God says: “Woe to them!” (Jude 11 - NKJV).

Teacher

A teacher is one who teaches the Word of God, he is able to teach it accurately because the Lord has given him the ability to teach.

Besides being an apostle, Paul was also a teacher; for he said to Timothy: “To which [the Gospel] I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Timothy 1:11 – NKJV). Reading the epistles of Paul, we can see what he taught everywhere in every church; a teacher must teach the same things Paul taught.

Paul, a teacher of the Gentiles, wrote to the saints of Colosse: “Him [Christ] we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28 – NKJV). From these words we learn that a teacher teaches the saints, according to the wisdom given to him, so that he may present them perfect in Christ. Is it not true that also the ministry of teacher is given by Christ for the perfecting of the saints?

Paul stayed in Corinth “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11 – NKJV); in Ephesus for three years he did not cease to warn each one of the saints with
tears, and when he spoke to the elders of the Church of Ephesus he said to them: “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27 - NKJV). This is what a teacher does where God opens a door to him; he stays in that place to teach the saints the whole counsel of God.

The teaching of a teacher is elementary (milk) when it is delivered to the newborn babes in Christ; while it is perfect (solid food) when it is delivered to those who are of full age; in both cases, the teaching is sound and profitable.

Besides Paul, there were other teachers in his days, some of them are mentioned by Luke when he says: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1).

Nowadays, in the midst of the Church of God, the term teacher (or ‘doctor’ – the IBRV reads ‘dottore’ that is, ‘doctor’ instead of ‘teacher’) is used many times improperly toward some who don’t have the ministry of teacher. According to the Scripture a teacher (or a ‘doctor’) is not a man who have studied some foreign languages nor a man who teaches Greek, or Hebrew or Aramaic; of course, according to those who are outside such a man may be considered a teacher, but according to those who are inside a teacher is one who teaches the Word of God. Paul was a Jew and he knew well the Greek language, but when he came in Greece he did not begin to teach the Hebrew language (his own tongue) to the believers who were Greek, but he taught them the Word of God. Why do I say this? Because some believers think that a teacher is one who has a good knowledge of Greek, and of Hebrew and teaches them; of course, the knowledge of the ancient Greek language and of the Hebrew language is useful, but it doesn’t make anyone a teacher. For instance, those people who have translated the Holy Scripture know both the ancient Greek language and the Hebrew language because they have studied them (we thank God for what they did, because by their work we can read the Word of God in our tongue), but I want to make it clear that if one of those who have translated the Holy Writings into Italian (or into English) is not able to teach the doctrines of the Word of God to the saints, he is not a teacher.

Even the fact that a believer has obtained a degree or several degrees (no matter what kind of degree), and that he is able to speak about God with eloquence, does not mean that he is a teacher. To be a teacher he must be able to teach the Word of God: he has a doctor’s decree which was conferred on him by the University, but he does not have the ministry of teacher which is conferred by the Lord.

False teachers

Now I want to speak to you about the false teachers who are among the people of God, reminding you of what the apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle about the false teachers and commenting on his words briefly. Peter said: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [Greek: Tartarus], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)

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The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the
day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of
uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to
speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing
accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken
and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their
own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure
to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own
deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from
sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed
children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam
the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the
dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet. These are wells
without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved
for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the
flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.
While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a
man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the
pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are
again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.
For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they
have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto
them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that
was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:1-22)
In ancient times there were also false prophets among the people of Israel, who prophesied out
of their own heart, following their own spirit; that is what the Scripture teaches. Now, Peter said
that just as there were false prophets among the people, so there will be false teachers among
us, yes, among us, because he said: “There shall be false teachers among you” (2 Peter 2:1). Therefore pay much attention to the words of Peter, so that you may recognize these impostors
when they come to you.
The false teachers are as crafty as foxes and by their craftiness they introduce strange and
perverse doctrines into the church; “They trust in empty words and speak lies .... They hatch vipers’ eggs ... he who eats of their eggs dies” (Isaiah 59:4,5 - NKJV), says the prophet Isaiah,
and in fact those who have accepted the destructive heresies taught by the false teachers have
wandered away from the truth. The false teachers have denied the Lord who bought them, which
means that they once believed in the Lord but afterward they forsook Him.
These deceitful workers take pleasure in saying things they ought not to say; they are sensual
persons, and those who are enticed by their sensuality follow them and imitate their ways, and
because of these false teachers the way of truth is blasphemed by those who are outside. Why
do unbelievers blaspheme the way of truth? Because these deceivers, who claim that they are in
the truth and on the way of righteousness, are worse than unbelievers who do not know the
Lord! False teachers are lovers of money, and they exploit those believers who are sincere and
naive, who do not have enough discernment, extorting money from them by their smooth but at
the same time deceitful words, that they may live a lavish lifestyle. The pretexts used by these
false teachers to snatch money from the hands of believers are various; know this, that they do
not say to you: ‘Give us your money because we want to buy some luxurious cars, we want to
build some pleasant palaces, and we want to amuse ourselves in vanities’, rather they say to
you: ‘Give us your offerings for the work of the Lord and God will bless the work of your hands,
your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine’, these are words
which the bondservants of Mammon know very well and recite well before the crowds of people
who go to listen to their empty speeches. Judas Iscariot was one of the apostles of the Lord, and
when Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard and anointed the feet of Jesus, he said:
“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” (John 12:5 – NKJV). As you can see, Judas said that the fragrant oil could have been sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor, therefore he said something which was not wrong in itself. However, he did not say those words “because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6 – NIV). The false teachers speak like Judas Iscariot, for they say that they want to help the poor, they want to spread the word of the Lord and exhort people to give them some money for these good causes; but at the same time they live in luxurious mansions, they have expensive cars, they wear designer clothes, gold watches; in other words, they live a lavish lifestyle. These people are like Judas, for they are thieves; however they will not go unpunished because God will repay them according to their works in due season.

God did not spare the angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own abode and committed fornication with the daughters of men, for He sent them to Tartarus [the deepest abyss of Hades] and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved for the judgment of the great day.

God did not spare the world of the ungodly in the days of Noah, for He punished it by bringing in the flood on the world, and He put to death all living things who were on the face of the earth, as it is written: “So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth” (Genesis 7:23 – NKJV), but He saved Noah and seven others, as it is written: “Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive” (Genesis 7:23 – NKJV) and also: “A few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:20 – NKJV).

God did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them. All those cities had pride, fulness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did they strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. They had given themselves over to fornication and to sins against nature, and God rained brimstone and fire on those cities, and turned them into ashes, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly. However, in that case also, God manifested His justice, for He did not put to death righteous Lot for that righteous man, dwelling among those perverse people, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.

The above mentioned stories teach us that God loves righteousness and knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, but also that God returns all the wickedness committed by the wicked on their own heads. Know this, that God will judge the unjust, those who live according to the flesh, and those who despise authority; and the false teachers are among these people for they are full of all unrighteousness, they walk according to the fleshly lusts, and despise authority.

These impostors despise and insult the governing authorities, which are appointed by God, such as kings, governors, ministers, judges, public prosecutors; they refuse to honor the governing authorities, while the Scripture commands us to honor them. It is written in the law: “You shall not … curse a ruler of your people” (Exodus 22:28 – NKJV), and Solomon says: “Do not curse the king, even in your thought” (Ecclesiastes 10:20 – NKJV), but these people refuse to keep these commandments because they are haughty. And in addition to this, they speak evil of dignitaries, for they insult the prince of this world and the principalities, and the powers, whereas the angels of God, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord, and this is confirmed by Jude who says: “These dreamers … Speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 8-9 - NKJV). Remember that Jesus Christ called the devil “the prince of this world” (John 14:30 – NIV), and that when Jesus was tempted by the devil, He, who was the Son of God, dared not bring against the devil a reviling accusation, for when the devil tempted Jesus to bow down and to worship him Jesus replied: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matthew 4:10 – NKJV); he did not say
to the devil: ‘Now …. you’ll pay for it!’ or ‘If you do not go away, I will send you to …..’ (these abominable expressions and others, which are very much alike, are uttered against the devil by corrupt and haughty men who preach the Gospel, but the saddest thing is that many believers laugh when they hear them and even say ‘Amen!’). I found it necessary to tell you this so that you may understand that even though Jesus knew how many evil things the devil had done and said till that moment and He knew that He was more powerful than the devil, He did not dare to insult him or ridicule him. Jesus Christ left us an example, but these false teachers refuse to follow His example, because they are haughty, rash, and they give funny and humorous nicknames to the devil to ridicule him. The prophet Zechariah wrote: “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee ....” (Zechariah 3:1-2); which means that God, when He rebuked Satan, said to the devil the same words that Michael the archangel had said to the devil when he disputed about the body of Moses. Therefore, brothers, do not be led away with the error of the wicked. These men, who are disapproved concerning the faith, “speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 10 – NKJV), for some of them are sodomites. “Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28 – NIV); but God does not leave them unpunished in that in this world they receive “in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1:27 – NIV), and in the world to come God will bring upon them what their conduct deserves. The false teachers take pleasure in guzzling, which is one of the works of the flesh, for they count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime, they get drunk on aged wines and intoxicating drinks. During the love feasts they give themselves over to guzzling, that’s why Jude says that “these are spots in your love feasts” (Jude 12 – NKJV). Do you know what else they do in the love feasts? They delight in their deceptions. Like the ungodly mockers at feasts, these people like entertaining their hearers with their scurrilous jokes; they have eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, and this is what God says about them: “They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife” (Jeremiah 5:8 – NIV). These false teachers entice those souls who are unstable; Peter calls them “accursed children” (1 Peter 2:14 – NKJV) because they take delight in cursing their neighbour; on that day they will be among those to whom the Lord will say: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41 – NKJV). They were on the right way, but they have forsaken it and gone astray; they have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit; they are wells without water and also clouds without water which are carried about by every wind of teaching. ‘What is the use of a well without water to those who are thirsty?’ These people are totally devoid of the wisdom of God, but they are full of the demonic wisdom; they are devoid of the sound doctrine, but they are full of fables and false doctrines, thus they can’t edify those believers who walk in the Spirit and know the voice of the Lord. Notwithstanding this, we must admit that these deceivers have a hold over the crowds; on the other hand Peter said that “when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (2 Peter 2:18 – NKJV), therefore, we are not surprised by their ‘success’. Jude said that “they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 16 – NKJV), which means that they say many untrue things and that they flatter their hearers in order to win their confidence. One of the things these idle talkers do is this: they promise liberty to their followers, for they say that they know how to set people free from all sins and troubles, while they themselves are slaves of corruption because they are again entangled in the pollutions of the world (which they had escaped) and overcome. The latter end is worse for them than the beginning; this is why Jude calls them “late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots” (Jude 12 – NKJV). Brothers, beware of false teachers.
Conclusion

Before I conclude, I want to tell you that Christ has given the above mentioned ministry gifts to men for the perfecting of the saints, that the Church of God may be edified and that there should be no schism in the Church. God, through His ministers, wants us to come to the unity of the faith in Christ Jesus and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with confusing and divisive winds of doctrine, which blow round and about us in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation, which are spewed forth by deceitful men who are experts "in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Ephesians 4:14 – NKJV). In other words, God, wanting all of us to grow in wisdom, in knowledge and grace, in order to deliver us from these deceivers, who are ministers of Satan and transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, has appointed in the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,

What shall we say then about the presence of the false apostles, the false prophets, and the false teachers among the people of God? Brothers, there must be such people because it is written: “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19 – NKJV). I realize that these words that Paul wrote to the Corinthians are hard, but they are true.

We must admit that many false prophets and false teachers have risen up from among the Church of God over the course of history, and they have secretly brought in many perverse doctrines and have drawn away many disciples after them. However, we must also admit that many believers did not heed to these idle talkers and they stood fast in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ and they held fast the sound doctrine taught by our Lord and by the apostles, and they contended earnestly for the faith. Yes, those men of God fought the good fight and did not draw back, but with the weapons of God they fought the good fight till the end of their life, and it is because of the hardships and the many sacrifices of these courageous men of God, whom God raised up, that the Gospel has come to us; and it is because of the faithful work of many Bible translators that the Holy Scriptures have come to us unabridged. Although the devil raised up his wicked ministers, who twisted the Scriptures to their own destruction and to the destruction of many souls, the pure Gospel has come to us and by it we have been saved from our sins.

We, who have believed in the name of the Son of God, praise God because He has made known to us the truth and He makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. To God be the glory now and forever. Amen.
THE ORDINANCES

Water baptism

We believers in Jesus Christ have been baptized in water (in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). Why? Because Jesus Christ, before He was taken up into heaven, commanded His apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 – NKJV). Therefore we, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, have obeyed a specific command of the Lord.

Now, since water baptism is a rite which was commanded by Christ Jesus, it must have a meaning and it must be important.

So let us see what the Scripture says about the meaning of water baptism and its importance.

The meaning and importance of water baptism

The apostle Peter says that water baptism is “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21 – NASB). Therefore, since he who believes in God, by accepting to be baptized, wants to have a good conscience before God, water baptism is necessary (on the other hand how could Jesus have ordained an unnecessary thing for those who would believe on Him?).

All of us, after we believed in the Lord, felt we needed to be baptized because we perceived in us by the Spirit that even though we were sons of God washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, we had to obey the Lord’s command concerning water baptism in order to have a good conscience before God. Of course, we were sure that we were both saved and forgiven, but, notwithstanding this, we felt we had to be baptized in water according to the order given by Christ, our Saviour. Therefore, according to the Scripture, by water baptism we obtained a good conscience before God.

At this point, someone may ask: ‘Does a believer have a good conscience before he is baptized? Or does the good conscience follow water baptism?’ Well, according to the Scripture, the conscience of a believer is cleansed from dead works by the blood of Jesus Christ and not by the water in which he is immersed after believing, as it is written: “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14 – NKJV). Therefore, it is when a man believes in the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross for the remission of our sins that his conscience is purified. In other words, it is by faith in Christ that a man receives the remission of his sins, not ‘by faith and water baptism’, but by faith alone. The apostle Peter said to Cornelius and his household: “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43 – NIV), and Paul confirmed this concept by the following words he wrote to the Romans: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25 – NIV). Therefore, every believer has a good conscience before he is baptized. Why then does Peter say that water baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience? Because after one has believed in the Lord he must strive to have a clear conscience before God, that is to say, he must see that he keeps his conscience clear. How can he do this? Well, he can do it by keeping the commands of the Lord, and
among His commands is the command concerning water baptism. The apostle Paul one day said before Felix: “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16 - NKJV). He was an apostle of the Lord, thus He was a born again Christian, washed in the blood of the Lamb, his conscience had been cleansed from dead works by the blood of Jesus, and he had been baptized as well, yet he stated that he was striving to have a good conscience (or a conscience void of offense) before God and men. Therefore, no wonder that any newborn babe in Christ feels he needs to be baptized in order to keep his conscience clear before God. His conscience bears him witness in the Holy Spirit that he must be baptized. Let me tell you something that happened to me several months after my conversion. In 1984 I went to England and lived there for about six months. I worked for the C. L. C (Christian Literature Crusade). One day I was invited to a baptismal service which took place in a swimming pool; I was a born again Christian, I was sure that all my sins were forgiven, I was sure I was a son of God, however, I had not yet been baptized. During the baptismal service I perceived by the Holy Spirit that my conscience was telling me that I too needed to be baptized together with those people who were being baptized. I had not yet obeyed the Lord’s command concerning water baptism. I wanted to be baptized, but I wanted to be baptized before my parents and those believers who had known me for many years. So several months later, after I returned to Italy, I was baptized in the Lake Maggiore. The day on which I was baptized was a happy day. After I was baptized I perceived that my conscience did not rebuke me any longer.

In addition to this, by water baptism we were buried with Christ, as it s written: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). And since it is the dead who are buried and not the living, we can say that when we were buried through baptism into the death of Christ we had already died to sin, since we had repented of our sins and believed in the Gospel. In other words, we were already born again, thus, dead to sin, before we were immersed in water; and through baptism our old man was buried with Christ. Just as Christ was already dead to sin when He was buried (“for the death that He died, He died to sin once for all”, says Paul. Romans 6:10 - NKJV), so we also were already dead to sin through the body of Christ when we were buried with Him. We can express this concept also in this way: we were saved from our sins by faith, thus before we were baptized we were already saved (because faith preceded water baptism). Therefore we can call our water baptism ‘an act of obedience to God which sealed the justification we obtained by faith before water baptism’. We can compare it to the sign of circumcision Abraham received, as it is written: “He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, while he was still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11 – NIV), because Abraham also was justified by God through faith before he was circumcised. It was not circumcision which was accounted to Abraham for righteousness but his faith, as it is written: “We say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness” (Romans 4:9 – NKJV). Likewise, it was not water baptism which was accounted to us for righteousness but our faith, which we had before we were baptized.

Through water baptism we told the devil and his ministers (as well as the people who were present or heard about our baptism) that we have become disciples of Jesus Christ, and that we do not want to live for ourselves any longer, but we want to live for Him who died and rose again for us. So we proclaimed that we have decided to deny ourselves and the pleasures of sin, which the devil offers us through this evil world. For we should always remember that when we were born again we were delivered from this present evil age, which lies under the sway of the wicked one and we were conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of God; and also that before our new birth we used to serve sin but after the new birth we begin to serve righteousness. Water baptism, therefore, is an act through which we proclaimed that we died
to sin and to the world. Just as through the Lord’s Supper we proclaim the death that the Lord died to sin once for all, so through water baptism, which one undergoes once during his life, we proclaimed that we died to sin and to the world. And keep in mind that just as the Lord’s Supper is not the repetition of the Lord’s death, so water baptism was not an act through which we died to sin because our death to sin took place before we were baptized. Consider that in some countries to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ means to be condemned to death by one’s countrymen: this is why many of our brothers in these countries have been killed after water baptism, for thus they proclaimed publicly their decision to follow Christ. That shows that in these countries, according to the enemies of the Gospel, everyone who decides to be baptized has decided to proclaim that he has denied his former religion and embraced a new religion, and thus he deserves to be put to death for he is a traitor or apostate.

Water baptism is an act through which we declared that we are not ashamed of Christ, but we are willing to bear His reproach in this world of darkness. Therefore, the fact that many believers, before their water baptism, have met with strong opposition on the part of their unbelieving parents and relatives is due to the fact that the devil, through those who are under his power, tried to induce them to be ashamed of their Saviour. For the adversary knows that Jesus said: “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

At this point, someone will say: ‘If it is not by water baptism that we have been saved (because we have been saved by faith), why then does Peter say that baptism saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21)?’ Well, because that’s the truth. However, I want you to know that Peter did not mean that water baptism has saved us, because it is not water baptism that saves a man from the bondage of sin but his faith in Christ Jesus. It is not water baptism that saves a man from hell but his faith, and we can see this in the story of the conversion of one of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus, for Jesus said to him: “Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 – NKJV). As you can see, that man could not be baptized, yet he went to heaven. To confirm what I said before, I point out to you that Peter did not say ‘baptism has saved us also through the resurrection of Jesus Christ’ because if he had said that he would have said that a man is born again when he is baptized (this doctrine is called baptismal regeneration) and not when he repents of his sins and believes in the Son of God. But he said that water baptism “doth also now save us … by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21), that is to say, the baptism into His death saves us from the wrath to come. How does it save us? Through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for Jesus said: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16); therefore it is faith that saves us from the wrath to come. That does not mean that we have been regenerated by water baptism, for Peter himself wrote at the beginning of his first epistle: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Do you see that? Peter did not say that God has begotten us again by water baptism, but by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, by faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul also confirms that it is by faith in the resurrection of Christ that we have been born again and not by water baptism when he says to the Colossians: “Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12 - NIV); please note the expression ‘through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead’ for it clearly shows that we were regenerated through our faith in the resurrection of Christ and not through water baptism. And so Paul also preached to men that they could be born again through faith in Christ and not through water baptism. This is why he said to the Corinthians: “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel
....” (1 Corinthians 1:17 – NKJV), because in the sight of God to preach the Gospel is more important than to baptize; this was confirmed by Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh, in that Jesus preached the Gospel but He did not baptize anyone. Therefore, to sum up, by faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been saved, regenerated, and cleansed from our sins; by water baptism we were buried and it saves us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is to say, if we hold firmly till the end our faith in the resurrection of Christ. In other words, we will be saved from the wrath to come if we hold firmly till the end the confidence in God we had at first; but if we cast away our faith, the water baptism which was administered to us after we believed will be useless. I explain this concept giving you some examples. If Noah, or one of the other people who were in the ark, while the flood was coming upon the earth, had thrown himself out of the window God had commanded Noah to make for the ark, he certainly would not have escaped the flood rather he would have died with the wicked. Likewise if one of the Israelites who had just passed through the Red Sea had gone back into the midst of the sea (before God said to Moses: “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen” Exodus 14:26 – NKJV) he certainly would have died together with the Egyptians. In the same way, we who are in Christ through our faith must see that we abide in Christ in order to be saved from the wrath to come. Therefore we must keep believing in Him and see that we do not cast away our confidence, for such an act would be a spiritual suicide.

I want to emphasize the fact that both Peter and Paul (I cite them because I have cited their words concerning water baptism) did baptize immediately those who believed in the Lord; I remind you of this so that you may understand that for them water baptism had to follow faith immediately and it was not to be administered after weeks or months or years. Their behaviour shows that even though they did not teach baptismal regeneration they considered water baptism an important rite which according to the words of Jesus was to be administered immediately. However, today their example is not followed by most Churches; and the reasons why believers are not baptized immediately are not confirmed by the Scripture. As you know, many pastors want to baptize believers only during spring or summer, or when there is a substantial number of people who need to be baptized (so they refuse to baptize only one person or just two persons), and it grieves our heart to see such things.

I say this: if the priests of the roman catholic church command parents to have their infants ‘baptized’ a few days after their physical birth for they think that through the ‘holy water’ sprinkled on them they will be regenerated and thus they will become sons of God (which is not true); how much more must the ministers of the Gospel command the spiritual infants to be baptized immediately, knowing that water baptism is “an appeal to God for a good conscience” and not the means by which men are regenerated and become sons of God!! Why should a dead man, that is, a man who has died with Christ, be buried after days, weeks or months? What hinders him from being baptized immediately? Is it not true that when Christ died, He was buried immediately? Why then shouldn’t a man who has died with Christ be baptized immediately? If when a person dies his relatives decide to bury him as soon as possible, why shouldn’t a person who has died to sin (because he has accepted Christ as His personal Saviour and Lord) be baptized as soon as possible?

Therefore, ministers of the Gospel, do not delay in baptizing those who have really believed in the Gospel.

I want to take the opportunity to exhort also those who have believed but they delay in being baptized. I say to you: ‘Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized’. See that you are not ashamed of water baptism because it is an order given by Jesus Christ and you must obey it. Do not be deceived by the devil, who tries to deceive you into believing that you do not need to be baptized or that water baptism is not important. Submit yourselves to Christ, and resist the devil with the shield of faith.
Who must be baptized and how water baptism must be administered

According to the Scripture, water baptism must be administered to people who have repented of their sins and have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore infants must not be baptized, for they do not distinguish right from wrong and they are not able to believe with their heart in the Lord.

The following verses of the Scripture show that those who are to baptized must first repent of their sins and believe in the Gospel which is preached to them, so infants cannot be baptized.

- “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, …. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:37-38, 41).
- “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
- “Many of the Corinthians who heard him [Paul] believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8 – NIV).

As you can see, in the above mentioned verses the following expressions “they that gladly received his word”, “when they believed Philip” and “believed” precede the expression “were baptized” , and thus they show clearly that in ancient times water baptism was administered only to those who had believed in the Gospel. That is in agreement with the following words of Jesus: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). So only those who have believed can be baptized. But in order that they may believe, they must first hear the Word of Christ, for Paul says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, and he says also: “And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14 – NKJV), therefore there must be those who preach Christ, as Paul says: “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14 – NKJV). And that is in agreement with the following words of Jesus: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16), and also with these other words of Jesus: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them …. “ (Matthew 28:19), for the preaching and the teaching must precede water baptism because the apostles had to preach the Word first, and then they had to baptize those who believed in it. This is what happened on the day of Pentecost, for after the apostle Peter preached the Gospel, those who heard him accepted his word and the apostles baptized them, as it is written: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). This is what happened also at Philippi in the case of Lydia and her family, as it is written that Paul and his fellow workers “sat down and spoke to the women who met there” [out of the city on the riverside]” (Acts 16:13 – NKJV), and after the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to heed the things spoken by Paul, “she and her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15 – NKJV); this is what happened at Philippi in the case of the jailer and his family, as it is written that Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32 – NKJV), and then “he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33 – NKJV); and this is what happened at Corinth, as it is written that “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8 - NKJV). And since the Gospel could not be preached to infants (nor could infants accept it), because though they could hear they were not able to understand what was spoken, thus in them faith could not come, we infer that infants were not baptized in the early Church. We have seen, therefore, that in
ancient times water baptism was administered only to those who believed in the Gospel, which excludes infant baptism since infants are not able to believe.

In addition to this, we must say that the baptism of which the above mentioned Scriptures speak consisted in immersing believers in water and not in sprinkling some water on their head. On the other hand the Greek word *baptizo* means ‘to immerse’, ‘to dip’, and not ‘to pour out’ or ‘to sprinkle’. The following passages of the Scriptures state that water baptism must be ministered by immersion and not by sprinkling.

- John the Baptist baptized people by immersion (even though his baptism was just a baptism of repentance) as it is written: “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6 – NKJV) and also: “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23 – NKJV).

- Jesus was baptized at about thirty years of age; he was immersed in water by John, as it is written in the Gospel according to Matthew: “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water …” (Matthew 3:16 – NKJV), and also in the Gospel according to Mark: “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” (Mark 1:9-10 – NKJV).

- The eunuch was baptized by immersion, as it is written: “And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more ….” (Acts 8:38-39 – NKJV).

What shall we say then about the following arguments in support of baptism by sprinkling or pouring, ‘on the day of Pentecost about three thousand people were baptized and we know that there is no river near Jerusalem in which all these people could be baptized’ and ‘the jailer and his family were baptized in the prison and there was no river or swimming pool in which they could be baptized, therefore in those cases water baptism was administered by sprinkling or pouring’? We shall say that they are just empty words used by many theologians to deceive people. God was not bound to move Luke to write down how and where all those who accepted the Gospel were baptized. One thing is certain, every time God did not want Luke to write down how and where water baptism was administered to the believers, it was not because that baptism was administered to them by sprinkling or pouring! In addition to this, if we follow this way of reasoning we should say that every time it is not written that some believers were baptized in water - as in the case of those people who believed the words of Peter after the healing of the lame man which occurred at Jerusalem (Acts 4:4), those who believed at Thessalonica, and those who believed at Athens - those believers were not baptized at all, thus water baptism was not necessary!! However, if we came to such a conclusion we would cause the Word of God to state a thing which it does not state and which is contrary to the Word of God.

So we have demonstrated that the baptism established by Christ is to be administered to those who have repented of their sins and believed, and that it is to be administered by immersion. Therefore, when a Roman Catholic or a Lutheran or a Methodist or a member of the Reformed Church repents and believes with his heart in the Gospel of the grace of God he must be baptized; I do not say that he must be baptized again because as a matter of fact the water baptism which was administered to him when he was just a child (or even when he was an adult) is not a baptism at all but just something which is falsely called baptism.

As for the baptismal formula, he who baptizes should say to the person to be baptized: ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ for Jesus said to the apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). In the name of the Father because the Father drew him (that is, the person to be baptized) to His Son (John
6:37, 44, 65); in the name of the Son because the Son received him and revealed the Father to him (Luke 10:22); and in the name of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit convicted him of sin, and of righteousness and of judgement (John 16:8).

Water baptism does not regenerate man

According to the doctrine called baptismal regeneration, when a man is baptized he experiences the new birth, that is to say, he is regenerated through water baptism. This doctrine is taught not only by the Roman Catholic Church but also by some Protestant Churches.

Those who hold this doctrine, support it citing the following words spoken by Jesus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5), and also the following words written by Paul: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration ….” (Titus 3:5). However, both the words of Jesus and the words of Paul, quoted by those who affirm that water baptism is able to regenerate man have another meaning. Let me explain their meaning to you.

When Jesus said that a man must be born of water in order to enter into the kingdom of God he meant that a man must be regenerated by the Word of God because the water represents the Word of God (Isaiah 55:10-11), Surely He did not mean that water baptism regenerates or that it is able to regenerate a sinner because this is not true; it is the Word of God that regenerates men, for the apostle Peter says: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23 – NIV). Furthermore, if the doctrine of baptismal regeneration were true, it would follow that the thief on the cross who turned to the Lord could not have entered the kingdom of God because he had not been born again of water, that is to say, because he had not been baptized. How is it then that Jesus said to him: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 – NKJV)? The answer is simple: because before he breathed his last, he experienced the new birth, that is to say, he was born of water and of the Spirit.

As for the above mentioned words of Paul, the washing of regeneration is not the regeneration worked by water baptism but the purification worked by the Word of God in the heart of those who have believed, for the apostle says to the Ephesians that Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26). In order to confirm that Christ washed and cleansed us through the Word of God, and not through the water baptism which we underwent after we believed on Him, I remind you of the following words Jesus said to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3 – NKJV). Notice that He did not say to them that they were clean because of water baptism, but because of His word, which was the Word of God, as Jesus said: “The word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:24 – NKJV).

The Lord’s Supper

As for the Lord’s Supper, Paul wrote to the saints who were at Corinth: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat:
this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [proclaim] the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [judgment] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:23-32)

Now, since whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper we proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes, that is to say, we proclaim His atoning sacrifice, I need to speak to you, first of all, about the benefits we received from the offering of the body and blood of Jesus.

What Christ did for us through the offering of the flesh of His body

● Jesus offered His flesh as a sacrifice to God to make us alive (for we all were dead in our transgressions), for Jesus said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51); and also to sanctify us, as it is written that “by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10 – NKJV). Therefore, if we are spiritually alive and sanctified before God it is because Jesus gave His body for us.

● Jesus offered His body as a sacrifice for our sins in order to put away sin in our life, for Paul says to the Romans that Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4). Therefore, through the offering of His body we died to sin, for sin, which had dominion over us, was condemned in His flesh. Paul explains this concept to the Romans in this way: “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Romans 7:1-4). Let me comment on these words briefly. We know that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives, because after he dies the law no longer has dominion over him. How can the law have dominion over a man who has breathed his last? Surely it can’t. Likewise we also had to die to the law, that we might be delivered from the bondage of the law, and that’s what happened when we believed in the death of Jesus. Therefore, the crucifixion of the body of Jesus Christ is of great importance for us because by faith in Him we were crucified with Him; that’s why the law no longer has dominion over us, for we died with Christ, as it is written: “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:4 – NKJV). Therefore, thanks be to God who, through the body of Christ, caused us to die to the law (that is, to what we were held by). Yes, we died with Christ to sin which had dominion over us through the law (which is the strength of sin) that we might belong to Christ and we should live for Him.
Jesus, through the offering of His body, reconciled us to God, as Paul wrote to the saints in Colosse: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death ....” (Colossians 1:21-22 – NKJV). Therefore, brothers, we, who once were enemies of God because we were lovers of the pleasures of sin and we loved to think evil thoughts and to do evil things, now have been reconciled to God through the body of Jesus Christ, who was sent by God into this world to die on the cross for us, in His great love that He demonstrated toward us while we were still sinners. Therefore, having been reconciled to God through the body of Jesus, we have peace in our heart for the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, as Isaiah said: “The punishment that brought us peace was upon him” (Isaiah 53:5 – NIV). Beloved, consider this: we should have been punished for all our iniquities, we should have received the due penalty for our transgressions, for we were wicked, but Jesus did nothing wrong, as it is written that Jesus “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38 – NKJV) - thus He was not deserving of death - yet He was crucified on the cross as an evildoer, they rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love. But all this happened so that it might be fulfilled what God’s purpose had determined before to be done that we might be reconciled to Him and become His friends. To Him be the glory now and forever. Amen.

What Jesus did for us by the shedding of His own blood

Jesus forgave us our sins by His blood. For on the night He was betrayed, He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples, saying: “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28 – NKJV). As you can see, the blood of Jesus is the blood of the New Covenant through which we have received the remission of our sins.

The principle according to which it is the blood that makes atonement for sins is expressed by the law in this way: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. …. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof... ” (Leviticus 17:11,14). Therefore, according to the law, it was the blood that made atonement for the sins of the people (that’s why God forbade the Israelites to eat blood). Here is what God commanded the Israelites to do when the whole congregation of Israel sinned unintentionally: “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the priest that is anointed shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them. And he shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn him as he burned the first bullock: it is a sin offering for the congregation” (Leviticus 4:13-21). However, the blood of those animals, which were offered
for the sins of the people, could not cleanse the conscience of those who offered those atoning sacrifices because "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4 – NKJV). For the blood of those animals foreshadowed the blood that Jesus Christ would shed in the fullness of the time to make atonement for our sins, which – unlike the blood of bulls and goats – would blot out all sins from the conscience of those who would accept by faith His atoning sacrifice. Therefore, since we are of those who have believed that He died to atone for our sins, we believe and proclaim that our conscience was cleansed from dead works through the life (that is, the blood) of the body of Christ. It was necessary for Jesus, therefore, to shed His own blood because without the shedding of His blood we couldn’t have obtained the remission of sins. So now since the blood of sprinkling has been shed by Jesus, all those who believe in Him are cleansed from all their sins through His blood.

● Jesus Christ, with His blood, has redeemed us from our aimless conduct, as it is written: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ . . . .” (1 Peter 1:18-19 – NIV). The redemption worked by Jesus Christ is of great importance because through it our life has ceased to be a life without a purpose and above all without a reward after death, that is, a vain and empty life. For we have been delivered from vanity, which had dominion over us for a long time, and we now live for the cause of the Gospel, which is the best cause for which a human being can live because when we appear before God on that day every thing which we have done in the name of Christ to honor the Gospel will be rewarded by God.

In the law we have several examples of redemption which foreshadowed the redemption of Christ. One of these examples is the following one: “Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger’s family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brothers may redeem him; or his uncle or his uncle’s son may redeem him; or anyone who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him; or if he is able he may redeem himself” (Leviticus 25:47-49 - NKJV). We had been sold to our aimless conduct received by tradition from our fathers, and we have been redeemed from it, but not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, so it was fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah said: “You shall be redeemed without money” (Is. 52:3 – NKJV). Therefore, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross is the ransom He had to pay to set us free; therefore, it was necessary for the Son of God to come in the likeness of men, partaking of flesh and blood.

● With His blood Jesus purchased us for God, for John says that he saw the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and they sang this song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10 – NIV). Paul also confirms that Christ purchased us with His blood, as he says: “You were bought at a price . . . .” (1 Corinthians 6:20 – NKJV).

Brothers, the adversary had all of us in his hands, the enemy held us in his hand (and he manipulated us so that we might hurt both ourselves and our neighbour), but Jesus Christ, our great God, redeemed us from the hand of the enemy, for it is written in the Psalms: “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy” (Psalm 107:1-2). Jesus Christ, in the days of His flesh, knew that He would redeem by His own blood the elect from the hand of the enemy, for He told the following parable to show that He came to redeem those who were under Satan’s dominion: “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and
overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” (Luke 11:21-22). Therefore, in order to deliver us from the power of Satan, Jesus had to fight against the prince of this world, and as we know He triumphed over the enemy. Jesus Christ defeated the wicked one by dying on the cross for our sins and by shedding His own blood for us, as Paul says: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15 – NIV). The Son of God, through His death, destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered us from the fear of death. Thanks be to God, through Christ Jesus, because we no longer are afraid of death: we now desire to depart from the body and be with Christ, death no longer scares us for Christ destroyed it. The devil, through death, makes those who are under his power live in fear, while Jesus makes those whom He redeemed from the power of Satan live in peace and safety because He destroyed both death and the devil. Jesus Christ overcame the devil by giving His life for us, and thus we also, who are in Christ Jesus, have overcome the devil. We have not overcome the devil by our strength or by some personal merits, but by the blood of the Lamb; our victory over the devil is the direct result of Christ's suffering and not the reward for some good works we have done.

The meaning of the Lord's Supper

Now I want to speak about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. First of all I need to say something about the feast of Passover because the Holy Supper was established by Jesus on the night He ate the Passover with His disciples and He was betrayed, and because the Holy Supper draws its meaning from the Feast of Passover. The Feast of Passover was established by God when the Israelites were still in Egypt; let us look at the circumstances on which it was established and its meaning. The Israelites dwelt in the land of Egypt as God had said to Abraham, and the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor; the Israelites groaned because of the bondage and they cried out, and God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So He sent Moses to be a ruler and a deliverer. God brought terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who had oppressed the Israelites; the plague which forced Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go out of Egypt was that of the killing of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. And when God foretold Moses this last plague He established the Passover. Here is what the Scripture says: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he shall let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened
Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread. Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the
firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians. And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual. Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations" (Exodus 11:1-10; 12:1-42). The feast of Passover is still observed by the Jews, it is a memorial to them, they observe it every year, and through it they remember their coming out of Egypt and the fact that when God struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt He passed over the houses of the children of Israel. Therefore, if Jesus established the Holy Supper when He ate the Passover with His disciples, this means that by the Holy Supper He wanted His disciples to remember His atoning sacrifice, through which He has obtained for us a salvation which is more important than that accomplished by God for the Israelites, for through His atoning sacrifice Jesus saved us from sin, who were slaves of it. Therefore, while the Jews, through the feast of Passover, remembered and still remember their exodus from the land of Egypt, we, through the Holy Supper, remember the death of Jesus, by which we have come out of this present evil age to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. And now we, as priests of God and of Christ, are secure: just as the Israelites felt secure in their houses for they had taken some of the blood of the Passover lamb and put it on the top and on both sides of the doorframe, so we also feel secure because we have been sprinkled by the blood of the Lamb who was slain and thus when God pours out His fiery wrath upon the world of the ungodly we will be delivered from His wrath (for He will see the blood of Jesus), as it is written: “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:9 – NKJV). This is why Paul said to the Corinthians: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7 – NKJV); for Christ is the Passover Lamb who was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was sacrificed in these last times for our sins so that by His blood we might be saved from sin and from the wrath to come. To Him be the glory now and forever. Amen. The Lord Jesus on the same night He was betrayed, as He was eating the Passover with His disciples, took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying: “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19 – NKJV); then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood …. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25 – NKJV). According to the above mentioned words of Jesus and the words
Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the Lord’s Supper, it is clear that whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, we proclaim the death of Christ till He comes, that is to say, we remember the death of Jesus Christ which took place many centuries ago. To us the day on which we eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord is a memorial day which we are glad to observe to the glory of God. Not a day on which the sacrifice of Christ is repeated, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches falsely, because Jesus offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10) and His sacrifice can by no means repeated but a day on which Christ’s atoning sacrifice is remembered, and in remembering this tragic event, which is the death of Christ, we have communion with the body and blood of Jesus, which are represented by the bread and the wine, as Paul says: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Why do we have communion with His body and His blood? Because we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ and we have been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus, and thus we are one spirit with Him, as it is written: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17 – NKJV). Therefore, it is clear that those who are not joined to the Lord, not being members of the body of Christ, cannot have communion with the body of Christ, which is symbolized by the bread we break; nor with His blood, which is symbolized by the wine which is in the cup of the Lord.

No foreigner shall eat it

Those who are not born of God cannot partake of the Lord’s table because they are foreigners and uncircumcised in heart. In order to show you that they have not the right to eat this bread and to drink this cup of the Lord I remind you of what God said to Moses and Aaron about the Passover: “This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it … And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover of the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it” (Exodus 12:43,48 – NKJV). Notice these words ‘no uncircumcised person shall eat it.’ In that case it was the circumcision of the flesh that was required to eat the Passover. Therefore, just as under the law the uncircumcised in the flesh did not have the right to eat the Passover, so under grace those who are uncircumcised in heart do not have the right to partake of the Lord’s Supper. As a stranger who wanted to eat the Passover had to be circumcised in the flesh; so now those who are uncircumcised in heart must be circumcised in the heart (that is to say, they must repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ) and be baptized (1) in order to have the right to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Let us examine ourselves

Paul says that “whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27 – NKJV), and thus he “eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:29 – NKJV). That means that he who partakes of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner will be judged by the Lord. Let me expound briefly on this point.

We, as sons of God washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, have the right to eat the bread and to drink the cup of the Lord by the grace of God, not by our own merits, but only by the grace of the Lord Jesus, we recognize this and we proclaim it. However, if a son of God does not conduct himself in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ and eats the bread and drinks the
cup of the Lord, he eats and drinks in an unworthy manner and he will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord, and surely the judgment of God will come upon him. In the Church of Corinth there were some believers who, as they ate, despised the Church of God and humiliated those who had nothing, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk” (1 Corinthians 11:20-21 – NKJV). The believers of that Church came together not for the better but for the worse; first of all, because when they came together as a church there were divisions among them, and secondly because as they ate, each one of them went ahead without waiting for anybody else, and one remained hungry while another got drunk. The wrong that the Corinthians did was that they got drunk and in that state they partook of the Lord’s Supper, so they were guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord because they were not able to recognize the body of the Lord. And God judged those who did not discern the body of the Lord, for in the Church of Corinth many were sick and many had fallen asleep (that is, they had died) because they had partaken of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. The Lord has not changed, and He still judges those who partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. Therefore, brothers, knowing that “the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9 – NKJV), let us take heed to ourselves lest we be judged by the Lord.

Under the law, with regard to the Passover, there was a rule which shows us that in order to eat the Passover men had to be pure. God gave this rule after certain men were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover at its appointed time. God said that those men were allowed to eat the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month, that is, one month later (Numbers 9:1-11), after they had purified themselves. For according to the law, he who touched the dead body of anyone was unclean seven days, and he had to purify himself with the water of purification on the third day and on the seventh day, then he would be clean (the water of purification sanctified for the purifying of the flesh). Therefore, we who are under grace, before we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord, ought to examine ourselves and confess our sins to God so that we may be cleansed from all unrighteousness by the blood of Jesus. Therefore brothers, before partaking of the Lord’s Supper, “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Corinthians 7:1 – NKJV), lest we be judged by God.

(1) Keep in mind that – according to the Scripture - a person must be baptized immediately after repenting and believing in Jesus
ESCHATOLOGY

The soul’s immortality

The Word of God teaches that the human being is a living soul, for it is written that God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). However, the Word of God teaches also that man has a soul, which is immortal (and not mortal as his body), which after death – depending upon the spiritual state of the individual at death – goes either to heaven or to Hades (which is better known as hell). Therefore man continues to exist spiritually after death. We can say that the soul is the inward man which is in every human being; whereas the body is the outward man, in which the human soul dwells.

Some verses of the Scripture which call the human being ‘soul’

Now, the Holy Scripture calls people ‘souls,’ and the following verses confirm it:

● “For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people” (Leviticus 18:29)
● “And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire” (Joshua 11:11)
● “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43)
● “Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls” (Acts 7:14)
● “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20).

However the Scripture – as I said before – teaches also that the soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul; and that when a person dies his soul departs from the body, and if he who dies is a son of God his soul goes to heaven to be with the Lord, while if he is a son of the devil his soul is brought down to Hades, that is, the abode of the wicked (the place of the departed wicked), where there is a fire unfanned and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Some verses of the Scripture which distinguish between body and soul

First of all, let us see some verses which affirm that the soul (in Hebrew ‘nephesh’, while in Greek ‘psuche’) is not the human body and at death it departs from the body.

● In the book of Genesis it is written: “And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of
Edar” (Genesis 35:16-21). As you can see, when Rachel died her soul departed from her body.

- In the book of Lamentations it is written: “They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom” (Lamentations 2:12). As Jerusalem was besieged by the army of the Chaldeans, many children died of hunger and thirst and they yielded up their soul while they were on the bosom of their mothers.

- When the prophet Elijah prayed to God that He might raise the child of the widow with whom he lodged, he said to God: “O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him” (1 Kings 17:21 - NKJV). Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. As you can see, Elijah believed that there is a soul in the body of man, and that when a person has died it is necessary for God to let his soul come back to him in order that the dead person may revive.

- When the prophet Elijah prayed that he might die, he said to God: “Take my soul, for I am not better than my fathers (1 Kings 19:4 - YLT). So Elijah believed that he had a soul in his own body which at his death would depart from it.

- David spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, saying: “For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27 – NKJV). We know that Hades is the abode of the dead where fire is burning, for it is written that “the rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then “he cried out and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:22-24 – NKJV). Therefore, when Christ died on the cross it came to pass that His soul came out of His body and descended into the abode of the dead, while his body was laid by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb. If we should say that Jesus did not have an immortal soul inside His body, we should say also that when He died He was annihilated, that is to say, He ceased to exist not only physically but also spiritually. Thus we should conclude that Peter lied when he said that after death Christ, by the Spirit, “went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah ….” (1 Peter 3:19-20 – NKJV).

- Luke says: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life [soul] is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:7-12). As you can see, that young man was taken up dead, yet his soul remained in him by the will of God and did not depart from him, for Paul said to the brethren that the soul of Eutychus was in him. So Paul believed that the soul is not the body, but a part of the human being which is inside the body.

- In the book of Job it is written: “For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?” (Job 27:8). As you can see, these words also confirm that the soul is not the body because it is inside the body. Furthermore, they are confirmed by the story of the rich man and Lazarus told by Jesus, for Jesus said that the rich man died and was buried, and being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:19-31), but he had no hope of salvation, he was lost forever. And on the day of judgement he will rise in order to be judged and cast into the lake of fire.
Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 – NKJV). Therefore on that same day that man went to Paradise after his death. That means that after death he continued to live but in another dimension and in another place. If that man had not possessed a soul inside the body, how could he have gone to Paradise that same day? He certainly did not go to Paradise with his body, for it remained on the earth, but he went to Paradise with his immortal soul, which was inside his body and which could not be killed.

Jesus said to the Sadducees, who denied both the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul (Josephus Flavius, a Jewish historian who was born in 37 A.D. and died after the year 100, tells us that the Sadducees denied also the immortality of the soul for they said that souls die with the bodies - Jewish Antiquities, XVIII, 1 § 4): “But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him” (Luke 20:37 – NKJV). As you can see, in His reply Jesus corrected not only their denial of the resurrection but also their view of the intermediate state because He said that ‘all live to God’.

According to Jesus, all those who die in the faith die in the flesh but they continue to live to God, therefore they are actually living. For God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Therefore when we say that the God whom we serve is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, we say a right thing for God Himself said to Moses: “This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations” (Exodus 3:15 – NKJV), however, it is clear that the patriarchs must live somewhere so that God may be called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now, we can say that at their death, which took place many centuries ago, their bodies returned to dust; but we can by no means affirm that after their death they ceased to exist because God is not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 11:16). Now, since their bodies saw corruption, how can we affirm that they are living now? Well, we can affirm this because the souls of the patriarchs are living, for the Living God is the God of the living. And where are they living? They are living in the kingdom of heaven. While the patriarchs lived on the earth they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, showing thus that they sought a homeland, that is, a heavenly country which is far better than the country from which they had come out.

Paul says to the Romans: “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8 – NKJV).

That means that we belong to Christ and are in His hand while we are at home in the body and even after we depart from the body because not even death will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ; no, not even death. Didn’t Jesus say about His sheep: “They shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28 – NKJV)? Now, suppose that when a person dies he ceases to exist completely (that is, he lapses into non-existence) because he does not have an immortal soul, how could we affirm that after our death we will continue to belong to Christ and to be in His hand? We could not affirm these things rather we should affirm that death will be able to snatch us out of His hand!! However, we know that “the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 9:1 – NKJV).

In the book of Revelation it is written that John saw the souls of those who had been killed for the Word of God and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Here are the words of the apostle: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:4-5). As you can see, the souls of
those who had been killed for the Word of God lived, that is, they returned to live within immortal bodies, for John saw the resurrection of those who had been killed for the Word of God. However, in the meanwhile, that is, between their death and their resurrection, they had continued to live with their souls only, for John saw their souls. These words of John confirm the existence of a soul inside the human body and the soul’s immortality.

- In the Gospel according to Matthew we read that Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves, and He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light “and behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him” (Matthew 17:3 - NKJV). Now, the Scripture says about Moses that he died and was buried by God, as it is written in the law: “So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day” (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). Notice that it is written that Moses died and was buried, therefore nobody can say that his body was not buried. Jude confirms that Moses really died, for he says that “Michael, the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation …” (Jude 9 – NKJV). Therefore, since Moses had died, who was that man who appeared together with Elijah on the holy mountain and was seen and heard by the disciples of the Lord? The answer is simple, it was Moses without his body, that is to say, it was the soul of Moses. The appearing of Moses on the holy mountain, therefore, confirms that the soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul, and that after death the soul of man which is inside him departs from his body and lives on.

- Jesus said: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Greek: geenna]” (Matthew 10:28 – NKJV).

As you can see, the soul is not the body and vice versa because Jesus said that the body can be killed whereas the soul cannot be killed. So, unlike the body, the soul of a man cannot be killed but it can be destroyed in Geenna (the fire that will never be quenched) together with the body.

Some verses of the Scripture which indicate the places in the hereafter where the souls of men go

Let us see now some passages of the Scripture which affirm that the souls of the wicked go to Hades, while the souls of the righteous go to heaven.

- Jesus said: “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell [Greek: Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:19-24). As you can see, that rich man, after death, found himself in Hades, in torments, because he had refused to listen to Moses and the prophets.

- In the book of Revelation it is written: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:9-10).
John saw under the altar (which is in heaven before God) the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God. Note that those souls were able to cry out with a loud voice and to remember that they had been killed and also the persons by whom they had been killed. As you can see, the expression “the souls of them that were slain” shows that the soul of a person is not the person himself, that is, the body of a person, but something which is different from his body; and it shows also that, unlike the body, the soul cannot be killed.

In the light of the above mentioned verses, therefore, we affirm that man has a soul inside his body, and after death his soul lives on; either in Hades (or Hell) in the midst of awful torments, if he dies in his sins; or in heaven (Paradise) before God and Jesus Christ joyfully, if he dies in Christ.

A word of exhortation

Brother in the Lord, you are among those who have eternal life because you believed in the Lord. Therefore you have the assurance that when you die you will immediately go to heaven to be with the Lord, in the glory where peace reigns and where there will be no more sorrow nor crying, and where you will rest from your labors awaiting the resurrection. Therefore, rejoice greatly because your soul is saved, and see that you stand firm till the end because – as Jesus said - : “By standing firm you will save yourselves” (Luke 21:19 – NIV). Take heed that you do not deny your faith in Christ, or else when you die you will go to hell, as it is written that those who draw back do it “to perdition” (Hebrews 10:39 – NKJV). And see that you warn as many people as possible about the torments of hell they will suffer after death unless they repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

However, perhaps you attend a church where you never hear about hell as if it did not exist, or you hear about it rarely for every now and then someone mentions it yet without putting the right emphasis on it and thus you are persuaded that Christians should not speak of the fire of hell to sinners. You are greatly mistaken, because Jesus Himself, the Son of God who came down from heaven, spoke about hell in His teachings warning people of it. Read carefully the teachings of Jesus and you will realize this. So do not be afraid to warn the wicked of hell.

Surely, on hearing you speaking about hell to the wicked or even to some brothers, some believers will consider you a ‘terrorist’ and not someone who brings the Good News. They will say to you: ‘These words of yours were good in the Middle Ages, but they are not good today!’ or ‘Who do you want to frighten with this kind of sermon?’ Brother, do not surrender to these obstacles. Know this, that it is a normal thing to meet with opposition when one tells men the truth, and sometimes one meets with opposition even on the part of some brethren. Why do some believers are against warning people about hell? Because many churches think that the preaching of the Gospel must not contain any warning of the terrible and dreadful destiny awaiting those who do not accept the Gospel. However this is not true, because the Gospel is the Good News because it saves those who accept it from sin, whose wages is death and which leads (those who are slaves of it) to hell. Therefore when we say that we have been saved from sin and from this evil present age we mean that we have been saved from hell, where all of us were going to while we were children of wrath. I ask you: ‘How can a sinner be induced to tremble when he hears a preacher preaching repentance and remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus unless the preaching includes the solemn warning of the destiny awaiting the sinner after death if he refuses to repent of his sins? How can a sinner realize that if he rejects the Gospel he will spend eternity in the fire, weeping and gnashing his teeth, while if he accepts the Gospel he will spend eternity with the Lord in a wonderful place? I think that he can’t. In addition to this, how can the message of the Gospel be appreciated fully by those who have accepted it unless they hear or know that
the Lord has saved them from an awful destiny full of torments which human words cannot describe adequately? How can those who have accepted the Gospel be induced to continue in the faith in Christ and to perfect holiness in the fear of God unless they hear that if they draw back and are entangled again in the pollutions of the world they will go to hell? I think that they can’t.

That is confirmed by the fact that today many of those who hear the Gospel think that to accept the Gospel simply means that one’s problems will be solved. In other words, they think that when one accepts the Gospel it happens that he is no longer lonely, sad, and afraid of the future. That’s what it means to accept the Gospel to these people. Of course it is true that when a person accepts the Gospel he is no longer lonely, sad, and afraid of the future, because the Lord is always with him, and he has the joy of salvation and the peace of Christ in his heart; however, it is also true that after a person turns to the Lord he will have many other problems because he will begin to be persecuted and insulted because of the Lord and therefore he will begin to suffer many things; from a certain point of view he will suffer more things than before his conversion because in some cases he will be put in prison as an evildoer and even put to death because of the Gospel. So they, that is, those who are slaves of sin, do not know that if they reject the Gospel they will go to hell; on the other hand nobody warns them of hell lest they be frightened!!!

Let me say something about believers; as far as I know there are few believers who appreciate the Gospel, because only few believers realize that by the Gospel they have been saved not only from sin but also from the fire of Hades and the fire of Geenna (that is, the lake which burns with fire and brimstone). In speaking with some believers about eternity it seems that to them after all the salvation they have obtained by the grace of God is not so great. Their opinion can be summed up as follows: ‘Of course, we have been saved, however, while we were still lost we did not run the risk of going to such a tragic and horrible place!’, that is to say, ‘Well, even if we had died in our sins our destiny would not have been so bad!’ However, the Scripture does not teach me that, for it tells me that if I had died in my sins I would have suffered an everlasting torment in the everlasting fire where there is no water. That’s why I continually thank God the Father through Christ Jesus for saving me; that’s why whenever I proclaim the Gospel to the sinners I see that they do not repent and believe in Jesus to obtain the remission of sins, but also that unless they repent and believe in Jesus they will go to hell. And this is why I speak of hell to the believers too, so that they may stand firm in the faith till the end and thus escape hell. For if they deny the Gospel, they will go to perdition. And what shall I say about holiness? I shall say that there are few believers who really perfect holiness because many believers do not want to honour the Gospel as they ought to. ‘On the other hand, by the Gospel we have not escaped such a terrible punishment, why then should we say ‘no’ to so many pleasures?!’ That’s why the Gospel is dishonoured by many of those who should honour it with all their strength! There is a phrase of a Christian song which says: ‘Let us honour the word of the Gospel,’ which is a beautiful phrase. However we must not only sing it, but we must also put it into practice. I sang these words even when I was lost, but as a matter of fact I did not honour the Gospel. And this is what many believers do, that is to say, they do not honour the Gospel, and it grieves my heart to see this. The apostles gave their life for the Gospel, they endured so many persecutions for it, they suffered so many hardships for it, they were insulted for it, in order to bring it to those who had not heard it and to honour it by their words and works so that the name of the Lord might be glorified in them; yet, this very same Gospel is so much despised among many Churches as if it were of no value! Yes, theoretically it is of great value in the places of worship, during the Christian conferences or during the summer camp meetings, but practically it is of no value, for it is not honoured in the daily life. The Word of God is trampled on, there are many compromises with the world, therefore the message of the cross is blasphemed. Many pastors are pitchmen,
they seem to have attended marketing schools, rather than institutes where the Word of God is taught and honored. They are ready to betray the Gospel for less than thirty silver coins. They want crowds of people to attend their meetings, they want their name to be mentioned on this or that newspaper, therefore they have adapted their message, they tell believers what they want to hear (that is, smooth things) and not what God wants them to hear. Those believers who attend their meetings conduct themselves like the unbelieving people, their way of life is so similar to that of the unbelieving people that the unbelievers feel at ease among them. This is what happens when pastors avoid speaking of hell to the believers; they do not take anything seriously, as if their life were a wonderful holiday on the earth and when they enter into heaven they will begin a even better holiday!!

On the contrary, life for a believer is a permanent war against sin, against the devil and his invisible ministers who try to choke the word planted in him, who try to make him become lukewarm so that he may be vomited by the Lord out of His mouth, who try to make him become a friend of the world and thus an enemy of God that he may be sent to hell!

Therefore, brothers, speak not only of heaven but also of hell; speak not only of the beauty of Heaven and the immense joy and peace associated with it, but also of the ugliness of hell and the unspeakable torments associated with it. This, for the following reasons: that the wicked may be seized with fear and thus may repent of their sins and receive eternal life, which is in Christ Jesus, and that believers may be led to honor the Gospel.

Where sinners go after death

The Word of God teaches that there is a place of torment in the unseen world, a horrible and dreadful place where fire burns continually and where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, and where the souls of those who have not repented of their sins and believed in the Gospel of the grace of God go after death.

This place is called ‘soggiorno dei morti’ (that is, ‘abode of the dead’) – in Greek: Hades, while in Hebrew: Sheol – and it is mentioned many times in the Scriptures. Before proving you from the Scripture the existence of this place, I want to tell you the following things.

First of all, both the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades, which is equivalent to Sheol, mean also ‘sepolcro’, that is, ‘sepulchre, grave, tomb’. That's why in the Bible sometimes the word Sheol (in Greek Hades) is translated ‘sepolcro’.

For instance, Diodati [1] translated Sheol ‘sepolcro’ in the following passages:
“Non lasciare scendere la sua canutezza in pace nel sepolcro” that is, “Do not let his gray hair go down to the grave [Sheol] in peace” (1 Kings 2:6);
“Così chi scende nel sepolcro non ne salirà più fuori” that is, “So he who goes down to the grave [Sheol] does not come up” (Job 7:9);
“Perciocchè il sepolcro non ti celebrerà” that is, “For the grave [Sheol] will not praise you” (Isaiah 38:18). [2]

I have said ‘sometimes’ and not ‘always’, because this Hebrew word refers also to the abode of the souls between death and the resurrection [3], that’s why some other times it is translated ‘inferno’ (that is, ‘hell,’) or ‘soggiorno dei morti’ (that is, ‘the abode of the dead’).

‘inferno’ (‘hell’); while in the New Testament he left the word Hades in its untranslated Greek form. (See the above mentioned passages in the Riveduta Version). However, both ‘inferno’ and ‘soggiorno dei morti’ refer to the same place.

Furthermore, I want you to know that the word ‘inferno’ – which is not present in the Riveduta Version – comes from the Latin word *infernus* which means ‘lower, underground’. As for the English term ‘hell.’ it comes from the Old English word *helan,* which means ‘to hide or cover’ Someone will say: ‘Why wasn’t this word translated always in the same way?’ Because sometimes the context did not allow the same rendering. In other words the same word has a different meaning in different contexts. Therefore, sometimes Sheol or Hades indicates the unseen place where the souls of the dead go, while some other times Sheol or Hades indicates the grave where the body is laid. Let me give you an example taken from the book of Isaiah. The prophet says: “Hell from beneath is excited about you, to meet you at your coming; it stirs up the dead for you, all the chief ones of the earth; it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. They all shall speak and say to you: ‘You also have become as weak as we, and you have become like us” (Isaiah 14:9-10 – Translated from the IBDV). Here Diodati translated the word Sheol as ‘inferno’ - Luzzi translated it as ‘soggiorno dei morti’ – because it does not mean grave, in that the text speaks of people staying in Sheol who at the coming of the king of Babylon speak to him.

Therefore, in the light of the Scriptures, those who deny that the word Sheol (or the equivalent Greek word Hades) refers also to the place of torment where sinners continue to exist after death (and they stay there till the resurrection) are greatly mistaken.

Now I am going to prove from the Scriptures the existence of this place of torment (called Sheol or Hades) in the unseen world; I will tell you where it is located and how the Bible describes hell.

● It is written: “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell [Greek: Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in tortments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither will they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31).

This is a story which was told by Jesus Christ. It teaches that people continue to exist after death and that the souls of the sinners continue to live in an unseen world. It is clear that we do not see our soul, yet we know that it dwells in our body made of flesh and bones; and just as we can’t deny the existence of the soul just because we do not see it, so we can’t deny the existence of Hades just because we do not see it or we have not seen it. The fact is that while the soul is in our body, Hades is in the lower parts of the earth. According to the Word of God, Hades is a real place where the soul of the sinner, after it has gone out of the body, goes to stay and where it will be waiting for the judgement. In other words, while the sinner lives on the earth his soul enjoys the pleasures of life and takes delight in doing evil things using the
human body, but when the body in which the soul dwells temporarily dies, the soul departs from the body and goes to Hades where it will be tormented by the fire which is in this horrible place. The story of the rich man tells us that he lived in luxury every day while he was on the earth and that when he died he was buried, but he found himself in a place of torment called Hades. It was his body which was buried not his soul, because man's soul cannot be seized by any man nor can it be buried. According to what God said to Adam, it is the human body which returns to dust: “For dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19 – NKJV), and not the soul because the soul is not made of destroyable matter. On one occasion Jesus said that we must not fear “those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28 – NKJV); therefore, unlike the body, the soul of man cannot be killed nor seized by any man. As you can see, the rich man, who had enjoyed himself on the earth, was still able to talk, to remember, while he was in Hades, and according to what he said to Abraham his tongue could have been cooled by some water, but there is no water in Hades; water is just a memory for those who are in the fire of Hades. Now, we can't understand how the soul of a man can burn continually in the midst of the fire of Hades without burning out, nor can we understand how the soul of a man can weep and gnash their teeth in Hades. However, this does not keep us from believing that those who are in Hades are tormented by fire and they weep and gnash their teeth continually. If we were to believe the things the Scripture speaks of only when we fully understand them, we would end by disbelieving the things the Scripture speaks of; we would not believe even in the existence of God. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ for He has given us faith, by which we accept all the things the Word of God teaches us without doubting them. So we do believe all the details of this story told by Jesus, they are all true. As I said before, even though that man did not have a body any longer, he was able to talk and remember.

The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus that he might dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue for he was in agony in the fire of Hades, but Abraham told him that such a thing was not possible. Abraham told him to remember that in his lifetime he had received his good things, and furthermore he told him that between them (Abraham and Lazarus) and him there was a great gulf fixed, so that those who were in Abraham's bosom could not go from there to those who were tormented in Hades to help them. God had no mercy on that man; just as he had been merciless toward his neighbour during his lifetime, so God was merciless toward him after he died. In this we see a manifestation of the justice of God. Even under the Old Covenant He did not leave unpunished those who refused to heed His Word.

After the rich man had heard the answer of Abraham, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to warn his five brothers of that place of torment so that they would not come to that place of torment. He thought that if his brothers had heard Lazarus, they would have repented and they would not have gone to that place of torment. However, Abraham answered him saying that his brothers had Moses and the prophets, so they had to listen to them in order not to go to that place of torment. He thought that if his brothers had heard Lazarus, they would have repented and they would not have gone to that place of torment. However, the answer of Abraham did not satisfy that man, for he told Abraham that in his opinion the testimony of Lazarus would be more efficacious because if someone from the dead went to them they would repent. But Abraham did not agree with him, for he told him that if his brothers did not listen to Moses and the Prophets they would not be convinced even if someone rose from the dead. (I would like to point out to you the following things: first of all, that man believed that Lazarus could go back to the earth and speak to his brothers; secondly, he did not ask Abraham to grant him to go back to the earth; thirdly, Abraham confirmed that Lazarus was dead). The words of Abraham were hard words, and they show that those who do not believe what God says (through the Holy Scriptures) about Hades and the torments which people suffer in it, will not believe in the existence of this place of torment even if one goes to them from the dead and speaks to them about hell and the torments of this horrible place.
This is the truth, brothers: some people will not believe in the existence of hell neither will they repent of their sins, even if one of their loved ones rises from the dead and tells them the things he saw in hell. However we are called to warn people about this place of torment, because God Himself has warned us of this place with His Word. If God did not want people to know what will happen to them after death if they do not repent and bear fruits worthy of repentance, He would not have caused some persons to write so many clear references to Hades and to the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the place of torment where the wicked will be cast after they are judged in that day.

Let us see some other verses of the Scripture which confirm the existence of hell, and that hell is located in the lower parts of the earth and the wicked are brought down to it.

- In the Psalms it is written: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17 – NKJV), and again: “Like sheep they are cast into the abode of the dead; death is their shepherd” (Psalm 49:14 – Translated from the IBRV).
- Job said about the wicked: “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to the abode of the dead” (Job 21:13 – Translated from the IBRV).
- Isaiah said about those who did not regard the work of the Lord but followed intoxicating drink: “Therefore the abode of the dead has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure, the splendour of Zion, its multitude and its pomp, and he who is jubilant among it, shall descend into it” (Isaiah 5:14 – Translated from the IBRV). Isaiah, in his prophecy against the king of Babylon, said to Israel: “It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: ‘…. The abode of the dead from beneath is excited about you, to meet you at your coming; …. Your pomp and the sound of your stringed instruments are brought down to the abode of the dead” (Isaiah 14:3,9,11 – Translated from the IBRV).
- God foretold through the prophet Ezekiel what He would do to Tyre: “Then I will bring you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the Pit …. “ (Ezekiel 26:20 – NKJV), and He told what He did to Pharaoh: “In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth. They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen” (Ezekiel 31:15-17).
- When Jesus rebuked Capernaum He said: “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades” (Matthew 11:23 - NKJV). And when He predicted that He would be in the abode of the dead for three days and three nights He said: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40 – NKJV), and we know that the soul of Jesus Christ went down to Hades, from which God brought it up on the third day when He raised Him from the dead, as it is written: “You will not leave my soul in Hades” (Acts 2:27 – NKJV).

As you can see, from all the above mentioned verses of the Scripture we clearly learn that the abode of the dead is a place which is in the lower parts of the earth, or rather, as Jesus said: “In the heart of the earth”, and that the sinners who refuse to heed the voice of God go down to this place.

However, the Scripture even describes hell.
Job called hell “the land of darkness and the shadow of death. A land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness” (Job 10:21-22 – NKJV).

Bildad the Shuhite, in speaking of the destiny of the wicked, said: “He is driven from light into darkness” (Job 18:18 – NKJV).

Zophar the Naamathite said about the wicked: “An unfanned fire will consume him” (Job 20:26 – NKJV). As for these words they are confirmed by the following words the rich man said to Abraham: “I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24 – NKJV). The fire which is in hell is not a fire which was lit by man, but by God, that’s why no one can put it out.

As you can see, the Bible describes hell as a place of darkness where people are tormented by an unfanned fire. Hell is not a pleasant place where to dwell; some people scoff at it saying that those who go down to hell have a great time there! But I can assure you that it is a dreadful and horrible place. Some people have seen it, for God granted them to see it, and they have a clear and indelible memory of it. Yes, because even in this generation God has allowed some men and women to see hell. These people, after they came back to life, have tried to tell as clearly as possible the horrible things they saw in that place; they still recognize that the best words they can use to describe hell, which they saw by the grace of God, are those which are written in the Holy Scripture. Indeed there are no better words to describe hell than those written in the Word of God.

The testimony of a man who died in his sins and came back to life

The late Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) saw Hell at the age of 16. Here is what he tells us in his book *I believe in visions*: “I gave my heart to the Lord and was born again the very first night I became bedfast. That was Saturday, April 22, 1933 at 7:40 p.m. in the south bedroom of 405 North College Street in McKinney, Texas. Earlier that evening, my heart had stopped beating and the spiritual man who lives in my body had departed. When death seized my body, my grandmother, my younger brother, and my mother were sitting in the room. I had time only to tell them “goodbye.” Then the inner man rushed out of my body and left my body lying dead, with eyes set and flesh cold. I went down, down, down until the lights of the earth faded away. I don't mean I fainted - I don't mean I was unconscious - I have proof that I was actually dead. My eyes were set, my heart had stopped beating, and my pulse had ceased.
The Scriptures tell us about the lost being cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). The farther down I went, the blacker it became, until it was all blackness - I could not have seen my hand if it had been one inch in front of my eyes. And the farther down I went, the hotter and more stifling it became.

Finally, far below me, I could see lights flickering on the walls of the caverns of the damned. The lights were caused by the fires of Hell. The giant, white-crested orb of flame pulled me, drawing me as a magnet draws metal to itself. I did not want to go, but just as metal jumps to the magnet, my spirit was drawn to that place. I could not take my eyes off of it. The heat beat me in the face. Many years have gone by, yet I can see it just as clearly today as I saw it then. It is as fresh in my memory as if it just happened.

I came to the entrance of Hell. People ask, "What does the entrance of Hell look like?" I cannot describe it, because if I tried, I would have to have something with which to compare it. (Similarly, if a person had never seen a tree in his life, it would be impossible to tell him what a tree looks like.) Coming to the entrance, I paused momentarily, because I did not want to go in. I sensed that one more foot, one more step, one more yard, and I would be gone forever and would not come out of that horrible place! Upon reaching the bottom of the pit, I became conscious of some kind of spirit being by my side. I had not looked at him, because I
could not take my gaze off of the fires of Hell. But when I paused, the creature laid his hand on my arm to escort me in.

At that same moment, a voice spoke from far above the blackness, above the earth, and above the heavens. I don't know if it was the voice of God, Jesus, an angel, or who. I did not see him, and I do not know what he said, because he did not speak in English; he spoke in some other tongue. When he spoke, his words reverberated throughout the region of the damned, shaking it like a leaf in the wind, and causing the creature to take his hand off my arm. I did not turn around, but an unseen power, like suction, pulled me up, away from the fire, away from the heat, and back into the shadows of the absorbing darkness.

I began to ascend until I came to the top of the pit and saw the lights of the earth. I saw my grandparents' home, went through the wall back into my bedroom, and it was just as real to me as it was any time I had entered through the door (my spirit needed no door). I slipped back into my body as easily as a man slips into his trousers in the morning. It was the same way in which I had gone out - through my mouth. I began to talk to my grandmother. She said, "Son, I thought you were dead."

My great-grandfather had been a medical doctor, and Granny had worked with him. She later told me, "I dressed many people for burial and laid them out in days gone by. I have had much experience with death, but I learned more about death in dealing with you and your experiences than I ever knew before. You were dead. You had no pulse or heartbeat, and your eyes were set."

"Granny," I said, "I am going again. I am dying. Where is Momma?" "Your mother is out on the porch," she replied. And about that time I heard my mother praying at the top of her voice as she walked up and down the porch. "Where is my brother?" I asked. "He ran next door to call the doctor," Granny answered. If you're not ready to go, you want somebody with you. You're afraid! I said, "Granny, don't leave me! Don't leave me! I'm afraid I'll go while you're gone! I want somebody with me! Don't leave me!" So she gathered me into her arms again. I said, "Tell Momma I said goodbye. Tell Momma I love her. Tell Momma I appreciate everything she has ever done for me and for all of us. And you tell Momma that I said if I've ever put a wrinkle in her face, or a grey hair in her head, I'm sorry, and I ask her to forgive me." I felt myself slipping. I said, "Granny, I'm going again. You were a second mother to me when Momma's health failed. I appreciate you. Now I'm going, and I won't be back this time. "I knew I was dying, unprepared to meet God. I kissed her on the cheek and said goodbye. My heart stopped beating for the second time. It's almost as real to me today, nearly half a century later, as it was that day. I felt the blood cease to circulate. The tips of my toes went numb - then my feet, ankles, knees, hips, stomach, and heart. I leaped out of my body and began to descend: down, down, down. Oh, I know it was just a few seconds, but it seemed like an eternity. I began to descend again into the darkness until the lights of earth had faded. Down below, the same experience occurred. The voice spoke from Heaven and again my spirit came up out of that place - back into my room and back into my body. The only difference this time was that I came up at the foot of the bed. I began to talk to Granny again. I said, "I will not be back this time, Granny." I asked, "Where is Grandpa? I want to tell Grandpa goodbye." She said, "Son, you know your Granddad went down to the east part of town to collect rent off of some of his rent houses."

"Oh," I said, "I remember that now. I just forgot momentarily." I said, "Granny, tell Grandpa goodbye. I've never known what it means to have a daddy. He's been the nearest to a daddy I've known. He gave me a home when I had none. Tell him I appreciate him. Tell him I love him. Tell Grandpa that I said goodbye." Then I left a word for my sister and two brothers, and my heart stopped for the third time. I could feel the circulation as it cut off again - and I leaped out of my body and began to descend.
Until this time, I had thought, this is not happening to me. This is just a hallucination. It can't be real! But now I thought, this is the third time. I won't come back this time! Darkness encompassed me 'round about, darker than any night man has ever seen.

I wish I had adequate words to describe the horrors of Hell. People go through this life so complacently, so unconcerned, as if they will not have to face Hell. But God's Word and my own personal experience tell me differently. I know what it is to be unconscious - it is black when you are unconscious - but there is no blackness to compare with outer darkness.

As I began to descend in the darkness this third time, my spirit cried out, "God, I belong to the church! I've been baptized in water!" I waited for Him to answer, but no answer came - only the echo of my own voice as it came back to mock me. It will take more than church membership - it will take more than being baptized in water - to miss Hell and make Heaven. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." (John 3:7). Certainly I believe in being baptized in water - but only after a person is born again. Certainly I believe in joining the church - but only after a person is born again. If you merely join the church and are baptized in water without being born again, you will go to Hell! The second time I cried a little louder, "God! I belong to the church! I've been baptized in water!" Again I waited for an answer, but there was no answer, only the echo of my own voice through the darkness.

It would frighten a congregation out of their wits if I ever imitated the way I screamed the third time, although, if I could scare them out of Hell and into Heaven, I'd do it! I literally screamed, "GOD! GOD! I BELONG TO THE CHURCH! I'VE BEEN BAPTIZED IN WATER!" And all I heard was the echo of my own voice. I came again to the bottom of that pit. Again I could feel the heat as it beat me in the face. Again I approached the entrance, the gates into Hell itself. That creature took me by the arm. I intended to put up a fight if I could to keep from going in. I only managed to slow down my descent just a little, and he took me by the arm.

Thank God that voice spoke. I don't know who it was - I didn't see anybody - I just heard the voice. I don't know what he said, but whatever he said, that place shook; it just trembled. And that creature took his hand off my arm. It was just as if there was a suction to my back parts. It pulled me back, away from the entrance to Hell, until I stood in the shadows. Then it pulled me up headfirst. As I was going up through the darkness, I began to pray. My spirit, the man who lives inside this physical body, is an eternal being, a spirit man. I began to pray, "O God! I come to You in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I ask You to forgive me of my sins and to cleanse me from all sin." I came up beside the bed.

The difference between the three experiences was that I came up on the porch the first time; I came up at the foot of the bed the second time; and I came up right beside the bed the third time. When I got inside my body, my physical voice picked up and continued my prayer right in the middle of the sentence. I was already praying out of my spirit. Now, we didn't have all the automobiles in 1933 that we have today - that was in the Depression. But they tell me that between me and Momma praying so loud, traffic was lined up for two blocks on either side of our house! They heard me praying from inside the house, and they heard my mother as she walked the porch praying at the top of her voice.

I looked at the clock and saw it was 20 minutes before 8 o'clock. That was the very hour I was born again due to the mercy of God through the prayers of my mother. I felt wonderful - it was just like a two-ton weight had rolled off of my chest. Although I was rejoicing and was happy in my spirit - although I felt wonderful spiritually - I felt no better physically. The doctors had been called, and they told my family that I was going to die. I thought I would die that night, but it no longer bothered me. I knew I was ready to go. My experience of being brought back from the dead is not new. Jesus raised three people from the dead: Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son. The Apostle Peter raised Dorcas from the dead; the Apostle Paul raised a young man from the dead; and others throughout Church history have had similar experiences.
Through my experience, God brought me to knowledge of salvation, which is the best thing in the world to know. I was so thankful to know that my heart was right with God, and to know that if I should die before morning I would go, to be with Him' [6]

Conclusion

Brothers in the Lord, I conclude by saying to you: rejoice and be exceedingly glad for Christ Jesus in His mercy has saved you from the fire of hell, from the unspeakable torments of hell people suffer in this horrible place because of their iniquities; and warn sinners of this terrible place of torment, exhorting them to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ, because if they do not repent and believe in Jesus they will go to hell when they die.

Footnotes

1] Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649) was an Italian Bible Scholar, who translated the Bible into Italian. The Italian Bible Diodati is very similar to the King James Version for it is based on the Text Receptus. This Bible Version is still used by many believers.

2] In the King James Version as well as in the New International Version, the Hebrew word Sheol is translated ‘grave’ in 1 Kings 2:6, Job 7:9, and Isaiah 38:18. While in the New King James Version the word Sheol of Isaiah 38:18 was not translated, for we read: “For Sheol cannot thank You”.

3] In the Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (New York 1995), the Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary defines Sheol in this way: ‘Hades or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat), includ. its accessories and inmates: - grave, hell, pit’ (page 135), while the Greek Dictionary of the New Testament defines hades in this way: ‘Hades’ or the place (state) of departed souls: - grave, hell’ (page 2).


In the Old Testament of the New King James Version the word Sheol is translated ‘hell’ 18 times. In Psalm 9:17 and in Proverbs 7:27 Sheol is translated ‘hell’ (while in Job 26:6 and in many other verses it is left in its untranslated Hebrew form). In the New Testament the equivalent Greek word Hades is left in its untranslated Greek form: see Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14. As for the Old Testament of the New International Version, it must be said that unfortunately the word Sheol is never translated ‘hell’. Most of the times it is translated ‘grave’. And this is a bad thing which was done by the Bible translators of this Bible for there are various verses – for instance Psalm 9:17, Job 26:6, Isaiah 14:9 - in which the word sheol must be translated ‘hell’ or ‘abode of the dead’ and cannot be translated ‘grave’ or ‘death’. And as for the New Testament of the NIV, the word Hades is translated ‘the depths’ in Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15; ‘grave’ in Acts 2:37 and 2:31; ‘hell’ in Luke 16:23; ‘death’ in 1 Corinthians 15:55; while it is left in its untranslated Greek form in the following verses: Matthew 16:18; Revelation
1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. The word Hades in Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15, and Acts 2:37 and 2:31 should not have been translated in that way.

5] Giovanni Luzzi (1856-1948) was a Bible Scholar. In 1906 the British Bible Society appointed him Chief Reviser of a Committee whose task was to revise the Italian Bible Diodati Version. The Luzzi Version therefore is a Revised version of the Bible translated by Giovanni Diodati. We call this Bible ‘La Versione Luzzi’ that is, ‘the Luzzi Version’ or simply ‘la Versione Riveduta’, that is, ‘the Revised Version’. It must be said, however, that many passages of the New Testament of the ‘Revised Version’ are very similar to the New Testament of the New International Version for the Committee based the revision also on the ‘Critical Text’.

6] I want you to know that I don’t accept every thing that Kenneth Hagin writes in his book / Believe in Visions (for example, I don’t accept the fact that he says that angels are waiting for our commands). Furthermore, I don’t accept several things he teaches on prosperity and health, for I reject the so called ‘prosperity message’, and I don’t accept his ‘holy laughter’ for I consider it a camal and diabolic manifestation. There are other teachings taught by Hagin that I reject. Of course, the fact that at a certain point of his life Kenneth Hagin accepted strange and diabolical teachings did not bring him honor nor did it bring praise to God, for I firmly believe that his false teachings have discredited seriously his ministry. However, I firmly believe that what he says about his death-experience is true and cannot be refuted at all, because it is confirmed by the Scripture.

Where Christians go after death

Brothers in the Lord, I want you to know that when a Christian dies, he dies in the flesh, but his soul departs from his body and goes to heaven to be with the Lord. There are several verses of the Scripture which teach that that when one dies in the Lord, he departs from the body and enters the heavenly kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Here are these verses.

● Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1 – NKJV).
Therefore we believers have an etenal house in the heavens, not built by human hands but by God. All those who die in faith go there on the same day they die, or rather they enter this eternal house a few moments after their death, for the entrance into the heavens takes place a very short time after death. The apostles had a desire to depart from the body and be with the Lord, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8 – NKJV. The IBRV reads ‘partire dal corpo’ that is, “to depart from the body” instead of “to be absent from the body”), and to the Philippians: “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Philippians 1:23 – NIV). We also have the same desire as Paul and his fellow workers had, for we know that to be with the Lord in heaven is far better than to live on earth. Of course, it is a wonderful thing to live with the Lord on earth (for the Lord is always with us), however, it is far better to live with the Lord in His heavenly kingdom.

● The apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle: “I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord
Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things” (2 Peter 1:13-15 – NIV).

The apostle knew that within a short time he would die and go to be with the Lord in heaven, and compared his death to a departure for he said that he would shortly put off his tent. Now, it is clear that since death is called departure that means that there is something inside the body which departs from the body at death, otherwise what Peter said would not make sense. And we know that this ‘something’ is the soul which is in man. Furthermore, if the soul of man departs from his body there must be a place where the soul goes after death, otherwise it would make no sense to call death ‘departure’, and we know that this place is Paradise, that is, the third heaven, the same place into which Paul was caught up (however he did not know whether he was caught up to heaven in the body or out of the body) and where he “heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4 – NKJV).

● John, in the vision he had while he was on the island called Patmos, saw among other things the souls of those believers who had been slain for the Word of God. He said: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Revelation 6:9-11).

According to the above mentioned words of John, therefore, it is clear that those who die in Christ go to heaven, and they are fully conscious in heaven. In addition to this, what John saw in vision confirms the following words of Jesus: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28 – NKJV), for the souls which John saw were the souls of those who had been killed for the name of Christ. Therefore, not even death can separate the disciples of Christ from their Lord and Saviour.

● In the vision John had while he was on the island called Patmos, he heard a voice from heaven saying to him: “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Revelation 14:13 – NIV).

Why are the dead who die in Christ blessed then? Because they rest from their labor. And where do they rest? In heaven, for a short time before John said that he saw in heaven under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held, who cried out with a loud voice asking God to avenge their blood, and “it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (Revelation 6:11 – NKJV). Note that according to what was said to those souls, they were already resting, however it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer till a certain time. Therefore we proclaim that he who enters heaven “rests from his own work, just as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:10 – NIV). Glory be to God for ever. Amen.

However, I want to say something also about those who do not die in Christ. They are not blessed for they do not rest at all since they are in the fire of Hades where there is no rest for them. Could there be any rest in a place of torment, a horrible place, where billions of souls weep and gnash their teeth because of the terrible pains they suffer there? Therefore those who die in their sins are wretched because they go to Hades to be tormented by fire. Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus for saving us from the horrible and dreadful destiny awaiting the lost. Amen.

● Paul says to Timothy: “If we die with him, we will also live with him” (2 Timothy 2:11 – Translated from the IBRV).

What does he mean by that? He means that if we die in faith (or in Christ) we will go to heaven to live with Christ. Then at the resurrection (which will take place at the coming of the
Lord from heaven), our body will be transformed and made incorruptible. Our soul will enter our new body (that is, the resurrected body) and with that new body we will continue to live with the Lord.

- Paul, a short time before his death, said to Timothy: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18 – NIV). This is the confidence Paul had, that at his death the Lord would bring him to His heavenly kingdom. Many centuries before Asaph had said: “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory” (Psalm 73:24 – NIV). As you can see, the words of Paul agree with the words of Asaph.

- Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26 – NKJV). That means that though a believer may die in the flesh he will continue to live. Where will he live on? He will live in the third heaven, where the Lord of glory is sitting on His throne, for Jesus said: “Where I am, there My servant will be also” (John 12:26 – NKJV). Beloved, we have great joy and consolation because we know that where our Lord is we will be also if we stand firm in the faith. We are not at all afflicted at the thought that one day we will have to leave this earth, because we know that the world where we will go is far better than this. While on the one hand sinners go to a world which is far worse than this; on the other hand we believers, by the grace of God, will go to a far better place. While sinners do not know where they are going because they walk in darkness, we know where we are going, we are going to the place where Jesus went when He had by Himself purged our sins, and we know also the way which leads to that place, for Jesus said to His disciples: “And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:4 – NKJV). Jesus Christ is the way which leads to the Father and we want to follow His steps in order to enter His everlasting kingdom. And what shall we say about death? Death is surely a bitter thing, because it is not a pleasant thing for those who remain on earth to see the corpse of a brother in Christ, but remember that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15 – NKJV). To God, who in His mercy has given us eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.

The testimony of a man who died in Christ but God brought him back to life

The Lord resurrected me to life

1. An interview with Boris – an officer in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ukraine.

Who he was before his death.

INTERVIEWER: - I introduce to you, Mr. Boris Pilipchuk, 36 years of age. Please, Boris tell us about yourself a bit.
BORIS: - I am an officer, a Senior Lieutenant in the police force. I worked as a strategic duty officer in one of the operation sections of the police force in Khemlnitskij District of Ukraine. I fought in the Afganistan war. I am married with three children. We live in a village called Novaya Siniavka, in the Starosiniavskij region of Khemlnitskij District.

INTERVIEWER: - Boris, I know that you are a Believer. How did you get saved?
BORIS: - I was a strong atheist, but my wife and her parents were Believers and they always wanted me to be saved. One day, on the 16th of September 1996, the Pastor Nikolai Ivashenko, of the Full Gospel Church in the town of Mariopol, came to our village, on a visit to
his relatives. My wife asked him to speak to me a bit, but with care, because at that time I was very aggressive, lacked temperance and rude. The training I got from the army left a scar on my character.

When I saw Pastor Nikolai, I thought to myself, “Now, I’m going to teach you a lesson…” However, Nikolai walked up to me and began saying something and suddenly, I began feeling such peace, such tranquillity in my heart, such that I had never experienced since my childhood days. I was only used to giving orders, receive orders and carry them out blindly. I was trained in this sort of environment, in which normal human interaction was so rare. Something on the inside of me was transformed as I listened to the words of Nikolai and when I heard the phrase, “Now, we’ll pray, repeat after me…” I repeated the sinner’s prayer. The power of the Holy Spirit came upon me and the Lord baptized me in the Holy Spirit. Ever since then, I dedicated my life to serve the Lord.

INTERVIEWER: - How did those around you react to this change in your life?
BORIS: - My mother reacted to all this very indignantly, at the beginning, because she had not known the Lord yet. Later on, opposition at my work place began, they threatened to lay me off the job or demote me, they even went to the extent of trying to make me backslide, but I wasn’t perturbed by this, neither did I worry. Formerly, I would likely have been in a state of confusion…to relinquish my officers rank, simply because of some sort of incident, to me, seemed absurd. God’s Word says, that if you are taken to court, do not be anxious over what to say, for I will speak for you. So not being worried over my fate, I said, “ You cannot do anything to me, because the Lord is with me’. So my superior officers had to condescend to this. Not only did colleagues condescend to this, but they also began listening, with pleasure, to me preach during my break period. I told every one about the Lord, in the hope of at least leading one soul to the Lord. I will not go on to describe what hideous things I did before repentance, because the Lord has forgiven me of all of them. I praise and thank the Lord for this. The Lord forgives every sin, of anyone who earnestly repents.

INTERVIEWER: - You are a serviceman and a Believer. This is very unusual. Do people consider this as being normal?
BORIS: - I tell every one that Jesus Christ is Lord over everyone, and servicemen as well. The Lord loves each and everyone just the same. I have been asked several times, “ How can you serve God, being a serviceman, handling weapons?” The fact is that God’s word teaches us how to serve the Lord.

When John the Baptist baptized people in River Jordan, servicemen came up to him and asked, “What shall we do?” John the Baptist’s reply to that question was such that they should be content with their wages, so that they should no longer complain and so that they wouldn’t go beyond their bounds. There is no place in the word of God where it is written, servicemen should not serve the Lord. On the contrary, we know from the Holy Scriptures that two roman officers repented and that they and all their household served the Lord Jesus Christ. Each and every Believer, has a discrete ministry in God’s sight.

INTERVIEWER: - Boris, I can see that you are in perfect health. Before your remarkable ordeal, were you in the same state of health?
BORIS: - Yes. Perfect health is a prerequisite to join the force. It was mandatory for us to undergo routine medical test.

INTERVIEWER: - Please, tell me what happened to you.
BORIS: - I will narrate how the Lord raised me from the dead. On the 27th of July, 1998, I returned home from work, to my village. Something happened to me at that time. I cannot describe what happened to me exactly. I was completely paralyzed and I lost consciousness.
According to my wife’s account, after I lost consciousness, I was rushed to the hospital, to the reanimation unit. Their diagnosis was - Brain haemorrhage. I remained there for several days in an unconscious state. I was transferred to the reanimation unit of the Khelmitskij District Clinic. The doctors continued to fight for my life. However, the heart attack, which was now progressing didn’t leave them with a chance of my survival.

INTERVIEWER: - How serious was your brain haemorrhage?
BORIS: - As I found out later on, the doctor diagnosed a internal bleeding in 95% of my brain. All the equipment and the sensors that were attached to my body, testified of death. In their medical report the doctors diagnosed a haemorrhage that had spread all over my brain, all of the nine tests made confirmed death.

2. Death registered by the Doctors.

INTERVIEWER: - Boris, from what you were later on told, after the doctors certified your death, did they immediately call your wife?
BORIS: - Yes, they did and she was not the only person they informed. Actually, what happened was that every 15-20 minutes my colleagues called the hospital to inquire of my health. They were told that I was no longer alive, that I was already dead. At my working place, money was already being collected for my burial, a coffin was already ordered for me, the burial viennese and every other thing necessary for the occasion. In a nutshell, preparation was made for my burial. In my opinion, I think the sudden death of such a healthy police officer was a very stunning occurrence, which took everyone aback. This was clear, from the numerous phone calls to the hospital, from my colleagues.

INTERVIEWER: - Was your wife present with you when you died?
BORIS: - Yes, she was, but she was not allowed in the reanimation room itself. Later on my wife told me, that she constantly prayed to God over my salvation. When the doctors began to desperately fight to save my life, my wife called Pastor Nikolai in Mariopol on the phone. My wife told him what had happened and asked him to pray for me. While he prayed, God told him that the situation would not lead to death, but to the glory of God. He calmed my wife down and told her that a Christian Festival was underway in the town of Mariopol and that all the believers would pray for me. They prayed. During this time, events in the hospital were mounting. The doctors informed my wife of my death and after two hours she was permitted to accompany my body, on the stretcher, to the door of the morgue.

3. Medical information on the possibility of a dead person returning to life

INTERVIEWER: - For an understanding from a clinical point of view, we make reference to a directory of medical publications. In the Concise Medical encyclopedia (published by “Soviet Encyclopedia”, 1974) the following is written: Brain haemorrhage is defined as the disruption of normal blood circulation in the brain, which results in the death of the brain material (Part 1, page 506). Resuscitation of an organism (reanimation) is defined as the restoration of a sudden disruption or total loss of life supporting functions of an organism. Clinical death is the last reversible stage of the death of an organism from the moment breathing and blood circulation cease to the beginning of irreversible changes in the central nervous system, after which death is referred to as being biological. The duration of clinical death depends on the reason that gave rise to the development of a terminal condition, the duration of dying, age etc. In normal temperatures, clinical death extends over a period of 4-6 minutes, after which the restoration of normal activities of the central nervous system becomes impossible. Reanimation procedures should be started immediately sudden death has been established.
It is also recommended not to allow the complete ceasing of breathing or heartbeat. If the heartbeat is not re-established, reanimation procedures are advised to be continued until they prove effective. Signs of effectiveness: Disappearance of cyanosis, noticing of spontaneous gasps (the sooner they begin, the better the prognosis), pulsation of the large blood vessels in accordance with the rhythm of the massage, narrowing of the pupils. If these signs do not appear in 20-25 minute, resuscitation procedures should be discontinued (part 2, page 270-271). I know that doctors have some rules, which can never be violated by any one in any medical establishment. In their rules, a person who is lying in reanimation, in a condition of biological death, should not be there more than 2 hours and only after this the person may be transported to the morgue.

That means that after establishing the fact that Boris was in a state of clinical death, the doctors struggled for 30 minutes to save his life, and after establishing a state of biological death, not less than 2 more hours elapsed, for the period of time he was in the reanimation unit. Meaning that the irreversible processes and death of the brain matter had already begun, seen as the time necessary for resuscitation after clinical death takes about 4-6 minutes. In this case the person couldn’t be more dead. Boris’ death was confirmed by the doctors and by the medical equipment that were connected to his body.

4. “I saw heaven” - Boris

INTERVIEWER: - And now, Boris, tell us how you felt. What did you see?
BORIS: - It felt as if I was conscious, I began seeing with my own eyes, what happened after an internal push in the body. I began seeing everything as if from above. My soul came out of me and looked at my body. Doctors in their white gowns had gathered around my body. Numerous equipment were connected to my body. The doctors tried to bring me to a normal condition, they ran about, and applied all possible measure. But all their effort were to no avail.

Then I began to ascend from the earth. The earth became smaller and smaller. It became so small, and then it disappeared totally. My transportation was accompanied by a continuous whistling in my ears. Then I ended up in an extraordinary place, that was so illuminated, that I began to feel good. I saw a golden staircase, that shone with rays of glory. The staircase was rather wide. On either side of the staircase were golden railings, along which from the end to the top were winged angels in white clothes, with golden belts. Their hair was white, their faces shone so much, like lightning, their eyes were like two lanterns. They had human faces. Their hands and legs were the color of shinning copper chips. On the outside the angels were like humans. Around the staircase and under it, stood a great number of angels, and their number, I simply cannot describe. These were without wings. All the angels were singing psalms. And surprisingly, I did not know, what language they were singing in, but at that moment I completely understood the words of the psalm. They sang: "O worthy are you Lord of all glory and praise. You, Lord, created the heavens and the earth. You are worthy of our praise!"

Then I saw an extraordinary light at the end of the staircase. But the light wasn’t like that of the sun or of welding instrument, which has a harmful effect on the eyes. The light was extraordinarily bright, but did not hurt the eyes, warm, calming, full of joy and peace. I was full of delight, to such an extent that mere words cannot describe how I felt. My delight continued to increase and there was no limit to the joy I felt. I don’t know how to describe this vision, this feeling, in words, but I would like you to imagine the picture the Lord showed me. Later on, I heard a voice, coming from the place where the wonderful light was, which said: ‘My son, come to me and I will show you something. I will help you’.

From the great number of angels, two angels walked up behind me. One stood on my left and the other stood on my right, just a short distance from me. I didn’t turn my head around, I
didn’t look behind me and I didn’t gaze around me, but it appeared as if I could see 360 degrees about me. I wasn’t nervous and didn’t feel any form of discomfort. I was absolutely calm and so joyful to extent, that I cannot describe how I felt, not then and not now. I didn’t ask anyone any question, such as ‘where am I?’ ‘What happened to me? What’s going to happen later on?’ I felt completely confident in myself, as if I was standing in a familiar place. I felt as if I lived there permanently.

Then the Holy Spirit, transferred me to a vast open plain, in which very beautiful white horses pranced. In the center of the field, stood a great big city, in the form of a cube. When I noticed it, I began to draw close to it. But I approached it in a different way, not as a man normally walks on the ground. I moved without my feet touching the ground, it was as if I was sliding. The angels escorted me. The closer I approached the city, the more intense was the delight I experienced, from what I saw.

There were very high walls, which were multiple in number and of various colors. There were 12 colors in all, which radiated and shone like a bright light. (Later on, after my resurrection, when I studied the 21-22 chapter of the book of Revelations in the Bible, I found a confirmation of what I had seen). I saw the foundation of the city, which was made up of 12 precious stones of this world. I saw a pearl gate, three on each wall. The pearl gate was very big, higher than two meters. I didn’t measure them, but one pearl was larger than two meters, in my opinion. I saw only six gates, because the Lord led me into the city through one of its corners. I saw the two sides of the cube. Then the Lord led me through one of the gates into the city, as we passed through them, I saw two inscriptions. One of them was above the gate and the second was under the gate. One of the names of the tribes of Israel was written above the gate, and under it the name of an Apostle was written. Unfortunately I do not know which gate the Lord led me through, into the New Jerusalem, but now I would like to know that.

When I entered into the city through the gates, I stood still in admiration: The city was made completely of gold. The gold was so pure and I had never seen such brilliance before. I had seen how brightly gold articles in a jeweller’s store shone, but this was not comparable, to what I saw at that moment. Gold streets, houses of gold, gold doors – everything was made of gold, transparent like glass. I could never have imagined that gold could appear transparent and so pure. I read about this in God’s word, but I could not really imagine it, to me this issue was concealed. I just couldn’t imagine how a hard metal could be transparent. Now that I saw it, I just wanted to touch it. I touched the walls, I entered some houses and scrutinized everything. I did not ask the angels, where I was to go from here. I seemed to know the way. I was overcome with such a feeling as if I was in a place of my own.

As I continued my way further into the city, close to the center, I saw a large tree in one spot. The tree had pear-shaped fruit on it. The size of the fruit was about the size of two average sized fists put together. The leaves on it reminded me of the leaves of a lime tree, only they were larger and like leaves of burdock. When I got near the tree, I wanted to take a fruit from it and began to reach for one. Suddenly with enthusiasm, I was surprised that the hand that I stretched out, was not like an ordinary hand, it was transparent. When I was about to pluck a fruit, the angel who stood a little distance behind me, on my right side, stretched out his hand and stopped me. Gesticulating with his finger, he told me that for now, I shouldn’t pluck the fruit. Then something I didn’t expect took place: Without any form of regret, disappointment from the angel’s action, I left the tree. Generally speaking, within the city, I never experienced any kind of discomfort, or disorder.

When I left the tree, I saw an extraordinary bright light at the center of the city. It was very interesting that I didn’t see any shadow not from the trees and not from the houses. There were no shadows there and neither were there any lamps. I didn’t see the sun nor any object that gave light, but the light was extraordinary bright and so pleasant to the eyes, to the
extent that I was so delighted beyond measure. I cannot adequately describe in words, the extra unusual condition of my soul…

When I saw the center of the illumination, I bowed my head and felt an overwhelming urge to bow my knees. But the angel supported me and I heard a voice, “My son, I have shown you all that is necessary for you at this time, and you should return now, to declare My Glory, power and dominion, to declare all that you have seen and heard”. Then I began to pray and implore the Lord, asking Him to let me remain there, where I was. I cried, “Lord I don’t want to return”. But the Lord said, “You have a wife, and three children. You have to return to them, for it is not time for you to be here yet”. Then again I began to implore the Lord, “Lord, I don’t want to return. Allow me to remain with beside You”. But the Lord said to me,” My Son, be meek and self-controlled, do not murmur, go back. You have to declare My Glory”.

5. Panic among the hospital staff.

BORIS: In the blink of an eye, I moved in space over such a distance, that I saw the earth to which I was now approaching. As I approached I saw the next scene: My body was being taken by the hospital staff on a stretcher to a room where bodies of people were kept. Some of the bodies had incisions made on them. I understood they were taking me to the morgue. In other words, looking from above, I only saw how they were taking me, I didn’t see precisely that they were taking me, because the body was covered with a cloth, only the feet could be seen. When I saw my weeping wife accompanying the stretcher, I understood I was the one being taken. One of the hospital staff was comforting her, trying to tell her not to grieve over the incident and tried to prevent her from entering the room where they were taking the body on the stretcher. I saw this as if from above. I understood that I was brought to the morgue. When the doors ahead of my wife were closed and the stretcher with my body on it was already in the room, people began to move away. These were the orderlies and nursing sisters who brought me to the morgue, who were comforting my wife. When I saw all this, I felt a clap or more precisely a jolt and immediately, I entered into my body. At that instance, I felt the blowing of wind, an enormous force, which flung the doors, through which my body was brought in, open. This force tore the doors off their hinges and they dropped to the floor and the force pushed the trolley with the body out of the morgue. After this I got up. The upper part of my body sat up on the trolley and the cloth fell off my body. The orderly slipping along the sides of the wall, fell and so did the nursing sister as well. Both of them lay there in a state of terror. Another nursing sister came and when she saw me sitting up, went into state of shock. The same supernatural power made the trolley on which I sat, to stand up right, vertically, and I stood vertically on the ground with my feet. Then the trolley fell to its normal position and rolled back in to the morgue.

I wanted to go but could not. My body did not respond. I experienced such a feeling, as if I was not in my own body. Then I began to pray, because my senses were returning to normal. I saw everything, I recognized everything, I heard everything, but I did not recognize the voice I heard, it drawled. The feeling was as if an audio tape was playing at a slower speed than normal. At that instant, I began to call upon the Lord, for the Lord gave me strength to walk. When I finished praying, I felt a great outpouring of energy. I felt as if the hairs on my head were falling off and a thousand needles pricked my forehead. I received such an outpouring of energy, that I felt as if my feet were in asphalt. I felt warmth and a great power, from my head to my feet. I began to walk as the Holy Spirit led me, in the direction of the doctor’s room, where all the doctors were seated. Unconsciously I had perfect orientation of the hospital’s layout, seen as I had been here on several occasions as a serviceman. My wife fell down on her knees, thanking the Lord, because he had resurrected me to life. When she came to herself, she took a cloth and ran after me, to cover my nakedness, because I was completely naked. As I continued walking on, the hospital staff all ran in
various directions screaming out. Some of them fell down, while others shut themselves in the wards. My wife caught up with me just as I was approaching the doctors room and wrapped the cloth about me. I reached the doctors room and with a gentle push, opened the door of the room. Later on, I Learn that the room was locked with a key by the doctors, and cupboards were placed behind the door from the inside to prevent entry into the room. The door opened before me with such ease. The power of the Lord opened that door.

When I entered the room, some of the hospital staff were in a state of terror, while in the corner, other staff were frantically shouting out, “who are you, what do you want from us? Let us alone!”

I calmed them down and said, “Don’t be afraid, give me some clothes.” Looking in their faces, I saw they were stone cold with fear and indescribable horror, I understood there was no sense in explaining my resurrection to these poor doctors frightened to death. Whatever I would have told them, all the same they wouldn’t listen to me. The only thing they could hear was the pounding of their hearts. I repeated, “Give me my clothes and I'll go home”. The doctors allowed me to leave quickly, because they were in such a state of terror because of my presence. When I came out of the doctors room, I stood a while in the corridor and surprisingly, my first four steps left something like a print of water behind, although I was completely dry and the cloth about me was also dry! I dressed up. My wife called a car on the phone, and we went home.

INTERVIEWER: - Boris, I can imagine the panic and shock of the doctors, when they saw you. What they saw, definitely did not conform with the training they underwent in medical school or with what they came across in their medical practice. It’s clear that it wasn’t death that scared them, because they encounter that everyday. Your resurrection back to life is simply not comprehensible to the human mind. It’s a fact and everyone knows that blood clots in a closed space of the brain, couldn't possibly go anywhere and what more considering the degree of the haemorrhage – 95%. There couldn't possibly have been any mistake. After a futile struggle to save your life, your death was confirmed. All the medical equipment connected to your body, confirmed this fact. You were dead in their presence long enough, about 2 hrs and 30 minutes. After that you were taken to the morgue . The irreversible process in the central nervous system had long taken place. And it turned out that the dead man, didn’t just breath, but walked in on his feet and even spoke normally. In actual fact, doctors understand how difficult and how much time is needed in reanimation, for a patient to recover, who has suffered from brain haemorrhage. The doctors did not expect such a miracle.

And what more, the resurrection was accompanied with such power of the Holy Ghost, to the extent that the doors were torn from their hinges and they fell to the ground with such a noise. The trolley rolled out of the morgue, over turned and then rolled back into the morgue. All this happened in the presence of the medical staff. The news of your resurrection had already preceded you. The doctors had already locked themselves in the doctors room and barricaded the door. The door being opened by the power of the Holy Ghost was something they just could not comprehend. They were in such a state of fear. The events that took place were just too incredible for the normal human mind to comprehend...


INTERVIEWER: And so, we stopped at the point where you were going home in a car. What happened next?
BORIS: I was on my way, in complete health in the front seat of the car. Along the road, within our district, we happened to drive up to a road warden, a vehicle inspection officer, with whom I incidentally happened to work with. When he saw me, he slumped to the ground. He
sat on the ground for a long time stunned. My wife asked me to get out and tell him, “everything is OK, and that I am alive”. I said, “I won’t do that, because, he may end up dying out of fear”.

The driver that drove us had to drive into town for some personal matters, he quickly attended to them. We continued our journey into the village, and a police officer, whom we happened to drive past in his car, increased his speed and caught up with us, in order to get a better look at me, to make sure I was really the one. Seeing me he took off his cap, wiped away the sweat from his face, shrugged his shoulders and drove on ahead.

After I arrived home, literally speaking, within thirty minutes my superior officer came to my house to find out if I was really alive or the police officer who met us along the way was out of his mind. They just couldn’t believe that after all that had taken place, I was not only in reanimation, but also in complete health at home. They couldn’t understand this. When I went out to greet them, they were afraid and began to step back, as if they had seen a ghost. I asked them to have a seat and began to speak to them about my resurrection. They began to nod their heads, but their faces revealed so much fright, that everything I told them, they didn’t believe a word, they didn’t even listen to all that I said. They tried as fast as possible to leave, so that they wouldn’t be around me for long.

The next day when I arrived to work, my superior officer didn’t allow me to commence my duties. He said:
“Cannot allow you to work, because after brain haemorrhage and other similar sicknesses, that the doctor’s discovered in you, you ought to have been categorized as an invalid. Considering your death and mysterious resurrection…”

“But do you believe your eyes?” – I asked him.
“I believe”, he said.
“Can you hear me?”
“I can hear you”, he replied.
“Can you see me?” – I continued to ask.
“I can see you” - he said.
“Then pinch me, perhaps you don’t see me well. I am as healthy as you” – I said to him.
“That’s impossible”, he said.

7. Deductions by the Medical Committee – Completely healthy. May carry on service.

INTERVIEWER: - Boris, you talked about the reaction of your colleagues. But what about the doctors?
BORIS: - Yes, for two weeks, 15 different medical committees carried out medical checks on me, to determine if I could remain in service. The doctor’s wanted to prove, that at least some side effects should exist. And that it was impossible that everything should just vanish away without a trace. But in all their x-rays and their investigations, testified of complete health only.

A team of doctors, mainly psychiatrists and neuro-pathologists, came to a common opinion, that I am absolutely well, that I could be admitted on a team of Astronauts. I was allowed to continue my duties as a duty officer in the district police office.

The doctors came to a conclusion, that I am well, however up to this moment in time, all of them are in a state of confusion. As the medical committee was carrying out their duties and the doctors affirmed that I was completely well, they didn’t believe their eyes. Some of them said that if they hadn’t personally fixed the diagnosis, based on the x-rays, cardiographs and many other investigations, they wouldn’t have believed it. How could blood clots, within the brain disappear by themselves without any surgical procedures?

The doctors asked me to keep silent about all this, or else people would think I was crazy. But I know that every lie is a sin, as it is written in God’s word, that all liars will have their part in
the lake that burns with fire...", and that they will not inherit the Kingdom of God. I told the doctors: “For the very reason I stand on the earth, after all that has happened to me, doesn’t give me the right to remain silent. For as it is written in God’s Word, that if you remain silent, than “stones will sing out”. They replied: “Well, that’s your own business. We will not record your resurrection”.

But the doctors that treated me, passed the diagnosis and later certified death all repented. They all accepted the Lord Jesus as Savior.

I would like to say something in addition, that God doesn’t only resurrect a person, in order to leave him crippled. He resurrected me to life and gave me complete healing.

I affirm this statement that God – is not an abstract being. He is a personality, who spoke with me. He is real and heaven is real.

From: http://www.word-of-faith-ch.org/

Conclusion

Brothers in the Lord, rejoice and be exceedingly glad because when you die, if you will be found faithful, you will leave this world and go to a far better place, where you will be in the presence of God and of His Son, and you will praise them continually. In heaven there is fullness of joy and of peace, there is no crying, no affliction, and no pain. The glory of God gives light to everybody and to everything, and everything is glorious and majestic. However, besides rejoicing, you must also speak to one another about this marvellous place, that is, the heavenly paradise, in order to comfort one another. And do not forget to show sinners the way to heaven so that they may come to their senses and begin to walk in it.

One last thing, brothers; as I said before, you will go to heaven if you are found faithful: that is something you should keep always in mind lest you deceive yourselves or be deceived by the devil. For Jesus said to His disciples: “But he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13 – NIV), and also: “By standing firm you will save yourselves” (Luke 21:19 – NIV). Therefore, you must believe in the name of the Son of God to the end in order to enter the heavenly kingdom.

Anyone who draws back will go to perdition, that is to say, he will go down into the fire of hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth; his soul will not be taken into glory, but it will be brought down to hell. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, it is better to fall into the hands of men than to fall into the hands of our great God [1], who is called the Fear of Isaac and the One to be feared.

Therefore, let the fear of God be with you all the days of your life, brothers; let it be before your eyes day and night. Love God to the end and He will save you from the fire of hell and He will bring you safely to His Kingdom. So there you will meet all the saints who fought the good fight and kept the faith to the end. Stand firm in the faith; be zealous for the cause of the Gospel, and be rich in good works. Pray without ceasing.

[1] That is to say, it is better for us to be seized by men, beaten, put in prison, tortured and put to death by them for Christ’s sake, than to be punished by God with everlasting perdition for apostasy
The return of Jesus Christ and the following events

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He appeared to witnesses chosen before by God. He was seen by them during forty days and He spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. When the forty days were over, Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven at the right hand of God as it is written: “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 1:3 – NIV). This took place to fulfill what David had said: “The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110:1 – NKJV).

However, one day Jesus will come back from heaven. He Himself promised His disciples that He will come back, as He said to them: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:2-4 – NKJV).

How will He come back?

- **He will come back in the same way He went into heaven, that is to say, in a visible way**

For in the book of the Acts of the apostles it is written: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11). Therefore, as those who were present at His ascension to heaven saw Him go into heaven, so, at His coming, there will be people who will see Him come back from heaven. However, unlike His ascension to heaven, His coming again will be seen by everybody, as it is written: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7 – NKJV).

- **He will come back on the clouds of heaven, with great glory and power**

For in the Gospel according to Matthew it is written: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30 – NKJV). In the book of the prophet Daniel (which was written several centuries before the Gospel according to Matthew) there is the following prediction concerning the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).
What will happen at His return?

- **The dead in Christ will be raised from the dead and those who are alive will be changed**

Paul said to the saints of Corinth that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23 – NKJV), and to the saints of Thessalonica he said: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first ….” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Among the dead in Christ who will rise there will be also those who have been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who have not worshiped the beast or his image and have not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands (Revelation 20:4).

As for the change of those who are alive, Paul says to the Thessalonians: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Therefore, as Paul says, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52 – NKJV), in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet blast, which will be sounded by the Lord Jesus Christ. On that day Jesus Christ “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21 – NKJV); on that day we will be clothed with our heavenly habitation, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:2,4). Therefore the day on which Jesus Christ will come is a great day because both the dead in Christ and those who are alive will obtain the redemption of their bodies (Romans 8:23), or the full redemption (Ephesians 1:14 – IBRV), which all Christians of past generations waited patiently for and which we also are patiently waiting for.

- **Those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel will be destroyed**

For Paul says to the saints of Thessalonica: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Among those who will be punished there will be also those believers who will not be found ready at the coming of Christ. For Jesus made it clear that those who will not be found ready at His coming will be punished by Him. For instance He said in a parable: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:45-51). Notice the destiny which awaits that servant who has been made ruler by his master over his household to give them food in due season, but begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; he will be cut in two and assigned a place with the hypocrites. In other words he will be cast into the fire,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus spoke also this parable, which shows that the Lord will punish at His coming all those who will be found unfaithful: “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliverest unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury [interest]. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:14-30). Notice even in this parable the terrible punishment the Lord will inflict upon the unprofitable servant, he will be cast into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

● The man of sin will be destroyed

For Paul says to the Thessalonians that that day (that is, the day on which the Lord will come and gather us together to Him) will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, whose coming “is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 – NKJV), whom (that is, the man of sin) the Lord Jesus will consume “with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8 – NKJV).

In the book of Revelation the apostle John confirms that when the Lord Jesus comes back from heaven he will destroy the man of sin. Here is what he says: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a
loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves
together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of
captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them,
and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast [the
man of sin], and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war
against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with
him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had
received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast
alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of
him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were
filled with their flesh" (Revelation 19:11-21). Therefore, at His glorious coming, the Lord Jesus
Himself will destroy the antichrist and kill many people.

● The millennial reign will be established on the earth

For John says about those who will have part in the first resurrection (that is, the resurrection
of the just): “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second
death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a
thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). Therefore Christ and His saints will reign on the earth for
a thousand years. The thousand-year reign will be characterized by peace and righteousness
because the devil will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit, where he will remain till the
thousand years are finished, as it is written: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven,
having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the
dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And
cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should
deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must
be loosed a little season” (Revelation 20:1-3)

When will He return?

Jesus will come back at God’s appointed time, for Paul says that God will manifest Christ’s
appearing “in His own time” (1 Timothy 6:15 – NKJV). Therefore, as the first coming of Jesus
Christ took place at just the right time, as it is written: “For when we were yet without strength,
in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6), so His second coming also will take
place at just the right time. Nobody knows of that day and hour, as Jesus said: “But of that
day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew
24:36). Jesus told us to watch and pray for we know neither the day nor the hour in which the
Son of Man will come (Matthew 24:44; 25:13).
The apostle Paul wrote to the saints of Thessalonica about the times and the seasons: “But of
the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves
know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall
say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman
with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). Obviously the day of the Lord
will come like a thief in the night for those who are in darkness and not for those who are in
the light, that is, the sons of God who walk in the light, because the sons of light are waiting
for the Lord while those who are of the night are not waiting for Him. Paul explains this to the
Thessalonians in this way: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should
overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not
of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be
sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6). However, it is obvious that if a son of light ceases to walk in

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the light and begins to walk in darkness, the day of the Lord will overtake him also as a thief and thus he will not escape the punishment of God. Did Jesus not say to His disciples: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth” (Luke 21:34-35 – NKJV)?

According to what I have said, it is evident, therefore, that anyone who makes calculations to set the times and the seasons of the return of Christ, does something which is contrary to the will of God. God wants us to prepare to meet Christ (at His coming), so that we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming; but He does not want us to make calculations to set the date of His return. We know that the coming of the Lord is near (James 5:8), we know that “in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay” (Hebrews 10:37 – NIV), we know that many of the things that (according to the words of Jesus) are to happen before the coming of the Lord have already happened and are happening in this generation, and we know also that the day of the Lord will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed. But it is not for us to know the day and the hour in which the Lord will come, because Jesus said to His disciples: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7 – NKJV). However, there are some who, ignoring what the Scripture says, take delight in setting times and seasons concerning the return of Christ. I exhort you to beware of anyone who makes calculations to set the date of the coming of the Lord; know this, that such a person troubles with his words the heart of believers and this shows that his words are not of God. I say it again, brothers, beware of all those who have come to the conclusion (no matter what kind of calculations they have made) that the Lord will come on a particular day (or in particular month or year); their words will prove to be profane babblings in due time, and both they and those who follow them will be put to shame.

What will happen after His return?

- **There will be a thousand-year reign on the earth and when this period of time is over the devil will be released from his prison**

The second coming of Christ will usher in the millennial reign, which will be a reign full of peace and righteousness because at His return the devil will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit to keep him from deceiving the nations any more till the thousand years are ended. However, when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will deceive the nations. Here is what John says: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:7-10).

Therefore, when the millennial reign is over, all those who will be deceived by the devil will surround the saints to fight against them, but God will punish them by raining fire on them (as you know God punished also Sodom and Gomorrah by raining fire on them). The devil also will be punished, for he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where he will be tormented forever and ever; he deserves to be punished in this way. Therefore both the deceiver and those who will be deceived will be punished.
The present heavens and earth will be destroyed

For John says that after the devil was cast into the everlasting fire, he saw “a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them” (Revelation 20:11 – NKJV). God will make a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1)

The wicked will be raised from the dead and judged according to their works

This is the second resurrection, that is, the resurrection of those who have done evil (John 5:29), who will rise to be judged according to their works and be cast into the lake of fire. The apostle John saw in a vision the resurrection of the unjust. Here is how he described it: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:12-15).

The lake of fire, which is the final abode for all the ungodly and the devil and all of his co-workers, is also called “the everlasting fire” (Matthew 25:41), “the gehenna” (Mark 9:45 - YLT) or “the gehenna of the fire” (Mark 9:47 - YLT). It was initially created by God for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The torments of the lake of fire are eternal, for it is written: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46), and also: “… the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, … ” (Revelation 14:11), and again: “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). Therefore those who will be cast into the lake of fire will suffer endless torments, that is, they will be tormented forever and ever.

The New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven

Here is what John says about the coming down of the New Jerusalem and about the heavenly city: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away…… And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall
thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 21:1-4, 9-27; 22:1-5).

Conclusion

This is the hope that the saints have in God, that they will be raised from the dead or changed at the coming of Christ from heaven, they will reign with Christ upon the earth for the following thousand years, and will live forever with their immortal, incorruptible and glorious body in the New Jerusalem, which will descend upon the new earth. Let those who have this hope rejoice and glorify God, and let them purify themselves just as Jesus is pure; instead, let those who don’t have this hope repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ, that is, let them believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again the third day for our justification, that they also may have this glorious hope.

To Christ Jesus, the One who is and who was and who is to come, be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The resurrection of the dead

God predicted through the prophets of old that the dead will rise again, for in the book of the prophet Isaiah it is written: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19), and in the book of Daniel it is written: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame
and everlasting contempt ....But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (Daniel 12:2,13 – NKJV).
Several centuries later He confirmed that prediction through His Son and the apostles. For Jesus said: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29 – NKJV); Paul said that he had the same hope in God as the people of Israel, “that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15 – NKJV); and John wrote that he saw both the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and the rest of the dead come to life; those who had been killed because of their testimony for Jesus came to life just before the millennial reign, for John says that they reigned with Christ a thousand years, while the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended (Revelation 20:4, 11-15).
Therefore, the resurrection of the dead was predicted by the prophets first, and then by Jesus and the apostles. So the resurrection of the dead is certainly one of the events which is to take place in the latter times. God foretold the resurrection of the dead and we believe that the dead will rise again at His appointed time. I would like to point out that all the dead will rise again, no one of them will be excluded because all men must appear before God with their body to give account to Him for the things they did in the body. I say this because some people affirm that according to the following words of Daniel “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake” the resurrection of the dead will be partial; however the words of Daniel were made clear by Jesus who said that “all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”. Therefore, let no one deceive you with empty words.

The resurrection of the just

Paul says to the Corinthians: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming .....” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23 – NKJV). Now, Jesus Christ is called the firstborn from among the dead (or the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep) because He rose from the dead with a glorious and incorruptible body, that is to say, because He is the first man who has risen again with an immortal body. Those who were raised from the dead before Jesus, such as the son of the widow of Sarepta, Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain, were not raised from the dead with an immortal body but with the same mortal body they had before their death, for the Scripture says that after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead “the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 12:10-11 – NKJV). As you can see, Lazarus could still be killed and thus could still die, and we are sure that at God’s appointed time he died again. But the One whom God raised from the dead on the third day “dies no more” (Romans 6:9 – NKJV) because death no longer has dominion over Him. Therefore, when we say that Christ is the firstborn from among the dead we mean that He is the first man who has been raised from the dead with a glorious, immortal and incorruptible body. And since Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep that means that all those who died in Christ will be raised from the dead too; they will be raised from the dead at the return of the Lord.
Both Jesus and the apostles stated that the saints who have fallen asleep will be raised from the dead; let us look therefore at some of their statements about the resurrection of the just which is to take place at God’s appointed time.
• Jesus mentioned the resurrection of the just when he said to a Pharisee who had invited Him: “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12-14). And on another occasion He said to the Jews: “Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life ….” (John 5:28-29 – NKJV).

• Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power” (1 Corinthians 6:14 – NKJV), and to the Thessalonians: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 – NKJV).

In the light of the above mentioned verses of the Scripture, therefore, when the dead in Christ hear the mighty shout of the Lord Jesus they will come out of the graves with an immortal body and they will meet the Lord in the air. Therefore, the resurrection of the just will take place at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of the unjust

As for the resurrection of the unjust, Jesus said that “those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:29 – NIV). That means that they will be raised from the dead in order to be judged according to their works and to be condemned to an everlasting contempt in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. The apostle John speaks of their resurrection in the book of Revelation, when he says: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:12-15). The resurrection of the unjust will take place at the end of the millennial reign (during which Christ will reign on earth with the saints, who will be resurrected and changed at His return).

As I said before, the unjust will rise to be condemned to an everlasting contempt, for after their resurrection they will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, where they will be tormented forever and ever. There are several verses of the Scripture which confirm that the torment which the unjust will suffer in the lake of fire is eternal.

• Jesus said about those who will be put on His left: “And these will go away into everlasting punishment ….” (Matthew 25:46 – NKJV).

• Paul said to the Thessalonians: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance
on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

- John wrote in the book of Revelation: “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:9-11). The following expressions, “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever”, “they have no rest day nor night” show that those people will be tormented forever, and, unlike those who will live forever with the Lord and will rest from their labor, they will never have rest.

- John says in the book of Revelation that when Jesus comes back, both the beast and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Revelation 19:20); and that when the millennial reign is over the devil also will be cast into the lake of fire “and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10 - NKJV). Obviously since the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars will be cast into the lake of fire, we must conclude that they also will be tormented forever and ever (Revelation 21:8).

- Jesus said: “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire [geenna]: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47-48). Notice that it is written that the worm of the wicked does not die and the fire is not quenched, which shows that the torment which the wicked will suffer in the lake of fire will be endless.

- Jude said: “As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7 – NKJV). That means that when the inhabitants of those wicked cities rise again on that day, they will be condemned to a state of endless torment in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. However, keep in mind that even at present the inhabitants of those cities are tormented, for they are in Hades.

As you can see, the above mentioned verses in one way or another speak of eternal torment. However, as you know, some people say that these verses must not be interpreted literally, but they are greatly mistaken because if it were so as they say we shouldn’t interpret literally the following words of Jesus “but the righteous [will go away] into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46 – NKJV) and the following words of John concerning the righteous “and they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5 – NKJV) either.

**How the dead are raised up**

Let us see now how the dead are raised up. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the
glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven [some manuscripts don’t have ‘the Lord,’ thus they read ‘the second man is from heaven’]. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:35-49).

In order to explain how the dead are raised up, Paul used some similes. First of all he said that what one sows does not come to life unless it dies, and in fact every seed which is sown must decompose first in order to bear fruit; then Paul said that when one sows he does not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, but God gives it a body as He has determined, and to each kind of seed He gives its own body. All these things happen in nature at God’s command because the Scripture says that all things continue this day according to His ordinances, and they are useful to us to understand how the dead in Christ are raised.

Man’s body is subject to sickness and to all kinds of pains, and it gets tired when it makes some physical efforts; these are signs which show that man’s body is weak. However, at the resurrection the resurrected saints will receive from God a powerful body, which will not be subject to these things any longer for the former things will pass away and He will make all things new. In other words, the resurrected body will be more powerful than the earthly body. The body of the saints is sown in weakness, for when it is buried is lifeless, but at the resurrection it will be raised in power because it will be full of strength.

We who are in this tent see our body perishing for it is a corruptible body, but when we are clothed with our habitation which is from heaven then we will no longer see it perishing because it will be an incorruptible body. Our body is sown in corruption and it will be raised incorruptible, for the body which is buried decomposes and it returns to the dust as it is written: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19 - NKJV), however when it is raised, since it will be immortal, it will never see corruption again.

Paul says also that all flesh is not the same, for men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. He says this so that we may understand that the flesh of which will be made the resurrected bodies of the saints is different from the flesh of their earthly bodies. Yes, because even the resurrected bodies of the saints will be made of flesh, but of a kind of flesh which will be different from the one we have now on earth. This is confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus, for Jesus rose again with a powerful and incorruptible body, but at the same time with a body made of flesh and bones, in that when He appeared to His disciples (who thought they were seeing a spirit) He said to them: “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:38-39 – NKJV). As you can see, the body of Jesus could be touched because He was not a spirit. However, even though Jesus was not a spirit, He was able to pass through the walls, for the Scripture says that “when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them. Peace be with you” (John 20:19 – NKJV). He could appear to His disciples and could also vanish from their sight and at the same time He could eat and drink with them. Therefore, since Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, when the dead in Christ rise again they will receive a resurrected body which will be like His glorious body.
Furthermore, the apostle says that there are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies, but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. We can see this with our own eyes, can’t we? Let us consider the angels who are in heaven, which are heavenly beings created by God and thus they have a heavenly body. The splendour of their body differs very much from the splendour of our body. To understand this concept it suffices to consider the appearances of angels to men. For instance, let us consider the angelic vision that the women had at the tomb where the body of Jesus had been laid. It is written that an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it; “his appearance was like lightning” (Matthew 28:3 – NIV). Besides this vision, we can consider also some visions of angels that some brothers in our generation have seen; there is no doubt, according to their words the splendour of the bodies of these heavenly beings differs from the splendour of our bodies. Therefore, at the resurrection the body which has been sown in dishonor will be raised in glory, in a glory that is much greater than the glory our body has on the earth. Paul confirmed this when he said to the Philippians that the Lord Jesus Christ “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21 – NKJV).

The apostle Paul says also that just as there is a natural body so there is a spiritual body. However the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The natural body is the body we have now, while the spiritual body is the body which both the dead in Christ (who will rise again) and the saints who are alive at the coming of the Lord (who will be changed) will receive from the Lord on that day. It is called spiritual because it will be made alive by the Spirit of God, as it is written: “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11 - NKJV). Therefore, what we clearly learn from the Scripture is this: “As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:49 – NKJV).

At this point someone may ask: ‘With what body do the unjust come?’ The Scripture does not say anything about the body with which the unjust will rise again. However, their body will surely be a physical body since their resurrection also will be a physical resurrection. Furthermore, it will be an immortal body because with that body they will be tormented in the lake of fire for ever and ever. When Jesus told His disciples to fear “Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [geenna]” (Matthew 10:28 - NKJV), the body he referred to is the resurrected body of the wicked, since geenna is the everlasting fire into which the wicked will be cast after their resurrection.

On that day death will be destroyed and the saints will receive the redemption of their bodies

Paul says: “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave [hades], where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

The reason why Paul says that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, is that at the return of the Lord there will be some believers who will be found alive and since they have
not tasted death they will be changed. However, they will obtain a body like the body of the resurrected saints. That's what we learn also from the following words that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Then, that is, when the dead in Christ rise and we are changed, will death be destroyed; yes, because death has not yet been destroyed. It is true that Paul says to Timothy that Christ “has destroyed death” (2 Timothy 1:10 – NIV), however this destruction applies to the death of Jesus, for it is written that Christ, “having been raised from the dead, dies no more” (Romans 6:9 – NKJV), and not to the death of all the saints who died because they are asleep and they haven’t yet waked up. Believers still die, therefore we must say that death has not yet been swallowed up in victory. Actually death still has a sting, which is sin, that dwells in us, as it is written: “Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Romans 7:20 – NKJV), and again: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8 – NKJV). However, at the resurrection this sting will be taken away because in the glorious body we will obtain there will be no more evil or sin. Now as you know it is written: “The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Matthew 22:44 – NKJV), therefore Christ is at the right hand of God and He is reigning, waiting for His enemies to be put under His feet, for “now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8 – NKJV). Now according to what Paul says, “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26 – NKJV). When will it be destroyed? At the resurrection. Then will be brought to pass the word spoken by Isaiah: “He will swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:8 – NKJV), and there will be no more death.

On that day the redemption of our body will be fulfilled, for when the Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the just, which will take place on the day of Christ, it refers to the redemption of our body, for Paul says to the Romans: “We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23 – NKJV). This, because only on that day the mortal bodies of the righteous will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and will become immortal, glorious and incorruptible. So we can say that when the righteous die, they save their soul but ‘lose’ their body, but they lose it only for a time because they will take it back again in the resurrection, that is, when God raises their bodies. This is an important thing concerning the resurrection of the just, which must be stressed and kept in mind, because it confirms that the resurrection will be a physical resurrection, that is, it confirms that at the resurrection the just will take their own bodies back again, (and this is something which many sects deny). Obviously, since not all the just will die, not all the just will rise again because those who are alive at the coming of the Lord will be only changed; notwithstanding this, the redemption of the body will be experienced also by those who are alive because their bodies will be changed into glorious, incorruptible and immortal bodies, thus they also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Our hope

Dear brothers in the Lord, the resurrection of our body is the hope we have in God, and how distressed we are till it is fulfilled! Paul expressed this distress in these terms: “For in this we
groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:2-4 – NKJV).

Therefore, brothers, we are eagerly waiting for the redemption of our body, that is to say, we are eagerly waiting for our body to be transformed into a heavenly body, because we who belong to Christ were appointed to obtain a heavenly body; the habitation in which we now live is an earthly habitation but we earnestly desire to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven (that is, the heavenly body which we will keep for ever and ever) and which is better than the earthly habitation. However, in order to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, we must be found clothed and not naked at the return of the Lord. Someone will say: ‘With what must we be found clothed?’ We must be found clothed with what we put on when we believed. I will explain this concept through the Scriptures. Isaiah says: “He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10 – NKJV). That means that we believers have clothed ourselves, or rather, have been clothed with the garments of God’s salvation and the robe of God’s righteousness, and this, by faith in Christ. However, we must continue to wear the garments of God’s salvation and the robe of His righteousness till the glorious appearing of our Lord. That’s what Paul was determined to do, for he said to the Philippians: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:8-9 – NKJV).

Therefore, beloved, let us see that we are found by the Lord, at His coming, clothed with the righteousness which is from God by faith, and let us not imitate those who have put off the righteousness which is from God in order to put on their own righteousness (that is to say, let us not imitate those who have forsaken Christ in order to be justified by the law of Moses), for “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20 – NKJV). Nor let us imitate those who have put off the new man “which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24 – NKJV), and they have put on the old man “which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22 – NKJV); or else we will be found naked, that is to say, with the shame of our nakedness revealed. Brothers, know this, that all those who, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled in them and overcome (2 Peter 2:20), thus, they return to walk like natural brute beasts according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, I say, know that they will not be found clothed but naked.

I conclude by reminding you that the Lord said to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Revelation 3:15-18). As you can see, that believer with the passing of time had become lukewarm and the Lord, knowing his works, told him that he was naked, and He counselled him to buy from Him white garments so that he might be clothed, that the shame of his nakedness might not be revealed. That shows that if we cease to watch and keep the commandments of the Lord, we will lose the white garments that the Lord has given us.

Therefore, beloved, let us keep the white garments with which the Lord, after removing our filthy garments (our iniquities) from us, has clothed us. Let us not put them off, so that we
might be found by the Lord clothed and not naked, and thus we may be clothed with our heavenly habitation.

**On the day of Christ the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is**

Paul wrote to the saints of Corinth: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Now I will expound briefly these Bible verses.

According to what Luke says in the book of the Acts of the apostles, after Paul had been at Athens, he came to Corinth where he preached the Christ, and many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed in the Gospel and were baptized. Therefore, it was Paul who in Christ Jesus begot the Corinthians through the Gospel, it was Paul who as a wise master builder laid the foundation of that spiritual house which arose in Corinth, and the foundation which Paul laid was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Paul continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among the saints of Corinth, afterward he departed from there. After his departure from Corinth, Apollos came to Achaia; the Scripture says that “when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27 – NKJV).

Apollos preached the Word to the saints of Corinth, for Paul compared the preaching of Apollos to the watering, as it is written: “I planted, Apollos watered” (1 Corinthians 3:6 – NKJV). So Paul laid the foundation and Apollos built on it. However, Apollos was not the only one who built on it, that is to say, who preached and taught among the Church of Corinth, for others did the same. It was lawful for them to build on the foundation, but Paul warned them saying: “But let each one take heed how he builds on it” (1 Corinthians 3:10 – NKJV). And that is a warning which is still given to all those who build on the foundation, which is Christ Jesus.

Now the true ministers of Christ do not preach themselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, they preach the Good News of peace exhorting people to repent of their sins and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ in order to receive the remission of their sins. When they preach Christ where Christ was not known, they are diligent to lay Christ Jesus as the foundation and then they build on it; that’s why all the churches of the saints are built on the same foundation, that is, Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, elect, precious to us who have believed in Him. Therefore the foundation of each church of God is Jesus Christ, and Paul says that “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11 – NKJV); that means that no minister of God has the right to take away this foundation and to lay another foundation in its place. However, while on the one hand we see that no minister of the Gospel who serves God with a pure conscience dares to take away the solid foundation, on the other hand we see that many ravenous wolves (accursed children who preach a different Gospel from the one we accepted) try by their craftiness to take away this foundation from the life of the saints. For these people have only one purpose: to draw away the disciples of the Lord after themselves. Beloved, beware of them!
Let us speak now of the ministers of the Gospel, who do not dare to lay any other foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. As you know, the ministers of the Gospel preach Christ and Him crucified, the remission of sins by faith in His name, and water baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. However, as you know, not all the ministers of the Gospel teach the same thing about certain topics. At this point someone will ask: 'Which ministers of the Gospel are right and which are wrong? That is to say, ‘Which ministers are building on the foundation gold, silver and precious stones? And which ministers are building on the foundation wood, hay and straw?’ Certainly, not all of them are right, for not all of them teach the same thing concerning those topics. Those who are building wood, hay and straw on the foundation are those whose teachings are inconsistent with the Word of God, and thus these ministers are laboring in vain when they teach these wrong doctrines of theirs.

Let me give you some examples to show you how some labor in vain teaching the believers certain things.

As for the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, some preachers and teachers (who do not set aside the grace of God for they preach the Word of faith) say that one is baptized with the Holy Spirit when he believes in the Lord, while others say that one receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit when he is baptized in water, however all of them say that when one is baptized with the Holy Spirit he does not begin to speak with other tongues. Therefore all of these preachers and teachers have this in common: they teach a baptism with the Holy Spirit which is not accompanied by speaking in tongues. Now, these preachers and teachers teach falsely with regard to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, because the Scriptures very clearly teach (and the facts confirm this) that when one is baptized with the Holy Spirit (that is to say, when one is filled with the Holy Spirit, or when one receives the Holy Spirit) he begins to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives him utterance. The following Bible verses teach what I have just said: “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4); “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46); “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:5-6). What shall we say then about these brothers who preach Christ and salvation by faith in Christ? We shall say that as far as the baptism with the Holy Spirit is concerned they are building straw on the foundation and on the day of Christ that straw will be burned and their labour will prove vain.

However, the fact is that even among those who preach the Word of faith and teach that when one is baptized with the Holy Spirit he begins to speak with other tongues, there are some who do not teach the same thing on the same topic, and sometimes they teach personal opinions which set aside the Word of God. I am going to give you some examples.

Some preachers teach that the commandment concerning the veil (that is, the commandment according to which a woman must cover her head with a veil when she prays or prophesies) applied only to the women of the church of Corinth; they give many absurd arguments and many believers believe them for they think that since these preachers and teachers are well known and speak to many people they must be right!!! I say to you this: these people are building straw on the foundation, therefore they labor in vain teaching that doctrine because on the day of Christ the straw they are building on it will be burned by the fire of God. This teaching of theirs is of no value, that is to say, it is not one of those precious things which are worth building on the foundation, for the Scripture says: “The woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10 – NKJV). Now, is man the head of the woman and thus she must be subject to male authority? Yes, he is. Are the
angels watching all those who are in Christ? Yes, they are. So the woman must cover her head with a veil (the symbol or sign of authority) when she prays or prophesies in order not to dishonor her head. The fact that this commandment is written only in one of the epistles of Paul does not nullify this commandment because according to what Paul wrote in the same epistle he commanded women to cover their head with a veil in the other churches also, for he said about certain things he wrote only to the Corinthians: "And so I ordain in all the churches" (1 Corinthians 7:17 – NKJV). Therefore the fact that those things were written only to the Corinthians does not mean that he taught them only to the Corinthians. In addition to this, Paul said about the veil: "But If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" (1 Corinthians 11:16 – NKJV), therefore at that time all the other churches of God had that good custom! It was not only the church of Corinth that had that custom! I say it again, the teaching which makes the commandment about the veil of no effect is straw, so do not build it on the foundation for if you build it you will suffer loss on that day.

Some pastors say that the following words of Peter: “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4 – NIV), are addressed only to the married women whose husbands are not believers, for they need to win their husbands to Christ by their chaste conduct!! These people also are building straw on the foundation, for they do not divide the Word of truth rightly. For they quote the words of Peter: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2 – NKJV) to support their doctrine, but they forget the following things. First of all, the fact that Peter said “… that even if some do not obey the word”, means that the commandment “your beauty should not come from outward adornment” was given to both wives whose husbands are not believers and wives whose husbands are believers, for what Peter means when he says ‘that even if some do not obey the word’ is this: ‘so that, if any of them do not obey the word …’, therefore if all those wives whose husbands are not believers are submissive to their unbelieving husbands and they adorn themselves in modest apparel, they will win them to Christ by their chaste conduct. Secondly, they forget that immediately after Peter says: “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adored themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror” (1 Peter 3:5-6 – NKJV). Now, as far as I know, Sarah did not have a husband who did not obey the word, and thus the reason why she did not wear expensive clothes nor did she braid her hair nor did she wear gold jewelry was not that she might win her husband! I know that Sarah was not dressed like the corrupt women because she was a holy woman who feared God and trusted in God, and her husband also trusted in God and feared God (when God tested Abraham, he offered his only begotten son). Beloved, do not build on the foundation the straw which is being built by these people; the commandment of Peter concerning the outward adornment of women is confirmed by Paul and it is addressed to all women who are in Christ, that is to say, to all the unmarried women, to all the married women and to all widows.

Also those who teach that a pastor is also a prophet for he speaks of the things to come which are written in the Word of God are building straw on the foundation, for a pastor is also a prophet if he possesses the gift of prophecy and some gifts of revelation. Also those who teach that when one speaks with other tongues in the church he speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men, whereas when one speaks with other tongues privately (that is, when he is alone in his bedroom, etc) he speaks to God, are building straw on the foundation because Paul made no difference between the two things; there is not one
hint in the Scriptures that things are as these believers teach. Paul said: “He who speaks in a
tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit
he speaks mysteries” (1 Corinthians 14:2 - NKJV), therefore even when a believer speaks
with other tongues in the church he speaks to God. It follows then that even the interpretation
of tongues is addressed to God (a prayer, a song, a thanksgiving) and not to men, for it does
not change the direction of the original utterance when the saints are gathered together as a
church.

I have given you the above mentioned examples to show you that what is inconsistent with
the truth is straw and on that day it will be burned and he who has built it will suffer loss. On
that day the Lord will separate by the fire what is precious from what is of no value, only what
is precious will stand for what is of no value will be burned. When the fire tests each one’s
work, he who has built upon the foundation wood, hay and straw, however he will not be cast into the everlasting fire, not at all, because Paul says: “But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15 – NKJV). Therefore the wood, the hay and the straw will be lost, but the brothers who have built those things on the foundation (they built them because of lack of knowledge or because they did not divide the word of truth rightly) will by no means be lost. Be careful, the
above mentioned words of Paul do not encourage anyone to build wood, hay and straw on
the foundation, rather they arouse fear in us for they lead us to ask ourselves: ‘What am I
building on the foundation? Am I building gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and
straw?’ I think that all those who teach the Word of God must examine carefully the things
they are teaching to make sure they are building on this foundation things which are of value
and which will endure forever and for which they will be rewarded. Know this, that if one
refuses to teach a doctrine, which is biblical, just because many do not teach it or because he
thinks that if he taught it he would make himself ‘unpopular’ or an enemy of many brothers,
he deceives himself; if one wants to teach something which is not scriptural in order to please
most of the brethren he deceives himself for on that day he will suffer loss. I know that on that
day the wood, the hay and the straw one has built on this foundation will not become gold,
silver and precious stones because they are what they are and they will be burnt. Therefore
let us take heed to ourselves, lest we labor in vain. Keep in mind, brothers, that the reward
we will receive from the Lord for our labor which will prove useful is an everlasting reward,
therefore let us see that we build on this foundation only things which are of value lest we see
part of our works burnt by the fire of God.

But on that day will be burnt not only the untrue teachings but also the wrong judgements we
have passed on things or people because we judged according to appearance or because we
judged by the hearing of our ears, as well as jokes, buffooneries, dishonest things, and
useless works. You see, brothers, when we talk or do something we labor in a certain
measure because our body does something, however we must take heed to our conduct
because on that day we will have to give account for it to God; and remember that we will be
rewarded for the right things we have said and done and not for the bad things we have said
or done. It can’t be otherwise. Do you think that God will reward a Christian for the false
teachings he has taught or for the wrongs he has done or for the jokes he has told to His
people or for the pleasures of life to which he has given over? I don’t think so, for God is just.
Furthermore, if God rewarded Christians even for the useless things they say or do, we would
not be encouraged to serve the Lord with a pure conscience or to take heed to ourselves.

On the earth some people are rewarded by other people for many useless and perverse
things they have done or said; haughty people, perverse people, prostitutes, and unjust
people get trophies, money, and riches as a reward for their evil works, as if they had done good works. However, we should not be surprised by that because Solomon said long ago: “There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: .... wicked men who get what the righteous deserve” (Ecclesiastes 8:14 – NIV). Now that’s what happens on earth, but on that day no one will be rewarded by God for his useless, wicked and lying works; all those who have done these things will receive what is due them for these things; God will by no means praise any of His sons for the useless and wicked things he has done while in the body.

Let me explain to you now what gold, silver and precious stones represent. They represent all the things which are of value in the sight of God. Every sound doctrine as well as every sound word are things of value, for they are helpful for building others up according to their needs, therefore believers will be rewarded for these things on that day. In the Psalms it is written: “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6 – NKJV); therefore, since the Word of God is like pure silver, he who uses it to edify the Church of God (teaching it, or speaking it to uphold the weak, to comfort the fainthearted, and to warn the unruly) will be rewarded. God has given us the right material which is to be built on the foundation, so let us build it on the foundation for our own good and for the good of the Church of God.

Good works (that is, alms, visits paid to the widows and to the orphans and to those who are in prison for the Gospel, and any other kind of good works) are precious things which are built on the foundation and God will reward us for them, for it is written that “he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward” (Proverbs 11:18 – NKJV). Yes, brothers, on that day we will be rewarded for our labor of love; this thought comforts us and fills us with joy in the midst of this world full of unrighteousness and hypocrisy.

Paul said: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10 – NIV). Brothers, one day all of us will appear before the judgement seat of Christ because each one of us must receive what is due him for all the things said or done while in the body. So let us abound in the work of God honestly and sincerely, doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, for on that day the Lord will reveal even the counsels of our hearts, thus He will reveal even the reasons why we have spoken and acted in a way rather than in another way. What will happen on that day then? It will happen that many classifications made by men will be upset because many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first and everybody will see what each one has built on the foundation. God will show no partiality, the fire will test the quality of our work; vanity will be burnt, truth will be rewarded; those who humble themselves will be exalted, but those who exalt themselves will be humbled; I am convinced that on that day we will see things which we have never imagined because on the earth we tend to look at things according to the outward appearance and to judge according to appearance or by the hearing of our ears; while in heaven God will judge no one according to the outward appearance.

Even if a person lives with another person and sees him very often, he can know him only in part, while God knows all the things done and said by that person during all his life. That’s why we will do well to wait for the classifications made by God and we should not trust the classifications that men make according to their understanding or to the outward appearance. Only on that day will we know many bad works, many hypocrisies, many falsehood, many lies which are told by many believers and covered skilfully for fear of being discovered or put to shame; only on that day will we know many good things said and done by many believers in secret in order not to be seen by men nor to have glory from men.

Beloved, all the things we are doing will be brought to light, for Paul says that the Lord will “bring to light what is hidden in darkness” (1 Corinthians 4:5 – NIV), whether precious things or useless things; we will not be able to keep anything secret any longer because God will bring to light all our works, words and thoughts before all. This must lead us to perfect our
holiness not in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth every day. On the one hand this discourages us from speaking and doing all kinds of evil things, but on the other hand it encourages us to do and speak as many good things as possible while we are in this tent. I conclude by saying this: the day is coming on which we will have to depart from the body, and thus we will not be able to do or say any good thing on the earth any longer; God commands us to do good works and to speak the truth, let us obey Him. Let us do what He commands, and let us abound more and more in the work of the Lord. Let us be zealous for good works, for if we stand fast in the faith and keep the works of Christ until the end, we will surely be rewarded for our good works. We will not lose what we have worked for, but we will be rewarded fully. To the One who will reward us in justice (His justice is very high) be the glory now and forevermore. Amen.
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