

# The VINE & BRANCHES



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*Jesus said, "For without Me, ye can do nothing."*

## A Man, An Ox, a Lion & An Eagle

Most Christians are aware that there are four Gospels in the New Testament. Not every Christian knows why.

Today, almost all color printing utilizes a process called “color separation.” Like the least common denominator in mathematics, the entire palette of colors needed to produce an image is reduced to four components: cyan, magenta, yellow and black. These translucent colors are printed one on top of another in varying amounts, producing the desired hues.

Suppose you wanted to print a photographic image of an evergreen tree standing against a clear blue sky, and your printer had only yellow ink. With so much information missing, your finished product would be scarcely recognizable. On the other hand, if you had all the ink you needed *except* yellow, the image you produced would be at best a distorted representation of the original image.

The four gospels work together like the four inks in a printer. Each gospel tells a particular aspect of the story of Jesus Christ. All four gospels are required to tell the whole story.

A vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel provides interesting information as to how the four gospels work together as one.

As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. (Ezekiel 1:10)

In this vision, Ezekiel saw four faces: the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox and the face of an eagle. Now, these four faces were the ensigns of the tribes of Israel. The lion was the ensign of the tribe of Judah, the ox was of Ephraim, the man was the ensign of the tribe of Reuben and the eagle was of Dan. Judah, the Lion, camped on the east, opposite Ephraim, the ox, on the west. Dan, the eagle, camped to the north, opposite Reuben, the man, to the south.

Now, things get even more interesting! These four faces represent the four sides (if your will), of the person of Jesus

Christ our Lord. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ is figuratively portrayed with the face of a lion. He is the Lion of Judah, the Messiah of Israel, and the King of kings. In Mark, Christ is figuratively portrayed with the face of an ox, that is, that is, as a Servant. In Luke, Christ is portrayed as a man, the “second” Adam. In John, Jesus is figuratively portrayed with the face of an Eagle, the Son of God.

Just as a complete color portrait requires all four of the printer’s tones, our understanding of Jesus Christ must be based on not one or two but all four Gospel accounts, each held in check by the others. To the north, we see John’s portrayal of Jesus as God dwelling in His Son. That portrait is countered on the south by Luke’s Gospel of Christ the man. Lean too heavily on Luke, as is the manner of some, and your portrait of Christ will be imbalanced in favor of His humanity. Lean too heavily on John, as is the manner of others, and your portrait of Christ will be imbalanced in favor of His divinity. To the east, we have the Gospel of Matthew, Christ the King. That portrait is countered on the west by the Gospel of Mark, Christ the servant. Christ the King is balanced by Christ the Servant. “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11)! Now, how fantastic is that?

Each Gospel becomes increasingly interesting not only for what it contains but also for what it does not. In Matthew’s Gospel, for example, the line of Joseph is key. His genealogy of Christ spans from Abraham, the “father of all who believe” to Joseph, by whom Jesus held legitimate right to the throne of David. Matthew writes only of Joseph’s reaction to Mary’s unexpected pregnancy. We must turn to Luke’s testimony to learn how Mary herself reacted. Mary is the focus of Luke’s genealogy, which spans from Adam to Heli, who through marriage was the *other* father of Joseph (or as we say, his *father-in-law*). Only Matthew tells of the visit of the wise men from the east. Only Luke tells of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, because there was no room at the inn. The record of the birth of the

King is balanced by the birth of the Man.

The testimony of Christ's birth would be incomplete but for the Gospel of John. Here, the genealogy of Christ does not commence with Adam or Abraham but "in the beginning" when "the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (Jn. 1:1-2). Concerning His nativity, we read only that "the Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14a). John's Gospel references neither Christ's temptation in the wilderness nor His agony in the Garden, for the Jesus of John's Gospel is God (Who cannot be tempted) made manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). As Jesus told Philip, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

Yes, it just as interesting to note what each gospel contains as what it does not. With this in mind, I'd like to direct your attention to four events that occurred in the final days of Jesus' first coming, with emphasis on how they together portray a complete picture of Christ, the man, the servant, the king and the Son of God.

Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. He spoke to them of His impending death, and shared with them the bread and cup of remembrance. On this momentous occasion, which would be immortalized as the Last Supper, Judas Iscariot departed into the night to betray Him. Undoubtedly, the hearts of the remaining eleven apostles were heavy as they made their way toward the Mount of Olives. It is here that we read from Mark.

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. (Mark 14:26)

Matthew also records this event, but I'd like to emphasize this from Mark's perspective, that is, Jesus as Servant. I have the joy of knowing two ministers who are singularly adept at what we call the song service; the song leading that is an important part in our congregational meetings. These two men, Rev. Evan Pyle of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Rev. Jerome Lucas of South Harrow, England, are in many ways as different as different can be. At the same time, their lives run a parallel course. Both are men who have been entrusted with the oversight of a church. Both are accomplished musicians who use their talents to minister to the Church. A song service in their hands is not a performance or a sing-a-long, but a true *service*. I have witnessed song services that were as effectual as the laying on of hands to minister healing.

Imagine the kind of song service our Lord led that night on route to the Mount of Olives, as He ever cared for the hearts of His followers. How wonderful it is to read of this in the gospel of Jesus the Servant. But soon,

the soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus. It was then that Jesus spoke these words, words that you will only read in Matthew's Gospel:

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? (Matthew 26:53-54)

The King of the Jews was also King of Heaven. He had limitless power at His fingertips. If a legion of devils held no sway over Him, how much less a legion of soldiers? He could have walked right through that mob, just as He had so many times before. But as He said, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?"

Christ was arrested, tried and sentenced to die on a cross. As He hung on the cross, the very people for whom He was giving His life cruelly mocked Him.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34a)

Here again are words you will only find in one gospel, in this case, the Gospel of Luke. Here we see Christ's compassion for mankind. He is not untouched by the feelings of our infirmities. Before He ever asked us to walk in His steps, He walked first in ours.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:16-18)

Jesus is no Pharisee, looking down His nose at us in perpetual annoyance at our weakness. He is a merciful and faithful high priest, waiting to succor us in our time of need. As the Psalmist wrote, "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps.103:14).

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.(Hebrews 4:15-16)

The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, from the third to the ninth. And on the ninth hour, Christ proclaimed these words, words that you can only read in the Gospel of John:

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30)

"It is finished!" Jesus proclaimed. This was the triumphal cry of God our Saviour (Jd. 1:25 *among many*). His plan of redemption, written in the stars even before there were men on earth to gaze up at them, was complete.

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:3)

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with the resurrection of Christ. Mark concludes with His Ascension. The Gospel of Luke ends with the promise of the Father, power for service here on earth. Finally, the Gospel of John ends with the promise of His return. No one book can tell us all there is to know about Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, no, not even the Bible. For as John wrote:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. (John 20:25)

May this message add to your appreciation of our Saviour, the Gospels and the upcoming Easter holiday. God bless you.

*Rev. Tim Sullivan*



one soldier speaks:  
**His Resurrection and You**

by Jay Pearson  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Romans 6:5

At times when I'm frustrated with myself, I ask myself a question. Why am I here? Have you ever asked yourself this question? Let me share my answer. I believe it is to live unto God. We are here to live unto God.

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:9-11)

Ok, who will show me the way to God? Jesus said in John Chapter 14, He is the way.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

What do we do when we get to God? Worship and glorify God. How do I do that?

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. (Psalm 22:23)

I like to keep it simple. In simplicity there are great depths. Complexity is always shallow. I think of complexity as trying to force things to fit, that don't fit. Simple things don't have to be put together, they are together. Here are just a few ways to glorify God.

Obey him, endure and give thanks. Well, what can just one man do to change anything or make a difference?

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. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

(Romans 5:17-19)

Wow, what a difference one man can make. Ok, how about enduring?

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 12:2)

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:3)

Last, but most definitely not least, give thanks.

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. (Ephesians 5:2)

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

God knows us and He made it simple. God placed everything in one package, Jesus Christ, His son. We are complete in him. AMEN.

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (Colossians 2:9-10)

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)

Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead so that you and I might live. May we live and worship and glorify God through Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords. I love you and I am thankful to serve with you to His glory. AMEN.



### **Do You Love Me? (Pt. 1)**

by Rev. Dimitris Pelidis  
Thassos, Greece

Of all the mighty works of God, the greatest must be how He changes ordinary men of flesh and blood into extraordinary men of God. The Master-disciple relationship between Jesus Christ and Simon Peter exemplifies the wonderful transformation that takes place when the Lord comes into our life.

The Lord entered Peter's life when He set foot on his fishing boat and asked him for space to teach the Word of God to the people. What happened to Peter is what happens to anyone else who makes space for Christ and His word. There isn't enough space to contain the blessing that follows!

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. (Luke 5:4-7)

This must have been an immense catch for their net to break and for both ships to be sinking under the weight of the fish. And to think that all this was the outcome of a hesitant Peter who, deciding to play along with the Lord's instruction, cast the net. He didn't have any idea what he was getting into by acting according to that simple instruction. No wonder he was in a state of shock when he realized what awesome power Christ's words carried. Ecclesiastes 8:4 states "Where a word of a king is there is power."

Peter was standing in the presence of the King of kings and this exposed his sinfulness so much that:

...he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man O Lord . For he was astonished and all they that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And Jesus said unto Simon Fear not: from hence forth thou shalt catch men. And when they brought their ships to land they forsook all and followed him. (Luke 5:8,10)

It is interesting to see that the Lord Jesus visits Peter (and the rest of us) not when we can boast great achievement but when we are at our wit's end having nothing to show for all our hard work. This invariably is the first lesson the Lord teaches His every disciple: "For without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5b) or "when you fail, I prevail."

How amazing was Peter's response! Confronted with his own wretchedness, he initially constrained the Lord to depart from him. Yet, a short while later, he forsook everything in pursuit of the noblest calling of all. Becoming a fisher of men loomed exceedingly larger in his mind than any of his former occupations or goals. He instantly dropped the worldly (his nets) in favor of the heavenly (God's nets)! Likewise, all of us who come into contact with the Lord are made to realize His greatness and our helplessness. The question is: Will we remain miserable or surrender to Him and allow Him to transform us into fishers of men?

Peter made his choice and the transformation that ensued was no less than miraculous. Peter is the definition of a passionate follower of the lord, one who despite obvious weakness went on to become a great fisher of men. In the Gospels we see him constantly following Jesus, hanging on every word, gazing at every miracle and pressing on for deeper understanding with probing questions. He is an intriguing mixture of human frailty and a heart ablaze for God. Good, raw material in the Potter's expert hands.

Of the many accounts that relate to him, the instance when Peter walked on the sea paints a clear picture of his character. Encouraged by the Master we see him boldly walking on sea to meet Him, only to begin sinking at the sight of boisterous wind, crying, "Lord save me!" (Matt. 14:28-31). Surely we can all identify with Peter's frailty and fear. However, not many of us have walked out on choppy sea as he did. He was as humanly bold and devout as can be. He had left all and followed Christ.

It was Peter who, when many of Christ's disciples abandoned him, answered his question of "Will you also

go away?" with these remarkable words: "Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:67-69). Peter had passed many tests of good discipleship during his training. He was blessed to have his eyes opened to the reality that Jesus was the true Messiah!

However, there was one last precious lesson which he had not yet mastered: the lesson of self-denial. When Jesus started showing his disciples that he had to suffer death "Peter began to rebuke Him saying, "Be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22). He shuddered at the thought of crucifixion! He could not accept that love would reach such depths as to require total sacrifice. The Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Mt.16:23).

When Peter followed Christ, he had left everything behind except for one thing! SELF. He had left parents, wife, children and siblings but was still clinging on to dear life. However Christ said "If anyone comes to me and does not hate (love far less) his father mother...and his own life also he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:26). Peter was still trapped in worldly mentality, still savouring the things of men, still holding on to his life. Christ, on the other hand, had come to teach not only with His life but primarily with His death that you save your life by losing it (denying it) and not by saving it (clinging to it). He gave His life on the cross to save us. In so doing, He saved our life as well as His. As He Himself said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Jn. 10:17).

Likewise we ought not to count our life dearer to us than Christ. The lesson of self-denial in favour of Christ is imperative if we are to become His true disciples. By so doing we do not lose our lives but we save them.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall save it. (Matthew 16: 24-25)

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## Lessons From A Leper: Be Thou Clean

Stephen P. Monahan  
Ponchatoula, LA

Through many years of Bible reading, I've come to the conclusion that although the Scriptures portray a multitude of characters, it's all primarily for the purpose of revealing two people: Jesus Christ and me. Of course when you read they reveal you, because you and I are equal. We're all sinners in need of a savior.

With this idea in mind, I would like to invite you to consider a short passage in the Gospel of Luke.

And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean. (Luke 5:12)

Here we have Jesus approached by whom? A leper. As I was driving to work one day, it suddenly dawned on me that I was the leper. I understood that in the Old Testament, leprosy represented sin which defiles us before a holy God. This immediately produced in me an intense thankfulness that the Lord Himself has provided a solution to the problem.

And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. (vs.13)

So now, let's think about this. What did it mean to be a leper in that day? Scripture gives the answer.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell. (Numbers 5:1-3)

God dwelt in the tabernacle in the middle of the camp. Lepers, though they were members of the congregation of God's chosen people, dwelt outside the camp and were thus the Israelites most distant from the Lord's presence. This also placed them outside the protected area where they were in the greatest danger of attack by wild beasts or human adversaries.

The priests whose lives and living were wholly tied to the service of God were even more severely affected.

What man soever of the seed of Aaron is a leper, or

hath a running issue; he shall not eat of the holy things, until he be clean. (Leviticus 22:4)

The holy things, of which the leper could not eat, were the very sustenance that God had appointed for the priestly family. I'm talking about nourishment.

Old Testament Israel shows us a physical picture of the spiritual reality of what the New Testament church is. 1 Peter 2:9 actually calls us "a royal priesthood, an holy nation." Therefore, let me ask a few questions. Are you eating of the holy things? In John 6:53-55, the Lord explains to us that His flesh and blood are meat and drink which sustain the very life of Christ in us. Without this we can do no true service to God.

Do you have sweet communion with Jesus which is producing in you an ever growing desire to do His works and fulfill your destiny, or is the relationship casual, disconnected? Are you enjoying the protection that comes of being close to God, or are you wide open to attacks of depression, anxiety, anger, and such like? Is your life filled with His joy to strengthen you? His peace to settle you? His love to free you from fear and self interest? Or are those things you are counting as blessings merely superficial such as money, possessions, comforts which serve only the flesh and can disappear overnight?

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: (Revelation 3:17)

This verse shows us that the superficial material things are not the true blessings. I would be so bold as to say that they shall by no means sustain you through the days that are soon upon us. Only Christ in the very forefront of your life will be sufficient. If He's not there (please – be honest), perhaps you're still a spiritual leper: of Israel but living outside the camp.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (1 Corinthians 5:17)

Christ is in us; we belong to Him. But if we are not enjoying newness of life and are still full of old things, we must not be "in Him." How is a person held in this state of separation from God?

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Through the blood of Christ, our sins are forgiven. But if we continue in the practice of sin, how can our prayers

be answered? How can there be any newness, any good things?

Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. (Jeremiah 5:25)

God's will is to bless, but ongoing sin halts blessings.

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lords table and of the table of devils. (1 Corinthians 10:21)

What is in the Lord's cup, and on His table? The blood and the flesh of Jesus Christ! NOURISHMENT. Are you starving; held from His table by the power of sin in your life? Indeed held captive at the enemy's table and filled with his poisons? This is spiritual leprosy.

Take a lesson from the leper "who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The leper did not pretend to be clean: he sought cleansing. Present yourself humbly before him, knowing that nothing is hidden from God.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 2:9)

Remember that works of religion are of no effect here. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

What we don't want to do is make peace with our sin and just go on trying to do good things. That leads only to weariness and despair. We must go to war against it. That's repentance, and the first step in true repentance is confession. You may rest assured that the Lord will always respond by embracing you with his love and compassion, saying, "I will, be thou clean."



### If You Love Me

By Rev. Todd Pekel  
Thessaloniki, Greece

If you are like most Christians, the teachings you've heard about the love of God are innumerable. You've heard what God's love is and what it isn't. You've even heard what it may mean in languages long not spoken. How many believe that the Lord Jesus Christ knows what the Love of God is, and is able and willing to teach us?

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)

This verse of Scripture, while concisely stating the Gospel message, also gives us a real working definition of what God's love is. For God so loved...*He gave*. Simply stated then, we can say that love is giving. It's complete *selflessness*.

While talking to His followers' one day, Jesus gave them a simple, yet colossal, commandment.

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15)

Have you ever had to keep something? You know, like score at a basketball game or your eye on something or someone? Then you know that to keep something is not just to hold it passively, it is a very *active* pursuit. You *do* something when you keep it. So it is with love. Jesus Christ said that *if* we love Him, we were to *keep* His commandments. We can see this truth reiterated in the following exchange between Jesus and Simon Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-17)

Each time the question, "lovest thou me?" was followed by a positive answer. Each time the answer was followed by a commandment. "Feed my sheep," said the Lord. In other words, if you love me, *do* something.

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

If we call Him Lord, we should do the things He tells us to do. This point is made even clearer in the verses that follow the Lord's question:

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that

without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)

Do you see that? Both men *heard* the Lord. It's not a question of hearing or knowing the commandments of the Lord, but whether we *do* them that makes a difference. You see, the blessing is not in the *knowing*, but in the *doing* of His commandments.

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

(1 Corinthians 8:1b)

Sometimes we can have the attitude that we are doing God a favor by loving or serving Him. As if God would fall to pieces if *we* weren't there to do something for Him. Thankfully, we can't even take credit for loving God. We couldn't even love Him, unless of course He loved us *first*. In fact, when we are born into this world, we are His enemies.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)

The very *ability* to love God, is given to us by our Heavenly Father. We love Him because *He* first loved us (1 Jn 4:19), not the other way around. In fact, He loved us with a love for which He says there is no greater.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. They didn't take it. *He gave* it. He loved us.

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)

God's love can't be put in a petri dish or on a slide and examined under a microscope. We can't come up with a long-winded definition that tickles the ears of our audience. We can, however, *perceive* it "because He laid down His life for us." As a result, then, *we* ought to do something. As the above Scripture declares, "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

(1 John 5:2-3)

The love of God is to *keep His commandments*. To do them. They are not grievous or burdensome because He first loved us. Therefore, we can love Him and our brethren.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved

us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (1 John 4:10-11)

Christian! Don't just sit there. Do something. Love somebody. *Keep His commandments!*

The following perhaps best illustrates what it is our Lord would have us to do regarding His love for us and, in turn, our love for the brethren.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? (John 13:1-12)

What a question! Our Lord asked them if they knew what He had done to them. Can't you just see the look on their faces? Uh, gee, Lord...you just washed our feet...once again, however, Jesus would have to explain His actions to them.

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. (John 13:13-16)

Jesus Christ's life on earth is an example of love and service unparalleled. Isn't it great to know it? But, brothers and sisters, let us remember that there is something

far better than *knowing* it.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (John 13:17)



## To Have Life More Abundantly

by Elizabeth Lohr  
Montana, USA

As a teacher of home Bible fellowships in the past, I had taught the verse in John 10:10 many times: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." I mean, for years I taught that verse. I remember teaching that the more-abundant life meant abundance in every category: mentally, physically, financially, spiritually, etc. Wow, if a person could only believe it, he could have an almost perfect life! Or so the logic seemed to imply. One flawed implication led to another, until it seemed that if a person did not have abundance in every category, then he was not believing the Word of God. That's not what I meant at all, but one could logically get to that point. Only now, 28 years after I seriously started studying the Bible, do I really believe that I fully understand that verse.

The life that Jesus Christ came to make available to us – life more abundant – is centering oneself in the will of God. After the new birth, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and receiving and using the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, we are able to communicate with God freely and with certainty. At any given moment I am ready to do God's bidding; whether I am to go here, or go there, speak this one thing, or minister to that person, or to stop and pray over a certain person or situation. It has nothing to do with what abundance in things a person has: jobs, homes, titles, money, or good marriages and wonderful kids. Or even more noble things like peace, happiness, good health, or long life. The life more abundant is not measured in things. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:1: "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." But it doesn't mean to take a vow of pov-

erty unless God instructs you to do that, and it doesn't mean to focus on amassing great wealth unless God directs you to do that!

The more abundant life is above the mundane things we see around us, physical comforts and nice belongings. This abundance doesn't mean having way above our basic human needs of food, shelter, clothes, etc. (I need a house, so why not have a mansion?). It is yearning to hear God's voice, wanting Him to direct your paths, trusting Him to work in you – then doing as He directs, day by day. It is using the gifts He has given you; it's communing with Him – talking and listening (prayer). A person can have fantastic homes, cars, riches, no worry over finances with millions in the bank (and thousands to tithe), but if that person doesn't know God's direction for his own life, he's never satisfied, and will at times, and for sure eventually, be miserable.

To find out what God's will is for your life doesn't mean to spend your life trying to discover the one thing God wants you to be "when you grow up spiritually." But when you understand something that God wants you to do, and you do it, and you know you've done God's will, then the joy and satisfaction, the pleasure and awe in the knowledge that you are Almighty God's vehicle whom He trusts to carry out His will on earth, these are the ultimate riches of the more abundant life! Brother Andrew wrote in his book, *The Calling*, "The real calling of God is not to a certain place or career, but to everyday obedience...and that call is extended to every Christian." The life more abundant is a day-by-day thing, responding to God's voice as He directs you through your life.

*And of course, there is no life more abundant than a life that has no end. As the most well-known of all Bible verses tells us:*

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

## The Problem with Commitment

by Evan Pyle  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana USA

How many times have you been encouraged to make a commitment to a cause or belief? Indeed, salvation messages are often concluded with an invitation to "make a commitment to Christ." In much of modern life, whether in business or education, friendships or family, commitment is the glue that holds these pursuits together. Yet, it is somewhat startling to discover that the concept of commitment is absent from the Bible. Indeed, the common meaning for commitment, "a pledge of an undertaking," is of recent origin. As recently as the original 1828 Noah Webster dictionary, the primary meaning for commitment was "the act of sending to prison." I would like to submit to you, dear reader, that commitment may send you to a prison of sorts, a prison of your own making. By it you are imprisoned to your own self-will and self-determination.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Wait a minute, Evan, the Bible is full of 'commit' and 'committed'. How is this different from commitment?" Good question. When referring to the inner condition of our *heart*, "commit" carries quite a different meaning from "commitment." Would some scriptural examples help you?

But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. (Genesis 39:8,22)

Joseph was found to be so utterly trustworthy that both Potiphar and the prison guard turned their affairs over to Joseph, fully confident that their matters would be handled as they should. In both cases their trust was so complete that they no longer had knowledge of the details. Knowing that Joseph was in charge and took care of the details was assurance enough.

Are you a "take-charge" kind of person in your own life? I know that I am. I find it difficult to let go of the details of my life and leave the Lord fully in charge.

Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. (Psalm 37:5)

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. (Proverbs 16:3)

Fully trusting the Lord will help establish our thoughts on a solid foundation. We all struggle with our thoughts, which is why Paul exhorts us to lead every thought captive to Christ's obedience. But never think yourself defeated by sin or Satan because you struggle with your thoughts. Or, worse yet, never think that you are defeating sin or Satan merely by your correct thoughts. This is deception. How did Jesus fight Satan's temptation? "It is written," Jesus said.

For us to be able to freely commit ourselves in trust to another, that "other" must be faithful. (Lk. 16:11, Jn. 2:24). Consider God's faithfulness:

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:19)

In my experience "commitment," or "Christian bravura" is often a poor substitute for committing oneself in trust and faith to the Faithful Lord. Why would you or I have trouble trusting Him Who is so faithful? May I suggest that it is because we really don't trust Him? The bottom line is that, in our heart of hearts, God seems capricious and unpredictable. He seems like a pagan god that needs to be appeased for all to go well. We feel betrayed because He hasn't healed us, because we still struggle, and we wonder and agonize over what we are doing wrong. Our lives too often seem mundane and unproductive, not heroic and noble like we envisioned. This eats at the core of our faith and we lose heart. We are quietly broken-hearted. The hidden implication, too painful to face or articulate, is that God doesn't really love us after all. Such knowledge is too painful to face and we turn away in denial. We instead construct a false religion based on commitment, moral perfection and "good Christianity." Sadly, we bury our hearts. We are like the child who blinks back tears after a particularly cruel teasing. We put on a good face, but our view of life is forever affected by the hurt.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: (Isaiah 29:13)

In truth, from my human perspective, God seems almost reckless and unpredictable. It seems dangerous to trust my life to Him. How can I trust such a God? More yet, how can I love him? The answer is, I must come to know His heart. But how can I know His heart when

He seems so in-charge, distant, even calculating? After all, he predestined me, as the Bible says. (Eph. 1:3)

When I see my wife I think I understand true love. She is faithful, yes. But we also share a warmth, openness and closeness, yes, even intimacy, due to our close relationship as husband and wife. Shouldn't a similar intimacy translate into my relationship with God?

The answer is, in Christ it DOES translate. Jesus' incarnation is God's tangible love gift to you, me, and to all humanity. Though God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, is there any mistaking Jesus' motives? Jesus wept. A disciple felt so close and comfortable to Jesus he rested against Jesus' chest at the Last Supper. Jesus took the children up into His arms to bless them. He then showed you and me the ultimate proof of His love by suffering the horrors and indignities of Calvary, all to pay for our own unfaithfulness.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

Shouldn't we then ask, how do we come to know Jesus so well that we trust Him unreservedly and feel this close to Him? To have this sweet fellowship we must have something more than a knowledge about Jesus. We must come to know Him personally, as we would a personal friend. (John 15:15) To know Jesus, we must first come to the Bible:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)

Thus we will come to know Jesus' character. Our natural faith response will be to keep His sayings:

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:10-12)

Jesus answered and said unto him, 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)

In keeping Jesus' words we come into a precious and intimate relationship with God. Our arid heart is refreshed. Our joyless Christianity is replaced with heavenly joy and supernatural love.



## Workers Together With Him News Report

By Rev. Tim Sullivan

I am happy to report that the new year is off to a very fruitful beginning. All praise to God, Who has created us in Christ Jesus unto good works.

For 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)

All glory be to God, Who gives us all we need to abound in these good works.

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: (2 Corinthians 9:8)

With help from our brother Hilario Martinez from Matamoros, Mexico, my wife Nelly and I completed the Spanish narration for our video tour of the places in Greece that Paul visited in answer to the Macedonian call. We now have versions of this short film in English, German and Spanish.

In late January, I was blessed to travel to Forest, Virginia, to present my class, "If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall." I'd like to thank my hosts, Scott and Suzanne Abercrombie, for their wonderful hospitality. I'd like to thank the participants in that event as well, for a very memorable time. I am looking forward to returning to Virginia in June for a "Weapons of Our Warfare" class.

In February, we held the 3rd annual Board of Directors meeting for Workers Together With Him (USA) at the home of Evan and Nancy Pyle in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Our Board consists of Ray Beard of Alaska, Evan Pyle and Jay Pearson of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Steve Monahan of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and myself. It was a wonderful time of fellowship. I am profoundly appreciative of these gentlemen and the counsel and support they provide. I am also so very thankful that, though the work we do is quite serious, they help keep it fun. If, as they say, you are known by the company you keep, these brothers do wonders for my reputation!

While in Louisiana, I was also blessed to spend time with Bro. Vince Falcone, pastor of the Liberty House of Prayer in Independence, Louisiana, and also, to teach at the Sunday service of the Grace and Power Fellowship.

The next weekend, I was across the border in Matamoros, Mexico to teach the first part of the Weapons Of Our Warfare series, "That The Church May Receive Edifying." I'd like to again commend the assistance of Bro. Hilario, who secured the location for this event, and made the necessary arrangements for this class. I'd also like to thank my wife Nelly, who once again provided excellent interpretation for this class of Spanish students. One event that I'll long remember: a married couple returned home the evening after hearing the teaching on speaking in tongues and, after sharing with their four children the simple truths they'd learned in class, had the joy of hearing all four children speak in tongues that night! Glory be to God! That's the way the Gospel was meant to be furthered, by teaching faithful men who shall be able to teach others also!

I have just returned from the island of Maui in Hawaii where I presided over the wedding of Jason and Sheila Davis. Sheila is the eldest daughter of my longtime friends, Ken and Ginny Burton. I was very happy that my wife and children were able to accompany me for this blessed event – thank goodness for "frequent flyer" miles! I spent my youth in Hawaii, so I was excited to visit there for the first time in twenty-seven years.

Some other wonderful events are in the works. I have been invited to present the Weapons Of Our Warfare class in Tanzania, Africa this July. Details have yet to be finalized, and I ask you to pray that the Lord's Will be done. It was Mr. George Straub of Switzerland who first told Pastor Clement Mwaitebele of our work.

I have also accepted the invitation of Mark and Elizabeth Lohr to teach a class in Stevensville, Montana in August of this year. Details will be forthcoming.

Thank you for your financial support that makes it possible for me to accept these invitations while continuing to preach of the Gospel without charge (1 Corin. 9:18).

My teaching in this issue of The Vine & Branches will be a part of a weekend seminar I am developing that will be an introductory overview of the Scriptures. God willing, I hope to have this work completed by the autumn of this year.

Things continue to progress in the establishing of Workers Together With Him in the United Kingdom. Rev. Jerome Lucas has had "more than his share" of challenges, but I thank God for his faithful persistence, and for the invaluable support he receives from so many people in the UK, including Aine his wife, Carl and Vivienne Roberts of Wales and Brendan O'Hara. God bless you all.

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