

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

### MATTHEW

1:1 The Gospel records are transcripts of how e.g. Matthew preached the Gospel. Matthew begins his explanation of the Gospel ["good news"] by demonstrating that Jesus was the descendant of Abraham and David. This is important because the Gospel was contained in the promises to those men (Gal. 3:8) that they would have a literal descendant, who would be God's Son, Jesus.

Therefore Jesus didn't exist as a physical person before He was born; He had our human nature.

1:19 Joseph could have told others of her situation, and made her a "public example", or put her through the "law of jealousy" of Numbers 5. But exactly because Joseph was truly "righteous", he didn't do that. He was sensitive to her- as we should be to others who are caught up in situations beyond our full understanding.

1:20 *Conceived*- Jesus began within Mary. He didn't pre-exist. He was born 'of her' (1:16).

1:21 'Jesus' means 'Saviour'; 'Christ' means 'Anointed'.

2:5 *Through the prophet*- The prophets wrote the words of God, not just their own words. Hence the significance of *through*. The Bible is the inspired word of God.

2:6 Jesus came forth "out of" Bethlehem- He didn't come down from Heaven as a person. Note how Matthew so often shows that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

2:8 The astrologers didn't obey the King, because God told them not to (:12). We shouldn't always do what those in authority tell us, if it contradicts God's word (Acts 4:19).

2:14 *He arose*- Joseph's immediate obedience to God's word is emphasized (as 1:24; 2:20)- an example to us.

2:15 *Out of Egypt*- As Israel were called out of Egypt. All God's children are to leave 'Egypt'- which is often a symbol of the world.

2:20-22 Joseph was told that it was safe to return. But he doubted. And so God made a concession to his weakness by telling him to go and live in Galilee.

3:6 *Baptized... in the river*- Baptism [Greek *baptizo*] means to dip, to immerse- not to sprinkle. So baptism was performed in a river. Note 3:16 *out of* the water.

3:7 *Offspring of vipers*- They were the descendants of the snake spoken of in Gen. 3:15. There will always be opposition between those in Christ, the descendant of the woman, and the descendants of the snake. We will be temporarily wounded by them, but we will triumph in the end.

3:9 *Within yourselves*- The Bible is aware of how we are likely to respond. God's concern is with our state of mind, how we think within. For this is the ultimate source of human sin.

3:12 *Unquenchable fire*- not literally. A symbol of complete destruction (Jer. 17:27).

3:15 Jesus was baptized as an adult by immersion- as an example to us. We should also be baptized.

4:1-8

'The Devil' doesn't exist as a fallen Angel or evil cosmic being- see *Bible Basics*.

Jesus "tempted in all things like as we are" (Heb. 4:15), and: "each man is tempted... by his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). We are tempted by the "devil" of our own mind, and so was Jesus. We are not tempted by an evil being prompting us to sin - sin and temptation come "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mk. 7:21).

The temptations cannot be literal:

4:8 implies that Jesus was led up a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory "in a moment of time" (Mk. 4:5). There is no mountain high enough to see all the world- the earth is a sphere.

- Comparison with Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mk. 1:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Mt. 4:2-3 says that "when he had fasted forty days... the tempter (Satan) came to Him...". Thus these same temptations kept repeating themselves- e.g. to turn stones into bread.

- It's unlikely the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then they scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews.

- If the devil is a physical person who has no respect for God's Word and is interested in making people sin, then why would Jesus quote Scripture to overcome him? According to the popular view, this would not send the devil away. Jesus quoted a Bible passage each time. Ps. 119:11: "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin".

- Jesus was "led of *the spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil". How could the Spirit of God lead Jesus to be tempted by a superhuman being existing in opposition to God. He had just received the power of the Spirit (3:16). Now He was tempted to use it to turn stones into bread, jump off buildings unharmed etc.

5:5 *Inherit the earth*- The Kingdom of God will be established here on earth at the return of Christ. 'Inheritance' refers to the promises to Abraham that his children would inherit the earth. Eternity on earth and not Heaven is promised to those "in Christ" and thus Abraham's children.

5:15 If a candle is put under a basket, it will go out. If we don't publically witness to our faith, we will lose it. We can't be secret Christians.

5:17 The Mosaic law was fulfilled by Christ in His death (Col. 2:14-17). We therefore don't need to keep that law, nor the Sabbath.

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5:45 *Makes His sun*- God hasn't wound the world up and left it ticking. Every action within creation is consciously from Him. We are therefore never far from Him- just feel Him acting in nature.

6:3 *Left hand know*- Don't be conscious of your good works. Do them and forget them. Those accepted into God's Kingdom will honestly not remember the times they fed the hungry (Mt. 25:37).

6:4 *Shall reward*- when Jesus returns to establish God's Kingdom on earth. "I come quickly and my reward is with me" (Rev. 22:12).

6:10 *On earth*- We pray for the Kingdom of God to come on earth, i.e. for Jesus to return soon.

6:18 *Not be seen*- We must consciously try to conceal our good works so that other people do *not* notice them. When was the last time you did this?

6:24 Few would say they "hate" God. But if we love wealth ["mammon"], then in His eyes, we do.

6:26 *Father feeds them*- As 5:45, God is consciously in contact with His creation, and has some kind of relationship with the animals (Job 41:1-5). 7:1 *Judge not*- The Greek word translated "judge" can mean both to condemn, and to make a judgment of right and wrong. We must not condemn others, but we must judge between right and wrong.

7:14 The majority are usually wrong in spiritual matters.

7:22 *Lord, Lord*- There will be people who called Jesus "Lord" and who thought they did miracles in His Name who will be rejected at the last day. They actually did "iniquity". Possessing the gifts of God is no guarantee of salvation.

7:25 *Floods came*- The day of judgment will be like a storm which shakes us to the core and reveals who we really are. True spiritual progress is slow- like bashing away at the rock of our hard hearts. Quick spiritual progress is likely to be a building upon sand.

8:3 *Touched him*- All would've been shocked. Touching a leper made a person ritually unclean, and risked contracting the illness. Jesus did this to show the extent to which He did not believe in "guilt by association".

8:16,17 'Demon possession' was the language used in the first century to describe mental illness. Note the parallel between 'casting out demons' and being cured of disease. 'Demons' don't in fact exist- see the "Doctrinal Summary".

8:20-22 Jesus, the Lord of all grace, can at times be very demanding. He wants our *immediate* response. Likewise He exaggerated the situation in :21- He did often have somewhere to sleep, e.g. the home of Martha and Mary, but that night perhaps He had nowhere.

8:23 *His disciples followed him*- The impression is given of them walking behind Him. They are symbols of us all.

8:25 *Awoke Him*- Jesus surely only appeared to be sleeping, in a small boat about to sink. But as in our lives, He appears silent only to bring us to the point of realizing our desperation for Him.

8:26 *O you of little faith!* – Remember the Gospel records were written by the disciples. They are transcripts of their preaching to others. They appealed for others to believe in Christ by pointing out how they had themselves been of such weak belief in Christ. Such humility, recounting our failures to others, is what makes our witness powerful rather than pretending we are perfect. Self-righteousness turns people off.

8:32 Jesus agreed to the mad man's request in order to provide him with a visual *aide memoire* for the rest of his life. Mental illness is usually intermittent, and the man needed assurance that this time the cure was total. His illness may have been caused from eating pig meat.

9:2 *Jesus seeing their faith*- He cured and forgave a person because of the faith of third parties. If our faith can influence the eternal destiny and wellbeing of others, then we should be making every effort for them, in prayer and practically. Either our efforts and prayers can be a factor in others' salvation and blessing, or they are not. They are. So we should give our lives to prayer and care for others.

9:13 *Not to call the righteous but sinners*- All are sinners, it's just that some think they are righteous. We will never be good enough for God, never morally ready enough for baptism- but the whole purpose of Jesus is to save us who are sinners.

9:17 The new wine represents the new covenant in the blood of Jesus; the old wine is the old covenant, Moses' law. If we have received the new wine of Jesus, we *must* change- otherwise it will destroy us.

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9:35 The theme of Christ's preaching was "the gospel of the Kingdom", the good news ['Gospel'] of having God as our King now, and looking forward to the return of His Son to establish God's Kingdom physically here on earth for ever.

9:37 The symbols suggest that the harvest is lost and spoilt because there aren't enough workers to harvest it. The harvest refers to converts, spiritual fruit being given to God, the owner of all. God in some ways chooses to be limited by us. There will be some who will not be harvested for God because the church didn't make enough effort for them, or there were simply not enough of us to reach them. "Few" in Greek can also imply weak, as well as numerically few.

10:11 *Until you go*- Jesus wished to focus upon families and homes, which later developed into the house churches of the later New Testament. His focus is still very much on the family unit as the foundation for His church.

10:15 *More tolerable*- There will be degrees of reward and punishment at the day of judgment when Jesus returns. All our behaviour in this life will be judged sensitively, nothing will be overlooked and everything will receive an appropriate response.

10:16 *Wise as serpents*- We are not asked to be naive; but the opposite.

10:23 *Gone through the cities of Israel*- This may imply there will be persecution of believers and also a strong witness to the Jews in Israel immediately prior to Christ's return. We should be prepared.

10:25 We should therefore not be surprised to be persecuted; in fact we should expect it, because if this world treated Jesus as they did, they will treat us the same.

10:26 *Revealed* – at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). If we will be revealed for who we really are eternally, there's no point in acting out a false image to our brothers and sisters in this life.

10:27 *Proclaim upon the housetops* - This is alluding to 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks "the word of the Kingdom" in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

10:28 Gehenna was the rubbish dump outside Jerusalem. The fires were always burning there because new garbage was always being thrown onto it. It became a symbol of complete destruction. Some Bibles translate it [wrongly] as "hell".

10:40 Peoples' attitude to us is their attitude to Jesus. This means that we, as baptized into the body of Christ, are Him to this world. Our behaviour should be appropriate to this.

11:1 *Their cities*- Jesus encouraged people to preach to their network of friends and relatives, in their home areas; He visited those places to back up their witness. Witnessing to friends and family is the most difficult yet most important witness we make.

11:11 Whoever is least in the Kingdom of God in the future will be greater, spiritually, than John the Baptist was in his human life. We learn from this that there will be degrees of reward in God's Kingdom- one star will shine brighter than another (1 Cor. 15:41), some will rule over ten cities, others over five (Lk. 19:17-19). Do we have the spiritual ambition to want to shine then as much as possible? If we love and seek God's glory, then we will want to extend it as far as possible, reflecting it as far as we can.

11:12 *Men of violence* – The image is of commandos storming a city. Whatever our position in life, we now have a cause to totally give ourselves to- to enter and take the Kingdom of God for ourselves.

11:27 Reading the Bible alone will not reveal the Father to us. There's also an element of grace- Jesus reveals His Father to those whom He chooses.

11:30 The heavy weight remains, but Jesus is a yoke, binding us together with many others, and so the weight seems far lighter to us. The purpose of the body and person of Christ is to bind us together with other believers- with all the personal problems and conflicts this can create. Christianity isn't intended to be lived in isolation from others.

12:1 Jesus and the disciples were prefigured by David and those who followed him (12:3). Those who followed David were those in debt and 'distressed' (1 Sam. 22:2). It is the desperate and broken who follow Jesus today.

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12:11 The man who had only one sheep was poor; that was why he was so concerned to rescue his only sheep. Yet he represents God and Jesus in their constant search for us. They therefore identify themselves with the very poorest of society. God is in search of man; and we search for Him. Hence the joy of our meeting with Him in baptism.

12:13,14 *Then-* The pure grace and love of Jesus often produces a harsh reaction and rejection from those who refuse to be moved by it. We can't be passive to it.

12:16 Jesus sometimes did ask people to tell others about what He had done for them. Maybe He asked the extroverts to be quiet, and the introverts to tell others? The preaching of the Gospel in the right spirit is something done against our will; it's difficult (1 Cor. 9:17).

12:20 Jesus tries to fan into life whatever weak spirituality a person has, rather than expecting perfection at His first encounter with them. We should treat people likewise.

12:28 The kingdom of God will be established literally on earth when Jesus returns; but the essence of the Kingdom is that God is King and that is true today. The sphere of His rulership and authority in the lives of His people can be understood as His Kingdom.

12:32 This is only true for those who saw the miracles of Jesus and blasphemed them. But if a person stops going against the clear evidence provided by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is God's Son, then he is no longer blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

12:34 Therefore control of our thinking is so important. The environment we chose, what music we listen to, affects our thinking.

12:36 The judgement process will involve a recall of our words- and we shall have to explain them.

13:9 Not everyone has the capacity to hear and understand the Gospel; not all have faith (2 Thess. 3:2). But those of us who do should use the potential we've been given.

13:11 The parables weren't stories with an obvious, easy to understand meaning. Jesus used them in order to filter out those who didn't want to understand. For them the parables were confusing and obscured His message. There's an upward spiral and also a downward spiral in our relationship with God.

13:12 How can a person who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? Maybe Jesus meant us to read in an ellipsis: 'the person who [thought he] had nothing [even though he does], will have even that taken from him'. This would be like the one talent man of Mt. 25:24. People have more than they think; for God's generosity is greater than we imagine.

13:21 Trial comes into our lives soon after baptism, as Israel were 'baptized' in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2) and very soon encountered problems in the wilderness [no food or water].

13:28 Jesus foresaw that His followers would have a tendency towards trying to do God's judgment for Him; He explains (:29) that it's not possible for us to judge who is who. It's therefore a fact that there will be insincere people growing within the field of the church, next to those who are sincere. They have an appearance of growth. But we must leave them until harvest- the return of Jesus.

13:32 From tiny beginnings- reading a Bible, noticing an advertisement, meeting someone 'by chance'- we will come to eternity. We will be a refuge for others then. We will look back on this life and it will seem so disproportionate- that we got 'there' from 'here'.

13:39 *Angels-* First we will know that Jesus has returned is that our Angel will be standing next to us and inviting us to go meet Him.

13:46 Often Jesus intends us to think how the stories continue or end. So, what did the man do now? No wealth or possessions, just one stone. Surely he looked at it and loved it and treasured it more than anything else. This should be our attitude to the Kingdom of God.

13:50 Banging teeth is a symbol of anger with oneself.

13:55 Jesus never sinned, neither in commission nor omission, for all those 30 years He lived amongst them in Nazareth. But they never noticed He was anything special. This isn't only an essay in His utter humanity. It challenges us, for whenever we appear righteous in the eyes of the world, they perceive it and dislike it. But somehow the perfection of Jesus wasn't outwardly noticeable. Hence He was indeed perfect.

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14:4 Should we therefore also rebuke unbelievers for their breaking of God's law? God feels every breach of His law, by whomsoever. His sensitivity, and thereby His pain, sorrow and joy at obedience is far greater than we can perceive.

14:16 Jesus knew this was impossible for them to do. But He asks them to do it, in order they might learn that whatever little we have can be used by Him; and He challenges our faith and horizons likewise.

14:19 The food was mediated through the disciples; just as His salvation of others is mediated to them through our hands. Note the similarities with how Jesus 'broke bread' at the communion service. The way Jesus prayed with open eyes looking up to Heaven reflects His good conscience with God. Can we do that?

14:23 The way Jesus sent the people away is a window into the power of His personality, the strength of His will and mind.

14:26 The disciples went back to their beliefs in ghosts. People still hold wrong understandings even after they come to Christ.

14:28 *If*- Peter knew that only Jesus would ask such a demanding thing. That's His style. We see it in our lives too.

14:30 Peter only saw the wind because he must've taken his eyes off Jesus and looked at something blowing in the wind- maybe he looked back to the boat. We too will sink if we take our eyes off Jesus.

15:6 Traditions are dangerous. God's commandments are intended to have an effect upon our lives; human traditions tend to find an easier way, whereby His commands lack cutting edge in our lives.

15:9 Note the parallel between doctrines and commandments (:6). Understanding correct doctrine is important because doctrine shapes our lives; it is a commandment.

15:16 We feel Jesus' frustration with the disciples. He expected them to have reached a higher point of perception than they had. He may set similar benchmarks for us, as any good teacher does, and be disappointed at the slowness of our growth. Matthew was telling his hearers that he too, and all the founders of the early church, had been terribly slow to understand, and had been a great disappointment to Jesus. He preached the Gospel with humility and an awareness of his own weakness.

15:19 Sin comes from within; nothing outside of us, e.g. demons or spirits, can enter us and possess us, thereby making us sin. The source of sin is internal and not external. The real battle is for self control and spiritual mindedness. See notes about Satan.

15:27 The dogs were the Gentiles; crumbs were the miracles; the masters were the Jews; the meal or table was Jesus' fellowship and ministry to the Jews. She showed humility and faith by saying this; she knew that even the miracle she so sought was a mere crumb of what Jesus was offering Israel. They refused so much.

15:32 Jesus perceived that the crowd was hungry. Jesus is the same today as He was then (Heb. 13:8). He's just as perceptive to our needs as He was then.

15:39 See on 14:23. The power of Jesus' personality and words deeply impressed Matthew.

16:11 Again note Jesus' frustration with His followers' lack of understanding. We should so seek to understand Him, for clearly it's pleasing to anyone who loves us that we understand them. See on 15:16.

16:12 Doctrine is compared to yeast; it influences a large mass of dough, out of proportion to its own volume. This is the power and importance of doctrine. We must understand correctly.

16:18 The rock was the rock of Peter's belief that Jesus was God's Son (:16), and Peter's personal preaching of it. 'Peter' means 'rock'; it was a nickname, something like 'Rocky'.

16:19 This was promised to all the disciples- Mt. 18:18. The Roman Catholics misuse this verse to claim that Peter and therefore the Pope has this power. But there's no reason to think that any authority was passed on from Peter, nor the other disciples, to any subsequent generation.

16:23 Peter is called 'Satan', 'an adversary', showing that 'satan' doesn't mean a sinful Angel. The word simply means 'an adversary'. Jesus turned to speak to Peter- Peter had been walking behind Jesus- and tells him to *really* 'get behind me'. Hence He says in v. 24 that to follow behind Him means taking up a cross. Peter didn't want Jesus to die on the cross because this meant that

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those who followed Jesus should also likewise die. But Jesus tells him to *really* get behind Him, to be a real follower of Him, not just externally but in the spirit of carrying His cross. Peter failed badly here, so soon after his spiritual peak of 16:17,18. Our spirituality- and that of our brethren- goes up and down dramatically.

16:28 This is a reference to the transfiguration which we now read of in chapter 17.

17:9 "The vision" [Gk.]. Moses and Elijah weren't literally there, they were seen by the disciples in a vision.

17:11 An Elijah prophet will come to Israel in the last days to prepare them for the return of Christ, just as John the Baptist tried to prepare them for His first coming [see Malachi 4:5,6].

17:15 *Epileptic*- Or 'lunatic' [Gk.]- someone struck by the moon. The belief that the moon struck people at night causing them to go mad was a wrong understanding. But Jesus didn't explicitly correct this. He showed by the magnitude of His miracle that such beliefs, whether or not they had any truth in them, were irrelevant compared to God's power. Hence references to demon possession decrease throughout the Gospels and New Testament- it became apparent that they don't exist, or if they do, they are irrelevant compared to God's power.

17:17 Again Jesus shows His frustration with their lack of spiritual perception- see on 15:16; 16:11. To be frustrated isn't sinful- for Jesus never sinned. If He so desires understanding from us- let's give ourselves to trying to understand. And surely He will help us if we ask Him.

17:20 Just a small amount of real faith is very powerful. Faith is so powerful that you don't need much of it- just a little of the real thing is quite enough.

17:25 Jesus paid tribute tax even when He didn't have to and when the reasoning behind the demand for it was wrong. We should do the same. We cannot change geopolitics now; we must wait for His return and the coming of God's Kingdom.

17:27 Jesus was very sensitive to not making people spiritually stumble. Even people whom we would consider as disinterested in His Gospel.

18:3 Conversion has various levels. The disciples had been converted, but there was a higher level of conversion- to become like children. Baptism isn't the end of our conversion- it's part of the process.

18:5 Jesus invites us to see Him as represented by the child. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century world, children and women were considered as non-persons. But Jesus paid great attention to them and showed how He valued them as persons.

18:6 Such drowning in the sea as a millstone is Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). Those who make others sin or stumble will share in Babylon's punishment at the last day- they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). Those rejected by Jesus will be sent back into the world they so loved- and share its judgment.

18:8 Everlasting fire is symbolic of total destruction. Jerusalem was punished with this (Jer. 17:27)- but there is no eternal fire there today. Don't read 'eternal fire' literally.

18:17 *To you*- you singular [Gk.]. This passage speaks about personal disagreements. If you follow this process, the end result is that you personally will treat the other person as a Gentile and tax collector- both of which groups Jesus especially sought to minister to and win for Him. It doesn't speak about a church disfellowshipping an individual.

18:20 Jesus is with us all the time individually, but He is especially with us when we gather together. Hence the importance of believers meeting together rather than believing in isolation.

18:21,22 *Sin against*- Peter refers back to :15. Jesus seems to be saying that we can go through the process He outlines in :15-17. But the higher level is to forgive unconditionally. If somebody sins against us 490 times / day and claims each time to have repented, it's clear their repentance is insincere. Jesus is saying we should forgive people without trying to assess nor believe the sincerity of their repentance. For the nature of the forgiveness we show others is what we will be shown.

18:24 There's an element of unreality in this story. How could a person amass such a huge debt? Only because the King kept on and on lending to him, knowing the man could never repay. This speaks of God's forgiveness of us and the enormity of our debt to Him. Realizing our sinfulness will motivate us to forgive others.

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18:31 When we see unreasonable behaviour from our brethren, the response is to tell it to the Lord. He knows about it already, but it's good for us psychologically to tell the story to Him in prayer.

19:5,6 Often partners don't psychologically 'leave' their parents, and only when this is done can they cleave to their partner. As they try to do this, so God will confirm them in 'joining' them. Partners are glued together [Gk.] by God in His own way- often through life circumstances overruled by Him. Adultery is therefore so wrong. It's a fighting against God's work in a couples' life.

19:8 God makes concessions to human weakness. He knows the mind of those He has created. He sets an ideal standard but is willing to accept a lower achievement from us in practice. But this is no reason to abuse this. If we love God we will try to live life on the higher levels rather than be minimalists.

19:11 There are different levels. Some people can live on a higher level than others spiritually, especially in this area of marriage and human relationships. We must bear this in mind when forming opinions about those in the church who fail in these areas.

19:17 Jesus is at pains to show that He is not God Himself. The man wanted to know what he could *do* to be perfect. Jesus was perfect; but even then, His standing with God was only what it was by God's grace.

19:20 The young man said he had kept the commandments from his youth. That's youthful arrogance! But Jesus loved him (Mk. 10:21) rather than condemning his obvious arrogance and self-contradiction.

19:21 This was a specific command to the young man; it's not a global command to all Christians to sell literally all they have. The example of converts in the later New Testament shows that they didn't do this. "The poor" are often poor because of their own bad decisions. But Jesus says that we should still be generous to them with all that we have, rather than blaming them for having got themselves into the hole they have. If a person's in a hole, however they got there, they still need our help out of it. Just as God does to us.

19:24 The needle gate was the small gate in a city wall through which only people could walk. For a camel to pass through it, it had to kneel down and have all its baggage unloaded- and even then it could only just squeeze through. We must shed our wealth and humble ourselves if we are to enter the Kingdom.

19:25 The disciples held the common but wrong idea that wealthy people were wealthy because God had blessed them. Jesus here totally deconstructs the 'prosperity Gospel'.

20:2 The small coin represents salvation.

20:6 Those who don't serve Christ are standing around doing nothing- no matter their intellect and full diaries. It was only the old and weak who were not taken by anyone to work. But they wanted to work- so they stood there all day in the hope someone might be desperate enough for workers that he would take them. God is desperate for workers, and we who are called to Christ in these last days are those weak workers. Like those called at the last moment in Lk. 14:23 are the street people and desperate. That's us.

20:8 We are 'called' by the Angel appearing when Christ returns to gather us to judgment.

20:14 The implication could be that this man is 'fired'- he must go his way, away from Jesus, because he thought that he was more worthy than the weak, sick, old or lazy workers who had also been hired. Such spiritual snobbism is so repellent to Jesus.

20:28 A radical inversion of human values. We are here to serve, to give; not to be served, get wealthy or receive some benefit for ourselves. The very opposite of the 'prosperity Gospel'.

20:32 Why ask this, when the answer was obvious? To focus those men upon their own need. Jesus does the same with us; through His word and hand in our lives, He brings us to perceive how much we want what we say we want.

21:5 A humble King was a contradiction in terms. A King was supposed to ride upon a battle horse, not a donkey. It's like a President arriving in a battered 20 year old small car, rather than a cavalcade of Mercedes.

21:9 The crowd were so fickle. A few days later they would cry "Crucify him!"; and 6 weeks later claim to have accepted the preaching of Peter. Fickleness is part of our nature; what God and Jesus desire, as we do in any relationship, is stability, loyalty to the end, faithfulness.

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21:14 The blind and lame had been banned from the temple due to a Jewish misapplication of 2 Sam. 5:8. But Jesus welcomed into God's house those whom man had banned from it.

21:18 He hungered for spiritual fruit on Israel, the fig tree. He was prepared to eat even the unripe fruit which the leaves promised to be there. He cursed it because there was an appearance of fruit, i.e. it had leaves, but in reality there wasn't even the beginnings of spiritual fruit. He is satisfied with even our immature spirituality- if we do at least something (Mt. 25:27).

21:22 We should visualize the answer to our prayers and act and feel as if they have been answered. But this verse is only part of the overall Bible teaching about prayer- we can only pray with such confidence if we know it is according to God's will (1 Jn. 5:14).

21:30 Often parables present two kinds of people- those who appear to be righteous and aren't; and those who are openly disobedient but repent. Churches seem full of the first category, but these aren't those whom God accepts. We have to accept that we are serious sinners, and repent.

21:35 These servants represent God's prophets whom He sent to Israel in the Old Testament.

21:37 Here is the hopefulness of God. On one hand, He knew from the beginning that Israel would reject and kill His Son. But He had such hope that they would not. The God who is omnipotent sometimes and in some ways limits His power; and He does the same with His knowledge, His omniscience. He has entered into relationship with us and therefore He has in a way limited Himself in order to conduct that relationship with us on a legitimate, meaningful level. Hence we read of God's shock, hurt and surprise at human actions.

21:44 This refers to how the image of Daniel 2, representing the kingdoms of men, is to be ground to powder by the return of Christ to the earth. He will judge those who reject Him along with the world whose ways they so loved (1 Cor. 11:32). We either fall upon Christ and are broken, through recognizing our sins (1 Pet. 2:8); or He will fall upon us and break us at the last day. So there is a logic to all this- we must be broken people now, or we will be broken then. The true community of believers is one of broken men and women.

22:4 Everything was 'ready' for God's Kingdom in the first century, but the Jews rejected it.

22:5 Just as people today allow the busyness of their lives to stop them from responding to the Gospel.

22:7 Jerusalem was burnt by the Roman armies in AD70. They were *God's* armies in the sense that He controlled and used them. Those who persecute us are also in a sense directly under God's control.

22:10 There will be both bad and good people who accept the invitation; just as the weeds grow together with the wheat in the field of the church (Mt. 13:29). We shouldn't be surprised at the sense that this is the case; but it's not a reason to leave the church. We will not find any pure church.

22:11 The wedding garment represents the righteousness of God which is given to us when we are clothed with Christ in baptism. In weddings of those days, the white wedding garment was given to the guests as they entered the feast. To refuse it was arrogant- presumably the person thought that his own clothes were better than the wedding garment offered by the host.

22:21 The coin had Caesar's image on it and therefore should be given to him. Our bodies are what has God's image on it, and we should give them to God.

22:30 We are to be made as the Angels; we will be eternal and unable to sin, therefore the Angels are like that today. There are no sinful Angels in Heaven.

22:32 Those men are dead and unconscious, but their memory lives on with God, to the extent that when He says "I *am* [still, now, today] the God of... Jacob", He means that He visualizes Jacob as actually alive. Jacob will be resurrected and given eternal life when Jesus returns; but God speaks about those things which are not yet as if they are, because the future is totally assured from His perspective (Rom. 4:17).

22:39 The Jews were always arguing about which commandment was most important. Jesus answers by saying that there are two commandments which are in fact one- to love God and to love our neighbour. His point is that these two can't be separated. We can't be Christians in isolation from people; we can't love God and be indifferent to our neighbour.

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22:45 The Jews thought that David was greater than Messiah; Jesus is saying that it's the other way around.

23:9 The practice of calling a priest 'Father' is therefore totally wrong.

23:13 We can both enable and hinder others from entering God's Kingdom. Causing others not to enter the Kingdom by our words, actions or example is one of the most serious sins. The Pharisees were a very small group, but the Gospel records give much time to describing Christ's interaction with them- for legalism and discouraging others from entering the Kingdom is such a serious sin, which we can so easily commit.

23:22 God is a personal being, located in Heaven- not a whisp of 'spirit' nor an abstraction.

23:33 An allusion to the promise in Eden of Gen. 3:15. All who oppose Jesus are the descendants of the serpent, and those in Christ, as the descendants of the woman, will overcome them in the end after suffering from them in the short term.

23:37 Did Jesus think up this idea from watching the hens in his mothers' yard in Nazareth?

23:39 This may mean that when Jesus returns, those who rejected Him will be resurrected and then will recognize Him. But it will be too late. At the day of judgment, nobody will be indifferent. People may shrug their shoulders now or even reject Jesus, but in that day they will desperately want one thing- to be with Him. But for those who rejected Him in this life it will be too late. Hence the rejected will bang their teeth in self-hatred.

24:2 This was fulfilled by the gold of the temple melting and running down between the stones, so that the Romans literally threw down every stone to extract the gold.

24:14 This implies that the return of Christ to some extent depends upon our taking the Gospel to all the world. It must be preached for a witness to the world- not all will respond, but all nations will hear. The advent of the internet has enabled this.

24:22 Although there are some stated conditions for the return of Christ to return (see :14), God will shorten the days. 2 Peter 3 says that there is also a delay, so that more may believe. So there are various apparently conflicting factors at work in determining the actual date for Christ to return. The shortening of the days will be because of the prayers of the faithful for Christ to return soon; or in order to save the faithful from falling away, so great will be the temptations and pressure of the last days.

24:31 The Angels will gather us from all over the world- there will be true believers world-wide, as a result of the witness of v. 14.

24:32 The fig tree represents Israel; fruit on the fig tree speaks of the spiritual fruit of repentance. When at least some Jews repent and accept Christ- which is already happening- this will be a sign that we are in the last generation.

24:40,41 As often in His teaching, Jesus balances examples from the worlds of both men and women. Such was His valuing of all people.

24:48 The Lord *does* delay His coming- the same Greek word is found in 25:5 describing how the bridegroom [Jesus] delays His coming. See on 24:14.

25:4 Again there are two groups in the parable- the weak, who knew their weakness and took extra oil with them, knowing they'd likely not stay awake; and the arrogant self-assured, who didn't think they would fail.

25:5 There is a delay in Christ's return- see on 24:14. They all fell asleep- but we should be awake and watching when Christ returns (1 Thess. 5:6-8). The last generation before Christ returns will be spiritually weak and sleepy saved only by their recognition of their weakness and lack of oil [a symbol of spirituality?].

25:6 Midnight- an element of unreality in the parable. The bridegroom comes at a most unlikely time- as Christ will.

25:11 Some who call Jesus "Lord" will be rejected. Nobody will be passive in that day- all will wish to be accepted by Jesus.

25:15 Each of us have different abilities given us to use in His service. We all have something. Pray that God shows you what abilities He has given you, what is His hope and expectation for you.

25:22 The Greek word translated "gained" is elsewhere used about gaining people for Christ.

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25:27 Under the Law of Moses, Jews weren't supposed to lend their money for interest. But Jesus is saying that the man should've done at least something, even if it wasn't the best. He will explain to the rejected how they could've entered His Kingdom- but it will be too late. Hence the gnashing of teeth.

25:31 The throne of Jesus is the throne which God promised to give David's great descendant, i.e. Jesus. This throne or place of rulership was literally in Jerusalem, on this earth (Lk. 1:32).

25:37 The righteous did their good works unconsciously, and so totally can't remember them that they disagree with Jesus about these things- they really will be genuinely persuaded they hadn't done them!

25:40 The least of Christ's brethren may refer to the spiritually weakest. Our attitude to them is our attitude to Christ- see too 1 Cor. 12:23.

26:5 The crowds were very pro Jesus, but soon shouted "Crucify Him!". We must try not to be so fickle, even though it's how we tend to be by nature.

26:8 *Disciples*- the other records say that Judas said this. One person can so easily negatively influence a whole group of believers.

26:13 This incident is mentioned in all the Gospel records, confirming our thesis that the Gospels are transcripts of the actual Gospel message which the authors usually preached.

26:15 This suggests that Judas' motivation was largely financial. Hence his throwing down of the pieces of silver in disgust at himself. So many have betrayed Christ for the passing wealth of this world.

26:26 The original breaking of bread was part of a meal.

26:29 Alluding to how the priest on duty wasn't allowed to drink alcohol. Jesus intended us to understand that He will literally drink wine again with us when He returns, at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

26:38 Jesus almost died from sorrow, sorrow that Israel had rejected God's salvation. His heart so bled for others' response to the Gospel, as should ours.

26:39 How long did it take Jesus to pray these words? Were there minutes between each word or clause? Our salvation hung in the balance as He struggled. The will of God was clearly not the same as the will of Jesus in all things- Jesus was certainly not God in person.

26:45 Jesus said this to them as they slept, as if talking to His own sleeping children.

26:52 A solid argument against Christians taking weapons.

26:60 The Jews had a strange desire to still keep the Law and to be legally correct- whilst destroying the innocent Son of God. This kind of paradox and gross internal contradiction is so often seen in religious people.

26:73 Jesus and His followers were distinguished by their Galilean accents. Another window into the humanity of Jesus.

26:74 These oaths weren't expletives. They were calling down various types of Divine condemnation upon himself if he had ever known Jesus. Peter's bitter weeping in v. 75 is similar to the weeping which Jesus often predicted would be experienced by those whom He rejects at the last day. Peter condemned himself in this life- but repented and was saved. We either go through that process now, in contrition for our sins- or then at the day of judgment when it's too late to change the verdict.

27:3 Judas realized his condemnation and had a change of mind; parallel with Peter (see on 26:74). The difference was that Peter believed in God's grace but Judas wouldn't.

27:5 The way Judas threw down the money suggests he now despised those few coins, for which he had betrayed Jesus and lost his eternal salvation.

27:14 The self controlled silence of Jesus was amazing. May it be our inspiration in times of provocation.

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27:17 Pilate appears to genuinely want to save Jesus, and to be the victim of manipulation. Yet history records that he was a conscienceless man who murdered people at will, having no respect at all for justice nor the value of life. The 'contradiction' is only explicable by the strange effect which Jesus' righteousness, love and perfection can have on even the hardest character and most damaged conscience. For the example of Pilate shows that everyone has a conscience.

27:23 This is the same crowd that just recently had been crying "Hosanna!", and whom the Jews feared as supportive of Jesus. We tend to be so fickle in our loyalty to Jesus.

27:25 The fact the Jews said this doesn't mean it happened; for God doesn't punish the children for the sins of their fathers (Ez. 18:1-10).

27:29 There is a set of nerves just beneath the scalp which the thorns would've intentionally pierced as they hit Him on the head with the crown on (:30). Jesus would've been bleeding profusely down His back as a result.

27:34 Because He wanted to share completely in our feelings; nobody, therefore, can say that Jesus doesn't know how they feel. Maybe nobody on earth does; but He knows.

27:44 The one thief's repentance was therefore literally a last minute repentance just before he died.

27:46 The Old Testament is clear that God will not forsake those faithful to Him, but will forsake those who sin. Jesus felt forsaken by God. He felt as if He had sinned, even though He hadn't. This was because of the intensity of His association with us who have sinned, just as men like Daniel and Nehemiah spoke and felt to God as if they had sinned Israel's sin. So even when we fail, Jesus still knows how we feel in the separation from God which sin brings. He never sinned, but in His final horror of aloneness He felt as if He had.

27:48 The reeds in that area aren't very long. Therefore Jesus' cross was not that large. The Catholic impressions of a cross towering far above us is wrong. His feet would've been only a metre above the ground; remember how He communicated with Mary and John.

27:55 *From Galilee*- The idea is that they didn't just follow Him when the going was good, amidst the crowds of Galilean peasants who thronged Him; but also followed to the cross. We too are to follow the Lamb wherever He leads.

27:56 *Mary the mother of James*- A reference to Mary the mother of Jesus; for He had two half brothers called James and Joses (Mt. 13:55).

27:58 Only close relatives could beg the body of the crucified. But this was how Joseph felt. He wanted to associate the dead body of Jesus with his own dead body, laying Jesus where his body should lay. This was the essence of baptism, whereby we identify ourselves with the death of the body of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5).

28:1 The other Mary is surely a reference to Mary the mother of Jesus- see on 27:56.

28:7 The Lord's original intention to meet His followers in Galilee (as in 28:10) seems to have been changed. Presumably because even in Divine nature, He was simply so excited and eager to get together with His brethren.

28:8 Women weren't valid witnesses in first century legal circles. But Jesus chose women to be the primary and initial witnesses of His resurrection.

28:17 The doubt and unbelief of the disciples is a strong theme in all the resurrection accounts. Yet these are transcripts of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles. They were emphasizing how *they* had had difficulty believing these things, and had been incredibly slow and dumb to grasp what had happened. And on this basis their appeal for others to believe had more power to it.

28:19 As the good news of the Lord's resurrection had been spread from the women to the disciples, now it was to be spread by all the disciples worldwide. The Gospel preaching of Matthew concludes with an appeal for baptism. Acts records how people were baptized into the name of Jesus- for the Name of the Father has been given to Him.

28:20 After baptism there was to be a teaching of the baptized person.

Mark

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1:3 The way of Jesus was prepared in the wilderness by John baptizing people in the wilderness (:4).

1:5 John baptized in a river- by immersion, not sprinkling of water.

1:7 Truly preaching Christ involves telling others of our own unworthiness.

1:10 *Up out of* – Baptism is by immersion, not sprinkling. Jesus was baptized as an adult to set us an example- that we also should be.

1:12 *Immediately*- Many such words occur in the early chapters of Mark (1:10,18,20,21,28,29,42). The impression is created of a hectic, exhausting time for Jesus with everything moving at high speed. When we're in those situations, remember that He knows how it feels.

1:16 Jesus called them at the most inconvenient time- just as they were casting their nets. But they let the nets sink, v. 18, and followed Him. Jesus too calls us to uphold His principles and do His work often at the most humanly inconvenient moments.

1:27 The authority and credibility of Jesus' teaching was given by His works. And so with us. Teaching people ideas about God will have little power nor conviction until they see them lived out in our lives.

1:35 This regular quiet time with God at the start of busy days was the key to the Lord's spiritual success, as it can be for ours.

1:41 Touching the leper would've been a very radical thing to do. The man had probably not been touched by a human being for many years. We too should be unafraid to be associated with those whom others are scared of and have rejected.

1:44 Nobody was cleansed of leprosy and so the priests would've been amazed that someone was bringing them the offering proscribed in the Law for a cleansed leper. Jesus would've appeared unrealistically hopeful in thinking that the priests might respond; as they were the very class who were opposed to Him and later killed Him. But His hopefulness for people worked- many of the priests did later repent and accept Him (Acts 6:7).

2:5 The man was healed because of the faith of his friends. To some extent we can save others, obtain their forgiveness or bring about their betterment in this life. As this is the case, we should give ourselves to prayer and caring practical effort for others; for we really can make a difference to the salvation of others.

2:8 Was this ability to read others' minds given to Jesus as a blast of insight from the Holy Spirit? Or was there a process of perception going on, whereby His intense sensitivity to others, even His enemies, enabled Him to know their minds?

2:14 Tax collectors were seen as collaborators with the Romans and were hated. Jesus also called a Zealot, a hard line nationalist terrorist, to His group of followers (Lk. 6:15). The body of Christ is comprised of people very different from each other. Yet our tendency is to attend a church or group comprised of those from our own class, background and personality type. But the body of Christ is so different.

2:16 In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, to eat with someone was a sign that you fellowshiped them. Jesus ate / fellowshiped with sinners in order to bring them to Him; rather than only fellowshiping those whom He considered fit for His table. His 'table manners' were deeply controversial and offensive to traditional Jews and were a factor in their mad hatred of Him.

2:25 What David did when he was needy and hungry justified what Jesus did; we have an insight here into His poverty.

2:28 Jesus is greater than the Sabbath; we don't need to keep the Sabbath today (Col. 2:14-17) because Jesus has fulfilled all the Jewish regulations.

3:2 Jesus appears to have intentionally sought controversy over the Sabbath issue. On some things (e.g. the popular belief in demons) He didn't challenge His audience; but on issues of legalism, He did.

3:10 The desire to touch Jesus and His desire to touch people comes out frequently in the Gospels. People believed that through touching a holy man, they would receive blessing; rather like Catholics and Orthodox travel far to touch relics. Jesus went along with this, but always emphasized that it was faith in Him, and His Father's power, which were responsible for the miracle, and not the touching in itself.

3:13 He alone went up into the mountain and then sent word to His followers to come to Him. They had to make quite some effort to come to Him. He thus filtered out those who really wanted to come to Him from those who were merely inquisitive. He does the same with people today.

3:26 *If Satan...* Satan as a personal sinful being doesn't exist [see notes at the end], but Jesus reasoned with them within the frames of their beliefs, even if those beliefs were wrong. He met people where they were, as He does today.

3:33 This must've been so painful for Mary to hear. This is one of a number of conflict points between Jesus and Mary during His ministry. It seems she had a mid-life crisis of faith, but returned to full belief after His resurrection. Mary wasn't the sinless superhuman which some believe she was.

4:10 Jesus revealed Himself to those who bothered to come to Him and enquire further (as in v. 34)- see on 3:13. Those with a merely passing interest in Him will not find Him.

4:14 The word of God is a seed- we are born again by it, it has the power of life within it (1 Pet. 1:23). The Bible is on one level black print on white paper; but it is so very much more, unique amongst literature to the point that it shouldn't really be classified as 'literature' in the secular sense. God's word gives life to people. It should be our meditation all the day as it was for David (Ps. 119:97).

4:19 Wealth is deceitful in that we think that money can buy all things; it can't.

4:22 If throughout eternity we will be shown to be who we really are, it's senseless to be hypocritical now.

4:24 The measure we apply to God's word will have a recompense. If we pay little attention to it, we will be given little; if we give our mind and life to it, then we will receive an appropriately large recompense.

4:29 As soon as the harvest is ripe, it's harvested. This could mean that once the body of Christ has matured to the level God expects, Jesus will return, and the harvest of judgment will begin.

4:33 Jesus spoke to people as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound to them. The fact we know more than some other people doesn't mean we must tell them all we know. We should be sensitive to them and at times restrain our superior knowledge, because our end aim is their spiritual growth to the glory of God.

5:4 The man's illness had bad episodes, it was intermittent. He had thought many times that he was cured of it, that he could be restrained- but then it broke out again. So the herd of pigs were sent over the cliff as a dramatic *aide memoire* which he would never forget, showing how permanent and total was his cure.

5:6 The sick man worshipped Jesus by recognizing Him as Son of God (v.7). And yet, in his illness, he also spoke aggressively to Jesus. But God understands mental illness and focused on the positive, accepting the correct parts of his understanding as "worship". Men other than Jesus are described as being 'worshipped'; the fact Jesus also was worshipped doesn't mean He was God Himself.

5:9 *My name... We are many*- The man was schizophrenic, thinking he was possessed by multiple personalities. The language of demon possession is used to describe mental illness; demons don't ultimately exist.

5:20 The man was told to go and witness to his family, but instead he went around the 10 cities of the Decapolis preaching. Often when a command is given to preach, God's people don't obey it fully. The command to go and teach the Gentiles wasn't obeyed by the apostles initially- they only went to the Jews. Those told not to tell others of their healing often did. And do we obey the call we have received to share the good news as God wishes?

5:28 The woman had the common idea that merely touching a holy man would give her healing. Jesus didn't refuse her because she understood wrongly; but He explained that it was her faith and not the touch in itself which had cured her (v. 34). See on 7:33.

5:31 The disciples are almost ridiculing Jesus. Yet Mark's account of the Gospel includes this, as if to say to his audience: 'Look how badly we treated the Lord Jesus, how we misunderstood Him, what a low level we were on compared to Him!'. And this integrity, humility and human honesty was what made their message so attractive and credible to their hearers.

5:40 Jesus was 'laughed to scorn'- implying He had the usual human reactions of embarrassment and awkwardness. He really had our nature.

5:43 Note His thoughtfulness in reminding them to give her something to eat. She'd been dead, so she'd not eaten for some time. This same thoughtful, sensitive Jesus is the same today and forever (Heb. 13:8).

6:1 *His own country* is another indication of Christ's humanity (also in v. 4). He "came to His own" (Jn. 1:11). He had a home area, and spoke with a Galilean accent.

6:3 The translation "carpenter" is unfortunate. The Greek *tehton* can mean any manual worker. He could've been a stonemason or a casual building labourer.

6:10 Jesus loves families and homes, and wanted them to be the nucleus for the new community He was developing.

6:12 Repentance means 'a change of mind'. It doesn't as a word necessarily refer to stopping sinning- God is described as 'repenting'. We may be simply too weak to stop sinning; but we can repent in that we change our mind, we strongly repudiate our sins, we try not to do them, our deepest heart is with the Lord and not with the flesh.

6:37 Jesus asks the question to try to elicit faith and spiritual ambition from the disciples. But they couldn't see beyond the immediate problems. The possibility that Jesus could do a miracle and multiply what little bread they had... just didn't occur to them. All they could think of was the cost of buying the bread.

6:41 Blessing and breaking bread, then giving it to the disciples, is so similar to the last supper. Through the breaking of bread, we show our faith in the fact that Jesus provides for our needs.

6:48 Jesus made as if He would walk past them in order to make them cry out to Him for help. Because so far they'd not thought of praying to Jesus for help, because He wasn't with them. He works like that with us today, bringing us into situations which have no human way out, and appears to ignore us- only so that we will pray and call out to Him the more fervently. This is one reason for the apparent silence of God which we find so difficult to accept.

6:52 They didn't reflect upon the miracle, and so they lacked faith to face the next trial which came along in their lives. The incidents in our lives are arranged by God in a certain order. We are intended to reflect upon the great things He has done in our experience, not just benefit from them and go onwards in life without remembering them or thinking about them. Ingratitude and lack of reflection on life's events are typical of human beings; and we must try to do better.

6:56 They thought that by touching a holy man they would be cured. This is a wrong idea, but Jesus went along with it. See on 5:28.

7:6 Isaiah spoke to the people of his generation, but Jesus says he spoke about those of the first century. God's word is living and relevant and speaks to each of us. Thus the Old Testament ceases to be mere history- it is speaking to us today.

7:7 The fact people worship God doesn't mean they are therefore with God- there's such a thing as worshipping Him in vain, if we have the wrong understanding of Him.

7:9 The Jews would've been shocked to hear that they rejected God's commandments. Jesus' generation were one of the most Torah observant there has been in Israel's history. But to follow human tradition as well as God's commandments is to effectively reject them. The Bible presents human failure in very stark terms.

7:11 We shouldn't try to get around God's intentions by legalistic interpretations.

7:18 It's good to try to imagine the tone of voice with which Jesus said these written words. Was it with frustration, anger, sadness or disappointment?

7:19-21 Sin comes from within. The human mind is a constant source of temptation. This is the real 'Satan' or adversary which we face.

7:29 Jesus is so thrilled when people understand correctly.

7:33 The saliva of Jesus represents His words. The people thought that merely touching a holy man would effect a cure (v. 32). So Jesus shows that actually far more intimate contact with Him is required than mere touch of itself. He puts His fingers in the man's ears and spits onto his tongue. See on 5:28.

7:34 Jesus could pray with eyes open looking up at the sky. Can we do this? He sighed, as He groaned whilst healing Lazarus (Jn. 11:38). This may have been the intensity of His prayer- and even now He prays for us in Heaven with such groaning (Rom. 8:26). In this sense Jesus is the same today as He was then (Heb. 13:8). Or His sighing and groaning may have been the result of how deeply He entered into others' situations, and so longed for the pain of humanity to end.

7:37 *He has done all things well* – Echoes the comment on creation, that it was "very good". Jesus was and is making a new creation, of people.

8:3 This situation is similar to that of 6:37. Jesus was hoping the disciples would have learnt from the experience they had then of Him multiplying their bread. This is why life situations repeat, in essence; because God plans them all for our spiritual education. We are intended to learn from one experience in order to spiritually succeed the next time that situation occurs. Sadly it seems the disciples didn't learn, just as we often don't.

8:12 *No sign*- The four Gospels are parallel accounts of the same incidents. In Matthew's record, we read that Jesus said they would be given no sign *except* the sign of Jonah (Mt. 12:39; 16:4). This shows that we have to read the whole Bible to get the complete message. We have to make some effort to understand. God wants us to read His word carefully, just as we appreciate it when someone listens to us carefully rather than assumes they understand what we're saying when they don't.

8:17 Jesus had twice taught them in the feeding miracles that physical bread is no issue to Him. He was disappointed they hadn't reflected further about this- for they were still thinking about bread on the literal, physical level.

8:23,25 The two stage healing process was for the man's benefit, not because Jesus was limited in power. The man was given sight, but he had never seen trees nor people before- and so he confused them. He needed to have the gift of understanding / interpretation also. The man was taught by this that even if we are given the one thing we so desire, this isn't enough. We need Jesus to give us understanding.

8:31 This is one of the clearest predictions of Christ's sufferings. Why then did He ask for the cup of suffering to be removed from Him in Gethsemane? He understood from Old Testament examples that God's intended program for a person can be changed by their prayers, and it seems that He tried this. But it also shows that even if we know something in theory, in the heat of the moment our understanding becomes clouded. Jesus was human, but never sinned. Therefore this kind of intellectual failure, even panic, isn't always sinful. It's just part of being human.

8:35 The sake of the Gospel- i.e. preaching the Gospel?

8:38 Jesus even after His resurrection still has the capacity to feel ashamed. We are made in God's image, and so shame on behalf of another is an emotion He also has.

9:7 *Hear Him*- Judaism so venerates Moses [symbol of the law] and Elijah [symbol of the prophets]. Peter wanted to build booths so that Moses and Elijah would stay; but God tells him of the need to listen to His Son. The cloud and the voice out of the cloud is similar to what happened to Moses in Ex. 34. The Divine voice in the cloud proclaimed the Name and characteristics of Yahweh; now God proclaims His Son. Because Jesus had a perfect character, He manifested the Name of God completely.

9:22 *If you can*- The man was unsure about the total abilities of Jesus. 'Do what's in your power to do' was his idea. Jesus replies by saying that God's action in our lives doesn't depend upon Him, it depends upon us. If *we* can believe, then everything's possible. It is us and not God who have our finger as it were on the volume control.

9:24 We both believe and disbelieve at the same time. We don't have complete faith. The man's humility and honesty are impressive. There is no personal Satan figure out in the cosmos; God is in control 100%. But within the human mind, there are desires to do both good and evil. Paul speaks of this in Romans 7. The man here realized this too, by recognizing his belief and disbelief within him. We should recognize it within us, too; and not be phased when we perceive it within others too.

9:34 They argued about who should be the greatest immediately after Jesus had told them of His upcoming death (v. 31). Whenever Jesus told the disciples about His death, they started arguing amongst themselves. They had a psychological barrier to the message of the cross. We tend to also; we would rather become inward looking, compare ourselves against ourselves, rather than against the standard set in the crucifixion of Jesus.

9:38 *In your name*- A disciple of John the Baptist who for some reason didn't want to associate with the Jesus' disciples.

9:40 Here Jesus makes it clear for all time that we should not be exclusive against those who in truth bear His Name (v. 39). If they exclude us, they have made the decision. But we shouldn't exclude them.

9:43 Whatever causes us to stumble on our path to God's Kingdom we must cut out of our lives, although this will be very painful and demands an unusual self-possession and strong will.

9:45 Gehenna was the rubbish dump outside Jerusalem, where the fires were always burning because fresh garbage was always being put onto it. But the individual items thrown onto it were destroyed and turned into dust. Likewise Jerusalem was threatened with the eternal fire of God's anger, due to the sins of Israel: "Then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27). Jerusalem being the prophesied capital of the future Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2), God did not mean us to read this literally. The houses of the great men in Jerusalem were burnt down with fire (2 Kings 25:9), but that fire did not continue eternally. Fire represents the anger/punishment of God against sin, but His anger is not eternal (Jer. 3:12). Fire turns what it burns to dust; and we know that the ultimate wages of sin is death, a turning back to dust. This perhaps is why fire is used as a figure for punishment for sin.

9:47 Who we will eternally be in God's Kingdom is a function of the efforts we have made in this life to cut off our sources of temptation and stumbling.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

10:9 Husbands and wives can divide what God has joined together in their marriage by arguing, insisting upon their way, criticizing, attachment to other things or partners. But other people can also divide them by things like manipulating one partner against another, poisoning the mind of one against the other etc.

10:14 Those who enter God's Kingdom will have the characteristics of children- trust, hope, willingness to learn.

10:19 The commandments which Jesus chose to list are all those which can be ticked off as done or not done. The man thought he was legally righteous. But Jesus taught that perfection isn't a matter of legalistic obedience. It's about taking up His cross and following Him.

10:21 By giving our wealth to the poor we are as it were transferring that wealth from earth to Heaven. The invitation to take up a cross was shocking to first century people- for death by crucifixion was the death of criminals, and the cross was despised as a symbol of shame. Jesus is asking us to join Him in a condemned man's last walk to the place of death. Following Him means following Him to death.

10:24 Trusting in riches is paralleled with having riches (v. 23). Having them is the same as trusting in them because this is the very nature of wealth. It's impossible to have it without trusting in it. Yet despite these grave warnings about the spiritual dangers of wealth, many Christians earnestly desire to have it!

10:30 We receive these blessings in the church now, in fellowshiping with our brothers and sisters there. If we chose not to fellowship with others, or if the church is dysfunctional, then these promised blessings won't come true.

10:31 Our society is like an elevator; once you get into it, the thrust is always upwards. People want to be upwardly socially mobile, to improve their position, to get ahead in the race. But the further we get ahead now, the further back we will be eternally.

10:35 Again, straight after the prediction of Christ's death, the disciples start arguing. The message of the cross was so lost on them at that time. And Mark is telling this story to an audience, showing them that the preachers themselves 'didn't get it' initially, and on that humble basis appealing for the hearers to do better than their teachers and 'get it' more quickly.

10:40 *Not mine*- Again we see the subjection of Jesus to the Father.

10:43 So we should be looking for opportunities to serve others every day. "Brother, sister, let me serve you" should be the heartbeat of our daily lives.

10:47 *Son of David*- He recognized that the promises to David of a future descendant of David who would also be God's Son had come true in Jesus (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

10:50 His garment was probably his only possession.

11:15 Making money out of religion is so obnoxious to Jesus.

11:16 *Not permit*- Jesus did all this without being stopped; and He did it single-handed. We see here the power of His personality; it was with this same authority that He could command the eager crowds to go home after He had fed them. This was partly a gift from God, but partly a result of His intense focus and strength of mind.

11:17 This prophecy is about the future Kingdom of God. But Jesus understood that we should be living the Kingdom life now. We should do the same; there will be no huge difference between the type of life we now live, and the life we will eternally live. In this sense we “have eternal life” in that we live today the kind of life we will eternally live.

11:22 *Have faith* – They were amazed at *His* faith, but Jesus tells them not to just admire His faith, as people admire a picture or image of Jesus, but see that His faith and life is to be our pattern. If He had such faith, then His followers also ought to.

11:26 Therefore forgiveness of others is vital for our own salvation. We ask God to forgive us our “secret sins”, those we don’t even recognize we have committed; and therefore we are wiser to forgive others without demanding their repentance.

12:1 God is the vineyard owner, the vineyard is Israel. God did everything so that they might bring forth spiritual fruit; as He does for us. The servants He sent are the prophets.

12:2 *At the season*- there were many times when the harvest could have come; the Kingdom of God could have been established earlier, but God has given us genuine freewill, and so He awaits the time when His people give Him the fruit. This could imply that Jesus will only return once Israel have repented and are giving spiritual fruit to God.

12:7 *This is the heir*- Implies the Jews recognized who Jesus really was (11:28-33 implies the same). The Jewish conscience about Jesus is apparent today too.

12:9 *Others*- The Gentiles.

12:12 Mark emphasizes how “the crowd” were supportive of Jesus (11:18,32; 12:37; 14:2). But this same crowd were soon shouting “Crucify him!”. We must battle against this same fickleness of human nature- to love and adore Jesus one moment, and deny Him the next.

12:17 We are made in God’s image and so we should give our bodies and lives to God.

12:24 *You do not know the scriptures*- But they did know them, many could recite the entire Old Testament from memory. We can know the Bible and yet not know it at all if we don’t personally believe in the power of God which it teaches.

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12:31 To love our neighbor as ourselves we must love ourselves; in the sense of perceiving our own value and meaning in God's eyes. We all tend in some ways to have too negative a view of ourselves.

12:33 The whole burnt offerings involved every part of the animal being burnt to God. To love God and our neighbour involves giving our entire lives to God; the life of faith can't be a hobby, a book we read occasionally out of interest, a church meeting we occasionally attend, a social circle we move in.

12:40 *Greater condemnation*- there will be degrees of both reward and punishment given to people by Jesus when He returns and judges us.

12:43 Jesus was very observant to notice those two coins going into the box. He is the same today- He notices the quiet devotion and sacrifice for Him which nobody else does. This is why He teaches against doing good deeds which others see, and was so against how the Scribes behaved (12:39).

13:2 This chapter, known as the Olivet prophecy, gives signs which were fulfilled immediately before the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD70. However it is clear that Jesus was also thinking about the signs which would be seen in Israel and the world leading up to His return. We can therefore say that what happened in AD70 is a type of our last days.

13:8 *Birth pains*- The bringing to birth will be when Jesus returns and we are fully 'born again' and enter His Kingdom with immortal nature (Jn. 3:3-5). Living in the last days just before He returns will therefore be a painful and frightening time for the believers.

13:10 The quicker we preach the Gospel to all nations, the quicker the end will come.

13:13 It seems the believers will be persecuted in the last days.

13:18 The actual timing of events in both AD70 and in the last days can be affected by our prayers.

13:19 This alludes to Dan. 12:1, which speaks of a "time of trouble such as never was" for Israel. This means that a situation worse than the Nazi holocaust must yet happen to Israel. We can therefore expect world opinion to increasingly turn against the Jews.

13:24,25 Sun, moon and stars are used in the Bible as symbols for the rulers of a nation, especially Israel (Gen. 37:9).

13:32 If God knows something which Jesus doesn't, then Jesus can't be God Himself.

13:33 We cannot know the exact time when Jesus will return; therefore we must watch [be alert] and pray. Ignore the various claims that we can work out from Bible prophecy which year Jesus will return in.

13:34 *Assigned tasks*- Each of us has a specific part within the body of Christ. If you don't know what it is, what God's hope of you and expectation of you is, then pray to find out.

13:37 *Stay awake*- But according to the parable of Mt. 25:5, even the faithful in the last days will fall asleep. We will be saved by grace.

14:5 The lesson is not to have a utilitarian approach to life. If our love of Jesus is strong, we will feel like doing things which others consider senseless and not sensible. But do them.

14:8 That woman perceived that Jesus was going to die; she had heard and believed Jesus' predictions about this. But the disciples had tuned out those predictions. Mark is showing in his preaching of the Gospel how slow the preachers had been to 'get it' themselves. And this gave the preaching more appeal and credibility.

14:13 Women and not men were the water carriers. This person was one of Jesus' followers; the liberation of women within the teaching and practice of Jesus was one of the factors which led to the explosion of Christianity amongst first century women.

14:19 At the breaking of bread, we should examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). This was prefigured by how the disciples each asked Jesus "Is it I [who will betray you]?"; and by how the Jews had to search their homes for yeast [representing sin] before they ate the Passover.

14:29 There is a tradition, and also some internal evidence, that Mark was writing down Peter's account of the Gospel. Although Mark is the shortest Gospel, the account of Peter's denials is most detailed in Mark. This shows how Peter was focusing upon his own weaknesses as he retold the Gospel; as we should.

14:36 'Abba' has been interpreted as meaning 'Daddy'. This is how close Jesus felt to God; and we can also.

14:37 *One hour*- His brief prayer of 14:36 took one hour to pray. We read those words too quickly.

14:51 Was this young man Peter (see v. 54)? Jesus speaks of him as "young" in Jn. 21:18.

14:68 *The cock crew*- Peter should've seen the warning sign. Did he psychologically ignore it; or did he resolve that next time he would not fail? He should've removed himself from temptation; but like us so often, he didn't. He, like us, thought he was stronger than he was.

14:68 He "went out" from the Lord. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain "'went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord and then some minutes later

further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

14:72 *Three times*- Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ. The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus. And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.

15:10 Envy and jealousy were the real reasons why Jesus was killed. Every time we suffer from them, we are fellowshipping the sufferings of Jesus. If we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him. This is what the symbol of baptism shows- we go under the water, but come up out of it with Christ.

15:15 The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: " 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" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on " *How*" , with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: " Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification" . So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being

delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..." take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind...this was it. This was the end.

15:22 John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: " They got him to a place Golgotha" . It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the " Where am I?" , the memory and consciousness flooding back. " Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

15:23 Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered...they crucify...and part...casting lots...crucified...was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:25 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting...they clothe him...they smote..." (Mk. 15:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes.

15:34 Mt. 27:46 says that at "about the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was *at* the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "about the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, into injury time, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the wonder of the final victory.

16:3 The women who came to the tomb weren't looking for the risen Lord; they came to anoint the body. But their love of the Lord was counted to them as seeking Him (Mt. 28:5). The Bible is full of how God counts people as righteous although they are not. This is what love is, in some ways. As God counts us as righteous, so we should recognize that our weak brethren are counted righteous by Him.

16:7 Jesus was so concerned for the spiritual welfare of Peter, the one who had denied Him. The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell *Peter* that He was 'going before him' to Galilee- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life. We who also deny Jesus can take comfort from this loving concern He has even for us. And we can learn to treat others who fail likewise.

16:16 Baptism is therefore very important if we wish to be saved.

16: 17 The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were given in the first century, but they were later withdrawn (1 Cor. 13:8).

#### LUKE

1:6 Zacharias was " blameless" in God's sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered. He was counted by God as righteous- "righteous before God".

1:13 He had prayed so long for a child that maybe it became a formality and he couldn't believe the answer had come. Our prayers may be heard and answered, but it may take years for the answer to be delivered. And all that time we think God's not answered. Daniel had a similar experience in Daniel 10.

1:19 Angels are sent all the way from God's presence to earth in order to answer our prayers. A guy standing at a bus stop praying to God can call forth an Angel to be sent to earth in answer to his prayers.

1:30 *Found favour*- She had the spiritual ambition to ask to be the mother of Messiah. Hence her reaction was joy rather than "Oh no! I'm pregnant without a husband!". And she was likely an illiterate, barefoot teenager. She was of low social status (:48,53).

1:32 *Shall be*- Note all the future tenses. Jesus didn't pre-exist as a person before His birth. Jesus was "conceived" within Mary (v. 31). He didn't literally come down from Heaven as a person. He began inside Mary. David was his father or ancestor because Mary too was an ordinary woman, who was in the line of David. Jesus only became God's Son when He was born (v. 35). The Son of God therefore didn't exist from creation, as the false doctrine of the Trinity requires.

1:35 The Holy Spirit is paralleled with the power of “the Most High”. The Holy Spirit refers to God’s power; it isn’t a person. God is “the highest”, and therefore neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit are equal to Him; they are lower than Him as He is the highest.

1:36 Often God arranges that someone else, e.g. a family member, has a similar experience to us- so that by fellowship with them we can find comfort and encouragement.

1:46 Mary’s song is full of allusion to the song of Hannah when she was enabled to conceive Samuel (1 Sam. 2). Although she was illiterate, she knew her Bible well. She had memorized it and felt herself into it. She saw the similarities between herself and Hannah. We too should ponder Scripture and see the similarities between ourselves and others we read of there, so that they become our heroes and inspirations.

1:53 The rich Jewish women no doubt wanted to be mother of Messiah. But God delights to work through the low, poor and humble who love His word.

1:74 Zacharias shared the common Jewish misunderstanding of Messiah as the One who would bring salvation from the Romans. But it’s also possible to understand his words spiritually, in terms of our freedom from sin. A faithful man can still hold misunderstandings, and God didn’t reject him because of it.

1:77 If we really feel God’s forgiveness, then we know salvation; but such wonderful experience comes from appreciating the seriousness of our sins. The proud and self-righteous have no feeling for the wonder of God’s forgiveness.

2:7 From birth, Jesus knew rejection from men; for surely somebody could have found a better bed for a heavily pregnant woman. When we experience rejection, He knows how we feel.

2:8 Shepherds were one of the most despised classes in Palestinian society. But God chose to use them as the witnesses to the birth of His Son.

2:15 *That has come to pass*- Faith is believing what we can’t see but what has been revealed to us by God’s word. The shepherds are a classic example of faith. Therefore the shepherds rejoiced because their faith had been rewarded- they found everything exactly as had been said and as they had believed (v. 20). This was and is the joy of faith rewarded.

2:32 *A light for revelation*- The Gentiles will only see that light if we reveal Him to them in our witness.

2:35 When the spear pierced the side of Jesus, the heart of Mary was pierced too as she watched. Our reaction to the cross is that the thoughts of our hearts are revealed. Hence the breaking of bread service, when we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, is a time for self-examination because quite naturally the thoughts of our hearts are revealed as we stand before the cross (1 Cor. 11:28).

2:47 Jesus would've had a natural aptitude for His Father's words. He would've searched for His Father just as any child does for the father they have never seen. As God's Son, His intellect would've been surpassing. His exposition of Scripture at 12 would've been very mature. Note His humility, though, in asking questions- of the men who later would hate and murder Him.

2:48 *Your father...* Jesus rebukes her by saying that she should've guessed that He was to be found in the house of God, His true Father (v. 49). Mary had become so used to the idea of Joseph being the father of Jesus that she had perhaps lost the intensity of persuasion she had when the Angel visited her 13 years ago- that Jesus' Father was God. Time and the incorrect views of others about Jesus and God can likewise make us view them as the world around us does.

2:52 The growth of Jesus in favour with God makes a nonsense of Trinitarian claims. Likewise His growth in wisdom and knowledge is understood quite naturally if we accept Him as God's begotten Son. "God the son" and "Trinity" aren't found in the Bible.

3:5 The leveling of the wilderness is symbolic. Those who were proud like the mountains were brought down low, and those with too negative a view of themselves, as low as the valleys, were lifted up to a higher level. The key in all this was repentance and acceptance of the reality of God's forgiveness and acceptance.

3:8 Repentance isn't a matter of words so much as actions, or "fruit". Baptism is part of our process of repentance and forgiveness; but we must attempt to change in practice too.

3:8 *To say within yourselves-* The Bible focuses upon and addresses our internal and very private thought processes. Verse 15 also talks about how people reasoned within themselves. This is the essence of Christianity- to change our spirit, the way we think deep within. The real 'Satan' or adversary is our own innermost mind, and not any external cosmic being.

3:14 John didn't tell the soldiers to stop being soldiers, but to act within moral principles. God meets us where we are, calls different people in different states, and asks them within their contexts to act accordingly. But the military shouldn't be the occupation of choice for a Christian.

3:17 The idea of gathering wheat and destroying the chaff is the language of the final judgment, when Jesus returns. But Jesus was ready to begin that at His first coming. All believers down the centuries have therefore lived in the expectation of His imminent judgment coming; we should live constantly with the awareness that Jesus may return today.

3:20 *Added this-* God doesn't just switch off watching sinners keeping on sinning. Each and every sin is a felt offence against Him, even if performed by Gentile unbelievers. His sensitivity to sin is amazing, and we should live our lives before Him recognizing it.

3:21 *Jesus also*- The idea is that Jesus was baptized along with all the other people, by full immersion as an adult. If He was baptized, so should we be.

4:1-8 See comments on Matthew 4 and notes about Satan at the end.

4:3 Jesus answers the three temptations with three quotations from Deuteronomy. Those quotations are close to each other- twice from Deuteronomy 6 and once from Deuteronomy 8. These passages were in the context of Israel being 40 years in the wilderness, tested by God and tempted to be disobedient to Him. Jesus perceived the similarities with Himself- 40 days in the wilderness, tested by God and tempted, led by “the Spirit” (v. 1) as Israel were led by an Angel. We too should look for the similarities between our positions and those of others we read about in the Bible. The more we are familiar with the Bible text, the more easily in times of crisis will we find strength and find warning and encouragement directly for us. This is why we should persevere in Bible reading even if at the time we don’t understand or feel any immediate benefit. Slowly, God’s word becomes a living word, speaking directly to us.

4:15 The popularity of Jesus was huge. But He knew what people were like (Jn. 2:25) and so He avoided the pitfalls of success and popularity. We should handle any popularity or success in the way He did. His focus was upon glorifying God, getting that job done, and whether we stand with our backs to the world or have adulation of men, that must be our focus.

4:23 *Heal yourself*- Did Jesus have some physical weakness, illness or deformity? He had “no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2).

4:27 There were no lepers healed in Israel in Elisha’s time. The young Israelite maid who told her Syrian mistress that Elisha was able to cure leprosy was therefore speaking in faith, the faith which believes what hasn’t yet been seen (2 Kings 5:3).

4:30 Jesus was therefore able to escape persecution and personal harm. He could’ve escaped from the cross. This was His agony in Gethsemane. But He resisted that temptation and willingly gave His life for us.

4:35 Jesus rebuked a demon and then rebuked a fever (v. 39). ‘Demons’ was the language of the day for illnesses.

5:5 Fishermen don’t like being told by carpenters what to do; they ‘know it all’ about their trade. So Peter had to humble himself to obey Christ’s word just as we do; it goes against the grain of our natural instincts.

5:10 Success in preaching, like (in this instance) Peter’s success in fishing, comes from obeying Christ’s word, being guided by that rather than our natural instincts. We may appear fools in the eyes of men by doing so.

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5:16 If Jesus needed to make time to be alone with God, so do we. It may require us to set the alarm clock 10 minutes earlier each morning.

5:20 Jesus knew they wanted a healing. But first He forgave the man's sins- to show that physical benefit from association with Him is secondary to the forgiveness of our sins. That is our primary and greatest need.

5:31 We are the sick, in need of healing. We will therefore never be ready or good enough for God. We shouldn't delay being baptized or not serve God because we feel we are spiritually sick. It is for us that He died.

5:35 Are we fasting because we want Jesus, the bridegroom, to return? Fasting doesn't only mean abstaining from food; fasting means forgiving people and trying to ease the weight of the burdens they carry (Is. 58:6).

5:39 Jesus here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; real change is so hard for us.

6:4 Jesus compared those who follow Him to the priests. We are all priests within the new community Jesus has established (1 Pet. 2:9). We all have responsibility for the spiritual welfare of each other; we are not to leave it to a class of specialists to care for them.

6:7 Do you feel in some contexts that everything you do is being watched critically by someone? Jesus knows how you feel.

6:9 Jesus speaks of omitting to do good (in this case, healing the man) as doing harm and destroying life. Sins of commission aren't the only sins; sins of omission are as bad as proactively murdering or harming someone.

6:11 *Rage*- Often acts of goodness provoke anger in others; they look at us with an evil eye because we have done good. This often happened to Jesus (Mt. 20:15). This kind of spiritual jealousy led to His death, and we will face it too.

6:19 Healing people was so demanding upon Jesus; He felt the power going out of Him (as in 8:46). If we feel exhausted by serving others- Jesus has 'been there'.

6:20-22 It's paradoxical that Christians want to be happy, wealthy, popular and well fed. We may take a second job or a very demanding one which leaves us no time or energy for Divine things- just because we want to 'buy' those very things which we are blessed if we don't have. This is a huge inversion of values.

6:23 *Is great*- God is watching our lives closely, and sacrificing things for His sake means we accrue some 'reward' immediately with Him. Salvation is a gift, by grace. But the nature of who we will eternally be is a function of the degree of sacrifice and service we have achieved in this life.

6:29 When Jesus was struck on the cheek He asked “Why do you smite me?” (Jn. 18:23). He didn’t literally offer His other cheek. So we must interpret this in principle rather than literally.

6:32 Let’s think what acts of love we can do today to those who do *not* love us and will not recompense us.

6:38 *They*- The Angels at the day of judgment. For this doesn’t come true in this life.

6:40 We will be “perfected” when Jesus returns and we are given God’s nature (Heb. 11:40). Then, we will be like Jesus. ‘We shall be like *Him*’ (1 Jn. 3:2). The wonder of the Kingdom will not simply be that we won’t die- but that we will be like Jesus, with His love, sensitivity, authority, ability to talk with God with no barriers between... Oh how rich the promise.

6:41 If Jesus was a carpenter, He may have thought up this idea one day whilst working, with His mind always on the things of God.

6:45 We may think that we’re clever enough to think evil of a person but say nice things to their face. The culture of nicespeak is no more than hypocrisy, and God will judge it. Our thoughts *will* eventually be reflected in our words. We must change our hearts and not our outward appearances.

7:6 *I am not worthy*- But the people said openly that he was “worthy” (v. 4). Even if others think and speak well of us, let us not think that we are worthy of Jesus; but always maintain our sense of sinfulness and humility before Him.

7:14 To touch coffins or dead bodies made a person unclean under Jewish law; but Jesus touched lepers and now touched the coffin to show His identification with the unclean. Those who realize they too are unclean will be comforted by this.

7:19 This could imply a collapse of faith in John. He doubted whether his cousin Jesus really was Messiah as he had earlier taught; because Jesus wasn’t acting as he had expected Messiah to act. God and Jesus are not to be defined by our expectations of them; but we are to accept them for who they present themselves to be in reality. Hence Jesus sent a message back to John warning him that blessed is that man who doesn’t stumble over Jesus (v. 23). The Bible records the failings of great men of faith. There are no white faced saints. Although John was weak at this point, Jesus goes on to speak very positively of him in v. 28. We should also be positive about each other despite being aware of each others’ weaknesses.

7:30 if we refuse to be baptized, this is what we are doing.

7:32 The children invited other children to play sad funerals, and they refused; so they asked them to play happy weddings, and they still refused. God appealed to all kinds of people through the different style of Jesus and John; but the Jews refused to really respond.

7:35 *All her children*- Both the converts of Jesus and of John.

7:43 The point is that we are all sinners and so the amount we owe is really the degree to which we perceive our sinfulness. The more we realize our sins, the more we will love Jesus for forgiving us.

7:44 Jesus therefore spoke with His back to Simon. He was being intentionally rude to His host to emphasize the degree to which He accepted and respected that repentant woman.

7:48 She already knew this, without Jesus having told her, because she loved Him so much. And He observed that her love was because she had been forgiven so much. When we are forgiven, we're not always told so directly by Jesus; but we feel it, as she did.

8:3 Jesus attracted a group of poor men and wealthy women. He calls very different people into contact with Him and therefore each other, making the true church of Jesus an example of extraordinary unity; it's not composed of just one psychological type, one social class, colour, race or gender. It's a wonderful mixture. It's the very opposite of a social club, which attracts the same types together.

8:8 *He cried-* Jesus so desperately wanted- and wants- people to understand His teaching.

8:16 If we hide our spiritual light, it will go out. Witnessing to our faith is for our benefit as well as that of those who receive our preaching.

8:21 Do we perceive our spiritual family as even more significant for us than our natural family? This is very hard to do, as hard as it was for Jesus to speak as He did here.

8:28 If Jesus is Son of the Most High God, then He cannot be equal to God in a Trinitarian sense; for God is the *most* high.

8:32 Keeping pigs was illegal for Jews as pigs were unclean animals.

8:42 Often we have been rushing to do something very important, and then somebody or something else demands our attention. The phone rings as we are rushing out of the door; a child insists upon having our attention as we are in the middle of an important conversation. In those moments of frustration, remember Jesus here. How calm He was, never flustered; how caring for people, to the point that He never ultimately ignored anyone's genuine need.

8:45 Jesus knew who had touched Him. But He wanted the woman to come out openly in front of the crowd and declare her faith. Jesus works in our lives to ensure that we openly declare our faith before the world, even when we try not to.

8:50 Fear is the opposite of faith.

8:54 *Taking her by the hand-* Jesus knew the girl would be scared when she woke up alive, without any human touch. We see His total faith that the miracle would happen; and also His extreme sensitivity to people, how He thought ahead to how they were going to feel. Likewise

with His command to get her something to eat. May His sensitive spirit be ours, always thinking ahead to how others will be feeling in response to events.

9:2 The frequent connection between preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing was because the healings were foretastes of how things would be when the Kingdom of God is established upon earth.

9:5 Jews were supposed to shake off the dust of Gentile areas from their feet. Jesus is saying that the Jews who didn't accept Him were no better than Gentiles. If we reject Christ, we will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:28).

9:12 Jesus preached in a "deserted place" so that the people had to make some effort to go to Him. We have to make some effort on our part to hear the word of God, even though salvation is of grace.

9:18 *Praying alone*- We must find time to pray alone, and not have a prayer life which is simply saying "Amen" to the prayers of others.

9:23 *Daily*- We should rise each day and remind ourselves that we are to pick up the cross of Jesus, accompanying Him on His 'last walk' to death. How we start each day is important.

9:24 How can we lose our lives for His sake today?

9:35 *Hear Him*- Alluding to the prediction of Dt. 18:15 that the faithful would hear the voice of the Messiah. This Old Testament prophecy is quoted about Jesus in Acts 3:22. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about Himself; He was "the word made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).

9:37 We also at times 'come down from the mountain' of intense spiritual experience to face the crowds of this world, lack of faith, human need and argument. We may have a wonderful Sunday service, but have to return into the world on Monday or Sunday evening. In those moments, remember Jesus went through the same. He understands.

9:39 *Bruising him*- The child bruised himself, as in v. 42 "dashed him". The language of demon possession simply refers to mental illness, in this case epilepsy and self-harm.

9:41 *How long?*- This is a phrase often found on the lips of God's people in the Bible. We long for the day when human weakness will be no more, when Jesus has returned and established His Kingdom on earth.

9:51 In Luke, Jesus is described as always 'going up to Jerusalem' even when He was going geographically away from it. We too may take two steps backwards at times, but our overall direction is ultimately towards God's Kingdom.

9:60 At times, Jesus is very demanding. To bury your father was seen as a Jew's greatest domestic obligation. But Jesus and His work must come first.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

10:2 The harvest of people for God's Kingdom will not be reaped if there aren't enough workers or we work poorly. The salvation of others has therefore been delegated to us, to some extent. Let's go and reap the harvest and pray that others will assist the work.

10:3 Jesus was "the lamb of God"; in our preaching Him, we are Him to this world. And so in the context of their preaching work in the world, Jesus called His followers "lambs". The principle is stated in v. 16- whoever hears us hears Jesus personally.

10:4 *Greet no one*- Greetings in the East took a long time. Jesus didn't intend them to be rude, but to be urgent about their mission, and dispense with niceties to fulfill it. Do we have that intensity and urgency about our preaching the Gospel?

10:13 *They would have repented*- God knows all possible futures and possible pasts, and His Son had some of this ability. This knowledge of 'what could have been' must give God such huge sadness; for the reason why we weep is because of our sense of 'what could have been'. It must be so hard being God.

10:18 Jesus has just used the figure of falling from Heaven to earth in v. 15. It means to lose power, and shouldn't be read literally. The power of the adversary ['Satan' is a Hebrew word meaning 'adversary'] had been taken away.

10:20 Our names are written in God's book of life, but they can be removed from it if we fall away (Rev. 3:5).

10:35 *Two denarii*- The wage for one day's work was one denarius (Mt. 20:2). Maybe the implication was that the Samaritan would "come again" after two days. If a day with God is as a thousand years, it could be that Jesus, the Samaritan, will return after 2000 years from when He first bound up wounded humanity and put us in the "inn" of the church.

10:37 *Do likewise*- The Samaritan was symbolic of Jesus and His saving work for sinners, which the representatives of the Jewish law did not do. But He asks us to not only benefit from His work, but go out into the world and do the same, taking risks and sacrificing our own safety to do so. The Jews claimed Jesus was a Samaritan- a mixed race of people whom 'pure' Jews despised (Jn. 8:48).

10:42 Here for all time we are encouraged to give more importance to hearing Christ's word than to domestic duties.

11:2 When God declared His Name to Moses in Ex. 34:4-8, He gave Moses a list of His characteristics- grace, justice, judgment, mercy, forgiveness etc. Our first request of God should be that those characteristics- His Name, what He stands for- be revealed and glorified in our lives by whatever situations we are in, and our reactions to them. If this is our first desire, then all else will fall into place ultimately. The next request is for God's Kingdom to come- for Jesus to return to earth and establish God's Kingdom here. We tend to make prayer a list of specific

requests, but Jesus teaches us to be less specific initially, and focus always upon those essential principles and have them as our greatest desires.

11:4 It is good for us to tell God in prayer that we forgive our enemies. But this makes this simple prayer hard to pray truthfully. For we must forgive others if we hope for forgiveness ourselves.

11:9 The 'asking' is for the reasons given in the parable- the man asks for things in order to give them to someone else in need (v. 6). If we ask for things in order to assist others, then God's promise will hold true. But it's not a promise that whatever we ask for ourselves will be given to us.

11:10 We knock on God's door, but He through Jesus knocks on our door (Rev. 3:20). There is a mutuality between God and us. We knock on His door, He knocks on ours.

11:13 *Give the Holy Spirit*- The parallel Mt. 7:11 says that God will give "good things" to those who ask Him. Being given the special power of God ("Holy Spirit") doesn't mean that we will be able to speak in tongues / languages, do miracles etc.- those gifts have been withdrawn (1 Cor. 13:8-10). But this doesn't mean that He doesn't amazingly answer prayer, and those answers are in a way a gift of Holy Spirit.

11:23 *Scatters*- Sins of omission are understood by Jesus as active opposition to Him. How we live life is crucially important; our inaction is seen as actively working against the Lord's work.

11:28 Mary, mother of Jesus, did hear God's word and kept it in her heart (Lk. 2:19). This was the side of Mary that Jesus wanted people to honour, rather than her physically having been His mother.

11:32 At the day of judgment, we will be judged in full view of others. The Ninevites will watch the judgment process of the first century Jews. We therefore shouldn't be hypocritical in front of others now, because in the end they will see us revealed at judgment day for who we really are.

11:34 Our perceptions, our filtering process which we apply to life, are so important.

11:52 We can hinder or stumble people from entering the Kingdom. This is perhaps the greatest sin. We therefore need to be so careful how we treat people, so that we do nothing which may lead them to turn away from the hope of the Kingdom because of our actions, exclusion of them or hypocrisy.

12:1 Hypocrisy is like leaven (yeast). Once one person starts being hypocritical, others tend to be; it spreads easily and has a huge effect, just as leaven does on bread. Jesus taught "first of all", most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy. We need to ask ourselves daily whether we are

being hypocritical; because it's so important not to be. All will be revealed anyway (:2,3)- at the day of judgment.

12:7 God sees and knows absolutely everything- even within the animal creation. Let's live with that awareness, that He is so intensely watching. Knowing this shouldn't frighten us but rather encourage us- "fear not!".

12:19 The 'soul' here refers to the self; Jesus piercingly analyzes the self-talk of materialistic people. It's our self-talk that we need to watch; what are the conversations that we carry on with ourselves as we walk, travel, prepare food... ? The words "I", "my" and "soul" occur often in this story- circle them in your Bible. The man was totally self-centred.

12:30 God knows our basic need for food and clothing and will provide, as He did for Israel after their 'baptism' in the Red Sea and journey through the wilderness. Their shoes didn't get worn out, and He gave them bread and water daily. David says he never saw the children of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25). We must really believe this promise.

12:33 Jesus was speaking to poor people when He said this. The poor can easily assume that all Christ's teaching about wealth and generosity are for the attention of rich Christians only. But this is not the case. The poor, too, are asked to be radically generous.

12:35 An allusion to the night of Israel's Passover exodus from Egypt. We are to have that same intensity, aware that Jesus could return at any moment.

12:36 How immediately we respond to the knowledge that Christ has returned will affect our eternal future, as in Mt. 25:10. If we are longing for His return and have a light hold on our material life, we will be ready to go immediately with joy and no regrets. The more we possess, the harder this will be.

12:37 Another unreal element in the parables- the Master would never come and serve His servants. But Jesus will do so- because He will be so pleased that they were watching and eager for His return. At the marriage supper of the Lamb, when Jesus again will eat and drink with us (Mt. 26:29), He will come and serve us. His loving servanthood is a characteristic that He has even now; it wasn't just how He was when on earth. He will always be the same as He was then (Heb. 13:8).

12:49 The judgment of God is likened to fire; but that fire is kindled, the match is set to it, by human beings. God's judgment is only confirming sinful people in what they themselves have chosen.

12:51 Jesus 'came' to send judgment (v. 49); and He came to send division within families. Such division is therefore His judgment upon them; but they will have kindled that fire themselves by their own rejection of His message of peace.

13:3 Sin and suffering aren't necessarily related in this life. The book of Job is all about this. Indeed, the wicked prosper. But sin will have its recompense- which creates the necessity for the coming of the day of judgment when Jesus returns.

13:7 The "man" who owned the vineyard [Israel] is God; the "vinedresser" is Jesus. The three years are the three years of Christ's ministry. Jesus knew God so well that He asked Him to delay His plan to destroy Israel, to give them yet more opportunity to give spiritual fruit (v. 8). Moses and other Bible characters showed us that we can reason with God, and in some cases He is prepared to change His stated intentions. Prayer is *so* powerful! Earlier, Israel were the vine and the Lord Jesus the vinedresser. But now *we* are the vine, and God Himself the vinedresser (Jn. 15:1). We are in good hands; and the Father and Son who through Biblical history showed themselves so sensitive to spiritual fruit are the very same ones who will meet us in the last day.

13:21 The Gospel is like leaven [yeast]. It can influence a huge amount of flour. The Gospel we preach has more power and potential to radically change people than we realize.

13:23 We all tend to wonder about such questions of Divine 'fairness'. Jesus gives no answer but says that we should focus instead upon our own salvation (v. 24)- rather than dabble in questions which are God's concern and beyond our comprehension.

13:25 The ideas of standing at the door and knocking are all found in Rev. 3:20, where Jesus says that He does this to us. If we've not opened to Him, not responded to His promptings in this life, then He will not open the door to eternity to us when He comes again.

13:26 *Eat and drink in your presence*- A reference to the fact they had participated in the communion service? There will be some who break bread who will not be saved ultimately. We must ask "Lord, is it I?".

13:28 *You shall see... yourselves*- The purpose of the judgment process will be for our benefit, to help people see themselves from outside of themselves, to see themselves as they really are. It's not in order for God to gather information and make a verdict; He knows all things. In this sense, "judgment" is a metaphor not to be pushed too far.

14:10 We are to take the lowest place in the ecclesia / church. Jesus is the one who invited us (v. 9), and He will "come" and inspect us at His return. And He will re-arrange the order at which we sit at table. Our breaking of bread services are foretastes of our eating with Jesus at His return. We should take the lowest place in those meetings, at least in our hearts; aware of our own failings, and seeing our brothers and sisters positively and with grace.

14:13 The poor, maimed, lame and blind are the very ones whom God invites to *His* supper (v. 21). The connection is clear enough- we are to act to others as God does to people; and He has a way of inviting the most desperate people into fellowship with Him. Snobbery should have no part in Christian life. *We* are the spiritually poor and handicapped street people whom God has

invited into His Kingdom in these last days. That's what v. 21 teaches. And so we ought to invite such people into our homes- with all the problems that can bring. There should be no sense of social superiority at all in the true church. This is utterly abhorrent to God.

14:18 The man begs Jesus to 'excuse' him. The New Testament is written in Greek, and we read through the mask of translation. The same Greek word translated 'excuse' here is also translated 'reject' elsewhere. Those who are rejected at the last day will have begged Jesus to reject them by their behavior in this life. He will only confirm them in their choices. If more than anything else we want to be in God's Kingdom; then we will.

14:23 The implication could be that as the last days progress and the return of Christ becomes imminent, the standard of those accepted will decrease; only the absolutely desperate [in whatever way- not just materially] will be responding to the Gospel. We who have responded in what appear to be the last days are therefore a desperate lot indeed.

14:31 The King who comes against us with far more strength is God; coming in judgment of our sins. Sin is serious, and isn't just ignored by God with a grin. It is a felt offence against Him, that provokes His wrath. We make peace with Him, we are reconciled, through the work and sacrifice of Jesus.

15:4 The answer is: No shepherd does this, nor does he throw a party for the sake of that sheep (v. 6). The point of unreality in these parables would've been immediately noticed by the first century hearers. The point of unreality is what teaches the lesson- in this case, that God is exceptionally concerned about the lost. As we should be too.

15:8 Her dowry was all that a woman possessed; even her body wasn't hers. To lose a dowry coin was therefore to lose part of herself; this is how hard God takes when He loses one of His people. She searched "until she finds it"- God, and we too, should search for the lost with the attitude that we will search until we find them. We certainly should not exclude any of God's people from His house; we should search passionately for any who leave.

15:12 This request was equivalent to saying 'I wish you were dead'.

15:20 For an old man to run publically was seen as undignified. This unreal feature of the story shows just how much he was delighted his son was returning; it speaks of the radical joy of God when we return to Him. When a prodigal returned to a village, they would've been badly mocked by everyone who knew them. The father therefore ran to the son to shield him from the name calling and stone throwing of children. We should seek to shield from shame those who 'come back' .

15:32 The vital point of Jesus' parables is often at the end. This story isn't so much about a sinner coming home, but about self-righteous people within the house of God who say "If *he's* coming back, I'm out of here".

16:10 All that we have been given by God, spiritually and materially, is “a very little”. Only a small portion of God is known by us (Job 26:14). So because we may correctly understand the Bible on some points, let’s not think that we have 100% truth about God or ‘know it all’.

16:11 How we handle wealth [whether we have to manage much or little of it] is proportionate to how we will eternally be in God’s Kingdom.

16:19 This is a parable, and isn’t to be taken literally.

16:23 This is a parody of Jewish beliefs. But those beliefs are in themselves wrong; the righteous don’t go to live in Abraham’s bosom; death is unconsciousness; the punishment for sin is death when Jesus returns, not torment in fire. Jesus used the wrong beliefs of the Jews against themselves. He spoke to people in their own terms.

16:31 The parables of Jesus often make their key point at the end; and it’s the same here. The point of the story is to show that even when Jesus rose from the dead, most of the Jews still wouldn’t believe. And that the witness of the written word in the Old Testament was and is as powerful as ‘seeing a miracle’ of a dead man coming to life.

17:2 Causing others to stumble is the very worst kind of sin. We should therefore think carefully how our words and actions are going to impact others; and be careful that we set the right example to others. The punishment of a millstone being hung around the neck and cast into the sea is that of Babylon’s punishment at the last day (Rev. 18:21). Those within the church who make others stumble, e.g. by unreasonable demands upon them or excluding them, are no better than Babylon, the great enemy of God. How we treat others is very, very important.

17:4 If someone sins so many times each day and claims to have repented, it’s obvious their repentance isn’t sincere. So Jesus is teaching that we should forgive people without trying to assess if their repentance is sincere, or even if it is apparent that their repentance is insincere. The radical grace of God to us requires that we should simply forgive others without demanding their repentance.

17:10 *Unprofitable servants*- The same phrase is used in Mt. 25:30 about those who will be condemned at the final judgment when Jesus returns. After we have, as we think, done everything we should- we must still recognize that we deserve only condemnation. When doing good deeds, it’s necessary to remember that we are sinners; we have already sinned, we still sin, and probably will sin again before Jesus returns. This will mean that we do our good works with a humble spirit; if they are done with a spiritually arrogant attitude, this is a huge turn off to the world and ruins our witness.

17:21 “Within” can also be translated “among”. Jesus as King of the Kingdom of God can be called “the Kingdom of God”. All the principles of God’s Kingdom were to be found in Him. The Jews were looking for Messiah to come, and Jesus is saying they don’t have to look here and

there for Him; because He, the Messiah, was already among them. The Kingdom of God wasn't within the hearts of "you", i.e. the Pharisees.

17:27 *Until the day*- There is strong Biblical emphasis on the fact that the flood began on the day Noah entered the ark. But Gen. 7:1,4 says that God told Noah seven days before the flood came to enter the ark. But actually he didn't do this- he entered the very day the rain came. Why? Surely because he was begging people to come into the ark- he was a preacher (2 Pet. 2:5). Do our hearts desperately bleed for the people around us, as we await the coming of Jesus?

17:32 Lot's wife looked back behind her when she had been told not to. She mourned the loss of her home and possessions. The command Lot received to leave Sodom is therefore typical of the command we will receive to leave this present situation and go to be with Christ in Jerusalem when He returns. If we look back on this world with longing, we will share the judgment of this world. Lot's wife was turned to salt, which was also the punishment which came upon the area around Sodom (Gen. 19:23; Dt. 29:23).

17:37 Don't worry where the judgment seat will be, or how we will get there. We will get there as naturally as God makes the eagles go into the air and come down where the carcass is.

18:3 The element of unreality in this parable is that a widow woman, with no male to advocate for her, went *directly* to the judge. This speaks of the spiritual ambition which we should have in daring to continually pray to God; and perhaps also indicates how approachable God is, even if prayer to God Himself initially seems too wonderful an idea for us.

18:7 The apparent silence of God to our prayers is because of His patience with us, not His deafness or indifference.

18:8 *Shall He find faith on the earth?*- It's an open question. The context speaks of how God answers prayer. The fact He does this should inspire faith. But will there be such faith in the earth [maybe "land", of Israel] on the eve of Christ's return?

18:13 *Struck his breast*- The same Greek phrase is found only in the account of how those who watched the crucifixion of Jesus struck their breasts (Lk. 23:48). Here in 18:13, striking the breast means contrition and repentance. So it probably means the same in 23:48. Watching the death of Jesus brought people to repentance. This is why when we remember the death of Jesus at the breaking of bread service, we are naturally led to self-examination and repentance (1 Cor. 11:28).

18:14 *Rendered righteous*- We are not righteous in ourselves; but we are counted righteous by God through our being "in Christ" by baptism and continued faith in Him.

18:30 *In this time*- We receive these things in the church of God, through our relationships with others in Christ. Christianity isn't intended to be lived in isolation from other believers.

18:34 Note the repetition of the fact they didn't understand. They had a psychological barrier to the cross, just as we do in some ways- to share in the cross of Jesus is so demanding.

19:7 Fellowshiping with sinners through eating with them was seen as very wrong; the faithful Jew only fellowshiped with those who were "clean" and apparently not associated with sin. Jesus' open table policy showed the very opposite. There is no 'guilt by association'; He fellowshiped with people in order to bring them to Him, rather than only eating His bread with those who had reached a certain standard.

19:9 He was a Jew ("son of Abraham"), but worked for the Romans collecting taxes from the Jews. He would've been a very lonely, despised and rejected person. These are the kinds of people who respond to Jesus.

19:17 *Ten cities*- There is an element of unreality in the parable of the pounds: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few pounds to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards.

19:20 He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money, using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. But we must creatively use the basic gift of the Gospel which we have been given.

19:23 Jesus will explain to the rejected how they might have entered eternity. This will be quite enough mental torment and punishment. The Law of Moses forbade Jews to lend money to other Jews for interest. Jesus was telling His parables to Jews in a Jewish context. He's saying: "Even if you had done what was not the best, not the most obedient; but if you had done *at least something*, I would've accepted you'. But the man thought Jesus was a hard, grace-less man. Alternatively, Jesus may have meant: 'You could at least have given the Gospel to the Gentiles'.

19:25 Even those accepted into God's Kingdom won't understand everything immediately. We will spend eternity eternally growing in the knowledge of God and Jesus.

19:27 *Slay them*- The punishment for the rejected will be death, "the second death" (Rev. 2:11); not eternal punishment of a conscious person.

19:37 *Now drawing near*- The verb tenses and style here encourage us to visualize Jesus 'drawing near'. The Gospels often encourage us to play 'Bible television' - to reconstruct how things happened as if the scene is playing live before our eyes.

19:41 This was the city which would kill Him- He had predicted that "Jerusalem" would kill him (Lk. 13:33). And yet Jesus had a heart that bled for the salvation of even His enemies and

murderers. He so wished for their salvation (Lk. 13:34). Do we have a heart that bleeds for this world?

20:9 The absentee landlords of Galilee were despised by all; and yet the Lord uses one of them as a figure for Himself. Whenever we feel despised, we are sharing in the sufferings of Jesus.

20:13 God sent His Son to Israel, hoping they would reverence Him. But Isaiah 53 had prophesied that when Israel saw Him, they would see no beauty in Him and crucify Him. Yet God restrained that knowledge, in His love and positive hope for His people. God in a sense comes down to our level, rather like you crouch down to speak with a child at their level, and seek to enter into their limitations of perception, their language and outlook. Truly man is not alone. God is with us.

20:15 The parable has a telling twist to it. Absentee landlords who had never visited their land for ages, and found the people they sent to the property beaten up, would usually just forget it. They wouldn't bother. In the parable which draws on this, the Lord asks what the landlord will do. The expected answer was: 'Not much. He got what he could, he was never bothered to go there for years anyway'. But *this* landlord is odd. He keeps on sending messengers when any other landlord would have given up or got mad earlier on. But God's patience through the prophets was likewise unusual. And then, when the tenants thought they must surely be able to get away with it because the Lord seemed so distant and out of touch... He suddenly comes Himself in person and destroys them. He doesn't hire a bunch of people to do it. He comes in person, as the Lord will in judgment. And instead of deciding he'd had his fingers burnt and giving up vineyards as a bad job, this Lord gives the vineyard to others- He tries again. And so the Lord is doing with the Gentiles.

20:18 We have a choice- to be broken in this life by falling upon the rock of Christ, or to be broken by Him when He falls upon this earth in judgment. We must be broken men and women one way or another, either now or then. It's so logical to choose to be broken now. But in spiritual matters, we're not logical in how we reason.

There is evidence within the text of the NT, in addition to church tradition, which would suggest that memorizing Scripture was a common feature of the early believers. A passage in Psalm 118 is referred to here in Lk. 20:18; and also in Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart.

20:36 Angels cannot die: "Death...does not lay hold of angels" (Heb. 2:16 Diaglott margin). If angels could sin, then those who are found worthy of reward at Christ's return will also still be able to sin. And seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), they will therefore not have eternal life; if we have a possibility of sinning, we have the capability of dying. Thus to say angels can sin makes God's promise of eternal life meaningless, seeing that our reward is to share the nature of the angels. The reference to "*the* angels" shows that there is no categorization of angels as good or sinful; there is only one category of angels. Dan. 12:3 says that the faithful will shine as

the stars; and stars are associated with the Angels (Job 38:7). We will be made like Angels; and yet we will be given immortal, sinless nature. Therefore, Angels can't sin. Our hope is to enter into the wonderful freedom of nature which the "Sons of God", i.e. the Angels, now share (Rom. 8:19).

20:37,38 God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious. Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously that this is how God too sees the dead believers. But "all live to him", the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of "the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters ("spirits") who reached a level of spiritual completion ("perfection").

21:8 *Not be led astray*- This Greek phrase is extensively quoted later in the New Testament concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the church* (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; 2 Tim. 3:13).

21:13 God uses bad situations in order to give us an opportunity to witness to others. When we ask "Why *this?*" - perhaps one of the reasons is so that we might preach through it.

21:17 This hating by all men may imply a world-wide persecution.

21:24 The "times of the Gentiles" appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. So today is a great day of opportunity, to respond to and preach the Gospel. The chance won't always be there.

21:34 Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted? This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. If "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

21:36 In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7).

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days.

22:10 Carrying water was women's work. Jesus seemed to take special pleasure in challenging the 1st century gender roles.

22:16 When we break bread, we remember that we shall by grace do this again with Jesus when He returns.

22:19 *This is-* The bread isn't the actual body of Jesus; it "is" His body in the sense that the bread represents His body.

22:20 The new covenant is God's solemn set of promises to save us and give us eternal life in His Kingdom on earth as He promised Abraham. That set of promises were confirmed in the death of Jesus; whenever we take the cup we remind ourselves of our participation in this great hope.

22:23 There was some self-examination at the first memorial meeting. There should be every time we conduct the service (1 Cor. 11:28).

22:28 Yet Jesus knew the disciples would run away and Peter would deny Him. But He counted them as righteous; and He sees us so positively today, for all our failings. Quite simply, because He loves us.

22:36 *Buy a sword-* But the Lord's comment in v. 38 suggests He was being sarcastic or ironic in commenting upon their collapse of faith and dependence upon human strength. He wasn't literally suggesting they buy swords- in any case, He surely knew that they already had two swords with them (v. 38). And when the disciples used those swords, Jesus sharply rebuked them (:50,51 "No more of this!"). True Christians follow their Master in non-violent resistance of evil and do not believe in the use of force even in a just cause.

22:40 Prayer is our strength against temptation.

22:42 The wills of the Father and Son were different; therefore Jesus was not God Himself in a Trinitarian sense.

22:44 This condition indicates Jesus was at the limits of nervous endurance. He prayed to God at this time "with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). But even now, Jesus intercedes for us in Heaven, praying to God with intense groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). If He is so intensely praying for and with us, and offers our prayers to God with this intensity; then our prayers should also be intense and focused. Be careful not to rattle off the same old phrases in your prayers; put meaning into words; don't let your mind wander in prayer; pray out loud if necessary; and beware of only praying at night, warm in bed and drifting into sleep.

22:54 *High Priest's house-* About seven weeks later, Peter was standing maybe 100 meters from this spot and powerfully persuading people to believe in Christ. He converted more people in

one day than anybody else ever is recorded as doing. God used the repentant, public sinner- and very quickly after his repentance. God loves to use humbled people.

22:57 *Denied-* Years later, Peter wrote that the worst possible category of sin was to “even deny” the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter preached to others and pastored his converts on the very basis that he had denied the Lord- and repented of it. He often alludes to his failings in his preaching addresses. This kind of thing is the very qualification which is required, rather than an apparently sinless life which is in fact only hypocrisy.

23:4 Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as “ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition”, famed for “frequent executions without trial”. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us.

23:12 The forces of evil often unite against the righteous.

23:26 Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as “coming out of the field” (Gk.) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn’t a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else, just as we were... until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

23:34 In His final sufferings, Jesus often mentions the Fatherhood of God (Lk. 22:42; 23:34,46; Mt. 26:39,42,44). That God is “our Father” is a comfort in our times of trial.

The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. It would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. It should inspire a similar effort in us to communicate with others when we feel like retreating into ourselves; to comfort them with our forgiveness; to pray for our enemies.

*Divided up his clothes-* Such petty materialism in the presence of the cross of Jesus was and is pathetic.

23:42 The command to be baptised into Christ's death and resurrection was given *after* Christ's resurrection (Mk. 16:15,16). The thief couldn't have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection before those things had occurred. The thief asked Jesus to remember him for good, when Jesus returned "in" his Kingdom (RSV). The thief was therefore not ignorant of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God which Jesus had been preaching (Mt. 4:23). He knew that there would be a judgment day at the establishment of that Kingdom, and therefore he asked Jesus, whom he knew would rise from the dead to eventually be the judge on that day, to remember him for good. The thief was certainly not ignorant; he recognised that salvation in the day of resurrection and judgment would be pronounced from the lips of Christ. Jesus replied that the thief *would* be with him in "Paradise". This Greek word always refers to an ideal situation upon *earth*. It is used concerning the restored Garden of Eden which will be seen in the future Kingdom of God on the earth (Rev. 2:7). Christ and the thief did not go to the Kingdom that day. Jesus went to the grave (Acts 2:32; Mt. 12:40). . The thief was asking for Jesus to remember him for good at the day of judgment; he was aware that he was responsible, and would appear there. But Jesus gave him the marvellous reassurance - 'I can tell you right *now!* You don't have to wait until then to find out my verdict upon you - you *will* be with me in the Kingdom!'. .

24:11,12 The Gospels emphasize the disciples' disbelief and slowness to understand the clear predictions of Jesus about His death and resurrection. Yet the Gospel records are transcripts of the apostles' preaching, and they climax in an appeal to believe the Gospel. This urgent appeal was made by the lips of men who had just confessed how slow they had themselves been to respond. But that integrity and humility was what gave their appeal such power and persuasion.

24:31 God does open and close our understanding. Let's be patient with those whose eyes are still closed. There was a time when we too 'didn't get it'.

24:35 *By the breaking of the bread-* Perhaps this means that the body language of Jesus as He broke bread *after* His resurrection was identical with that which He had in His human life before that. Resurrection and receiving Divine nature won't change us unrecognizably; we will recognize each other. We personally shall be saved through resurrection; what died shall revive and be immortalized.

24:39 Ghosts and immortal souls don't exist in reality. But Jesus reasoned with them on the basis of their wrong understanding, to lead them to the crucial conviction that He personally was alive.

JOHN

"The Word" cannot refer directly to a person, because a person cannot be "with God" and yet *be* God at the same time. The Greek word 'logos' which is translated "word" here, does not in itself mean 'Jesus'. It is usually translated as "word", but also as:-

- Account
- Cause
- Communication
- Doctrine
- Intent
- Preaching
- Reason
- Saying
- Tidings

'Logos' can strictly refer to the inner thought which is expressed outwardly in words. In the beginning God had this 'logos'. This singular purpose was centred in Christ. Christ in person was not "the word"; it was God's plan of salvation through Christ which was "the word". 'Logos' ("the Word") is very often used concerning the Gospel about Christ - e.g. "the *word* of Christ" (Col. 3:16; cp. Matt. 13:19; John 5:24; Acts 19:10; 1 Thess. 1:8). Notice that the 'logos' is *about* Christ, rather than him personally. When Christ was born, this "word" was turned into a flesh and blood form - "the word was made flesh" (John 1:14). Jesus personally was 'the word made flesh' rather than "the word"; he personally became "the word" through his birth of Mary, rather than at any time previously.

The plan, or message, about Christ was with God in the beginning, but was openly revealed in the person of Christ, and the preaching of the Gospel about him in the first century. Thus God spoke His word to us through Christ (Heb. 1:1,2); he thereby fulfilled the prophecy concerning himself, "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35). It was in this sense that "the word was with God...in the beginning", to be "made flesh" at Christ's birth.

### **"The Word Was God"**

Our plans and thoughts are fundamentally us. "As (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7), and as God thinks, so is He. Thus God's word or thinking *is* God: "the word was God". Because of this parallelisms like Ps.29:8 are common: "The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness". Because of this, God's Word is spoken of as if it is God Himself. Thus we are told concerning the Word, "All things were made by Him" (John 1:3). However "*God* created" all things by His word of command (Gen. 1:1). It is evident from Gen. 1 that God was the Creator, through His word, rather than Christ personally. It was the *word* which is described as making all things, rather than Christ personally (John 1:1-3). "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them (i.e. the stars) by the breath of his mouth... he spake, and it was done" (Ps. 33:6,9).

God's word being His creative power, He used it in the begetting of Jesus in Mary's womb. The Word, God's plan put into operation by His Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), brought about Christ's conception. Mary recognized this in her response to the news about her

forthcoming conception of Christ: "Be it unto me according to Your *word*" (Luke 1:38). When Christ was born, all of God's Word/Spirit was expressed in the person of Jesus Christ.

**Footnote:** "In the beginning was the Word" probably comments on the Jewish concept that the Torah (the five books of Moses) existed before creation. Jn. 1:1-3 is saying that the important thing to appreciate is that those words of God prophesied about Jesus; God's plan about him existed before creation (cp. Lk. 1:70).

2:25 *Understood*- Jesus knew how fickle people are, how quickly they change. His understanding of humanity is because He Himself was human.

3:5 Here we see the importance of water baptism. But of itself, it's not enough- we must be spiritually reborn by the action of God's word within us (1 Pet. 1:23) if we are to enter the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. *Baptism is therefore very important. Contact the publishers if you would like to be baptized.*

3:13 'Ascent' and 'descent' here aren't being used literally. John's Gospel uses very symbolic terms. Jesus was conceived within Mary, He was "begotten"- He 'began'- as a foetus within His mother. Either He literally floated down through the clouds from Heaven to earth- or we must understand 'descending' from Heaven as meaning that He was born on earth but sent by God.

3:14 The serpent was a symbol of sin. Yet it also represents Jesus. On the cross, Jesus was identified very strongly with sinful people, even though He never sinned. He is 'one' with us who are sinners, the sinner's friend who doesn't just turn away from sin but touches and identifies with it in order to cleanse it.

3:14 *In Him*- Gk. 'into Him'. We believe 'into' Jesus by believing and being baptized into Jesus.

3:21 If we feel sinners, we needn't be depressed. This is a result of being in the light.

3:23 Baptism is immersion in water, not sprinkling- hence it required "much water".

4:6 Jesus' needing to drink and becoming tired, needing to rest, all indicate His humanity. He wasn't God Himself.

4:14 If we truly believe, we will become a well of water of life to other people. We can become the source of eternal life to people- in that we are the source of their contact with Christ. This means we should witness to people urgently and directly, knowing that we can give people the eternal life which otherwise they wouldn't have.

4:22 People can go through the psychology and feeling of worship- but it's not real worship.

4:24 God is Spirit in the sense that He is identified with His Spirit. God Himself is a personal being, not an abstract puff of 'spirit' blowing around. God "is" a consuming fire; He is revealed through the fire of His judgment, but this doesn't mean that God equals fire and fire equals God. And the same with Him as Spirit.

4:27 Jewish religious leaders didn't speak to women, nor Samaritans; nor did they teach the Bible to women; nor would they be alone in a woman's company. Jesus was clearly not worried about gossip or His "image"- He intended to reach out to the marginal and despised.

4:29 It's quite natural to tell others of our experience of Christ. The Gospels are full of people doing this.

4:32 Having a stimulating, unexpected conversation about the Lord with someone takes away our awareness of our tiredness and material problems. Preaching is for our benefit and blessing too.

4:39 *All things*- All her sins. On the basis of accepting her sinfulness she could witness to the people in a non-threatening way. Some people believe in Christ because of the word of a preacher; others believe in Him directly (v. 42). In some cases, therefore, we have the ability to bring a person to Christ; if we don't do our part, they will not be saved. In this sense Paul can write to people and claim that they owed him their salvation.

4:53 *Believed*- But he is described as having "believed" the word of Jesus already, in v. 50. There are different levels of faith and conversion.

5:2 *There is*- Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70. The present tense indicates that John's Gospel was written before AD70- not generations after the events, as wrongly claimed by Bible critics.

5:8 Jesus didn't criticize the man for believing in a myth about an Angel touching water. Instead, Jesus focused the man upon the simple reality- that God alone through His Son can heal. We need to be patient with those who have wrong understandings and believe groundless myths; and gently re-focus them upon the simple truths of the Gospel.

5:13 Some of those Jesus cured didn't have any faith in Jesus- this man didn't even know Jesus' Name. This shows what it means to really be able to do miracles by the Holy Spirit- even ignorant unbelievers could be healed. This contrasts with the false claims of many 'faith healers' in Christian churches today, who claim they have Holy Spirit gifts, but can only claim to heal those who have faith.

5:18,19 Jesus answers their misunderstanding that He was claiming equality with God by making some statements that for all time end any question about whether Jesus is equal with God. He states clearly that He can do nothing of Himself, His power is only from God and not of Himself; and His will is not that of His Father (v. 30).

5:24 We have eternal life in the sense that we can live now the kind of life which we will eternally live in God's Kingdom. We will die, be unconscious, but be raised to stand before Jesus at His return, and by His grace live eternally in God's Kingdom on earth.

5:27 Because the Lord Jesus had our human nature He is therefore qualified to be our judge at the last day.

5:29 We receive eternal life at the resurrection, when Jesus returns. We don't have immortality naturally within ourselves, in the form of some 'immortal soul'. This isn't a Biblical idea. The resurrection is very important in the process of salvation. Therefore it's also important to identify ourselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus through baptism, so that we too will literally be resurrected and share in His eternal life at His return.

5:37 God sent Jesus. He that sends is superior to and different from Him that is sent (Jn. 13:16). Jesus isn't God.

5:39,40 It's possible to read the Bible a lot but never truly come to Jesus. To study the Bible but not have the living word / voice of God abiding in us (v. 38). We should be Christ-centric more than Bible-centric.

5:43 Jesus as God's Son carried His Father's Name. The Name of God is essentially His attributes and character; and Jesus showed these to perfection. But we shouldn't misunderstand this to mean that Jesus is God Himself in person, just because He carries His Father's Name.

6:14 The sign or miracle which Jesus did left people with no option but to believe. The miracles claimed by the Pentecostal movement today are highly disputable and therefore don't have the same effect. Whatever phenomena their 'healings' reflect, it's not proof they possess the Holy Spirit gifts.

6:26 Some people show an interest in our message just because of a hope that they will get some material benefit. Jesus didn't refuse to assist these people; but He made it clear that He realized what was going on.

6:30 Jesus had just miraculously fed these people and they still wouldn't believe and sought for yet more signs from Him. The faith produced by the miracle in v. 14 was therefore not very long lived. It is by hearing and responding to the word of Jesus that we can have a deep and lasting faith, rather than from seeing 'miracles'.

6:33 Jesus compares Himself to the manna. The manna 'came down' from God in the sense that it was from God. It didn't literally float down from Heaven to earth through the atmosphere, it was created on earth. And so with Jesus. He didn't exist as a person before He was born.

6:42 Although Jesus was perfect, He never omitted any act of righteousness nor committed any sin, the people amongst whom He lived for 30 years didn't think He was anything special. This

shows the humility of Jesus, and how He successfully hid His righteousness rather than did anything to display it to others. In this we have another window onto His perfection.

6:51 After their 'baptism' in the Red Sea, God's people walked through the wilderness fed only by manna (1 Cor. 10:1,2). After our baptisms, we too walk through the wilderness, eating the manna daily- taking strength from Jesus, His word and His sacrifice for us.

6:53 This may be a reference to the huge importance of breaking bread in memory of Jesus- the bread represents His flesh, the wine represents His blood.

6:60 To drink blood was abhorrent to Jewish people. Jesus chose this controversial way of speaking in order to make people chose between Him, and their surrounding religious culture. We can't follow His words, and also the surrounding culture and networks of thinking.

6:62 "Before" refers to where He was "before" He began to 'come down' to them in revealing Himself as God's Son (:41,42). He's saying: 'So would you prefer me to just go back to how I was when I lived amongst you in Nazareth, the incognito Son of God, no teaching, no miracles?'

6:63 The words of God and Jesus are "Spirit" in the sense that they are inspired, or in-spirit-ed, with and by the Spirit of God. All Scripture is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). We are born again of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5), and yet also by the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). God's Spirit works in us in many ways, one of them is through His word.

6:64 Jesus knew about Judas but still was hurt when the betrayal happened, and even "trusted" him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 13:18). The Lord Jesus had human nature; and it is part of our nature to know something on one level, and yet for love's sake we choose not to know it.

6:69 *We have believed*- Jesus responded by saying that one of them would betray Him (v. 70). He knew that these believers in Him had too positive a view of themselves as a community. The church today must bear this in mind.

7:3 Jesus was rejected by His family; He knows how we feel when this happens to us for His sake.

7:7 The testimony of Jesus against this world wasn't very overt; it wasn't in the words He spoke, at least not those recorded in the Gospels. His testimony was perhaps in His perfect life, in His caring for and saving those whom this world ignored, despised and destroyed. Our testimony also is more in our actions and personalities than in specific words of testimony.

7:20 Literally: "You have a demon!"- This was the language of the day for saying 'You are mad!', and should not be taken literally.

7:23 Sometimes we have to break one command or principle in order to keep another. God has arranged things in this way so that we think carefully about the meaning of our actions and the reason for our obedience to Him.

7:34 There's a hard logic here- we either seek Him now when we can find Him, or we will seek Him like the foolish girls of Mt. 25:11 will do- when it's all too late.

7:35,36 It must've been so frustrating for Jesus to be so constantly misunderstood; His words and ideas were continually understood within different frames of reference and worldviews. When we experience the same, we know that He can empathize with us.

7:38 *Living water*- The Jewish hearers would've associated this with the Old Testament teaching that "living water" was to be used to cleanse lepers; and that "living water" would flow out of the temple to heal the world (Lev. 14:6; Ez. 47:1-9). We are to be the source of cleansing for others- which means we are intended to communicate our faith to them. And we, rather than any physical religious building, are to be the source of new life and cleansing for the world.

7:48 The fact the great and learned of this world haven't believed in Christ is no reason not to. Fact is, the minority are in the right. "How can so many be wrong?" really begs the answer: "Quite easily, according to the Bible and also human experience".

7:50 Nicodemus sets us a good example of speaking up for Jesus in the midst of secular society which has no time for Him, even if it means being mocked and despised.

8:3 If they caught her in the act, then where was the man?

8:6 What did He write? Their sins? Or did He just doodle in the dust from sheer male embarrassment at being in the presence of a naked woman who clearly respected and loved Him?

8:12 *Light*- The Greek word can mean a torch, a burning flame held on a pole. There's a similarity of ideas with crucifixion; Jesus was lifted up on the pole, and thus becomes the light of our world, we understand everything in the context of His death there and all it means for us and demands of us.

8:19 The Pharisees studied the Bible all the time and could recite much of the Old Testament. But Jesus said they didn't know God. Knowing God is an experience, not head knowledge.

8:23 *From above... not of this world*- Doesn't mean that Jesus existed in Heaven before His birth. He was not 'of the world' in the sense that we are not 'of the world' (Jn. 17:16). But He like us was born in this world; we are in the world but not "of" it (Jn. 17:15).

8:37 In one sense they were physically Abraham's children; in another sense they weren't (v. 39). All those who believe in Christ and have been baptized into Him are the true children of Abraham and thereby God's people (Gal. 3:27-29).

8:44 "The devil" is a murderer. But "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die - but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36) they are

therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them. “The devil” is therefore not an Angel. 1 Jn. 3:10 identifies the children of the Devil as those who obey their evil desires - the real Devil. Cain was the first murderer (Gen. 4:8,9). Cain was not a super-human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man, having the characteristics of the serpent and manifesting the flesh. “Deceit” - i.e. lies - proceed “from within, out of the heart of men” (Mk. 7:21,22).

8:56 The only time we read of Abraham rejoicing was when he laughed for joy at the promise that he would have a descendant (Gen. 17:17). He understood that the son he was having would be in the line from which God’s Son, Messiah, would be born.

8:58 As God’s Son, Jesus carried His Father’s Name. “I am” may be a reference to this- although the same Greek phrase is used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9. To the Jews, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. Jesus is saying “I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham”. As they stood there, Jesus was the one to be honoured rather than Abraham. He is saying ‘I am now, more important than Abraham ever was’. Jesus does not say ‘Before Abraham was, I was’.

9:3 Disease and suffering don’t come necessarily as a punishment for sin. In our case, they come so that God’s purpose may be manifested through them.’

9:6 The word of Christ [His spittle] mixed with clay [human flesh] brings sight.

9:7 This may have looked forward to baptism, the washing we must do once we ‘see’.

9:11 *The man*- There was nothing in Jesus to give anyone the idea that He was God. This is a perversion of later human theology rather than the testimony of the Gospel records.

9:16 *This man is not from God, because he keeps not the Sabbath*- Sabbath keepers say the same today; but Jesus’ answer remains the same for them too.

9:21 Their fear of religious disfellowship is contrasted with the fearless attitude of their son. Excommunication is a practice much abused by many religious groups.

9:31 The man reasoned that Jesus must have prayed to God in order for God to do this miracle; and been pleasing to God, for God heard Him to an amazing extent. He came to a very accurate understanding of the nature of Jesus and His relationship with His Father.

9:34 They threw Him out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus and for having been cured by Him. Typical religious abuse.

9:38 The man believed *after* His healing; the real possession of the Holy Spirit gifts enabled miracles to be done upon unbelievers and people like this man who were ignorant of Jesus (v. 25).

9:41 Knowledge / 'seeing' brings responsibility to Divine judgment.

10:5 There is something instinctively attractive to us about the words of Jesus. When we read the uninspired 'gospels', it's clear almost instinctively to Christians that they aren't the true words of Jesus.

10:9 The 'entering in' to the sheepfold [the church] is through baptism into Christ. There is no other way "in".

10:12 This is an unusual shepherd- fighting with a wolf to the death for the sheep. Wolves don't fight that desperately. But this one does. Sin appears a menace but something which can easily be overcome by a man- when in fact it can't be overcome so easily, it is a bitter fight to the death.

10:15 *Knows me, and I know the Father*- The Greek verbs here are in the continuous tense. God grows in knowledge of Jesus, and Jesus grows in knowledge of God. It's a dynamic relationship between them; eternity won't be 'the same old scene' for us, we too will grow in knowing God- and even vice versa.

10:16 *Other sheep*- The Gentiles?

10:30 The unity between Father and Son spoken of here is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17:21). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same.

10:33-36 Jesus denied being God. He quotes an example of how men can be called "gods", *elohim*; and He shows people are illogical to claim He thought He was God, when He had only said He was the *Son* of God.

10:41 John did no miracles and preached a hard hitting message of repentance and preparation for the coming of Jesus. People flocked to hear him, accepting what he said, repented and were baptized. His own sincerity must therefore have been so obvious; it was this which gave him authority in the eyes and ears of his audiences. The same can be true in our preaching.

11:6 Lack of immediate answer to our requests doesn't mean God or Jesus haven't heard them. They have 'answered', but for various reasons, to glorify His Name the more, they may delay in 'coming' in response.

11:24 Nothing is said here about an immortal soul which goes to reward in Heaven after death. Instead the emphasis is upon the literal bodily resurrection of believers from the dead, when Christ returns. By baptism we identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and can share in this great hope (Rom. 6:3-5).

11:38 *Groaning* - In prayer to God. Likewise the 'weeping' of v. 35 was in prayer- Rom. 8:26 says that Jesus prays for us now with groaning. We should therefore take our prayer life seriously, knowing that there is such intense mediation going on for us in Heaven itself, before the throne of God.

11:41 Jesus thanked God for the answer to His prayers even before the answer had happened, i.e., before Lazarus had come forth. Jesus was no hypocrite- He was practicing what He had taught in Mk. 11:24: "When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for".

11:44 The miracle was not only of resurrection; but that a man with tied feet and hands could get out of graveclothes and walk across a cave to its entrance and out into the open air. The wonders which God does in our lives contain so many 'smaller' wonders, the more we analyze them.

11:52 The cross should elicit unity between God's children. This should be especially seen at the breaking of bread meeting, when we gather together to remember Christ's death. This is not the place for division and exclusion of God's children, but for celebrating our unity.

12:6 Someone with the perception of Jesus surely knew what was going on. But He didn't challenge Judas about it, in the hope he would repent. When we see the failures of others, it may not be wise to immediately challenge them.

12:7 Despite so clearly predicting His death, it seems only Mary really understood. In his preaching of the Gospel, John was saying that the male disciples- the public preachers of the Gospel- hadn't understood the most basic part of it, i.e. the death of Christ, but one *woman* did. Thus John is holding up a *woman* as the role model for all his hearers and readers.

12:24 Jesus perceived the great potential, the fruit, in the awful experience He was about to go through. We can face our sufferings likewise.

12:25 We must die first in order to live eternally. This is the symbolism of baptism- going under the water is like death with Jesus, coming up out of the water is like resurrection with Him (Rom. 6:3-5). But we must live out this principle in daily life, sacrificing what we could have in this life so that we might live eternally.

12:27 This is a wonderful insight into the internal thought process of Jesus as He struggled with temptation. Because He endured temptation, He is able to support us when we are tempted (Heb. 4:15,16).

12:32 We need to reconstruct in our own minds the picture of Christ hanging crucified upon the cross. If we are God's people, we will be drawn closer to Him by it. "All men" here doesn't refer to every human being, but to those who draw near to Jesus on the cross. This group of people are 'all things' to God.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

12:34 *Son of man*- This was Jesus' favourite self-description. He thus emphasized His humanity, that He was one of us, of our nature.

12:40 God blinds the eyes of those who don't want to see. We must be careful not to slip into the downward spiral, but remain instead in an upward spiral of belief and response to that belief.

12:42 Many people today 'believe' but will not openly admit it, because they are worried what people will think of them. God arranged circumstances so that rulers like Nicodemus and Joseph 'came out' openly; but others didn't respond to that and because they hid their candle under a bucket, they lost their faith, their light went out.

12:43 If we believe and confess that faith, through baptism and an open life of commitment, then God glorifies us- in His own book, in His own way, even if the world doesn't see it.

12:48 It's as if Bible verses, the words of Jesus, will be quoted back to us at judgment day and we will be asked how we responded to them. There will be a process of judgment, not just a yes / no statement from our Judge.

13:1 To give your life for God's people is 'love to the end'. Jesus defined that for us in His crucifixion.

13:3,4 We sense in these verses the very definite sense of purpose which there was in Jesus. We who carry His cross should have the same. The stream of small decisions we face each day we will make in the context of the purpose-driven life which we have in Christ.

13:5 To wash the guests' feet was the job of the lowest servant. Jesus showed us that true greatness is in humble service, being a "servant of all". Even Peter struggled to understand the huge extent of this principle (v. 7) and we also find it hard to grasp.

13:8 *No part*- This could be a reference to the vital importance of baptism in order to be "in Christ"; "he who believes *and* is baptized shall be saved" (Jn. 3:3-5); unless a person is born of water and spirit, they cannot enter God's Kingdom (Jn. 3:3-5).

13:16 Jesus repeatedly describes Himself as "sent" by God; He therefore recognized that God was greater than Him, as He stated specifically in Jn. 14:28. He wasn't therefore 'God' in a Trinitarian sense.

13:19 The purpose of prophecy / Biblical prediction is not to give us a road map of events in the future, but rather so that when events happen, we will be able to understand them in their Divine context.

13:20 We are the representatives of Jesus in this world, and our behaviour should be appropriate.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

13:23 This other disciple was probably John. In preaching the Gospel, John deemphasized himself. He describes himself as simply a disciple whom Jesus loved. We should have such self-effacement when preaching Christ, focusing upon Him rather than ourselves.

13:26 This was the sign of being the specially favoured guest. Realizing the greatness of Christ's love for us leads us to either repent, or as Judas, go out into the darkness.

13:34 What's "new" about this commandment is to love *as Jesus has loved us*. And He died for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

13:35 Our unusual love for others should be a startling witness which grabs the attention of those around us.

14:2 God's house refers to His temple, His family- not to Heaven as a location. There is a specific place for each of us within His family and purpose. "I go" is in answer to Peter's question of 13:36: 'Where are you going?'. Jesus was going to the cross, and would 'come again' in His resurrection. These verses do not teach that we will go to Heaven.

14:6 Non-Christian religions therefore cannot lead us to God in truth.

14:9 'Seeing' in John's Gospel often means to understand. Nobody can literally see God, but Jesus has revealed Him to us (Jn. 1:18); we can 'see' Him insofar as we 'see' or understand Jesus.

14:10 The words and works of Jesus are paralleled here. Our words too must be backed up by our actions and congruent with them.

14:13 This is not a blanket promise to do whatever anybody asks; whatever we ask that glorifies God, He will do.

14:19 The resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection- if we are baptized into Him and His new life is lived in us (Rom. 6:3-5).

14:21 *Has... and keeps*- Correct knowledge of Christ's word is important. We cannot keep His word without knowing what it is.

14:22,23 The reason why not everyone 'gets it' about God and Jesus is because they don't keep their word.

14:26 The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, therefore had special relevance to the disciples who heard Jesus; it brought all things He had said to them back to their memory, so that they could write the inspired Gospel records.

14:27 *Peace*- In Hebrew, *shalom*. Jewish people called out "Shalom!" to each other, but the "Shalom" of Jesus isn't mere words but a real peace which can be felt, known, experienced.

14:28 *The Father is greater than I*- This clearly refutes the idea that Jesus is the same as God. God was greater than Jesus.

15:1,2 Jesus doesn't say "I am the trunk and you are branches". He is us and we are Him. This is how intimately connected He is with us, and why no branch can claim to not be in association with the other branches.

15:4,5 True spiritual fruit cannot be produced by those outside of Christ.

15:6 If we go out of association with the vine, we will wither. Christianity can't be lived in isolation from other believers.

15:7 John also writes that if we ask anything according to *God's* will, then we will be heard (1 Jn. 5:14). But if *God's* word abides in us, then we will ask according to *our* will and be heard- because our will becomes *God's* will if His word abides in us. We will not ask what *we* want but what *God* wills- His will shall become *our* will.

15:15 Islam and many other religious systems speak much of 'submission'. But we are the friends of Jesus, not His slaves. Our work for Him is from a motive of love, and is performed in active co-operation with Him as we work together to the same end- the glorification of God.

15:16 The initiative was with God and Jesus- because we are saved by pure grace. We should take the initiative in showing love and grace to others, as God did to us.

15:18-20 We should therefore expect opposition from the world, as predicted in the opening promise of the Bible in Gen. 3:15.

15:22 Knowledge of *God's* word brings responsibility.

16:2 Jesus didn't tell His disciples to leave the synagogues, even though they were full of false teaching and behaviour. He predicted that His followers would be excommunicated from the synagogues because they taught the Truth about Him. The early church grew initially from witness made to Christ in the synagogues. We shouldn't be worried about 'guilt by association' with those who believe and act wrongly; we should try to teach them and witness to them about the real Christ, and in time they will exclude us if they are not of the Truth.

16:5 *None of you asks*- Did Jesus say this in tones of sadness and disappointment, or of irritated criticism? Consider how He spoke v. 31 also.

16:12 Have a look at 1 Cor. 3:2 and Heb. 5:11. These verses in the later New Testament allude here. The New Testament writers such as Paul were so full of the words of Jesus that they consciously and unconsciously alluded to them all the time. The word of Jesus should so abide in us that we do likewise.

16:17 This is a paradox- the believers would see Jesus when they could no longer see Him. The work of the Comforter is such that we can as it were see Jesus as realistically as the disciples did during His life on earth. But this is *if* we let the Comforter operate fully.

16:33 *I have overcome*- But He had not yet died and thereby overcome the world. He so believed that He would overcome that He spoke as if He already had.

17:3 "Know" is in the Greek continuous tense. We will spend eternity growing to know God. This is what eternal life will be about. If we don't want to know God now, then there will be no point giving us eternity in God's Kingdom to do this.

17:5 We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of 'pre-existence' was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be 'with God' didn't mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn't mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God with her "favour". The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed". The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the "Throne of Glory" pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn't have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being "foreknown"- the Greek word used is the root of the English word 'prognosis'. If God 'foreknew' His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being 'foreknown'. Otherwise the language of 'foreknowing' becomes meaningless.

17:14-18 We are to be "in" the world, but not "of" the spirit of this world.

17:23 The unity of believers was a major theme in the Lord's mind as He faced His death. It should be of paramount importance to us too.

17:26 God's Name refers to His characteristics. As the Angel declared these to Moses as he hid in a cave, humbled by God's glory passing by (Ex. 34:4-6), so Jesus declared that Name to perfection in His death. He did this in the life He lived ("I made known to them your name"), but in a very special way at the crucifixion ("and will make it known"). The result of us perceiving this in the cross is that we shall love one another, with the love of Christ.

18:4 *Knowing all... went forward*- His bravery and sense of mission appears the greater when we realize that He 'knew all' that would come. We are to carry His cross, and have His spirit.

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18:6 The "I am" was probably a reference to His Father's Name which Jesus carried. The fact He came in His Father's Name (Jn. 5:43) is quite normal and to be expected, but it in no way suggests He was one and the same as His Father.

18:10,11 This incident was a contradiction of Jesus' stated principle that His servants did *not* fight, because His Kingdom is not yet (18:36). We can embarrass and shame Jesus even now by the contradiction between our lives and His life in the eyes of the world, to whom we are His representatives.

18:15 *Another disciple*- John, the author of the Gospel, doesn't push himself nor his own name in the preaching of the Gospel. Neither should we.

18:22 Jesus did not literally turn the other cheek and invite more abuse; instead He challenged His abusers.

18:28 The legalistic mind is very careful not to break the letter of the Law whilst committing the awful sin of crucifying God's Son.

18:36 The Kingdom of Christ will come when He returns, at His second coming. One implication of that is that true Christians will not seek to enforce His principles and Kingdom upon this world in this time by using violence. There is no such thing as a 'just war'.

18:40 Barabbas is a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb... for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery.

19:11 Let's remember that all our abusers are ultimately in the hand of God. The power of evil men is ultimately from God, seeing that 'Satan' doesn't exist.

19:15 *No king*- The Old Testament clearly taught that God was Israel's King and they were therefore His Kingdom. Therefore by saying this, the Jews were declaring themselves no longer God's Kingdom.

19:20 *Written in Hebrew, in Latin, in Greek*- This explains the slight differences between the Gospel records in the descriptions of the title on the cross.

19:26 Jesus would've motioned with His eyes towards John- Mary was to see John now as her son. But tragically and so painfully, when Mary first heard the words, she would likely have understood them to mean 'Look at me here'. If we find our lives tragic, then think of Jesus

crucified, with men gambling over His one valuable possession, i.e. His coat, which probably His mother had made- and she was watching it all.

19:29 Hyssop isn't very long, therefore Jesus was not lifted up very high above the earth, contrary to the impression given by Catholic crosses and architecture.

19:36 We are the body of Christ, His bones (Eph. 5:30).

19:38 Only close relatives could ask for the corpse of the crucified. Beholding the cross motivated Joseph to 'come out' openly for Jesus, feeling as part of His family.

19:39 This is a huge amount, more than the Caesars were buried with. The cross motivated Nicodemus to spend his wealth to honour Christ.

20:7 After Jesus rose, it seems the first thing He did was to fold up His graveclothes. We sense a great calm about Him- the peace which comes to all those who have identified with His death and resurrection through baptism and living in Him.

20:13 Sometimes we can be so distracted by our immediate situation, sorrow or bitterness, that we fail to see the glorious answer and resolution of God is there right before our eyes.

20:17 *Touch me not*- The Greek means 'Don't keep grabbing hold of me'; she thought He was about to go to Heaven any moment and was trying to keep hold of Him so He didn't; but He comforted her that she needn't worry, He was not right then at that moment planning on ascending to Heaven.

20:17 *My Father...Your Father... My God... Your God*- Jesus didn't want His exalted status post His resurrection to become a barrier between Him and His followers. He calls God "my God" even *after* His resurrection. This destroys the Trinitarian argument that Jesus was only less than God during His mortal life. No. Even *after* His resurrection He emphasizes that God is still "my God" and that He has an analogous relationship with God as God and Father as we can have also with the same God. He is our pattern to follow, rather than something to be gazed at like an icon.

20:20 *Were glad*- The Biblical record doesn't use superlative language to record events such as the resurrection and crucifixion of the Lord. This is the mark of Divine inspiration.

20:27 The *finger* fitted the nail marks in His hands; the *hand* fitted the gash in His side made by the spear.

21:5 *Children*- The Greek word is a kind of slang, dynamically equivalent of "Fellas!" or "Guys!". Jesus was at such pains to show the disciples that although He has been exalted, He is very much with them, quite aware of colloquial language, and comfortable using it. This isn't only yet another nail in the coffin of Trinitarianism; it comforts us, that our Lord is so with us and understanding of us.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

21:11 The net wasn't broken- showing that in being "fishers of men", somehow our resources will not fail. 153 is the numerical value of the phrase "Sons of God".

21:15 *These*- The pile of huge fish lying there? Do we love our occupations, our working life, more than the Lord?

21:17 The three questions, asked again by a fire, were to undo Peter's three denials. Our love for Jesus personally is revealed in our care for His sheep.

21:22 We are so easily distracted from following the Lord by our focus upon the discipleship of others. If they follow Him, if they shall be saved, how they follow Him... so easily distracts from the call to us to personally follow Him and not take our focus off Him.

### ACTS

1:1 *Former account*- The Gospel of Luke. This was the record of what Jesus "began" to do. Jesus didn't stop His activity when He ascended to Heaven- the book of Acts is the account of how He *continues* to work with His people on earth, and that work continues to this day.

1:7 Even after His resurrection, Jesus didn't know the exact time of His return; only God knows (Mk. 13:32). This shows that Jesus wasn't only 'less than God' during His mortal life; even after His resurrection, God the Father is still greater than and different to Jesus. Trinitarian theology is totally mistaken.

1:10 *Two men*- Angels.

1:11 *In like manner*- Jesus will literally return to earth, perhaps to the Mount of Olives from which He ascended (v. 12).

1:20 *Let another take*- Peter sets us an example of how to proceed in decision making. He looked at the Old Testament prophecies and principles, and then concretely did something. It was written in the Psalms that another would take the place of the betrayer- and so Peter got on and did something about that. Bible prophecy requires that we do our part in fulfilling it.

2:4 *Languages*- Some translations say "tongues". Acts 2 shows that 'speaking in tongues' means 'speaking in another language'- a human language which was understood by the people hearing it. It doesn't refer to speaking 'mumbo jumbo', unintelligible utterances. Therefore the listeners were amazed that they heard "each in his own native language" (v. 8), "in our language" (v. 11).

2:17 *The last days*- This phrase refers to both the 'last days' of the Jewish state in the run up to the AD70 destruction of the temple, and it can also refer to the 'last days' around the return of Christ to earth. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit will be used to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth- they are "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5); they aren't possessed today. They will be given to us when Jesus returns.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

2:22 *A man*- Even after His ascension to Heaven, Peter and Paul still refer to Jesus as a “man” (1 Tim. 2:5).

2:23 *Men outside the Law*- The Romans, who were not under the Law of Moses. We cannot get others to do our ‘dirty work’ for us and still be innocent. We are judged according to our intentions more than our literal actions.

2:27 *Hades*- Translated “hell” in some Bibles. ‘Hell’ or *hades* is simply the grave. Jesus went to the grave for three days and was resurrected by God from it. Therefore *hades* / hell / the grave isn’t a place of eternal punishment for wicked people.

2:34 David didn’t go to Heaven when he died; instead his hope was in the coming of the Messiah, his great descendant, Jesus- who would raise David from the dead. The Biblical hope is the resurrection from the dead when Jesus returns, and eternal life in God’s promised Kingdom on earth. The idea of a soul going to Heaven on death isn’t Biblical.

2:36 God made Jesus Lord- showing His difference to and superiority over Jesus.

2:41 Baptism is the natural sign that we have accepted the word of the Gospel.

2:42 The Greek can be read as “Fellowship in the breaking of bread”. Believing what the apostles did, praying together and breaking bread together are all signs of our fellowship. Fellowship isn’t limited to just breaking bread together.

3:10 The Holy Spirit gifts were possessed in the first century church to back up the verbal preaching of the Gospel. The healings were in public places and uncontested; in contrast to the many claims to ‘healing’ made today. The miraculous gifts were withdrawn and will be poured out at Christ’s return.

3:16 *By faith*- The faith of Peter and John. The healed man didn’t seem to have any faith or understanding. Modern ‘healings’ demand faith from the person being healed; but the Holy Spirit gifts enabled people to be healed who had no faith or understanding. Those kinds of gifts aren’t possessed today.

3:19 This could mean that when the Jewish people repent, then God will send Jesus back to earth.

3:21 The Kingdom of God on earth will be a “restoration”. Israel in the past were God’s Kingdom- God was their King (Ex. 19:6); but that Kingdom was overturned by God until His Son comes again (Ez. 21:25-27). The restoration of Israel and the return of Christ are paralleled in Acts 1:6-11.

3:22 *From among your brothers*- The humanity of the Lord Jesus is emphasized. He was “from among” us.

3:26 The blessing promised to Abraham was the blessing of forgiveness of sins. By baptism into Christ, those blessings become ours. In this way, the Gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8,27-29).

4:12 Non-Christian religions therefore cannot be a way to salvation. We can be saved only “in” that name... “wherein” we shall be saved. This only becomes possible if we are baptized *into* Christ, *in* His Name.

4:13 *Unlearned*- Greek ‘a-grammatos’, ‘without grammar’; *Ignorant*- Greek ‘idiotes’. The early preachers and leaders of the church appeared as idiots, as men without even basic education. But God used their witness to confound the mighty of this world. Erudition and education aren’t qualifications for preaching the Gospel; we should never feel we’re not good enough, but just do what we can and let ourselves be used by God.

4:16 Even the enemies of Christianity couldn’t deny that the miracles done by the Holy Spirit were indeed real. Modern claims to possessing Holy Spirit gifts are debatable; whilst God hears prayer, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit aren’t available today. What is claimed to have been done by Pentecostals simply doesn’t compare with the usage of the miraculous Spirit gifts in the first century.

4:19 We must be obedient to state laws, until such time as they contradict the law of God and of Jesus. This is especially true of military service.

4:30 *Your holy servant*- Jesus after His resurrection and ascension to Heaven is still God’s servant and therefore less than God (Jn. 13:16).

4:31 The Holy Spirit refers to God’s power set apart for specific purposes. God gave it to people to do specific things- they were ‘filled’- but then had to be filled again to do other tasks and fulfil other purposes.

4:37 Levites weren’t supposed to own property, according to the Law of Moses. But they ‘got around’ this by owning property outside Israel, e.g. in Cyprus. But when Barnabas converted to Christ, he realized that all such ‘getting around’ God’s laws is wrong; simple, loving obedience from the heart is what God wants.

5:3 Ananias could control whether or not ‘Satan’ filled his heart, and was condemned for not doing so. If we think that a being called ‘Satan’ irresistibly influences us to sin, filling us with the desire to sin against our will, then we are making the same fatal mistake as Ananias.

5:4 The sin was conceived within the mind of Ananias- sin begins within (Mk. 7:19-23). Yet v. 3 says that ‘Satan’, the adversary, filled the mind of Ananias. The real enemy or adversary is our own mind, from where sin is conceived.

5:7 Appearing zealous, spiritual and generous when we aren't in our hearts is a terrible sin, and will be judged very hardly by God.

5:14 This growth in acceptance of the Gospel happened immediately after God had killed Ananias and Sapphira for the sin of hypocrisy (v. 11). The 'harder side of God', the fact He is serious about His demands upon us, is actually an attraction for genuine people, rather than a repulsion.

5:26 *Feared the people*- The crowd were so fickle. They initially believed Jesus, cheering Him as He entered Jerusalem; then they turned against Him and shouted "Crucify Him!". And now they are again supportive of His cause. God wants stable, loyal hearts and not commitment which is blown about so easily because it has no root in His word.

5:30 *You slew*- The Jews got the Romans to do it, because they were not under the Mosaic Law (2:23). But God of course sees through such behaviour; we are responsible for our intentions, even if we get others to do the deeds for us.

5:41 It's very hard to truly rejoice at every connection we see between our sufferings and those of Jesus. But this is the essence of life "in Christ".

5:42 The early preaching of the Gospel was in homes (as in 2:46); just as the ministry of Jesus focused upon homes. House churches and family groups are often the ways in which God chooses to work.

6:2 *The word of God*- The [teaching of] the word of God (see v. 4). Sometimes we have to read in an ellipsis into the phrases we read in the Bible. People 2000 years ago had a different style than we have today.

6:4 Prayer was of such huge importance in the early church, and it should be with us too.

6:7 The unity achieved between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the church attracted yet more people to join. Jesus predicted that our unity would convert the world (Jn. 17:23). Our disunity will discourage people from joining Christ; because initially, the church of Jesus is all that people see of Jesus.

7:2 *Brothers*- Stephen was willing to use this term about unbelievers. Neither he nor the early church were obsessed with 'separation' in an external sense from the unbelieving world.

7:2 Stephen's point is that God had a relationship with Abraham when Abraham didn't even live in the land of Israel; and without any temple building. That relationship was based around the promises God gave him, of eternal inheritance of the land in the Kingdom of God, due to the work of his "seed", or descendant, who was to be Jesus.

7:9 The Jewish elders rejected the Saviour- Stephen was hoping that his audience would see the similarity with what they had done to Jesus.

7:20,21 The repetition of the word “nourished” shows how Moses was under two distinctly different influences as he grew up- those of God, and of the world; of Israel and of Egypt. We, and our children, have the same tension; it took Moses a long time to shake off the influence of Egypt and decide openly for God.

7:25 Again Stephen hopes that his audience will perceive that Moses as Israel’s Saviour wasn’t initially understood by them and was rejected- and this was how they had treated Jesus.

7:29 Moses fled partly from fear, but partly in faith, because he didn’t fear the wrath of Pharaoh (Heb. 11:27). Our motives are so often mixed, as it seems Moses’ were at this time.

7:43 Israel carried two tabernacles through the wilderness- that of God, and that of their idols. If the exodus through the Red Sea is symbolic of our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), then the wilderness journey speaks of our journey after baptism towards the Kingdom of God. We must carry only one tabernacle with us, one worship system- that of God.

7:48 We don’t need to go into a church or religious building in order to worship God. God wishes to live in our hearts [i.e. our minds], and where two or three are gathered together in His worship (Mt. 18:20).

7:56 The New Testament often describes Jesus as *sitting* at God’s right hand (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). But He still feels passionately for us, and as He saw Stephen dying, He *stood*- in mediation before God’s throne for Stephen.

7:59,60 The last words of Stephen are very similar to those of Jesus just before He died. The crucifixion is therefore not something to merely look at and admire from a distance, as an icon or picture; it’s something which speaks to *us* personally and directly. We should be transformed by it; He there becomes a pattern for me here and now, today.

7:60 *Fell asleep*- For the believer, death is but an unconscious sleep. The next we will know will be the resurrection when Jesus returns.

8:2 They were “devout” because they were willing to risk shame and abuse for the sake of identifying with a Christian brother. We sometimes have to be brave in this way too.

8:3 Paul’s conversion is a pattern for us all (1 Tim. 1:16); our position before baptism was as bad, in essence, as Paul’s. For this is how serious sin is.

8:12 Baptism follows naturally and immediately after believing the Gospel. Infants can’t be baptized because they’re not capable of believing the Gospel.

8:13 Simon’s motivation probably appeared suspect from the start (v. 18). But we can’t judge the motives of others, we must baptize all those who profess belief in the Gospel.

8:24 *Pray for me*- But Peter had told him to pray himself to God (v. 22). We often balk at the direct relationship with God which He asks of us. We'd rather someone else did it for us, just as Israel didn't want God speaking direct to them, but asked Moses to listen to His voice and tell them what He said.

8:31 People cannot hear the Gospel without a preacher (Rom. 10:14). There are people out there waiting for us to explain the Bible to them. Let's go to them.

8:33 *Generation*- His children. The Eunuch couldn't have children, and so he was interested to read this prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 53, which predicted He would die without having children. We each see in Jesus some direct similarity or point of contact with our life experience, and this attracts us to Him.

8:36 The initiative for baptism came from the person wishing to be baptized. The idea of infant sprinkling is wrong.

8:37 There was a simple statement of faith before the person was baptized; he was mature enough to understand, and was baptized as an adult not a child.

8:38,39 *Went down into... came up out of the water* – Nobody crosses a desert without water. They surely had a few drops of water to sprinkle with, if that's what baptism is. But it isn't. Baptism means a complete dipping in water, which is what we see done here.

9:3 Paul asks us to see his conversion as typical of that of us all (1 Tim. 1:16). The blinding light of Christ has also shined in the darkness of *our* hearts (2 Cor. 4:6).

9:5 *Whom you persecute*- Jesus is His church; we are baptized into the body of Christ. What is done to us is done to Him.

9:15 God calls the most unexpected people to Him; it's not for us to judge whom He might call.

9:18 Baptism is the assumed immediate first step to be taken by someone who believes in Christ and has repented.

9:20 People typically expect a forgiven person to be quiet for some time before they openly serve God. But God's forgiveness is immediate; He is quick and eager to forgive and work with people, and we should be likewise.

9:27 We must be open minded to how God may be working. We must allow people the chance of repentance, be prepared to accept that they really have changed, and that God is willing to use them. It may be that we have to persuade other believers of this, just as Barnabas did. Ananias also had to learn the same lesson.

9:40,41 This incident of healing a woman called Tabitha has many similarities with the way Jesus healed another female called Talitha (Mk. 5:41,42). Peter remembered the actions, body

language, attitudes and words of Jesus which he had witnessed during His ministry- and replicated them in *his* life. This is what we should do- read the Gospels and absorb the spirit of Christ, and apply it in our lives, so that *we* act like *Him*.

9:43 Tanners were despised by Jews because they dealt with blood and the skins of unclean animals, and had to live separately from society, on the edge of towns and villages. It was just these types of people who were attracted to and accepted Christianity. It's the same today, in essence.

10:1 Being a soldier isn't a good choice for a Christian, but there's no evidence Cornelius left his job after his conversion (see too Lk. 3:14).

10:5 Peter was in Joppa, the very place where Jonah had failed to understand his call to preach to the Gentiles. God arranges circumstances so that we have the chance to learn from the mistakes of others; He reminds us of them, as Peter must have been reminded of Jonah by being in Joppa.

10:6 Tanners were a low class profession, who were so despised they had to live out of town, e.g. on the beach. Cornelius was humble enough to accept teaching and baptism from someone of a lower social class.

10:13 The unclean animals which Peter was to "kill and eat" [possibly a reference to sacrificing them] represented the Gentiles. Paul speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles as an acceptable offering to God (Rom. 15:16). Yet Jesus had previously told Peter to go into all the world and baptize people from all nations into Christ (Mk. 16:15,16). Peter had been very slow to understand this; just as we are slow to realize the extent to which we too are to preach the Gospel to all people.

10:15 The idea that Christians can only eat 'clean' food is therefore wrong. We aren't any longer under the Law of Moses.

10:31 Good works alone will not justify us to God; we need to have the knowledge of the Gospel and baptism into Christ. The greatest thing we can give someone is the knowledge of God and Jesus- this is far more than any material gift.

10:36 *Lord of all*- Now Peter appreciated the significance of the little word "all"- it included not just all Jews, but all peoples. We too are often taught by God the huge implications of terms and phrases we are over familiar with.

10:40,41 God didn't show the resurrected Jesus to everyone, but to just a few people, who would then go and testify this fact to the rest of the world. God always loves to work through people- rather like how Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, but insisted on distributing them to the crowd through the hands of the disciples. God is also eager to use *you* today as His witness in this world.

11:3 Considering that Jesus had clearly commanded to go and preach to the Gentiles (Mk. 16:15,16), the early believers [who were all Jews] were very slow to grasp the fact that in Christ, Jew and Gentile now meant nothing. We too are at times very slow to grasp the most basic teachings of Jesus, because our culture and background is so against those teachings.

11:14 *Whereby*- Faith and salvation are dependent to some degree upon the preaching of the word to people (1 Cor. 15:2,11). This is why sharing God's word with others is so important, and why we should respect those who preached the Gospel to us.

11:19.20 Bad experiences often work out so that the Gospel is spread wider (Phil. 1:12). Perhaps, in this case, if the Jewish believers had gone out into the Gentile world with the Gospel, they wouldn't have needed this persecution?

11:23 *Purpose of heart... cleave* – Belief and baptism are a beginning, but we must focus our hearts [i.e. our minds] on the Lord- “cleave” is the language of a person leaving their parents and ‘cleaving’ to their partner in marriage (Gen. 2:24). We are married to Jesus by baptism, He becomes the focus of our lives.

12:3,4 There are several similarities with the situation at a previous Passover when Jesus was killed. We should always be looking for points of contact between His sufferings and our own experience.

12:10 The Angel actually went with Peter through every street he ever walked; it's just that as he walked those two streets, he could see the Angel. We each have a guardian Angel who is constantly with us. If only we could see the Angel, we would feel so much differently about our lives and situations.

12:12 Holding a prayer meeting all night indicates the intense focus of mind which these early believers had. But when their prayer meeting was interrupted with the news that the prayers had been answered- they just didn't believe it and even mocked the idea. We too can pray without real expectation that the answer will come, and may come sooner and more powerfully than we could ever imagine.

12:15 The Christians believed that we each have a guardian, representative Angel.

12:23 God is so sensitive to pride- He hates it.

13:1 Niger- probably a black brother, who was an elder in the church on the same level as Paul.

13:2 *As they ministered*- It is in the course of daily service to God that He invites us further in His service. The calls to service don't come dramatically out of the blue, they are within a context of what we already are doing for God.

13:9 Paul means “the little one”. There's no record of any specific name change, but it seems that as he began his missionary preaching, Saul changed his name to “the little one”. Humility is

vital if we are to preach the Gospel. Arrogant, proud evangelists are an abomination to God. Saul, Israel's first king, was only acceptable to God whilst he was "little in his own eyes" (1 Sam. 15:17). Paul seems to have thought on this carefully, and taken the implications to heart.

13:11 This is exactly what happened to Paul on the Damascus road. He wanted others to share his conversion path.

13:18 *Nursing-father*- We see here the gentleness of God as He lead His people through the wilderness. After baptism we pass through the wilderness of life towards God's Kingdom... and God is so gentle in His leading.

13:21 God was Israel's King, they were His Kingdom. So it grieved God that they wanted a human king, to be like the nations around them. But He made a concession to their weakness, and gave them a king. We should not be unbending, but also willing to make concessions to others' weakness, even as God does to us.

13:25 To untie the sandals of a man was an idiom which meant 'to be his messenger or herald'. John in this sense *did* untie the sandals of Jesus by preaching of His coming; but he said that he was unworthy to do that. Humility is vital for the preacher.

13:39 *Declared righteous*- If we are in Christ, and believe in God's grace, then He counts us *as if* we are righteous, although we are not. We are clothed in His white garments at our baptism into Him. Keeping the Law of Moses [including the Sabbaths, food laws and feasts] doesn't make us righteous; faith in Christ does.

13:45 Jealousy is a word and idea which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. Opposition to us comes so often because people are jealous that we have something which they don't have- even though they say they don't want or need it.

13:46 *Judge yourselves*- The only people who will be condemned at the last day are those who have effectively condemned themselves. God's judgment is only a confirmation of peoples' own judgment of themselves.

13:47 Paul here quotes a prophecy about Jesus as the light of the world, and applies it to himself. All that is true of Jesus is to be true of us. If we imagine how He would be in our situation, then we have our life's mission. He Himself taught that He personally was "the light of the world", and yet He said that we also are "the light of the world".

13:52 After such opposition, they were joyful! This is the unique ability of Christians, to perceive victory in defeat [the cross is the greatest example], to bring good out of bad.

14:1 *In such a way*- Their style of preaching resulted in the conversions. God has delegated the salvation of others into our hands; how far it prospers depends to some extent upon our efforts and attention to style.

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14:7 Again, persecution, opposition and slander campaigns against God's people only resulted in the Gospel being spread yet further

14:17 The natural creation, e.g. the rain and seasons, is in fact a witness from God which thoughtful people will perceive.

14:22 *Tribulations*- We cannot expect Christianity to be an easy ride. Our salvation is through many traumas in this life, and God won't always preserve us from them, but rather He works through them so that we might come to His Kingdom when Jesus returns.

14:27 God opens doors to those who knock (Lk. 11:9). Maybe there had been Gentiles who had been begging for acceptance by God in His Messiah / Son, and so God worked through the persecution of the Jewish Christians, and in the life of Paul, to ensure that this happened.

15:1 There is always a desire amongst some Christians to seek justification by some form of works, often connected with obedience to the Law of Moses; the New Testament letters show how Paul strongly resisted this.

15:4 They felt they were being used by God, rather than giving the impression they had done their work in their own strength. Likewise in v. 7 Peter says that his preaching was merely being a mouthpiece for God.

15:10 The yoke we have is that of Jesus (Mt. 11:29,30). We can't have two yokes upon us. We either accept salvation by faith in Christ, or we attempt to bring about our own salvation by obedience to the Mosaic Law. We can't seek justification, therefore, by taking upon ourselves the yoke of Sabbath keeping and legal obedience.

15:13 *Brothers*- Note how many times this word occurs in this chapter. In resolving disagreements within the church, it's important to keep reminding ourselves that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, of the same indivisible family that was brought into being by the death of our Lord and Master. Once someone is baptized into Christ, we can never say they have left Him- once someone is a brother or sister, they are for the rest of our lives. For we cannot say they have left Christ and the family of God.

15:14 By being baptized into "His Name", we become a people for His Name.

15:20 This was a concession to the weakness of the Jewish Christians; sometimes to make peace within a church, we have to make concessions.

15:28 *Holy Spirit and to us*- God through His power at work confirmed the conclusions which the brothers had come to.

15:36 If we bring someone to Christ, they are our lifelong responsibility- our spiritual child in Christ.

15:39 This doesn't justify division within the church, nor does it mean that personal disagreement is inevitable. This incident indicates that Paul wasn't perfect; and it comforts us that we are all human, and will never find the perfect church anywhere.

16:3 Paul often writes in his letter that circumcision is meaningless (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:19). But he was sensitive to the feelings of the Jews. There are times when we must try to take down the barriers which there are between us and our audience. We must at times give in on non-essentials.

16:5 The decree of chapter 15 was a series of concessions aimed at producing unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The unity achieved by these concessions meant that more people were attracted to the faith- because our unity is our greatest witness (Jn. 17:21-23). The churches increased "daily" because presumably they baptized people each day- they saw the crucial importance of it, and didn't leave it until the weekends or some convenient time of year.

16:15 Again it is assumed that people who believe are immediately baptized. If we seriously believe, we must be baptized as Jesus commands (Mk. 16:16).

16:17 Mentally ill people often have great spiritual perception- hence the especial efforts of Jesus to cure them [the language of 'unclean spirits' and 'demons' refer to mentally ill people].

16:25 Joy in the face of persecution and suffering is a theme of Acts.

16:33 The Acts record emphasizes how "immediately" people were baptized, the same day they heard and believed the Gospel. The content of the Gospel wouldn't therefore have been presented in a very complicated nor lengthy manner. The vital importance of baptism is shown by how the family were baptized in the middle of the night, after an earthquake had struck, and with the prisoners able to escape. But they put God first; and all other things fell into place.

16:37 Why didn't Paul declare his Roman citizenship earlier, so as to avoid a beating? Whatever the reason, there was a reason, and it was connected with the furtherance of the Gospel. There are times when we can take an easier way and it's no sin; but the cause of the Gospel is better served by taking the harder way.

16:40 Paul and Silas comforted others! Despite having had so much distress themselves.

17:7 There was no other religion in the area which produced such profound unity between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor. Today too, God calls very different people to faith in His Son, just as the disciples were a very diverse group. This means that the potential for both unity and division is very high in the church.

17:11 The Bereans are our example- to not just accept what we are taught, but to daily, systematically "search the Scriptures". We should be in daily contact with the Bible.

17:12 *Therefore*- People believed *because* they searched the Scriptures daily (v. 11). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

17:16 We should also have hearts that bleed for the lostness and ignorance of this world.

17:23 We should walk through this world observant and sensitive, and use whatever we see around us as a springboard into sharing the Gospel with people. Likewise in v. 28 Paul quotes one of their poets to them, rather like we may quote a line from a popular song, in order to get over the content of the Gospel.

17:31 Doctrine has meaning in practice. If we believe that Jesus is returning and there will be a judgment day- then we ought to repent now rather than then!

17:34 There is emphasis throughout Acts 16 and 17 on how women believed; religion was largely a hobby for men, but Christianity was very much a woman's religion because of the unusual meaning and value it attached to all people, including women.

18:6 As explained throughout Ezekiel 33:2-7, if we do not witness to people and they die in ignorance, then we must bear the responsibility for their loss of salvation.

18:8 Baptism always follows belief. Infant baptism can't be right because the infant cannot understand or believe the Gospel.

18:10 Somehow, everything will work out all right for us if our focus is upon bringing people to be part of God's people.

18:12 When this happened, Paul must have kept remembering the promise of verse 10, trying to reassure himself that God will not break His promises.

18:26 *More accurately*- There are unbelievers and there are misbelievers. We mustn't assume that everyone outside our circle of understanding is the enemy, not of God etc. There are misbelievers, who need correction and more teaching, but we cannot judge their standing with God.

18:27 We believe "through grace". Salvation is of grace; we believe not only because we read the Bible and want to believe, but because God opened our hearts to believe (Acts 16:14; Ps. 119:18). If this factor wasn't at work, then salvation would be by our own strength of will and understanding. Those factors are significant, but the "grace" element must never be lost sight of. It's this which will keep us humble.

19:5 This could be used as an example of re-baptism. But the people who had been baptized by John were baptized before Jesus had died and resurrected- Christian baptism is into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the command to be baptized was only given by Jesus after His resurrection. Re-baptism must be a personal choice. If we were baptized by sprinkling or as an

infant, then that's not real baptism. Re-baptism after we more accurately understand the things about Jesus is a very personal decision.

19:18 *Those that had believed*- After seeing what happened to the sons of Sceva, it would appear that some who had 'believed' went up to a higher level of commitment. This would seem to imply that despite having 'believed', perhaps with the same level of shallow conviction as some 'believed' in the teaching of Jesus during His ministry, their faith wasn't so deep. They were taken up to an altogether higher level of commitment, resulting in 'confessing and declaring', and quitting their involvement with magic. There are levels up the ladder of faith and commitment. The language here seems to be intended to connect with the description of baptism in Mt. 3:6, where converts confessed and shewed their deeds *at baptism*. The way the Ephesians made their statement "before all men" again recalls the concept of baptism as a public declaration. Yet the Ephesians did all this *after* they had believed. It would seem that we are being invited to consider this as a re-conversion; and we can all go through such a process.

19:21 Paul had great spiritual ambition; he was determined to take the Gospel as far as he could, even to Rome. Within the limitations of our lives and situations, we can have the same spirit.

19:23 Christianity was called "the Way" because it is a way of life in practice; but there is also an allusion to how the Angel-cherubim keep the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Our life in Christ is a walking along the "way" to eternal life, watched over by the Angels.

20:7 This could suggest that the early believers did the 'breaking of bread' service weekly. But there is no clear Biblical command about which day to do it on, nor exactly how often to do it.

20:20 *House to house*- Again we see the emphasis upon the home as the basis for organization of believers and spreading of the Gospel.

20:23 The Holy Spirit told Paul that he would suffer if he went to Jerusalem; but he also felt bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (see v. 22 and 19:21; 21:4,11). Sometimes it seems God gives us contradictory guidance; this is so that we can work through the choices and come to a decision from the right motives, even if sometimes it doesn't always matter what the decision is. In some matters it's the process, not the product; the journey, not the destination... which is important.

20:26 Paul felt so truly and absolutely forgiven that he could say that he was "pure from the blood of all men". Yet as he said that, he must surely have had the blood of Stephen on his mind, trickling out along the Palestinian dust, as the clothes of the men who murdered Stephen lay at Paul's feet as a testimony that *he* was responsible for it. But he knew his forgiveness. He could confidently state that he was pure from that blood. Righteousness had been imputed, the sin covered- because he was in Christ.

20:31 *Three years... night and day with tears*- This is a huge statement. It reflects how major was and is the danger of false teaching and abuse entering the church. It shouldn't therefore surprise us to conclude that 'Christianity' as a human religion is corrupted; but God has preserved His word the Bible, so that those who truly seek Him can still find Him.

20:32 The word of God's grace has the power to build us up and lead us to the Kingdom. This isn't to say that Bible reading alone guarantees salvation; but if we perceive within the Bible the word of grace, *this* will inevitably and naturally transform us into Kingdom people.

21:5 Women and children were often counted as non-persons in 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean society. But Jesus gave special value to them, and the critics of Christianity mocked it as a religion largely comprised of women and children.

21:9 To 'prophesy' means to speak forth God's word, not just to predict the future. Women as well as men (:10) prophesied in the early church.

21:12,13 This incident is very similar to how Peter and the disciples tried to discourage Jesus from journeying up to Jerusalem to die on the cross (Mt. 16:21-24). We too can discern points of contact between the recorded experiences and feelings of Jesus, and our situations which we pass through in life. In this sense, He is 'with us' through the medium of His word.

21:20 Acts 8:1 records that the entire membership of the Jerusalem ecclesia was scattered; the way we read of them numbering thousands by the time of Acts 21:20 suggests that to avoid persecution those who remained reconciled themselves with the temple, becoming a sect of Judaism, presumably with the tithe and temple tax going to the temple rather than to the ecclesia. These "thousands" of Acts 21 were probably largely converted since the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The original Jerusalem ecclesia had gone and preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19,20), which wasn't what the later Jerusalem ecclesia supported. Early Christianity went wrong at two ends- the Jewish Christians merged back with Judaism to avoid opposition from the Jews, and the Gentile Christians tended to merge back with paganism to avoid persecution from the Roman empire.

21:21 Paul did indeed write in his letters that circumcision is of no spiritual meaning for the believer in Christ, regardless of whether we are Jews or Gentiles (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:19). But sometimes the way of Christian wisdom is to not insist upon principle, but to go along with the weakness or limited understanding of others.

22:2 If we communicate with people in their language, literally or metaphorically, i.e. in the terms they understand and are familiar with, then they will listen the more carefully.

22:13 Paul was called "brother" even before his baptism, and even after his baptism, he refers to the Jews as his "brethren" (v. 5). Of course, he knew all about the higher status and meaning of brotherhood in Christ; but he wasn't so pedantic as to not call the Jews his 'brethren'. He

clearly didn't have any of the guilt-by-association paranoia which has led many believers to be so separate from the world that they can't effectively witness to it.

22:16 There should be no delay to baptism- it is for the forgiveness of our sins. This is why baptism is a complete immersion in water- to symbolize the washing away of sin. "Calling [up]on [yourself] His name" (Greek) is what we do at baptism- we become His.

22:26 Paul was a Roman citizen. But he invites all of us to see ourselves as a citizen of a Heavenly state (Phil. 3:20); he downplayed his Roman citizenship in his own mind, because he was so conscious of being a citizen of God's Kingdom. We too should allow the wonder of our citizenship in Christ to lead us to despise all worldly advantage which we may have.

23:1 Can we say this? But the Lord Jesus Himself informs us that Paul kicked against the pricks of his own conscience *before* his conversion (Acts 9:5). Maybe Paul perceived his 'life' to have begun at his conversion? We have a conscience which in God's eyes is cleansed of sin, knowing that our sin has been overcome once and for all, and that we have access to this through baptism. Our hearts were purified by that faith (Acts 15:9); we were cleansed from the conscience of sins (Heb. 9:14); all things became pure to us (Tit. 1:15; Rom. 14:20). This is a good conscience, Biblically defined. When Paul said he had a pure conscience before God, they smote him for blasphemy because there is an association between a clear conscience and perfection (Heb. 9:9; 10:14). A clear conscience therefore means an awareness that in God's eyes, we have no sin. Whilst we may still have twinges of guilt, and sins to confess, from God's viewpoint the slate is clean, and has been since our baptism. It is impossible to believe this without responding- we are purged in our conscience so that we might serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

23:5 This can be read as Paul claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified.

23:6 The hope of the Gospel is that when Jesus returns, we who are in Christ by faith and baptism shall be resurrected from the dead and live eternally. Going to Heaven at death isn't taught in the Bible; the focus is upon the return of Christ to earth and the literal resurrection of the dead to live eternally in God's Kingdom on earth.

23:6 Paul says "I *am* a Pharisee", not "I was a Pharisee and now repudiate their false doctrines and crucifixion of Jesus". He didn't have any sense of being guilty by association with them. Rather he sought to be 'all things to all people', to the Jews he became as a Jew, in order that he might win people to Christ (1 Cor. 9:20,21).

24:5 The true church of God was called a "sect", they were [falsely] accused of being divisive just because they followed Christ rather than existing human tradition (28:22). The same happens today.

24:15 The unjust will be resurrected, judged, and then die again and remain dead for ever- "the second death" (Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14). The punishment for sinners will be at the resurrection- not immediately after death. For death is unconsciousness; and there is no such thing as an 'immortal soul' which must go somewhere, either good or bad, immediately after death.

24:16 We need to realize keenly the self-discipline and self-sacrifice which following the man Jesus requires of us. Paul 'exercised' himself in his spiritual life, the Greek word *asko* being the source of the English word ascetic.

24:25 The very fact of judgment to come is in itself a demand for righteousness and temperance. Felix realized this and trembled, in anticipation of rejection at the judgment. As the Lord had explained in Jn. 5, when a man hears the word of the Gospel, he hears the call to go to judgment. And if he rejects it, he rejects himself from the Lord's presence in the future. Likewise Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent.

25:11 Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Maybe it was simply because he so wanted to go to Rome in order to spread Christianity at the very heart of the Roman empire. Maybe he was spiritually ambitious enough to think that he might be able to testify the Gospel to Caesar himself- and even convert him? After all, Paul prayed that King Agrippa would become a Christian (26:29).

25:26,27 Being sent to the highest level of judgment seat in Rome, yet with no valid charges against him- was bizarre. Paul alludes to this when he wrote to the ecclesia in Rome (who surely knew the situation with Paul's case) that in Christ, there is now nobody to condemn us (Rom. 8:34). His letter from Rome to the Colossians has a similar message (Col. 1:22): "...to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable (Gk. 'free from accusation') in his sight". This freedom from accusation explains why none of our bad deeds will be mentioned to us then. One wonders if Paul's hearing in Acts 25 is described as it is in order to help us imagine this; he has no accusers, and therefore can be acquitted. We are in that same situation. We have been forgiven; there is no case against us before the judgment seat of Christ.

26:4 If Paul grew up in Jerusalem from his youth, he would surely have met Jesus and seen the miracles which He performed in Jerusalem at the feasts. He may even have seen the crucifixion.

26:6-8 The hope of resurrection from the dead is the hope which the Jewish fathers had. The promise that Abraham would personally inherit the land of Canaan and live there for ever required a resurrection of Abraham from the dead. The core of the Christian hope was taught to the Jewish fathers through the promises made to Abraham and David (Gal. 3:8). The New Testament Gospel of the Kingdom of God is in perfect harmony with the message of the Old Testament- see vv. 22,23.

26:8,9 Note the connection between these verses. Paul is saying that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him. This

was “the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10); and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren’t just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

26:11 Paul’s progressive appreciation of his own sinfulness is reflected in how he describes what he did in persecuting Christians in ever more terrible terms, the older he gets. He describes his victims as “men and women” whom he ‘arrested’ (Acts 8:3; 22:4), then he admits he threatened and murdered them (Acts 9:3), then he persecuted “the way” unto death (Acts 22:4); then he speaks of them as “those who believe” (Acts 22:19) and finally, in a crescendo of shame with himself, he speaks of how he furiously persecuted, like a wild animal, unto the death, “many of the saints”, not only in Palestine but also “to foreign [Gentile] cities” (Acts 26:10,11). He came to be every more confident of his salvation, as he came to realize the more his own sinfulness. And this is surely a pattern for us all.

27:2 “Adramyttium” means ‘the house of death’. The whole journey can be understood as an allegory of our journey in Christ until the daybreak of God’s Kingdom.

27:24 It often happens that those associated with us are blessed because of us, even if they are unbelievers. Especially is this true of our children and partners (1 Cor. 7:14).

27:31 The legalists in the early church taught that unless believers kept the circumcision laws, “you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). The very same Greek phrase is used by Paul when he calls out in urgency during the storm: “Except these stay in the ship, *you* cannot be saved”. Surely Luke’s record is making a connection; the legalists taught that it was time to quit the rest of the community unless they got their way, for the sake of their eternal future; and Paul responds by teaching that our salvation depends upon us *pulling together* against the desperate situation we find ourselves in. We should never walk out on our brethren or the body of Christ. Severed from Him, we can do and be “nothing” (Jn. 15:5); and He is His body, the church.

27:34 Paul is quoting here from Christ’s words of encouragement to the disciples that in the tribulation of the last days, they would survive (Lk. 21:18). The storm can therefore be seen as an allegory of our passing through the latter day tribulation.

27:35 The way Paul broke bread in v.35 is an echo of the way Christ did it. We get the impression that Paul was slowly, deliberately copying the example of how Jesus broke bread in the upper room. So it is as if Paul is seeing himself as typical of Christ, and those in the ship with him as typical of Christ’s followers. Paul twice encouraged them “be of good cheer” (vv.22,25) as they huddled together breaking bread -also quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus, in the same context (Jn. 16:33); and remember that Jesus also said those words when the disciples were struggling in another great storm (Mk. 6:50). The way the Angel appeared to Paul at night to strengthen him (v.23) also echoes the experience of Christ in the Garden. If Jesus is a living reality for us, if we are constantly reflecting upon His words, actions and experiences as they are

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recorded in the Gospels, then we will start to act in the same way. His Spirit will become ours; He will live in us and we in Him.

28:3 Paul, a relatively old man afflicted by a “thorn in the flesh”, was the one out there gathering firewood- a wonderful example of service.

28:20 The true Christian hope is “the hope of Israel”, based upon the promises made to Abraham which include the essence of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Gal. 3:8).

28:21 The Jewish synagogue system ‘disfellowshipped’ people and then acted as if they didn’t even exist; this would explain why nothing had been said about Paul. Some extreme Protestant groups behave similarly, but such behaviour shows a complete lack of appreciation of the value of the human person- even those with whom we disagree.

28:25 *The Holy Spirit spoke... through Isaiah*- The Bible writers were inspired by God, through the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16).

28:31 Paul preached ‘boldly’, but he had asked others to pray for him, that he would preach boldly (Eph. 6:19). We all find it hard to be bold in witness; Paul even asked others to pray for him, that he would be more bold; and the inspired record shows us that these prayers were heard, and Paul’s desire was granted. We probably need to pray for the same boldness.

## ROMANS

1:3 Jesus was the literal descendant of David; He therefore didn’t pre-exist as a person before His birth. Otherwise the promises to David about Jesus would have been meaningless- they spoke about a future descendant, who would be both God’s Son and David’s Son.

1:10 Paul kept praying that he could visit Rome; but he also did all he could humanly so that this would happen. This is surely why he appealed to Caesar to have his case heard, even though this wasn’t necessary and he would have been acquitted at the more local court (Acts 26:32).

1:16 Without the Gospel we cannot be saved. This is why there is no salvation in non-Christian religions; and why we must preach the Gospel as far as we can.

1:24 *Gave them up* – As in verses 26 and 28. God confirmed them in the downward spiral they chose. He confirms people in the mental attitudes, the mindsets, which they choose.

1:26 *Against nature*- Lesbianism / homosexuality isn’t therefore natural. It’s a perversion, what God calls in v. 27 an “error” which He will punish.

1:32 We should not only try not to sin, but also not ‘approve’ sin when we encounter it. This principle affects what we watch, view and read. The list of sins in verses 29-31 are what much modern ‘entertainment’ is all about.

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2:1 If we point a finger at another, we have three fingers pointing back at ourselves.

2:8 Things like anger are the masters of many people. They think they are expressing their freedom by being angry; but the anger is in fact their master, and they are enslaved to it.

2:11 Just as God doesn't distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, so we shouldn't 'respect persons'. As partakers of His grace, we shouldn't judge people on the basis of their social status, skin colour, ethnicity etc.

2:12 Knowledge brings responsibility to judgment. Those who never knew God's law will remain dead like the animals (Ps. 49:20). Those who knew God's law will be resurrected and judged as to how far they responded to it.

2:13 The difference between hearing and doing is illustrated by the parable of the two builders; the one who built quickly upon the sand was the person who only hears the word of God; building slowly upon the rock is like hearing *and* doing. As we read the Bible, there's a terrible temptation to merely read, to hear, but not to let this translate into action.

2:14 Romans was written to believers in Rome, who comprised both Jews and Gentiles. The "Gentiles" in this verse seem to refer to Gentile Christians. Likewise the 'uncircumcised' in v. 26 refers to the uncircumcised Christians in the church at Rome.

2:29 It's an amazing thought that a righteous God praises sinful humans like us. He does this on the basis that we are covered in Christ's righteousness and therefore can be presented faultless before Him (Col. 1:22; Jude 24).

3:3 There is no excuse to reject belief in God because of the unbelief and misbehaviour of His people, be they Jews or Christians.

3:9 We are no "better" than condemned sinners. We are different to them in that we have believed in God's grace and salvation. But we should never think we are "better" than unbelievers; such spiritual arrogance is an awful sin in God's sight.

3:19 *The world*- The Jewish world, who were under the Law of Moses.

3:20 *For through the law comes...*- This is why those who never knew God's law will not be resurrected to judgment; they aren't responsible to Him (2:12).

3:27 The fact that we are saved by faith rather than works, and that the law of God hasn't been kept fully by any of us, is so that we shall be humble; giving glory to God's grace alone. Humility and not glorying in our own achievements is so very important to God.

3:28 As keeping the Mosaic Law is irrelevant for salvation, it is quite wrong to insist that Christians keep the Sabbath or Jewish feasts in order to be saved.

3:31 *Establish*- The principles of the law weren't wrong; the essence and spirit of it are confirmed in Christ.

4:7 *Blessed are they*- The Psalm being quoted is David's reflections about his sin with Bathsheba, and he is reflecting how he personally is blessed with the blessing of forgiveness by grace- seeing there was no sacrifice prescribed to cover the sins of adultery and murder which he had committed. The change of pronoun from "he" [referring to David personally] to "they" shows that David's situation is typical of that of us all. He was 'every man'; his forgiveness and salvation by grace, and his humble response in praise and zeal to God and people, becomes our pattern.

4:12 Abraham's faith is our pattern; his faith was in the promises which were made to him. Those promises are effectively the same as the good news of the Kingdom which we also must believe- eternal life, inheritance of the earth, the blessing of forgiveness, and God as his personal God. In this sense the Christian Gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8).

4:13 The promises to Abraham were that he would inherit "the land" of Canaan; but here they are extended to include the whole planet.

4:17 This is why the Bible often speaks of things which don't yet exist as if they do; God in that sense is outside of linear time as we know it. Therefore we read of the believers and also of Jesus as if they existed at the beginning of the world, even though literally they didn't.

4:19 Abraham was impotent yet he still believed that somehow he would produce a child.

5:1 We are counted as if we are righteous even though we are not- because we believe in God's gracious offer to count as righteous all those who believe in Christ and are baptized into Him. This isn't mere theology- it gives the baptized believer a real and felt peace with God, which is the most valuable thing we can have in this life. If God accepts us, all else is of little importance.

5:10 The steps of logic here are so powerful. If so much was achieved through Christ's death, how much more through His resurrection? If so much grace was shown to us before we were born and whilst we were still living the sinful life- how much more now that we are repentant believers? If God gave us His Son, to die in shame and nakedness for us- it's not hard for Him to give us anything else, including eternal life.

5:17 *Reign in life*- We will be king-priests in the future Kingdom of God which Jesus will establish on earth when He returns (Rev. 5:10).

5:19 *The one man*- Adam

6:3 Paul didn't just decide to write about baptism in Romans 6; the classic exposition of baptism which we find there is within a context. And it's not an appeal for people to be baptized- it's written to baptized believers, appealing for them to live out in practice the "in Christ" status which they had been given as a result of their baptisms. If we really feel the result of our

baptism, we will not "continue in sin". Martin Luther used to overcome temptation by taking a chalk and writing *baptizatus sum*- 'I am baptized'. We simply cannot continue in servitude to sin.

6:5 Going under the water is like death or burial; death to the old life. Coming up out of the water is like resurrection with Christ, giving the sure hope of resurrection to eternal life when He returns to earth.

6:11 *Count yourselves*- We are not fully 'dead to sin', but God counts us as if we died with Christ and rose with Him, and He is now 'dead to sin'. It's hard, but we must try to have the same positive view of ourselves in Christ as God has of us.

6:18 We changed masters at baptism, from sin to righteousness. In this sense we are never totally 'free'. The life of sin, doing what we want, isn't freedom- it's slavery to sin. So we are either slaves of sin or of God. But in His service we find freedom- this is the wonderful paradox.

7:3,4 The law is dead; we are free from it and therefore don't need to keep things like the Sabbath, feasts or food laws.

7:4 We are married to Jesus, and have 'fruit' by Him- acts and attitudes of righteousness.

7:11 Sin is personified- spoken of as a person although it is an abstract idea. Sometimes that 'person' is called 'Satan', the adversary. However, Paul's exposition of sin here in Romans makes no mention of a personal, cosmic being called 'Satan'. This is a pagan idea.

7:17 Sin within is the real problem we face, not an external Satan figure. Paul emphasizes here that he sins because of an internal principle within him (verses 18,20,23). We sin because we have within us an internal source of temptation to sin. Because sin comes from within (Mark 7:15-23) we must struggle for control of our thinking and to develop a spiritual mind. This is the essence of practical Christianity.

7:24 Paul felt "wretched" and yet elsewhere he shows his confidence that he will be saved and live for ever when Jesus returns. We can take comfort from his words here, when we feel that we are making little progress in the spiritual struggle against sin.

8:1 We must give these wonderful words their true weight and not skim read them. If we are "in Christ" by faith and baptism into Him, then we will not be condemned at the day of judgment. This is a good news almost too good to be believed by many.

8:3 The identity of Jesus with human nature and sinners is clearly taught here. He wasn't God in person, for God is Spirit and not flesh. Jesus condemned sin, in the flesh- because He had our nature yet didn't sin, He overcame sin.

8:11 If we are spiritually minded now, if Christ's thinking dwells within us, then this is the basis upon which we will be resurrected to eternal life when Christ returns.

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8:15 We have been adopted, and yet we await full adoption as God's children when Jesus returns (v. 23). This is an example of the 'Now but not yet' paradox- we in one sense are saved, in another sense we await the physical revelation of that salvation when Christ returns.

8:17 The symbolism of baptism, dying and resurrecting with Christ (6:3-5), is lived out in our lives; insofar as we share in His sufferings, we will share in the joy and power of His new life, both now and at the resurrection of the body.

8:23 *Bodies*- Note the emphasis upon the salvation of the body in this chapter. The idea of an immortal soul going to Heaven isn't Biblical. Instead, we hope for the resurrection of the body, just as Christ rose literally from the dead.

8:27 Jesus intercedes for us in Heaven (v. 34). We should remember this when we offer prayers to God in Jesus' Name.

8:34 The judge and counsel for the defence are on our side; and in Christ, no accusation can be brought against us. And so in the court of Divine justice, we are acquitted. This reality is so wonderful that all earthly problems (verses 35-39) should mean little to us.

9:3 Paul is alluding to how Moses offered his place in God's 'book of life'- i.e. his eternal salvation- in order that Israel might be saved. This is an amazing level of love- to be prepared to offer up your place in eternity for the sake of others. Paul says he "*could wish*" this- because he had learnt from the fact that God had refused Moses' offer. God doesn't work on the basis of *substitution*; He saves people because of their freewill identification with Messiah, i.e. Jesus, as the *representative* of God to man and man to God.

9:5 The fact that Christ was ethnically Jewish shows He was the literal descendant of Abraham and David, the special descendant whom they had been promised. He therefore didn't exist before His birth, and was not God Himself; even though His status and glory is very great.

9:18 It is written in Exodus many times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart; and also, that *God* hardened his heart. So God confirms people in the attitudes and positions which they themselves choose from their own freewill.

9:20 The questions we ask about the justice of God aren't appropriate for us to ask. We will only be concerned about them if we have failed to accept Bible teaching about our low status- for we are just dust, or clay, which God is working with. If we accept this is all we are, questions about His justice, let alone implied criticisms of Him, are inappropriate. Bible characters have argued with God and been angry with God, but ultimately the 'answer' is simply that it is not for us to know these answers, because we are but dust. It's like a small child insisting that the workings of a car are explained to them. They wouldn't understand even if they were told, the concepts are far beyond them.

9:27 God has always worked with a “remnant”, a minority. The majority are usually wrong when it comes to spiritual matters.

10:2 Zeal for God, a religious streak in our personality, isn't enough; we need true knowledge of Him to have a relationship with Him.

10:14 God has delegated the work of witnessing and reaching people to us. If we don't preach to people, they won't hear the Gospel. Their eternity is in this sense in our hands. Each day we should try to share the Gospel with at least someone in some way.

10:17 Faith isn't just a feeling; it has a definite basis, in the word of Christ and of God. This is why Bible reading is so important.

11:2 *Against Israel*- Elijah didn't specifically ask God to destroy Israel. He simply told God of what he felt Israel had done to him. But God saw the real request and motive that was behind the words he prayed. God reads our prayers likewise- the Lord Jesus searches our minds and relays our spirit to God, as He intercedes for us in prayer (8:26,27). This is a comfort to those who feel they can't find the right words in prayer; and a warning, that we can't impress God with words, for He sees to the real feelings that are behind them, and understands these feelings as our prayer.

11:3 We also can feel alone; when in fact there are more true believers around than we might realize. Elijah felt he was alone because he considered himself better than those other 7000- he didn't consider them as genuine believers when in fact they were. We can make the same mistake; spiritual elitism leads us to despair and isolation, because we cut ourselves off from the fellowship of others.

11:5 God has 'elected' or chosen some people and not others; and this feature of His working is because salvation has to be by His grace and not of our works.

11:22 'Once saved always saved' is simply not taught in the Bible; we must remain faithful to the end (Mt. 10:22).

11:25 *The full number*- There is, it seems, a specific number of Gentiles who must be converted; and then the Jews will respond to the Gospel, at the return of Christ (:26). When the Gospel has gone into all the world, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14). In this sense we can hasten the return of Christ by spreading the Gospel worldwide and encouraging Israel to repent.

11:32 *Upon all*- Both Jew and Gentile believers.

12:1 The Old Testament sacrifices were cut up into their body parts, and even the most internal organs offered to God. This speaks of how every part of our lives, especially our innermost being, should be offered to God.

12:3 Faith is in one sense a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). Realizing this will keep us from boasting against unbelievers or feeling superior to them.

12:4 We become members of Christ's body by baptism into His body (1 Cor. 12:13). Every one of us has some specific function within the body; let's not underestimate or ignore the part we are intended to play.

12:18 *As it depends on you*- We cannot always be at peace with others; Jesus and Paul weren't. But the frictions and separations must always be the choice of the other party, and not ours.

12:19 *Never avenge*- This is why litigation against others is so wrong. If we are badly treated, we are to believe in the future judgment of God- and leave Him to take vengeance.

13:2 We must compare this teaching with Peter's example in Acts 4:19; we can only submit to authorities until such a point as to do so further would lead us to be disobedient to God. Paul seems to take this as assumed and obvious, therefore he doesn't specifically state it.

13:7 Tax evasion is clearly wrong for Christians.

13:10 Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses by dying on the cross (Mt. 5:17; Lk. 24:44); but here Paul says that love fulfils the Law. The death of Jesus by crucifixion was therefore 'love to the end' (Jn. 13:1), the ultimate definition of love, in a very public, memorable and graphic display.

13:13 "The day" refers to the time of God's future Kingdom in v. 12. We should live now *as if* we are in the Kingdom. In this sense we 'have eternal life' in that we live right now the kind of life which we will eternally live.

14:1 The spiritually weak, in understanding and practice (e.g. regarding things like the Jewish food laws and the Sabbath, which this chapter goes on to talk about) should be welcomed and not rejected.

14:6 Since keeping the Sabbath is a matter of personal conscience, it is wrong to insist that a believer 'must' keep the Sabbath.

14:10 *All stand*- The Greek can mean 'made to stand up'. In verse 11 we read of a scene we can well imagine- at the day of judgment we will be on our knees, begging for mercy, realizing our unworthiness. But we will be made to stand up (v. 4), to receive God's gracious acceptance. So if this is what will happen to us, we should not condemn our brother now.

14:19 We need to examine our attitudes and positions, and watch our words, to ensure that we are trying to make peace rather than division.

15:1 Jesus 'carried our infirmities' on the cross (Is. 53:4; Mt. 8:17). We are being asked to do for others what He did for us there. This makes the crucifixion far more than something to be gazed

at from a distance. He there becomes the daily inspiration for us, here and now, in our lives. The spirit with which He met death is to be ours in life today.

15:5 *The same mind*- This doesn't mean we are to be identical. Unity isn't uniformity. We are each trying in our own way to have the same mind / attitude which Jesus had in His life. It's this which creates unity between us; we are of the *same* mind in that we are all trying to be of *His* mind.

15:8 The death of Christ ended the Old Covenant, i.e. the Law of Moses, but confirmed the New Covenant, the essence of which was contained in the promises to Abraham which had been made *before* the Law of Moses was given.

15:20,21 When the Gospel goes into all the world, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14). Our focus also, therefore, ought to be upon introducing Christ to unbelievers / the unchurched.

15:30 Prayer isn't to be a formality; in a sense it's a struggle with God. Jacob wrestled with God in prayer, and was an example to us (Hos. 12:2-4). If we believe in the power of prayer, and are humble enough to recognize our own weakness in prayer, we will often ask others to pray for us- just as Paul does here.

16:1 *A servant*- Greek 'diakonos'. Women played an important part in the early Christian church, at a time when religion was largely a hobby for men.

16:5 The early churches met in homes; there is little archaeological evidence of specific church buildings until two hundred years after Jesus.

16:17 The book of Proverbs gave similar advice to the 'ecclesia' of Israel in the Old Testament. There are those within the community of believers from whom we may not formally separate, but from whom it is wiser to just stay away. Paul says that we should "mark" those who are always stirring up division and putting obstacles in the way of those wishing to walk towards the Kingdom; and just quietly keep away from them.

16:23 Erastus must have been a very wealthy man of high social profile. In this list, he is purposefully placed next to Quartus- a common slave name- who is simply described as a "brother". The true church of Christ will be characterized by an amazing unity between persons of very different social, ethnic and personal background. Our unity should be enough to stop this world dead in its tracks and win it for Christ (Jn. 17:23).

## 1 CORINTHIANS

1:4 To *always* be thanking God for what He has done for others is an indication of a very selfless spirit.

1:7 The purpose of the Holy Spirit gifts in the first century was to "confirm" the new believers (v. 6). Once the New Testament was completed, this was no longer required.

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1:10,11 There were many serious moral and doctrinal problems in the church at Corinth. But Paul begins with the problem of their being divided. Division amongst believers is an awful sin which must be avoided at all costs.

1:14,15 Who physically baptizes us has no spiritual significance.

1:17 Paul doesn't mean that baptism is unimportant- he has just said he did baptize some people, and the Acts record gives other examples. He means that the focus of the work the Lord had given him was to above all spread the Gospel; perhaps he left the follow up and baptizing of people to others.

1:28 God has chosen us; so we are in some way the low and despised in this world and the societies in which we live.

2:4 The power of persuasion is in the Gospel itself, especially in the message of the cross (v. 2). Converts are not won by the slickness of the presentation, but by the power of the message.

2:6 If the rulers of this world are "coming to nothing", we shouldn't place our hopes in politicians, but rather in the politics of God's coming Kingdom on earth at the return of Jesus.

2:9 God has "prepared" an individual place for us in eternity; we will each as it were have our own especially prepared room in God's eternal house (Jn. 14:1-3).

2:13 We combine spiritual things with spiritual by comparing the various parts of God's word, which was written by His Holy Spirit; and by making sense of God's Spirit working in our lives, combining this experience with the teaching of the words of His Spirit in the Bible.

2:14 It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, that many people just 'don't get' our message of Christ to them.

2:15 People *do* judge us; but our attitude should be that it means nothing to us, and in this sense we cannot be judged by them.

3:2 When we are baptize, we are born again (Jn. 3:3-5); in spiritual terms we are babies, and we grow spiritually from the milk of God's word, the basic teachings of the Gospel; but as we mature, we move on to the meat of His word. But the Corinthians hadn't matured.

3:8 The labour we expend upon others will receive an eternal reward- unlike the labour we expend upon our secular lives, careers etc.

3:9 Paul likens God to a fellow worker on a building site or on a farm; this shows the humility of God in being prepared to work with us as we try to help others to His Kingdom.

3:15 If those we convert or try to build up in faith should fall away, we ourselves will still be saved, although we too must pass through the testing fire of the final judgment.

3:23 Christ even after His ascension is "God's" and therefore not God Himself.

4:1 As taught in the parables of Jesus, we have each been given certain talents and blessings which we must use faithfully in God's service. If we don't use them, or use them for our own selfish advantage in this life, then we are not faithful stewards.

4:3 The fact we will be judged by God is so significant that it means that how mere people judge us in this life is irrelevant and should matter little to us.

4:4 On one level, our conscience is important. But even if our conscience is clear about something, this doesn't mean that we are therefore right. We stand before God's judgment of us; at the last day, our conscience will not as it were jump out of us and stand there and judge us. We will be judged according to our response to the Word which Jesus spoke (Jn. 12:48); and in some matters our conscience is faulty.

4:5 True judgement involves considering a person's deepest motives. Seeing these are hidden, both to us as observers and often to the person themselves, we cannot judge / condemn others; we simply *must* leave this to God. This doesn't mean that we can't have an opinion- otherwise we would be unable to tell right from wrong. But we must not pre-judge God's ultimate judgment of a person.

4:10 The life decisions we make because of our knowledge of Christ will often make us appear foolish in the eyes of unbelieving people. But *do we* appear fools to them- or do we usually act just like they do?

4:15 Those we bring to Christ are our spiritual children, and we must always care for them as long as we live; and we should likewise respect those who brought us to Christ as our spiritual parents.

5:2 Local church discipline is occasionally required in cases of severe immorality such as this. But the aim is that through the process, they will be saved (v. 5). We should not cast people out just because of personal disagreement with them and never in anger, only in love and a desire to save both them and others.

5:5 The common understanding of 'Satan' breaks down here; for the adversary [perhaps local Roman authorities, in this case] plays a part in the salvation of people, under God's hand.

5:6 The leaven or yeast which negatively influenced others in the church wasn't merely the sexually perverted person; it also refers to "malice" (v. 8). The reason for church discipline in this case was protective- so that others wouldn't be badly influenced.

5:11 Eating together in the first century was a sign of acceptance and fellowship. Jesus ate with all kinds of sinners in order to bring them to Him; He didn't refuse to eat with people because they weren't up to His spiritual level.

6:1 We should therefore not take other believers to court; instead we should try to resolve the issues through the mediation of wise, humble people within the church- even those who may be counted as nothing amongst us.

6:7 We should suffer ourselves to be defrauded rather than take people to court; we live in an age of litigation and legal threatening as never before, and we mustn't be caught up in it.

6:8 To take a brother to court for defrauding you is in fact [in God's eyes] to defraud them; so you show yourself no better than them, and thus condemn yourself.

6:9 If we believe that the wicked will not be allowed into the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns, this should be comfort enough for us. This is the only judgment that matters, and so we shouldn't take them to human judgment in this life. By refraining from doing so, we show our faith in God's judgment which is to come (see 4:3,4).

6:11 *Washed... in the name*- A reference to baptism. We also have committed [in essence] the sins which we are tempted to take others to court over. But we were graciously forgiven through our baptism. Therefore we should be forgiving to them.

6:12 Christ hasn't given us a long list of things which we must do and those we must not do. The question isn't 'What can I get away with?' but rather 'What is the expedient / wise thing?'

6:16 The sexual act is designed to be used by God in an ongoing sense in order to make two people "one". To use it any other way is seriously sinful.

7:2 Paul often sets an ideal standard, and yet recognizes God's concessions to human weakness. Thus he advises the single life, but makes a concession to marriage; in marriage, there shouldn't be separation, but if there is, then remain single (v. 11).

7:5 We are tempted by our own internal libido, rather than a cosmic being. The internal desire for forbidden sexual relations is our real adversary / Satan.

7:7 Both marriage and singleness are gifts from God. Yet many single people so wish to be married, and some married so wish to be single again; thinking that they would serve God better in this case. But whatever state we are in, is a gift from God that we must use.

7:12 *I, not the Lord*- All that Paul wrote was inspired by God's Spirit. Often, however, he is repeating the teaching which the Lord Jesus had already given (v. 10). However, now Paul tells us something which has been revealed additionally to him by the Spirit, and which is not to be found in the teaching of Jesus.

7:14 To some extent our unbelieving or immature family members are 'covered' in us. It's a motivation to remain faithful to God ourselves.

7:16 Whilst God through Jesus will save people, He has delegated this work to us. A believer can

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save another person; this is a great encouragement to 'stick it out' in marriage to an unbeliever, and in preaching the Gospel.

7:17 *In all the churches*- Paul's teaching to this one church was inspired by God and is therefore relevant and binding far wider than to that one church. His letters are therefore not merely historical documents, but the voice of God to all believers in all generations. We do of course live in a different place in time and geography, but the essence of God's teaching through him must be applied by us all.

7:20,23 *If you can become free... become not slaves*- Maybe relevant to signing ourselves up for careers or employment which enslaves us and takes us away from the things of God.

7:36 It appears that 7:26-40 are Paul's comments upon a very specific situation in Corinth- he is writing an answer to various things which the Corinthians had written to him about (v. 1). We are reading only his answers, without having seen the original questions.

7:39 Marriage is for life. At no other time in human history has this principle been under such attack as it is today. Marriage for believers is to be only "in the Lord"- to those who have been baptized into Him.

7:40 *I think*- the Greek can imply 'I am certain that...!'

8:1 We can use knowledge, including spiritual knowledge, wrongly- even if the knowledge is theoretically correct. If we live in love, our concern will be to edify or build up others, and we will use and apply our knowledge appropriately and sensitively.

8:3 The wonderful thing is that God knows us; not so much that we have some limited knowledge of Him.

8:4,5 Contrary to the popular beliefs of the time, Paul teaches that idols don't exist. He speaks of the idols as 'demons' (10:21); the people believed in the existence of demons as demi-gods, and made idols to them on earth. The Corinthians were tempted to worship both God and also the demons / idols. Paul is clearly stating that demons don't exist; the language of 'demon possession' in the New Testament is simply using the language of the day for unexplained [often mental] illnesses.

8:6 The only God is God the Father. The false doctrine of the Trinity claims that the one God exists in three persons, one of which is "God the Father". But the Bible teaches that the one and only God is God the Father. Therefore Jesus is not God. His existence as a separate entity from God is made clear by this verse.

8:9 We are free to eat what we want; but our decisions must be overshadowed always by the concern as to what effect our example will have upon others less mature in the Faith. This is a principle we often need to apply in our decision making. 'I see nothing wrong with it... it's OK in

my conscience' is a spiritually selfish attitude. Our examples have more influence upon others than we imagine. If our example causes another to stumble, then we have sinned against Christ and His death for that person is as it were wasted (vv. 12,13). So what may not be a personal sin for us becomes sinful if it causes others to stumble.

9:5 *A wife that is a believer*- Again Paul stresses that marriage should only be to a believer (7:39).

9:12 Here we have an example of how we can chose to live spiritual life on different levels. It wouldn't have been wrong for Paul to take a salary for his work, and he explains there is even Old Testament precedent for this- and even an unrecorded saying of Jesus which teaches it (v. 14). But he chose to take a higher level- and not take a salary. If we love God truly, we will want to try to serve Him on the highest possible level. We will not be minimalists, thinking what we can 'get away with'.

9:17 Paul is saying that a sign that he has been truly called to preach the Gospel is because this isn't something which came naturally to him; his silent years in Arabia after his conversion were perhaps due to him struggling against the command to preach (Gal. 1:17). If we feel it's so hard and 'not me' to share the good news of Christ with others- then we are in good company.

9:18 A paradox- by not taking a wage or reward from men for our service [be it money or the reward of praise], then we will receive a reward from God.

9:20 Without being hypocritical, we too must engage with people on their terms- rather than baldly presenting the Gospel to them in our terms with no real interest in their response.

9:27 The mere fact of telling others the Gospel won't justify us; we can still be rejected by God if we fail to practice personal self-control.

10:2 Israel in slavery in Egypt represent us in the world, before baptism. When Israel went through the Red Sea, they had water on both sides of them and a cloud (also water) above them. In this sense they were surrounded with water- and so Paul saw it as a symbol of baptism. They came through the Red Sea and had to walk through the wilderness (our life in this world after baptism), feeding daily on manna (God's word, Jesus), until they came to the promised land (the Kingdom of God on earth when Jesus returns). Israel failed in the wilderness, they wanted to return to Egypt, and we must learn from their example.

10:13 The test may actually be beyond our ability to bear; but God gives us a way of escape. Whenever we sin, we are therefore guilty and responsible; we can't justify our failure by 'situational ethics', whereby we reason that the situation left us with no choice but to sin. God promises that He will not allow this ever to happen. It's a great comfort as well as a challenge.

10:21 Demons are another name for idols- which don't exist, even though many think they do (8:4,5).

10:29,30 *Why is my liberty...? why is evil spoken of me... ?*- These appear to be Paul anticipating the kind of objections which people would raise to what he has just said (he has this same style in 15:35). We must be sensitive to the conscience of others, and not simply reason that we see nothing wrong in doing something.

11:1 Paul isn't someone to just be admired from a distance, as we may admire a painting; we really are to see him as our model, so that we might follow Christ better.

11:3 *The head of Christ is God*- Even now, *after* Jesus' mortal life, He is still subservient to God.

11:19 Our response to division in the church reveals whether we are approved of God or not.

11:23-29 This section can be usefully read just before we take the bread and wine at the breaking of bread service. We can break bread alone; and this is an appropriate Bible passage to read.

11:28,29 A few moments of silence before we take the bread and wine are necessary- so that we can examine ourselves. As we reconstruct in our own imaginations the death of Christ, we naturally will examine ourselves, because our conscience will be touched.

11:31 'Judge' is being used in the sense of 'condemn'. We cannot avoid the day of judgment; but if we condemn ourselves in our self-examination today, realizing that we are not worthy, then, we will not be condemned. This will work out to be the greatest paradox of all existence.

11:32 *Condemned with the world*- Those rejected at the day of judgment will simply be sent back into the world to share the world's judgment. If in this life we prefer to be with the world rather than with Jesus and His people, then we will be sent back into the world when He returns.

12:3 There were people who claimed to have the Holy Spirit gifts who in fact didn't, and who were willing to curse Jesus as the pagans demanded they did. The problem of false claims to Holy Spirit possession continues with us today.

12:10 Only some people in the first century were given the gift of speaking in tongues [foreign languages]. See too v. 30. Those who claim that 'speaking in tongues' is experienced by every truly converted believer are therefore wrong.

12:13 We become parts of the body of Christ by being baptized into His body. This is why baptism is so important; and it means that everyone who's truly baptized is part of the body of Christ, and we therefore should not be divided from others in the body (v. 25); and we cannot say that we have no need of others in the body of Christ (v. 21). The bread which we break at the breaking of bread is a symbol of the body of Christ; we are one loaf (10:17). We should therefore welcome at the breaking of bread all those who have been validly baptized into Christ.

Seeing there is only one body of Christ, one loaf, one bread, we are effectively breaking bread with them anyway even if we (wrongly) refuse to break bread with them.

12:22 The quiet or weak members of the body of Christ are very valuable- and we should recognize this.

13:1 Speaking with tongues is therefore not a guarantee of salvation.

13:4 Love here is personified as a person. We should 'be' love; love is the foremost characteristic, the essence, of the Christian life.

13:6 *Rejoices not in unrighteousness*- Much 'entertainment' invites us to do just this; to enjoy viewing and hearing unrighteous things and take pleasure from them, although we are not literally doing those things. We are not to rejoice in sinful things but to focus our minds upon spiritual things.

13:8 Paul here prophesies that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would pass away. They will be given again when Jesus returns (Heb. 6:5).

14:2 The gift of tongues was the ability to speak in foreign languages, as happened in Acts 2. Paul is here describing, and criticizing, what was happening in the church at Corinth.

14:6 To speak in a foreign language for the sake of it, just to show off, wouldn't help anyone; they'd need someone with the gift of translating to translate back to their own language. The essence of what Paul is saying in this chapter is: 'Don't show off. Use whatever gifts you've been given to practically upbuild others, rather than abusing them to exalt yourself, to show off before others, to appear different and cool in the eyes of men'.

14:10 'Tongues' refers to "languages in the world", i.e. not 'mumbo-jumbo' but intelligible speech, as happened in Acts 2.

14:19 Whilst these commands refer to the use of the gift of languages ["tongues"] in a first century church, we can grasp the principle- talk to people on their level, in a way and style which is spiritually helpful to them, rather than talking on your own level to them, insensitive to their needs. The Lord Jesus taught the people God's word as they were able to understand, not as He was able to expound (Mk. 4:33).

14:27 There were unlikely to be more than two or three language groups in the church audience, who didn't know any of the other languages being used.

14:28 This isn't obeyed in those churches which claim that 'tongues' are involuntary utterances.

14:32 Those who truly have the gift of prophecy will be in control of themselves and not out of their minds.

14:34 This command is specifically in the context of the use of tongues and prophecy; many churches today who claim to experience tongues simply disregard this.

14:37 Truly spiritual people will accept Paul's commands here and not short cut or ignore them.

15:2 Holding on to the true understanding of the Gospel is required for salvation. It is no bad thing to regularly remind ourselves of the basic teachings of the Gospel.

15:10 The idea of labour not being in vain recurs in v. 58. The connection teaches that Paul's zealous labour in response to grace is not just to be admired from a distance; he is to be taken as our example.

15:11 Peoples' faith is dependent to some extent upon the preacher; we can bring people to faith or leave them without faith and hope because we didn't preach to them (Rom. 10:14).

15:20 *Firstfruits*- Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given eternal life. When we are resurrected and given eternal life, we will be like the rest of the harvest. If Christ was the "firstfruits", then men like Enoch and Elijah, indeed nobody before the time of Christ, was given eternal life at the end of their mortal lives.

15:22 *Shall all be made live*- All those "in Christ" by baptism into His death and resurrection.

15:28 Christ will be eternally subject to God, and will give His Kingdom to God (v. 24). Christ wasn't just less than God during His mortal life; He will eternally be like this. Trinitarian theology can't satisfactorily answer this.

15:29 Paul doesn't support the idea of 'baptism for the dead' - he's saying that it's inconsistent for people to do this in Corinth if they also deny the resurrection; because baptism symbolizes death (as we go under the water) and resurrection, as we come up out of the water (Rom. 6:3-5).

15:32 The colossal importance of the resurrection of the body at the return of Christ is effectively downplayed by those who wrongly believe in a 'soul' going to reward in Heaven at death. For us, we should live our lives in the context of knowing that we shall rise again, be judged, and by God's grace live eternally in His Kingdom.

15:33 We may think we can be friends with bad people without being corrupted; but let us give Paul's words their full weight.

15:38 We will be given a new body at the resurrection- we will live eternally in a bodily form. All existence in the Bible is bodily existence. But there will be a connection between who we are now, and who we will eternally be- when we die, our character is like a seed which is sown, to rise again in resurrection. The personality and character we develop in this life are therefore of huge and eternal importance.

15:41 There will be different levels of reward in the Kingdom, just as one star is brighter than another; some will rule over five cities, others over two (Lk. 19:19), in reflection of the fact that some people in this life bring forth more fruit than others (Mt. 13:8).

15:50 As we are still “flesh and blood”, we cannot fully now be in the Kingdom of God, neither is the church fully the Kingdom- because we must be changed at the resurrection before we can fully enter the Kingdom (vv. 51-53).

16:2 God wants regular, consistent generosity rather than occasional large acts of generosity.

16:7 *If the Lord permit*- We should always speak of our plans as being ‘God willing’ (James 4:15).

16:14 It’s possible to serve God without doing it in love- as Paul warns against in chapter 13. It’s very important to do all we do consciously motivated by love; not because we ‘have to’, not for appearances, nor from habit and tradition.

16:15-18 Respect can never be demanded, it can only be earned. We should respect those who have clearly given their lives to serving others in Christ.

16:22 *Maranatha*- A watchword of the early church, meaning ‘May the Lord come soon!’.

## 2 CORINTHIANS

### 2 Cor

1:4 One reason for our sufferings is so that the comfort we are given for them we may share with others who are suffering the same. But this will only be possible if we are meaningfully in relationship with others; and suffering has a way of making us self-centred. Paul understood this principle so well that he could write that his sufferings were so that he could comfort the Corinthians (v. 6).

1:9 *Sentence of death within ourselves*- Paul may be referring to having received a death penalty from the local authorities, or to his recovery from a terminal illness.

1:13 ‘What we write is what you read’ may be a way of saying that they knew within their consciences, at first reading of his words, that there was congruence between Paul’s words and his actions- as there should be in our words too.

1:19 The totally positive nature of the Lord Jesus should be reflected in our positivity and sense of purpose in life (v. 17).

2:6 This may refer to the case of the immoral brother about which Paul had earlier written in 1 Cor. 5, advising the church to separate from this person. But Paul knew that excessive separation from even such an immoral person can result in psychological and spiritual damage if they have repented (v. 7).

2:12 *A door was opened*- God sometimes gives us opportunities to make a special witness for Him, and we must have the courage to take them.

2:14 This alludes to the Roman triumph, whereby the victorious soldiers marched through the streets in glory and with the burning of incense after defeating their enemy. The victory of Jesus on the cross should fill us with such a sense of victory and glory.

3:2 The fact Paul had converted the Corinthians was the basis upon which he had authority with them; he didn't need any letter from any other authority figure.

3:12 "Boldness" is a word often associated with the preaching of the Gospel in Acts. We who are naturally shy and not confident in witnessing to others can be inspired with boldness by the fact we have a sure hope. If we believe we shall live eternally in God's Kingdom, we will find strength to share this good news with others (see 4:13).

3:13 The things of the Old Covenant (v. 14), the Law of Moses, were fading away (v. 11). They would finally finish with the destruction of the temple in AD70. This means we aren't bound to keep the Law of Moses today- it has faded away.

3:18 When Moses spoke with the Angel, the glory on the Angel's face became reflected onto Moses' face, and he radiated it to others. If we are in a personal relationship with Jesus, His glory, His personality, will be reflected from our faces to others; and moreover, we will become like Him. His face will become ours. This is why we should regularly read the Gospels and meditate upon Jesus as a person; simply knowing Him will transform us.

4:4 It is darkness which blinds men's eyes (1 Jn. 2:11), i.e. not walking according to the light of God's word. There is only *one* God- not two. *God* (and not Satan) blinded Israel to the Gospel (Rom. 11:8); 2 Cor. 3:14 says that their minds were blinded or "hardened" (RV) as Pharaoh's was. Whoever "the god of this world" is or was, God worked through it and is therefore greater than it. In Eph. 4:18 Paul specifically defined what he meant by "darkness": "Having the understanding darkened... through the ignorance that is *within* them... the blindness of their heart" (AV). That opposition was the real adversary / Satan. Paul is likely quoting the phrase "the god of this world" from contemporary Jewish writings rather than actually believing such a 'god' existed.

4:5 Preaching can become a very proud exercise if we use it to project ourselves to others. The content of our message must be Jesus.

4:10 The principle of baptism is daily worked out in our lives; losing temporarily [dying] and yet sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus (Rom. 6:3-5).

5:3 *Found naked*- Those who will be rejected by Jesus at the final judgment will be "found naked" (Rev. 16:15) because they have not developed anything in God's account. In a similar

figure, Jesus tells us to store up treasure in Heaven with God by the way we live and think today (Mt. 6:20).

5:9 *At home or absent*- Whether we are dead or alive at the return of the Lord Jesus. If we die, we will be unconscious until He returns; but effectively, our death will be His return for us, because the next conscious moment for us will be the resurrection and being with the Lord Jesus.

5:10 We will receive the result of how we lived our lives in a bodily form- either we will remain mortal and die “the second death”, or we will not be affected by the second death (Rev. 2:11) because we will be given an immortal body like Jesus now has. Note we will exist eternally in a bodily form; all existence spoken of in the Bible is bodily existence.

5:17 We are “in Christ” by baptism into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5), and thus become part of a new creation, of which Christ is the creator.

5:20 We are Christ’s representatives on earth, and so when people meet us, they meet Jesus. Our behaviour must be appropriate to this (6:3,4).

6:2 The emphasis on the word “now” reflects the crucial importance of life and living today. We are living in moments of amazing, eternal opportunity. At the day of judgment it will be too late.

6:8 *By evil report*- The fact we will be slandered is a proof we are God’s servants (v. 4).

6:11 The Corinthians were aggressive to Paul, and yet he opened his heart to them- there is more autobiographical detail about Paul in his letters to them than in any other of his letters.

6:14 *Unequally yoked*- This principle affects who we chose to marry and have deep relationships with, knowing that bad company corrupts good spiritual habits (1 Cor. 15:33).

6:17 We are to come out from this world, and yet be a light to the world. Our separation from them is therefore from their sinful behaviour. The command to separate is positive- we are to be separated *from* the world so that we can be separated *unto* God Himself; this is the meaning of the Hebrew idea of ‘holiness’.

7: :3 Paul usually speaks of dying together and living together in the context of sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ, a process which begins with baptism (Rom. 6:3-5). But our brothers and sisters in Christ are also part of His body, and therefore we should think in terms of dying and living with them too- even with those like the Corinthian believers who were aggressive to Paul (12:16 etc.) and who were weak in their understanding and behaviour.

7:7 Elsewhere in 2 Corinthians it's clear that the Corinthians were aggressive to Paul; and yet he tried to be as positive about them as he could, believing their kind words as far as possible without being naive.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

7:10 Our salvation involves repentance, and this comes from "Godly sorrow". How often do we experience this as we reflect upon our failures?

7:13 If we are unselfish, then the joy of others becomes our joy. Joy is not only to be experienced in terms of things which make us personally joyful.

8:1,2 The grace or loving kindness of God elicits generosity or 'giving' from us; for the Greek word translated "grace" means 'gift'. We cannot be passive to the gift of saving grace.

8:12 In this way, a poor person can still be generous. If God's grace motivates us to generosity but we simply don't have the things we'd like to give to others, then our desire to give is still counted by Him as if we had done it.

8:15 This quotation from the Old Testament implies some Israelites gathered more manna each day than others who were maybe weak or old. But those who gathered more shared their excess with those who couldn't gather enough.

8:16 God puts things such as the needs of others into our hearts, and we must follow His leading.

8:23 Christ glories in those who do His work of caring for others; He has such a positive view of His servants.

9:2 Zeal and enthusiasm to be generous are contagious; but generosity and care for others mustn't be mere words, as it was with the Corinthians and as it so often is in conversations between believers; there must be concrete action (v. 3).

9:6 Reaping the results of our generosity will come at the harvest, which is the return of Christ (Mt. 13:30). We can be generous with things other than money.

9:7 Giving to others, of anything (not only money), should be done with joy and not because we feel we have to, or it's expected of us; it should be the result of a conscious decision which we privately take.

9:8 If we truly desire to be generous, then God will give us what is required to be generous with- He will give us yet more seed to sow, so that the harvest from it (both in terms of praise to Him from the recipients and of glory we will receive in the Kingdom) will be greater (vv. 10-12). Jesus taught the same in Lk. 11:5-7- we will be given whatever we ask, if we ask for it in order to give to others that which they truly need but we truly don't have.

10:5 The essence of Christianity is to be spiritually minded, to bring all our thoughts under control.

10:7 *So also are we-* Whatever we know of our own experience of Christ, not least His gracious love, presence and forgiveness of us, we should recognize is also experienced by our brethren in

Christ with whom we may have differences.

10:8 Authority, be it in a church, over children, in a marriage, in the workplace, is a gift from God to be used positively to build others up, to serve others with, rather than for our own glorification and negative destruction of others thereby.

10:10 Paul may have had some physical weakness or deformity which made him unattractive (10:1; 11:6)- a "thorn in the flesh" (12:7). God delights to use those with weakness to do His work, and Paul was a great example of this.

10:12 We tend to spiritually compare ourselves against other people and conclude that we're not bad. But the standard of comparison must be with Jesus. He was of our nature, our representative, so that we can realistically do this.

10:16 *So that...*- If Paul's converts at Corinth grew spiritually, then he felt he would be used to take the Gospel to other new areas. Their immaturity was therefore an obstacle to the spreading of the Gospel and the salvation of others.

11:2 In baptism, we are betrothed to marry Christ. As Paul had brought them to Christ, he felt the need to ensure they were a virgin for Him; every act of unfaithfulness, going after other gods, is no less awful than a betrothed virgin sleeping around with other men. It was for the sake of Christ's feelings, for the sake of how Paul loved and felt for Christ, that he so wanted the Corinthians to be faithful to Him.

11:3 Paul saw the Corinthians as innocent Eve in Eden- even though it's clear from his letters to them that they were sexually immoral and very immature in their Christian understanding. He really tried to be as positive as possible about them.

11:4 *You do well*- Paul is being sarcastic, concerning how the Corinthians were so easily attracted by false Gospels. There is such a thing as "another Jesus"; just because a teaching says something about Jesus, this doesn't mean it is the truth.

11:7-9 Paul is writing in response to criticisms made of him. The way he protests that he never once took money from the Corinthians implies that he had been falsely accused of making money out of them. Such slander and personal attack is sadly almost an inevitable consequence of preaching the Gospel.

11:14 Paul is here quoting from contemporary myths or a common saying about Satan. He is saying that in the same way, the false apostles were making themselves appear true apostles. The 'satan' / adversary in the Corinthian church seems to have been Jewish false teachers, who were "Hebrews", "Israelites" (11:22).

11:24 Forty lashes were supposed to kill a man. The list of Paul's sufferings here is amazing. They would have physically and psychologically shattered most men; he kept going because he was

truly motivated by the cause of Christ.

11:28 Equivalent to all these awful physical sufferings listed in vv. 23-27 was the pressure of anxiety for other brothers and sisters. This, therefore, was quite something.

11:29 There are times when we must appear weak and even be weak, even though ultimately we aren't weak; we show our strength by being weak. Jesus' death was the great example of this (2 Cor. 13:4); Paul is saying that he has taken this example personally. And we must do likewise.

11:33 Paul remembered that escape, squashed small in a garbage basket let down over a wall into the rubbish dump, as one of the most humiliating things that happened to him (v. 30).

12:2 Paul speaks of himself as a "man in Christ"; he had the ability to see himself from outside of himself.

12:2 *The third heaven*- 'Heavens and earth' is sometimes used in the Bible to mean 'a system of things'. The first 'heaven' was the Mosaic system; we are now in the heavenly places of Christ (Eph. 1:3 2:6); the third heaven may therefore refer to the Kingdom age after Christ has returned. Paul was given a special vision of the Kingdom- "paradise" (v. 4), the Kingdom of God on earth when the original state in the garden of Eden will be restored.

12:6 If people have too high an opinion of us, we should inform them of our weakness, as Paul did.

12:7 *Thorn in the flesh*- This could refer to a physical weakness in Paul, maybe a speech impediment (10:1,10; 11:6). Or the reference to "flesh" could suggest a moral weakness in Paul- worldly women were 'thorns' to God's people in the past (Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13). The 'satan' / adversary to Paul's work which was associated with his "thorn in the flesh" was however clearly the Jewish opposition to him, involving a group of false teachers following him around trying to get his converts to turn against him and return to the Jewish system.

12:8 This recalls the triple prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane that the cup of suffering would pass from Him.

12:9 There are things we too repeatedly ask God for, convinced that our service of Him will be enhanced if He hears our prayer. But the answer is the same for us as it was for Paul- the fact we have His grace and acceptance should mean that we ultimately lack nothing (Ps. 23:1; 34:10). The other part of the answer is that God loves to work through the broken, the small, those who think they aren't good enough or smart enough.

12:14 Paul saw his converts as his spiritual children. We can go through all the same emotions if we bring others to Christ.

12:15 Love that is unresponded to is one of the hardest human experiences. But it is what God and Jesus go through more than any; for the more we love and are prepared to love, the harder

is the rejection.

12:21 *I may have to mourn*- He means, he may have to discipline them. But such discipline was motivated by true sadness.

13:4 Christ's death, His willing weakness, was the model followed in handling the difficult Corinthians; and the cross becomes the pattern for us in our side of handling difficult relationships.

13:5 We also should be able to examine ourselves and see whether Christ is in us or not. Serious self-examination is a distinct feature of the Christian life.

13:7 *Seem to have failed*- Paul wasn't concerned with his image, with appearing a failure in the eyes of men [such fear of public failure obsesses many people]. What he wanted was for them to grow in Christ and please Him, even if they temporarily rejected Paul.

13:8 This wonderful principle means that we should not worry unduly if our technique is successful or not; for if we are truly motivated, we cannot damage the Truth by our genuine efforts to serve. It is the one talent man who did nothing, through fear of failure, who was condemned- not those who somehow did at least something (Mt. 25:25).

## GALATIANS

1:6,7 A teaching which appears to make mention of Jesus isn't therefore harmless; a 'distortion' of the Gospel (v. 7) is another Gospel (v. 6), which can lead to condemnation (v. 9). Correct understanding of the Gospel is so important (1 Cor. 15:2).

1:8 *An angel*- This is hyperbole; Paul means 'even if even an Angel was to teach something else...'. But Angels in fact do not sin; for our reward is to live eternally like them (Lk. 20:35,36). Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), and so Angels can't sin, seeing they are eternal.

1:10 Any preaching of Christ will lead to opposition from men, and we have to simply accept this fact.

1:16 Paul emphasizes that he was never one to be "in with the in crowd"; he was a loner, who preached Christ according to his totally personal experience of Him, not because any man had sent him to preach. We should be the same.

1:17 These silent three years of Paul in the Arabian desert may have been his disobedience to the call to preach, after his preaching immediately after conversion was met with rejection and opposition.

2:4 These false brothers appeared to be Christians, but their agenda was to bring Paul's converts back into bondage to the Law of Moses and the Jewish system. This element appear to have been the 'satan' / adversary to Paul's preaching of the Gospel throughout the Roman world.

2:9 If we too perceive that other brethren with whom we differ have been given a gift, a grace, and that they too preach the same Gospel (v. 7), then we should also not reject them- even if we agree to work somewhat separately from them. The agreement that Paul would focus on converting Gentiles rather than Jews was pragmatic, but here we have a precedent for pragmatic decision making in the church.

2:11-13 Although there has to be pragmatic decision making at times (v. 9 note), we must be careful not to let God's principles be broken. It must've been hard for Paul to directly confront Peter about his hypocrisy, but he did so because an important principle was at stake. Peter would break bread privately with Gentile believers, but not when some Jewish brothers came to visit. Paul saw this as seriously wrong; we should unashamedly break bread with our brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever political pressure may be exerted; and whatever the consequences. To do otherwise is to not walk according to the Gospel (v. 14). If a spiritual giant like Peter could fail in this matter, we must recognize it will be a temptation for the rest of us.

2:20 *Crucified with Christ*- Maybe a reference to the fact Paul had been baptized into the death of Christ, with the result that the resurrection life of Jesus is now revealed in our lives (Rom. 6:3-5).

2:20 *Loved me and gave Himself up for me*- We can each say and feel these words.

3:1 When Paul had preached the Gospel to the Galatians, he had been an incarnation of Christ crucified. People should see in us, in our sufferings and 'weakness', something of the crucified Christ in His time of dying.

3:6 *Imputed*- God counted Abraham as totally righteous because Abraham believed in God and in his promised future descendant, Jesus. Abraham lived before the Law of Moses, and so he wasn't counted as righteous because of his obedience to Law but by faith in the [future] Christ who was to come.

3:8 In the promises to Abraham, we see the basic elements of the Gospel. Abraham was promised that he would inherit the land for ever; God would be his personal God; that he would have one special descendant who would bring blessing [forgiveness- Acts 3:27,28] upon people from all nations; and that this one special son [Jesus- v. 16] would become many people who would also eternally inherit the land. This is fulfilled by people being baptized into Christ and being counted as "in" Him (vv. 27-29).

3:24 The purpose of the Law of Moses was to convict God's people of sin, and to understand their salvation in terms of the great future offering of God's own Son, which it pointed forward to. Once Christ came, there was no need to keep the Law of Moses.

3:27 *As many of you* – Implying only as many as have been baptized into Christ are "in Christ" and heirs of the things promised to Abraham. These included eternal possession of the earth

and the blessing of forgiveness from sin through Christ, Abraham's great descendant. Thus through baptism we become the spiritual children of Abraham, "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), members of the new 'community of Israel' (Eph. 2:12).

4:4 If Jesus was "born [Greek: 'made'] of a woman", He therefore didn't physically exist before His birth of Mary.

4:6 *Abba*- The Aramaic word for "daddy". This is how close we can come to God Almighty.

4:10,11 If we are justified by keeping the Law of Moses, then the work of the Gospel is in vain for us.

4:13 God often uses our weakness as an opportunity for preaching the Gospel- this may be a reference to Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), which Paul asked three times to be taken from him. But in fact God used this weakness in order for the Gospel to spread.

4:19 *Pains of childbirth*- Paul took such responsibility for the people he preached to. We are "born again" by baptism and response to the Gospel (Jn. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:23); but it can happen as with the Galatians that people go so far away from the Gospel that they have to go through the birth process again.

4:29 Conflict with the world of unbelievers is inevitable, as predicted in Gen. 3:15.

4:30 *The scripture*- Paul is here quoting the angry words of Sarah as she cast out her slave girl Hagar (Gen. 21:10). Even in flashes of failure and anger like this, God's Spirit may still be working through the whole situation to inspire later generations.

5:1 The warnings against keeping parts of the Jewish law are very clear.

5:9 False teaching and wrong behaviour spreads more easily than right teaching and good behaviour.

5:13 The very fact that we do not have long lists of commandments to obey should of itself inspire us to serve one another practically.

5:14 The Law was also fulfilled by the death of Christ; His death was love unto the end, the ultimate definition of loving our neighbour.

5:15 *Take care that you are not consumed*- Aggressive disagreement and argument with our brethren may cost us eternity.

5:16 Victory against the flesh will be achieved more by focusing upon the positive than trying to cut off the negative.

5:20 Divisions are placed in the same category as sexual immorality.

5:21 *Practice*- To live in these things as a self-justified way of life and thinking, rather than occasional, repented of failures.

6:1 *Lest you also*- We should always remember our own spiritual weakness whenever we have to deal with the failures of others.

6:7 The reaping is at the harvest, when Christ returns. Then we will receive a reward for how we have lived today. We don't receive "eternal life" (v. 8) when we die, but at the harvest- when Christ returns. Until then we are unconscious in the grave.

6:8 The punishment for the wicked at the last day will be "corruption" in that they will be resurrected mortal, but their bodies won't be changed; they will exist for a while and then die "the second death" and be eternally unconscious (Rev. 2:11).

6:9 The more we believe in the coming of judgment at Christ's return, the more we will be inspired in this life.

6:11 *What large letters*- Perhaps Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) was poor eyesight- hence Gal. 4:15.

6:12 Judaism was a legally recognized religion in the Roman world. If the new Christians joined or rejoined the synagogues, they would be spared persecution. This is why Gentile Christians in Galatia were being tempted to join Judaism.

6:14 Are we proud of the cross, as Paul was?

6:17 *The marks*- An allusion to how slaves were branded with the sign of their owners. It should be visible to others that we are slaves of Jesus.

## EPHESIANS

1:3 We are "in Christ" by baptism into Him (Rom. 6:3-5). He is now in Heaven, and so we are in a spiritual sense 'in the heavens' (Eph. 2:6). This situation has been brought about by Christ, and so we could say that He is the creator of a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), of heavenly places for us. This theme of Paul's has been misunderstood badly by those who mistakenly believe that we go to Heaven on death (rather are we unconscious until Jesus returns and then we will be resurrected); or that Jesus created the literal Heavens (God did, not Jesus).

1:4 We didn't physically exist before the foundation of the world; neither did Jesus. Both He and us existed in God's purpose and plan.

1:16 Paul writes this about many people. For it to be true, he would have spent much of his available time in prayer for various brothers and sisters throughout the Mediterranean world. How long do we spend in prayer for others each day?

1:20-22 The exalted position of Christ is only because *God* resurrected Him and gave Him such authority and glory; clearly God and Jesus are separate, and God is greater than Jesus.

2:2 *The spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience* – Defined in v. 3 as “the lust of our flesh... the desires of the flesh and of the mind”. This spirit or principle within us is what causes disobedience and sin (James 1:13-15); and it is personified here as the prince of the world. For the mind of the flesh is indeed the effective master and ruler of most people in the world.

2:5 *Alive together with Christ*- A reference to baptism (Rom. 6:3-5). If we make the choice to be baptized, God and Jesus will work powerfully in us.

2:10 God long ago prepared good works for us to do. We need to understand what is His hope for us, His expectation- and seek to fulfil it.

2:12 This verse is proof enough there can be no salvation in any religious system that excludes Jesus. To be without Him is to be “without God”, because He is the only way to relationship with God (Jn. 14:6). We also learn here of the vital importance of the covenant or promise which God made with the Jewish fathers- for the Gospel was preached to Abraham in the form of the promises made to Him about Jesus and the future Kingdom of God on earth (Gal. 3:8).

2:15 If Jesus has removed the “law of commandments contained in ordinances”, then we really are free from keeping the Law of Moses. The reference to “commandments... ordinances” may refer to the ten commandments, which included the Sabbath. We are totally under the teaching of Christ.

3:8 *Less than the least*- Paul preached the Gospel very aware of his own weakness and unworthiness. Hence his witness was in humility and with power. We should preach with the same spirit. Paul’s awareness of his sinfulness grew over time. In an earlier letter he felt “least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9), now least of all believers, and at the end of his life he felt the worst sinner in the world (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet he was progressively more and more confident in his ultimate salvation, even though he increasingly realized the extent of his unworthiness. We will go through the same pattern in our spiritual growth.

3:10 This refers to how the Gospel was preached before the rulers of the first century Mediterranean world (Lk. 21:12; Acts 9:15). They are described as in “heavenly places”, following the Biblical way of speaking of positions of power and authority as the ‘heavens’.

3:19 We can “know” what is beyond human knowledge, because God will open our hearts and understanding- if we let Him.

3:20 God delights to do for us more than we could even imagine; we should have the same generous spirit to others.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

4:1 Paul was a prisoner of Rome; but he saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. Those things and life situations which appear to limit us and imprison us are all of Him; and we find spiritual freedom from their burden by perceiving ourselves as slaves of Christ.

4:5 *One faith* – One set of beliefs which comprise the true Gospel.

4:6 The one and only God is clearly distinguished from the one Lord Jesus (v. 5).

4:13 *Until* - It could be argued that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given until the early church had come to maturity and the New Testament had been written.

4:16 *Builds up itself* – The body of Christ edifies itself because of what each member of the body supplies to the whole. This is why pushing off on our own is damaging both to ourselves and to the rest of the body. We need fellowship with others; they do have something to give us, and we have something to give them. This is why division within the body of Christ is such a serious sin.

4:17 Notice the emphasis in this section upon the internal state of our thinking; this is the essence of Christianity. The world has a “vain” mind, spiritually empty. They live a corrupt “manner of life” because they are deceived by their own desires (v. 22); whereas we are to have a new mind (v. 22).

4:26 This is great practical advice; don’t let the day end with you angry.

4:32 We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. If we ask God to forgive us our secret sins, things we do wrong without realizing it nor specifically repent of- then we must likewise forgive those who sin against us without repenting. The more we reflect upon our own sins and their forgiveness, the more empowered we will be to forgive others.

5:2 The death of Christ on the cross isn’t just something for us to look at from a distance; we should let there be a direct bridge of influence and inspiration between it and our lives today; loving others in practical ways because He, there, so long ago, on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill just outside Jerusalem- died for me.

5:3 *Not even be named*- Just as the Jews were not to even mention the names of other gods (Ex. 23:13).

5:23-32 The husband is the head of the wife in the context of being her saviour. The man isn’t simply the head of the woman in any context just because he’s a male. A saviour has to be the leader and be accepted as such; Christian marriage is to role play the relationship of Christ to the church. The husband should therefore be willing to die for the wife, to love her as Christ loved the church; and the wife in recognition of this should in this context be acceptive and obedient to that (v. 24). Thus Christian marriage is connected to very high ideals; human dysfunction of course means that neither husband nor wife totally fulfil the roles they are called

to, but the height of the challenge, if seriously accepted, will ennoble marriage and lift it to a very high plane. The reasoning of these verses shows that a choice to marry an unbeliever can never be marriage as God intends.

6:4 The Lord is the trainer and instructor of our children; but He chooses to mediate that teaching through the parents.

6:5 Those who feel enslaved by their daily work can do their tasks *as if* they are doing them as service to Christ- and He will accept this as done to Him. This means that the person who has to work long, hard hours in the workplace most of the week can do as much service to Christ as the person who is 'free' to serve Christ in things like preaching, teaching and serving His brethren- *if* the work done to our human employer is consciously done by us "as to Christ".

6:11-13 The world is under God's control, not that of evil beings in heaven (Dan. 4:32). "All power" in heaven and in earth has been given to Jesus (Mt. 28:18) by God (Rev. 3:21; Lk. 22:29), so it cannot also be possessed by wicked beings in literal Heaven. There can be no sinful being in heaven itself (Ps. 5:4,5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10). Verse 12 may be translated, "For we wrestle not only against flesh and blood..." i.e., we do not only wrestle against individual men, but against organized systems. The church was facing "the evil day" of persecution at the hands of the Romans (1 Pet. 4:12; 5:8,9). "The rulers of this dark world" at the time were the Romans. Note that the wrestling is spiritual wrestling to keep the faith (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The Greek word for "principalities" is translated "magistrate" in Lk. 12:11; human "rule", in the sense of human government, in 1 Cor. 15:24, and the "power" of the Roman governor in Lk. 20:20. So it does not necessarily have reference to any power or prince in heaven. "Wicked spirituals in high (heavenly) places" doesn't refer to wicked beings in heaven itself. The exalted position of the true believers in Christ is described as being "in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 2:6). The threat to the church was twofold: from the Roman/Jewish persecution and from the (often Judaist) "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:13) within. Remember Ephesians was written to the church at Ephesus. Paul had previously warned them about this threat from within in Acts 20:29-30.

6:17 Salvation is our helmet in that if we firmly believe that we really will be saved when Christ returns, then this will guard our thinking [our head].

## PHILIPPIANS

1:6 God will never stop working with us once He has started; there will be times when His apparent silence may lead us to question this, but the fact is, even those apparent silences are part of His working with us.

1:12 Even imprisonment for false reasons can be used by God to lead us to meet people to whom we can witness the Gospel; and far lesser traumas and misjudgements will be used by Him likewise.

1:18 We should genuinely rejoice that the real Christ is preached, even if we doubt the credentials and behaviour of those who preach. The progress of Christ's Name and work is far more important than our personal disagreements with other preachers.

1:23 Paul would "be with Christ" in the Kingdom, thanks to the resurrection at the return of Christ to earth. Death is no more than an unconscious sleep for the believer; the next waking moment, we will be with Christ.

1:27 The basic teachings of the Gospel are designed to elicit a practical life in response to them.

2:6-11 "God also has highly exalted" Jesus "and given him a name" (v.9) shows that Jesus did not exalt Himself - God did it. It follows that He was not in a state of being exalted before God did this to Him, at His resurrection. The whole process of Christ's humbling and subsequent exaltation by God was to be "to the glory of God the Father" (v.11). God the Father is not, therefore, co-equal with the Son.

The context of this passage must be considered. Phil. 1:27 speaks of the importance of our state of mind. This is developed in the early verses of chapter 2: "Of one spirit... one *mind*... in lowliness of *mind* ... Let this *mind* be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...". Paul is therefore speaking of the importance of having a mind like that of Jesus, which is devoted to the humble service of others. The verses which follow are therefore commenting upon the humility of *mind* which Jesus demonstrated, rather than speaking of any change of *nature*. Just as Jesus was a servant, so earlier Paul had introduced himself with the same word (1:1 cp. 2:7). The attitude of Jesus is set up as our example, and we are urged to join Paul in sharing it. We're not asked to change natures; we're asked to have the mind of Jesus- so that we may know the "fellowship of sharing in His [Christ's] sufferings, becoming like Him in His death and so to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (3:10,11).

Jesus was "in the form [Greek *morphe*] of God". Although Jesus was perfect, He had a totally God-like mind, yet He was willing to take on the demeanour of a servant. Later Paul encourages us to become "conformed unto (Christ's) death" (3:10). We are to share the *morphe*, the form of Christ which He showed in His death. Christ "made himself of no reputation", or "emptied himself" (R.V.), alluding to the prophecy of His crucifixion in Is. 53:12: "He poured out His soul unto death". He "took upon Himself the form (demeanour) of a servant" by His servant-like attitude to His followers (Jn. 13:14), demonstrated supremely by His death on the cross (Mt. 20:28). Is. 52:14 prophesied concerning Christ's sufferings that on the cross: "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men". This progressive humbling of Himself "unto death, even the death of the cross" was something which occurred during His life and death, not at His birth.

3:10,11 If we share the sufferings of Christ now, we will share in His resurrection. Our baptism committed us to this as a way of life (Rom. 6:3-5).

3:13 *Forgetting the past*- This is so difficult to do. But if we believe for sure that we will live eternally in God's Kingdom, we have so much to look forward to that the past weighs less heavily. And God can help us- He made Joseph "forget" or [Hebrew] 'neglect' the pain he suffered in his family (Gen. 41:51).

3:20 We are citizens of Heaven, of God and of Jesus, although we live here on earth. This is where our loyalty should be; our earthly citizenship should mean far less to us than the fact we are citizens of God's Kingdom.

3:21 Jesus now exists in a bodily form; and we also will, eternally in God's Kingdom.

4:1 *My brothers... my joy and crown*- The crown of joy will be given us when Jesus returns to earth (1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Pet. 5:4). But that crown will be our brothers and sisters for whom we have labored in this life. Their presence in God's Kingdom, the fact they get to be saved, will be what gives us eternal joy. The amount we try for others in this life will affect the nature of our eternal salvation.

4:7 The simple fact of having prayed to God about things (v. 6) can give us this peace.

4:17 *Accrues*- God keeps a record of every act of generosity which we commit.

## COLOSSIANS

1:5 The hope we have is the hope of God's Kingdom on earth; Jesus will come from Heaven to earth to raise the dead and give us the reward (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). In this sense the promised hope is being prepared for us in Heaven.

1:9,10 Knowledge is related to our practical walk in Christ; not academic knowledge, but the practical knowledge of Christ which comes from His word. Daily reading of His word is therefore so important.

1:15 Jesus isn't God Himself but is the "image" of God, because His character was exactly like God's.

1:16 The idea of a creation "in Him" can be understood with the help of 2 Cor. 5:17, which says that anyone who is "in Christ" becomes a new creation. It's not talking about the literal creation of the world, which the Bible says was done by God Himself.

1:22 It's amazing to think that we can stand "without blemish" before God, because we are "in Christ".

1:23 The stabilizing element in our lives is "the hope of the Gospel", that we will live for ever in God's coming Kingdom on earth. We must not only not deviate in understanding, but continue positively believing that we will really be there. This continuing in faith in the certainty of future salvation is what will 'ground and settle' us.

1:24 God arranges circumstances in our lives so that the essence of the sufferings of Jesus are experienced by us- so that we might also share in His resurrection life. Only in this sense can we begin to “rejoice in my sufferings”.

2:1 For Paul, prayer was a striving with God- based upon the example of Jacob wrestling with an Angel until his request was heard (Gen. 32:24,25; Hos. 12:4).

2:2 Understanding brings assurance; this is the advantage of searching the Bible for the correct understanding of God.

2:9 As the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, so it can also dwell in us (v. 10; Jn. 1:16; Eph. 1:23; 4:13). But this doesn't make us God Himself in person, and neither does it make Jesus that.

2:12 Baptism is an immersion in water, symbolizing death in the grave, and emerging in resurrection. Baptism isn't sprinkling.

2:13 Forgiveness of sins is associated with baptism; which is why baptism is so important.

2:14 *Written in ordinances*- A reference to the ten commandments, which include the Sabbath. Most of the other nine commandments are repeated in the teaching of Jesus; but the Sabbath command isn't.

2:17 The rituals of the Jewish law pointed forward to Jesus (Gal. 3:24). But now that He has come, the Jewish law has been ended (v. 14).

2:23 It may 'feel good' to obey legalistic rituals, but this will not help us in our battle against self-indulgence.

3:1 Christ resurrected and then ascended to Heaven. We share in His resurrection by baptism (2:12); and the equivalent of His ascension to Heaven is that we should be thinking about spiritual, Heavenly things. These should be our reality, rather than the passing things of this world like wealth, comfort and temporary success. To be spiritually minded is the goal of the Christian life.

3:17 To be thankful in all things is a major feature of the Christian life.

3:23 It's very gracious of Jesus to accept our service to our worldly employer as service to Him. This empowers us to no longer be crushed by the monotony of our daily work- it can now have meaning and be consciously done for Jesus. This must've been especial comfort to slaves in the first century.

3:25 *No partiality*- Masters of slaves were not to think they were unaccountable to anyone (4:1). Even if in some aspects of our lives and thinking we are free from being accountable to people- we are still accountable to God and He will repay us at the day of judgment, when Christ comes.

4:3 We should also ask God to give us opportunities for preaching.

4:4 If even Paul felt he ought to preach more boldly than he did, and asked others to pray that he might do this... we shouldn't be surprised if we feel the same.

4:5 We shouldn't waste our time, but redeem it. The world is full of opportunities to waste our time, to fritter it away on the internet or entertainment. But we should use every moment we can in the Lord's service; for we are His servants.

4:17 God gives us all opportunities, potentials and maybe specific things which He wants us to achieve in His service; we must not flunk out of our calling.

4:18 *Remember my bonds*- In this almost pathetic cry, we sense Paul's frustration at the limitations of his situation (as in Acts 26:29 "except these bonds"). When we feel the same, let's realize that all God's servants have felt similar.

## 1 THESSALONIANS

1:5,6 Converts tend to imitate the person who converted them. We therefore have to watch who we are, for the sake of others who will hear us preach. This isn't a call to hypocrisy; rather to being aware that who we are really does affect who others become, and so we should watch who we are for others' sakes.

1:10 The return of Christ to the earth is the basic Christian hope.

2:7 The figure is of a wet nurse this time feeding her very own child. This was the tender, special care of Paul for his brethren, and it should be ours.

2:8 Preaching the Gospel isn't merely a relaying of ideas and teaching; it's a giving of ourselves to others.

2:12 *Who calls you*- As if God is already in the future Kingdom of God, and He is calling out to us from there to come and enter it. The Gospel of the Kingdom is a call, an invitation, to go and walk towards it.

2:17 In the 'virtual' world in which we live, we shouldn't forget the importance of face to face contact and fellowship with each other (3:10).

3:1 This implies Paul found it so hard being alone without his brethren.

3:3 The believer shouldn't be surprised that afflictions come; it has to be in our lives, for only through tribulation can we enter God's Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

3:9 *Before our God*- We are 'before God' when we pray to God, and in our lives generally. Yet Paul uses the same phrase in v. 13 to describe how we will come 'before God' at the day of judgment. In prayer, and in our lives, we should try to live as if we are before God at judgment.

In our daily lives, let's not isolate ourselves from that ultimate reality. Prayer especially is a foretaste of judgment day.

3:13 As we face Jesus at the day of final judgment, our hearts will be calm if we have lived a life of love to others (v. 12).

4:4,5 We should take a partner in love, not "in... lust". Marriage is to be on the basis of love, not lust.

4:10 If our self-examination reveals that we are loving toward others, we shouldn't be complacent. Love by its nature grows and grows. Are our lives characterized by ever *increasing* love?

4:11 *Aspire*- The Greek word means 'to be ambitious'. In spiritual reality, our ambition should be for spiritual and not material things.

4:17 There is no mention here of the righteous being caught up to *Heaven*. Christ descends from Heaven before the believers meet him. Christ will reign for ever on David's throne in Jerusalem, and we will be with him, here on earth. It is therefore impossible that we should spend eternity with him suspended in mid-air. 'The air' extending only a few kilometres above the earth's surface means that it cannot refer to Heaven, the dwelling place of God.

The Greek phrase translated "caught up" really means to be snatched away; it does not carry the idea of any specific direction. It also occurs in Acts 8:39: "The Spirit of the Lord *caught away* Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more... But Philip was found at Azotus". This records how Philip was miraculously transported from one place on earth to another. When Christ comes, the responsible will be gathered together to the place of judgment; they will not be left to make their own way there. It is possible that our means of transportation to that place will be literally through the air.

Jesus said that "in the day when the Son of man is revealed...two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Luke 17:30,36). This gives the same picture of a sudden snatching away. The disciples earnestly asked, "Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17:37). As the eagles fly instinctively through the air and then land on earth where the carcass is, so the responsible will be brought to the place where they will meet their Lord in judgment.

5:6 We should not be asleep- but the parable of Mt. 25:1-13 suggests that even the "wise virgins" will be asleep when Christ comes.

## 2 THESSALONIANS

1:5 The fact we experience tribulation is a sure token that we are in fact going to be accepted into God's Kingdom; for through such tribulation we have to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

1:9 *Eternal destruction*- The punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not eternal conscious existence in torture. Their death will be permanent, and in this sense their destruction will be eternal.

1:11 If we are desiring good and right things, then God will powerfully fulfil those desires.

2:2 There were and are many false ideas around to the effect that Christ has already come; Preterism says He came in AD70, the Watchtower claimed He came in 1914. But the coming of Christ will be publically obvious to all because the wicked will be destroyed by it (v. 8), and we will be gathered unto Christ in that day (v. 1).

2:11 God isn't passive toward those who don't want to love His truth (v. 10)- He actively encourages them to believe delusions. This is one reason why we find believing such huge nonsenses- because God has in fact deluded them.

2:17 If we desire to speak and do the right things, God will confirm us in this; just as He confirms those who don't love the truth in the way of untruth (vv. 10,11). There is both a downward and upward spiral in spiritual life; we can't just opt out, we are on a journey either to eternal life or eternal death, and God is propelling us on the way we choose.

3:5 The Lord Jesus is able to directly influence human minds [hearts].

3:6 *Withdraw yourselves*- This verse is in the context of verses 7-12, concerning some who were "disorderly" in that they were involved with the church simply in order to get money, and refused to work when they could do so. Verse 6 doesn't mean we should withdraw ourselves from anyone who breaks any commandment of Jesus, for we all do this. The verse speaks about the specific situation of those seeking to gain money from being members of the church in Thessalonica.

3:9 Sometimes it's better not to do something which we could legitimately do, because of the bad example it may set, and because it may be misunderstood and misused by others who are weaker.

3:14 This is to be understood the same way as :6.

### 1 TIMOTHY

1:5 The importance of correct teaching is that it leads to love and faith. This is why having correct doctrine and rejecting wrong teachings is practically important (:3,4).

1:15 Paul, now nearing the end of his life, considers himself the world's worst sinner. Previously he had thought of himself as the least apostle (1 Cor. 15:9), then as the least of all the believers (Eph. 3:8). As Paul grew spiritually, he became more aware of both the extent of his own sinfulness, and of the certainty of his salvation. We should be following this pattern.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

1:16 Paul's dramatic conversion is a pattern for each of us. Whether we were raised Christian or not, whether we committed what the world would consider major sins or not, the fact is that our conversion was and is as dramatic as Paul's; and our response to God's grace should be as zealous as his.

1:20 *Delivered to Satan*- Maybe a reference to the local Roman authorities, the Satan-adversary of the Christians.

2:5 This verse clearly shows the Trinity to be a wrong understanding. Writing even after Jesus ascended to Heaven, Paul calls Him "the man Christ Jesus". He is a mediator between God and man; not God Himself, for there is only one God.

2:8 *I therefore desire*- Because we have such a powerful mediator for our prayers before God (v. 5), therefore we should make use of this blessing, and pray.

2:13,14 The basis for Paul's teaching about the differing roles of men and women is based upon the principles of Adam and Eve in Eden; his teaching is therefore not just a special expedient for his own times, because it is continuing the principles God laid down in creation.

3:13 Our service of itself develops our faith. This is an example of the upward spiral in spiritual life; years of humble service make faith deeper, which in turn motivates us to more service.

3:15 Even Paul didn't know exactly how his plans would work out; we all long for stability and clear plans for the future. But God doesn't work with us like that; He wants us to go through life with faith in His leading.

3:16 God was manifested in the flesh in His Son, Jesus. Jesus was of human nature but had a perfect character, so that He showed us what God would have been like if He were a human being. This doesn't mean He was God Himself in person.

4:1 This is a prophecy of how the initially pure Christian understanding would be corrupted by false ideas and practices.

4:3 *Forbidding to marry*- As the Catholic church forbid their priests

4:3 *To abstain from food*- As Adventists and others forbid various foods and meats, even though God has given us all animals as a gift, and we can eat them (vv. 4,5).

4:8 A spiritual life not only gives us hope of eternal life, but gives us blessing in this life.

4:15 The things of the Gospel can't be a hobby, something we show occasional enthusiasm for. We are to give ourselves to them "wholly".

4:16 *Your hearers*- Our salvation can to some degree depend upon third parties. If the wrong teaching is taught, the salvation of others may be jeopardized.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

5:4 Parents aren't to be forgotten, but to be cared for- a principle seriously overlooked in many parts of the world.

5:8 *Provide for his own family*- The context is talking about looking after elderly parents (v. 4). God's word here gives an unusually strong condemnation for those who don't do this.

5:14 *Rule the household*- The believing woman is ideally intended to serve in the domestic sphere.

5:18 Paul clearly supported the idea of a paid ministry, even though he himself chose not to take advantage of this in Corinth (1 Cor. 9:4-12) and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8,9). There are times and places and contexts where it's better not to do some things which we could legitimately do, for the sake of others; the example we set may be misused, or misinterpreted.

5:24,25 All our sins and good works will be openly revealed at the day of judgment in front of everyone; so we shouldn't be hypocritical in this life, nor should we grieve that our good works aren't noticed or valued. For the day shall come when they will be.

6:1,2 Paul didn't advocate the demise of slavery, even though it was an unChristian institution. He accepted some things are as they are in this world, and taught us to live within those limitations but in a spiritual manner. This principle applies to many situations and aspects of modern society.

6:10 *Love of money*- As our societies become increasingly money based, this is a temptation for our generation as never before.

6:10 *Pierced themselves through*- This is the language of crucifixion. We must be crucified one way or the other- either with Christ, or in trying to amass wealth. Suffering with Christ therefore becomes the logical choice.

6:16 No human being has ever seen God. Jesus was seen by men, therefore He was not God Himself. When the Old Testament speaks of men like Moses 'seeing God', the reference is therefore to their having seen Angels, who carry the Name of God (Ex. 23:21).

6:18 The real spiritual wealth is in giving our material wealth away.

## 2 TIMOTHY

1:3 Paul writes to so many that he prays for them constantly. This means he must've spent much of his time in prayer for others, both individuals and groups. Do we?

1:10 Immortality has only been revealed to us in the Gospel of Christ. Therefore we have no inherent immortality; there is no such thing as an immortal soul which each human is born with. This is a wrong, pagan idea. The Bible teaches that immortality is conditional.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

1:12 We commit things to God, and He commits things to us (v. 14). There is a mutuality between God and man.

1:15 However, it's clear from the letters of Rev. 2 and 3 [which were written later] that there were some in Asia who remained faithful to the Lord. Believers at times misjudge others and reject them, which is very painful for those rejected; but those believers may still be acceptable to their Lord. Seeing Paul's work had led to the conversion of most of those in Asia, their being poisoned against him must've been so painful.

2:4,5 The images of a soldier at war and a training athlete show the intensity expected of us in the Lord's service. It can never be a mere hobby, culture or inherited tradition.

2:7 If we "consider" God's word, He will confirm our efforts by giving us the understanding we seek. But we must reflect upon the Bible and life, rather than being unthinking and superficial.

2:8 Jesus was the "seed of David", a literal descendant of David through His mother Mary. This shows Jesus didn't personally pre-exist before His birth; and that Mary was an ordinary woman, also a direct descendant of David.

2:10 If Paul hadn't kept doing the work of the Gospel, at great personal pain and cost, others wouldn't have been saved. The salvation of others is to some extent dependent upon the efforts of third parties such as ourselves. Whatever the cost, we can't quit the Gospel's work.

2:11 This is the principle of baptism- death with Jesus beneath the water, and then resurrection with Him (Rom. 6:3-5).

2:12 *If we shall deny him*- Paul wrote this knowing that Peter had denied Jesus- but had repented. We too can repent.

2:14 Arguments between brethren about small matters can lead to the destruction of others.

2:18 *The resurrection is past already*- The error of extreme Preterism today.

3:1-5 This is an exact description of society as it is in our "last days" before the return of Christ to earth.

3:10 Paul's life and character are set up for us in the Bible as our pattern- not just something to be historically studied, plotting where he went on a map, viewing him as a mere historical figure.

3:12 Persecution therefore shouldn't surprise us. It may not involve physical suffering, but in some sense, the unbelieving world will persecute us.

3:15 This is the importance of the Bible- if we believe God's word, we find there the wisdom which leads to salvation. Attention to the Bible is therefore vital for every true Christian, and we ought to be reading the Bible daily.

3:16 *Inspired*- God breathed His word into the Bible writers, so that what they wrote wasn't merely the word of men, but was God speaking through them. This is what makes the Bible unique amongst books; God's word is all we need to prepare us to every good work (v. 17). We need no other books or revelations, as the Bible is enough to completely equip us (v. 17).

4:1 When Christ returns, the dead will be raised and judged, and then God's Kingdom fully established on earth.

4:3 This prophesied corruption of pure Biblical teaching has come true in the many confused and incorrect versions of Christianity which there are. People choose to accept whoever teaches what they naturally want to here- rather than realizing that the Bible is the inspired word of God (3:16), and only believing what they read there. We must be teachable in front of God's word, even if it says things we naturally would prefer were not true. We cannot exalt our ideas above those of God.

4:8 The reward of the faithful will be given when Christ returns- at "that day" (the "day" of v. 1); and all the true believers will receive their reward at that same time (Heb. 11:39,40). It is not true that when we die, we go to Heaven and receive our reward. We are unconscious until Christ returns; all the faithful will then be resurrected, judged, and given eternal life together in His Kingdom on earth (Mt. 25:34).

4:16 *All forsook me*- As all in Asia turned away from Paul (1:15). Paul died a lonely man, unpopular even with his brethren; but therefore he felt the very real presence of Jesus with him (v. 17).

## TITUS

1:2 Immortality is a hope, promised by God to those in Christ- we therefore have no inherent immortality or 'immortal soul'.

1:9 A church leader must be familiar with Scripture- not just a good presenter or charming personality.

1:14 Much false doctrine entered Christianity as a result of Jewish infiltration (v. 10). The ideas of a personally pre-existent Messiah, the need to keep the Sabbath and Jewish food laws, a personal Satan, demons, life after death in Heaven etc. can all be traced to the influence of an apostate Judaism.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

1:15 Thus sometimes, in some areas, the same actions can be performed by people, but for some they are sinful and for others they aren't. It depends upon our worldview, motivations and conscience.

2:3 "Slanderers" here translates the Greek word *diabolos*, elsewhere translated "devil". This word simply means a slanderer; it doesn't of itself mean a cosmic, supernatural evil being. It can be used about ordinary people, as it was about Judas (Jn. 6:70,71).

2:4,5 Loving a Christian husband and submitting to him are here paralleled. Submission within marriage can never be demanded; it is motivated by love.

2:10 The doctrines of the Gospel are made attractive to others by our examples, as we translate them into practice. Doctrine as theology will not immediately attract secular people.

2:12 We cannot be passive to God's grace (v. 11)- God's free gift of salvation to us trains us, as we experience and reflect upon it, in a life of good works.

2:14 The giving of Jesus in His death makes us "zealous of good works" in that the sensitive, reflective believer cannot be passive to the cross of Christ. We have to respond in practice to such love and grace.

3:1 Are we ready to good works, whenever the opportunities present themselves, whether the timing is convenient or not?

3:7 Justification by grace is a major New Testament theme. We are counted as righteous, even though we are not of ourselves, by God's pure grace; and thus we are waiting to inherit eternal life- which we will receive when Jesus returns. The fact we are saved as a pure free gift, and not by our works, should actually be a motivation to do good works (v. 8).

3:10 Keep away from those who cause division. Making divisions and factions between brethren can lead to condemnation (v. 11)- even though it is often justified as love for God.

### PHILEMON

1:10 Paul saw those he converted to Christ as his spiritual children. Onesimus was a runaway slave who had ended in prison in Rome; and yet Paul converted his fellow prisoner. It happened that Onesimus's master, Philemon, had also been converted by Paul (v. 19). And so now Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, persuading Philemon to have mercy upon him. We may feel imprisoned by situations, but we can still reach out to others who are also imprisoned within them, and lead them to Christ.

1:15 Paul is very positive. He suggests that such disagreements and interpersonal failures occur so that the fellowship and unity achieved after reconciliation will be that much stronger.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

1:19 We owe our eternal lives to those who converted us; this shows the eternal significance of converting another person to Christ.

1:22 Paul acted as if his prayers for deliverance for prison were going to be answered- so much so that he, a prisoner, asks someone to prepare a room for him to stay in when he next visits. This is the principle of Mk. 11:24- to act and feel as if we have already received what we are asking for.

### HEBREWS

1:3 Jesus was the reflection of God's glory, His image- but not God Himself. He is seated now at the right hand of God, begotten by Him (v. 5), and God is called 'his God' (v. 8). All this language is inappropriate if Jesus is God Himself.

1:5 Here and throughout Hebrews 1 and 2 it is emphasized that Jesus wasn't an Angel. The claim by some that He was is simply non-Biblical.

1:14 All of the Angels are serving God, and involved in caring for us whom He is preparing to inherit eternal life in His Kingdom. All the Angels are obedient to God and doing His work- there are no sinful beings in Heaven.

2:4 The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to confirm the spoken word; once the New Testament was completed, there was no need for this confirmation.

2:11 This solidarity between Jesus and us is fundamental; and any teaching that Jesus was God Himself is therefore fundamentally wrong.

2:13 The humanity of Jesus is reflected in the way that He had to put His faith in God.

2:14 *He also himself in like manner partook of the same-* This is saying the same thing five times over. It is a colossal emphasis.

2:14 Sin has the power of death (Rom. 6:23)- here "the devil" has this power. Paul often personifies sin, and here he is personifying it as *the* greatest 'slanderer' or 'false accuser' which there is. For 'devil' as a word means just those things; it doesn't of itself refer to an evil cosmic being.

2:18 God cannot be tempted (James 1:13), He has no possibility of sinning. But Jesus had temptation in a meaningful, legitimate sense- in that He had the real possibility to sin.

3:6 It's therefore not true that 'once saved, always saved'. We must endure to the end to be saved (v. 14; Mt. 10:22).

3:8 Hard heartedness is a spiritual disease we must avoid. Numbness of conscience, of feeling to and for others, indifference to God, existing rather than living life as God intended... this must be replaced by a softness of heart, a sensitive conscience, a gentleness.

3:13 Sin deceives; hence 2:14 personifies sin as a 'devil', a slanderer or false accuser. We deceive ourselves that we can sin; the Bible continually focuses us upon our internal thought processes, for to change them is the essence of Christianity.

3:17 Our baptism is like leaving Egypt, crossing the Red Sea and entering the wilderness journey with Israel (1 Cor. 10:1). All that happened to them there, especially their failures, becomes a warning to us.

4:1 It's no bad thing to have a sense of the future we may miss if we turn away. For the Hebrews, that meant turning back to reliance upon their own works and legal obedience.

4:2 The Gospel ("good tidings") preached in the Old Testament was in essence the same as that of the New Testament (Gal. 3:8).

4:9 It could be argued that if a day with God is as 1000 years (2 Pet. 3:8), then the day of rest, the Sabbath, the 7<sup>th</sup> day, will begin 6 days or 6000 years after creation. Rev. 20:2-7 suggests that the first part of God's Kingdom, the Millennium, will last for 1000 years. According to Biblical chronology, Jesus lived about 4000 years after creation. We are now 2000 years later, making 6000 years. This would mean that the coming of Christ to establish the 'sabbath rest' of the Millennium could be at any time now. This suggestion has some problems but it's stimulating to reflect on it.

4:15 Clearly Jesus was of our nature if He was tempted; for God cannot be tempted (James 1:13).

4:16 The practical result of believing that Jesus was of our nature and tempted like us is that we can confidently pray to God, knowing we have a sympathetic mediator in Heaven who once was human and tempted.

5:2 As stressed in 4:15,16, the atonement 'works' because Jesus in His mortal life was "subject to weakness" as we are; therefore He wasn't God.

5:7-9 Jesus prayed to God, and needed saving from death. He was therefore not God. He 'learnt' obedience and was 'perfected' by His sufferings. Such language is inappropriate to God Himself.

5:12-14 When we are baptized, we are "born again" (Jn. 3:3-5), and drink milk; but we should develop over time so that we are able to move on from basic Gospel teachings ["milk"] to deeper things.

6:5 The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit which were experienced in the first century are the same gifts which will be used in "the age to come", the Kingdom. These gifts will be poured out again when Christ returns to establish the Kingdom on earth. Therefore they are not possessed at this moment.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

6:6 This seems to be specifically talking about those in the first century who possessed the miraculous Holy Spirit gifts; in our time, we can always repent and be assured of forgiveness and acceptance by God.

6:18 *Fled for refuge*- An allusion to the way in which under the Law of Moses, if you accidentally killed someone [thereby committing a sin worthy of death, but not willingly], you could flee to a city of refuge, and remain there until the death of the High Priest; you would be safe in that city, and pronounced free when the High Priest died (Num. 35:24-32). We are in such a situation; the city of refuge and High Priest we have is Christ.

7:3 Melchizedek was not Jesus- he was “*like the Son of God*”, and Jesus was a priest *similar to* him (v. 11). The Hebrew Christians were complaining that Jesus was not from the priestly tribe, Levi, but from Judah (v. 14). The point is that Melchizedek, the great Old Testament priest, had no genealogy [“Without father, without mother”], and yet was still a priest.

7:16 *Has been appointed*- Jesus was given eternity by God; He therefore isn’t God Himself.

7:18,19 The Law of Moses has been ‘annulled’ and is therefore not binding upon us today- it is ‘unprofitable’. Throughout this section, the Law of Moses is spoken of in very inferior terms compared to the excellency of salvation in Christ.

7:27 *Offered up Himself*- Jesus was both priest and sacrifice. This indicates how in control He was of the situation as He died, despite the evident pain and distress He was under.

7:28 *Been perfected*- Hardly the language one would expect if Jesus is God Himself.

8:3 Jesus is actively at work in Heaven for us. He offers up our works, our thoughts, our prayers, to God.

8:7 There was ‘fault’ (v. 8) with the Old Covenant [the Law of Moses]; the New Covenant is “better” (v. 6). We therefore don’t need to keep the Law of Moses.

8:9 *Took them by the hand*- This is a picture of a loving Father taking the hand of a child to lead them. This is how gentle God was in leading His people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea- events which represent our exit from this world’s ways and passing through the water of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1).

8:13 *Ready to vanish away*- Suggesting that Hebrews was written shortly before the destruction of the temple worship system in AD70.

9:3 When Jesus died, the veil was torn (Mt. 27:51). This symbolized that through His death, not just the High Priest but all in Christ can enter the Most Holy Place and have direct fellowship with God (v. 8); not just once a year on the day of Atonement, but continually.

9:19 Water, scarlet and hyssop all feature in the events of Christ’s crucifixion, which the Old Testament rituals pointed forward to.

9:22 *Almost*- Blood was required for the forgiveness of sins, so animals had to be offered. But there were cases where the Law of Moses stipulated that if someone was too poor to offer an animal, they could offer grain or flour. This shows how although God respects His own principles, He is so eager to grant forgiveness and have fellowship with people, even if their personal circumstances preclude them from serving Him in the way He ideally requires.

9:27 After death we die and are unconscious until Christ comes, but this period of death is like a sleep; after we die, our next conscious moment will be the return of Christ and standing before Him at judgment.

9:28 *To bring salvation*- We will only be fully 'saved' when Christ returns and gives us an immortal body and inheritance in His Kingdom on earth.

10:4 However, God does state in the Old Testament that He forgave people their sins when they offered sacrifice. They were forgiven not because God was pleased with the blood as red liquid; but on account of the fact that it pointed forward to the future sacrifice of Christ, and because it showed they recognized that sin brings death. By placing their hand on the head of the sacrifice, they accepted it as their representative.

10:12 The point is frequently made that Jesus now *sits* at the right hand of God, whereas the Mosaic priests *stood* as they did their work (v. 11). However, in Acts 7:55, Stephen saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God, interceding for him. This shows that even now in His Heavenly glory, Jesus has passion and emotion; He so feels for us as we suffer on earth that at times He *stands up* in order to plead more powerfully for us.

10:15 The Bible is written by the inspiration process, whereby God's Holy Spirit was in the Bible writers, and what they wrote was therefore God's word. In this sense we can read the Old Testament passage which is here quoted (v. 16) and feel the Holy Spirit testifying to us personally in this age.

10:22 *Our bodies washed*- A reference to baptism into Christ which enables us to acceptably approach God.

10:24 We must take time to "consider" how we may encourage others to do good. This requires reflection, thinking about who others are, their contexts, their possibilities, and provoking them to do good rather than evil. Christianity cannot be lived alone with no reference to others.

10:26 Wilful sin involves a conscious blasphemy against the blood of Christ (v. 29); it doesn't refer to the temporary failures which we all commit. For we confess continually that we still commit sin (1 Jn. 1:8).

10:33 *Companions*- Our sufferings aren't only what we ourselves experience, but if we are truly connected with others, then we suffer also in their sufferings.

10:39 *Shrink back*- The rejected will shrink away from Christ when He comes, being ashamed from before His presence (1 Jn. 2:28). Those who love Him will in faith go towards Him, confident in His love despite being aware of their sins.

11:3 Matter was created- and all the science in the world cannot explain the ultimate question of origins. There had to be a point of ultimate creation, which implies God.

11:4 Abel offered animal blood to God, whereas Cain ignored the principle of 9:22 and offered just vegetables. Abel's faith was therefore in that God would forgive sin because of what that blood represented- maybe he understood something of the future sacrifice of Christ, and showed his faith in this.

11:5 It seems Enoch was snatched away from death by persecution, and was not found by his enemies. But the first person to be given eternal life was Christ (1 Cor. 15:23). So Enoch wasn't given eternal life in Heaven; he too must've died after his deliverance.

11:7 Noah so believed God's word that he could imagine the future flood (v. 1), although at the time he had never seen rain. His faith and related imagination was so vivid that he feared greatly and therefore built the ark.

11:11 When Sarah first heard that she would have a child, she laughed in disbelief (Gen. 18:12). So the "faith" of which we read in this chapter wasn't simple nor automatic, it had to be developed.

11:13 The promises were of the eternal possession of the earth in God's Kingdom. These people died without having received that; therefore, because God keeps His promises, they will be resurrected when Christ returns and given what God promised. Therefore they didn't go to Heaven when they died to receive the promised salvation.

11:27 *Not fearing*- But Ex. 2:14,15 says: "Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh". We can conclude that Moses did have fear, and yet his faith overcame that fear. Faith wasn't automatic nor easy for him, but involved much struggle (v. 11 note).

11:40 God's plan is that all the faithful receive the promises (eternal life in God's Kingdom on earth) at the same time- at the return of Christ, when the dead will be resurrected, judged and given immortality here on earth. It's therefore not true that one believer dies, goes to Heaven and gets rewarded, 100 years later another one does, etc. The true Christian hope is that of bodily resurrection from the dead when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom.

12:1 The faithful listed in chapter 11 are as it were a great crowd who are cheering us on as we run our race towards the Kingdom.

12:3 *Think on Him*- We are to live life always "looking to Jesus" (v. 2). But how many times each day do we think of Him? We should be reading something of Him each day, reflecting on Him and His words, so that His example is the constant guide for our lives.

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12:4 An allusion to Jesus sweating as it were drops of blood as He battled temptation in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:44).

12:5-11 Suffering comes from God, and in the context of Christian life it is given in order to develop us spiritually. The idea that good things come from God and bad things from Satan is therefore wrong. Nothing is chance or bad luck in our lives. God is in control and all negative things occur for our ultimate good as believers. This takes some faith to accept.

12:14 Our ultimate hope is to “see the Lord”. Job in the Old Testament rejoiced in this same hope- that in the very end, he would see God face to face (Job 19:26).

12:17 It would seem from this that last minute repentance before the judgment seat, even with tears, will not change our destiny- now are our great days of opportunity.

12:24 The blood of Christ speaks to us; we cannot be passive to the fact Christ died for us. It is an imperative and call to action- and we should not refuse that voice of the cross (v. 25).

12:28 If we are motivated by grace, in response to the fact God has graciously given us the Kingdom, then our works of response on this basis are pleasing to God.

13:2 Abraham was unaware that the strangers he entertained were Angels (Gen. 18:1-16). It’s possible that we may meet Angels today in the form of people who appear as ordinary humans.

13:3 This is a high challenge- to be so closely connected with our brethren that we feel their sufferings as if they are happening to us.

13:8 It isn’t true that Jesus was loving and mild when on earth, but will return in angry judgment. The Jesus who loved children, with whom fallen men and women felt at ease, the sinners’ friend, who delighted in grace and forgiveness... is the same Jesus who now looks down upon us, and whom we shall meet at the day of judgment.

13:15 We should be praising God all the time. This might be through singing or humming Christian music to ourselves, or simply having a thankful heart for everything, even the very [apparently] smallest things.

13:19 *The sooner-* The more they prayed (v. 18), the more quickly he would be released. Prayer really does change things, and therefore we should be in the habit of asking others to pray for us, and praying for them too.

JAMES

1:5 The allusion here is to Solomon, who when given the choice of whatever he wanted, chose wisdom- and therefore so much else was added to him.

1:13 Jesus was tempted (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15); yet God cannot be. Therefore, Jesus cannot be God in person.

1:14,15 Sin and temptation come from within; we are tempted by our own desires, not by any cosmic being called Satan. We are therefore totally responsible for our sin, and the result of sin is therefore quite rightly death.

1:18 The word of God is likened to seed in Lk. 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23. This is what has the power to birth the spiritual man within us. We should therefore be quick to hear it (:19).

1:22 We who read the Bible can delude ourselves that this very process will save us; but unless there is a direct connection between our Bible reading and concrete action, it will not help us at all. True Bible reading as God intends will elicit self-examination and an abiding awareness of our true spiritual state (:24). If it doesn't, then we are actually deceiving ourselves by the process of Bible reading into thinking we are religious when actually we are vain (:26).

2:5 If we are "heirs of the Kingdom", then God has promised it to us. We haven't yet fully received it. Gal. 3:27-29 says that we are heirs of the promises made to Abraham if we are baptized into Christ.

2:6 The Christians whom James was writing to were being abused by those richer than them; and they were taking out their hurt on those who were poorer than them. This is a psychological classic; but in Christ we are to break the cycle of abuse by *not* taking out our hurt on those over whom we in our turn have some advantage and human superiority.

2:7 The Name of God and Jesus is called upon us by our baptism into the Name.

2:10 This is the fallacy of keeping just part of the Mosaic Law, e.g. the feasts or Sabbaths.

2:25 In this unusual case, telling a lie was actually an act of faith.

2:26 There is no contradiction here with Paul's teaching of justification by faith without works. If we really believe that by God's grace we shall surely be saved, on the basis of His grace alone, then we cannot be passive to this; if we really believe this, we will concretely *do* something in response to such total grace.

3:6 Our words really can lead us to eternal condemnation; for by our words we will be either condemned or saved (Mt. 12:37). The control of our thinking and words is so utterly vital; and it is these things which are the essence of Christianity.

3:13 Good works aren't so much the occasional dramatic act, but a life lived in wisdom and humility.

3:16 Division between believers comes ultimately from jealousy and rivalry (:14; 4:1) which begins within the mind. Personal spiritual mindedness is therefore so important. Only because

this isn't achieved do we end up with divisions. And division results in "vile deeds". Yet such division was being justified by the immature Christians as "wisdom" (:15). Hence James has to say that this isn't wisdom at all, as true wisdom leads to unity and gentle behaviour between believers (:17).

4:1 Sin comes from within the human heart, not from some external cosmic being. James draws a connection between the 'wars' within the mind of the individual weak believer, and the 'wars' between groups of believers within the church. Divisions start because individuals aren't single-heartedly devoted to spiritual things. He repeatedly criticizes double mindedness (:8). James constantly highlights the human mind, processes deep within the heart of the individual, as the real arena of spiritual conflict- not in Heaven or 'out there' in the supposed 'spirit world'.

4:4 We are as it were married to Christ; any unfaithfulness to Christ is therefore as adultery.

4:15 We should therefore unashamedly say "God willing" when talking about our plans, no matter if others look at us strangely.

4:16 Here we have the principle of knowledge bringing responsibility to Divine judgment.

5:3 If we claim to live as if we expect Christ to return at any moment, it's inappropriate to be saving up wealth for future enjoyment.

5:9 If we believe that any moment now Christ will return and judge us, we will not be critical and condemnatory of our brethren.

5:11 Even when it seemed God wasn't answering Job's prayers nor helping him, He was in fact very pitiful of Job.

5:17 The context suggests that Elijah's prayers for a drought were because he believed this would lead Israel to repentance and forgiveness; and he himself suffered terribly as a result of that drought, coming near to starvation.

5:20 The prayers and spiritual efforts of a third party really can lead to a believer's forgiveness and salvation- although see 1 Jn. 5:16,17. If our prayers and efforts for others can have such eternal consequence- we should, like Paul, be praying for our brethren all the time (:15).

## 1 PETER

1:4 God and Jesus are in Heaven, preparing for us a wonderful, eternal future. But we will only receive this at the last day when Jesus returns (:5). We therefore don't go to Heaven on death to receive that future, but Christ brings it to us on earth when He returns.

1:7 The hard experiences of life are like fire applied to us, purging out the dross, and making our dirty piece of rock turn into pure gold. It's hard to imagine, but we will be "praised" by Jesus at

the last day- just as He enthusiastically commends the faithful for the good things they did which they had forgotten (Mt. 25:36,37). This is how positively Jesus views us.

1:13 Our faith isn't to be a hobby, but our complete focus in life should be upon the grace which will result in us being given eternity when Christ returns.

1:20 Jesus didn't physically exist before He was born, but He was known by God within God's plan, just as we were also (Eph. 1:4).

1:22 The result of believing "the truth" will be sincere love of our fellow believers; we can't discern and believe "the truth" and remain disengaged from others, otherwise we haven't really understood "the truth".

2:2 We are born again in baptism (Jn. 3:3-5) and afterwards we should desperately desire the milk of God's word; we need to get in the habit of daily Bible reading as soon as possible.

2:5 God's intention is that we should be a priesthood (:9). Priests serve others and empower them to give to God; this should be the focus of our lives. Most religions teach that just some religious leaders are the priests; but we are all to be priests.

2:9 These are the very terms used about the Old Testament people of Israel (Ex. 19:6). By baptism into Christ we become the children of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29) and are thus a new, spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16). We should therefore feel our national identity as "spiritual Israel" rather than whatever nation we were physically born into.

2:21 The cross and sufferings of Christ are therefore not just something to be admired from a distance as we may admire a picture or be intrigued by distant history. He there is our very real pattern and inspiration in daily life.

3:1 Peter writes here speaking about Christian marriage, in which both parties are heirs and therefore hope for eternal life (v. 7). He tacitly recognizes that no marriage will be perfect and that the man will at times fail the huge challenge of loving his wife as Christ loved and died for the church (Eph. 5:25).

3:6 Sarah is only recorded as calling Abraham her "Lord" when we are told that she thought this about him in her heart (Gen. 18:12). In fact she said this in disbelief in the promises of God- in her heart she initially thought God's promises of her and Abraham having a child couldn't come true because "my Lord" was so old and impotent (Rom. 4:19). However we see how both spirituality and unspirituality can exist within the heart of believers at the same time; and God here chose to focus upon the positive. His positivity about His children is an example to us, as well as a comfort.

3:7 Peter here assumes that believing husbands and wives will be regularly praying together; although those prayers will lose power if there is marital strife.

3:21 Baptism is therefore related to salvation; by being in Christ we have a clear conscience before God because all our sins really are forgiven and we are counted by Him as being His own Son, the perfect Lord Jesus.

4:4 We shouldn't be surprised if the world views us as strange and even gets aggressive with us because of our refusal to do the sinful things which they do. What they don't appreciate is that we have to give account to God for our lives, whereas they simply live and die for ever (:5).

4:10 Whatever gifts we receive from God, we are given them only to give them as gifts to others. These gifts may not be financial; but the poor need not think they have been given no gifts. We have each been given gifts by God.

4:19 Whilst we should be confident of our final salvation by God's grace, we should always be aware that we are totally unworthy of this; thus we will only be barely saved as it were, scraping in by grace alone- in one sense. This should give us an appropriate humility and grace in how we relate to others.

5:2 Shepherding the flock should never ever be motivated by a desire for money or material benefit.

5:4 The reward is given when Christ returns, at the resurrection; going to Heaven at death isn't taught in the Bible.

5:8 The "devil" or 'false accuser' here seems to refer to the power which was causing the "sufferings" of the Christians to whom Peter was writing (:9); and this was clearly the Roman empire, rather than any cosmic being.

5:9 We are strengthened in our sufferings by realizing that in fact they aren't unique to us, but somewhere, another believer is going through the same in essence. This is how Christian fellowship and engaging meaningfully with other believers on a spiritual rather than a merely human level can give such strength.

## 2 PETER

1:3 "Precise and correct knowledge" is important; it therefore does matter what and how we believe and understand God and His word. It's not that academic purity of understanding is important in itself; but this "correct knowledge" is useful for practical Godliness. This knowledge produces fruit in practice (:8).

1:5,6 There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, just as there is a downward spiral. One spiritual strength is connected with and leads to others.

1:21 The Bible was written by inspiration of God- the writers were moved by God's Spirit so that the words they wrote weren't merely their private views, but the word of God. This is why the

Bible is so unique and needs to be read and meditated upon daily. The word of God is to be the light for us in the darkness of this world, until the “day” of Christ’s return dawns (:19).

2:1 *Among the people*- The people of Israel. The following examples in this chapter are therefore taken from the history of Israel in the Old Testament. The ‘angels’ or messengers that sinned and were thrown down into the earth refer to the men led by the false prophet Korah who were swallowed up into the earth (Num. 16:32).

2:7 We get the impression from the Old Testament that Lot was spiritually weak; but we must be careful how we judge Bible characters because here we read that Lot was in fact righteous and although he was well involved in the life of Sodom, he was deeply grieved for their wickedness. He is a type of the faithful living in the world of the very last days (Lk. 17:28-32).

2:14 *A heart exercised*- The Bible uses “the heart” to refer to the mind. Our mind thinks in regular patterns; we are to exercise it, but not with unspiritual thoughts.

2:21 This proves there is no such thing as universal salvation, nor ‘once saved always saved’. We who have believed have a very real possibility of failure, and we should always be aware of this.

3:1 Remembering is a major theme of Peter’s letters. It seems that his initial audience had heard the Gospel but were forgetting it; this problem is seen in the way Paul writes too. We need to regularly remind ourselves of the basic Gospel.

3:6,7 The physical planet wasn’t destroyed by the flood, but the wicked human system upon earth was. ‘Heaven and earth’ is a phrase used in the Bible to refer to a system of things- the rulers are likened to the heavens, e.g. the sun, moon and stars refer to the fathers of Israel; and the earth refers to the ordinary people. The literal heaven and earth won’t be destroyed (Ecc. 1:4), but the system of human evil which is currently here will be. The new heavens and earth will therefore be “righteous” (v. 13).

3:15 This along with v. 9 could imply that God is delaying the return of Christ because He is so passionate for human repentance, so that as many as possible may live eternally in His Kingdom. We should therefore not only repent ourselves, so that our spiritual development hastens the return of Christ (:11,12); but also seek to spread the Gospel to others and thereby hasten the second coming (Mt. 24:14).

## 1 JOHN

1:3 True Christian fellowship is based around a common belief in the same basic Gospel message which both Jesus and John preached, and living according to it (v. 7). Christian fellowship as John speaks of it isn’t the same as social friendship, although it may include this.

1:10 The more God’s word abides in us, the more we are convicted of both our sinfulness and yet also the grace and certain salvation of God.

2:10 Bitterness against our fellow believers creates a stumblingblock in our spiritual path which can cost us our place in God's Kingdom. We must urgently let go of all bitterness (Eph. 4:31).

2:12 Forgiveness is available through baptism into the Name of Jesus because His Name is His character, and this is counted to us if we are in Him. Our sins are not therefore visible, as it were, to God's judgment.

2:19 We should never be the ones who "go out from" our fellow believers. They may go out from us or exclude us, but this is their sin; we shouldn't be the ones who create the divisions.

2:28 "Boldness" is the same Greek word we find elsewhere about how we can be "bold" or confident, open, as we stand in the presence of God in prayer (Eph. 3:19; Heb. 4:16). Thus our attitude to the Father and Son in prayer today is the attitude we shall have to them when we stand before them at judgment day. This gives cause for much self-examination.

3:2 It is not just the eternity of the Kingdom life which we should look forward to; the greatest thing is that we shall be like Jesus, perfect, 24/7.

3:3 If we really believe we will be in the Kingdom, this hope will lead us to practical changes and purity in this life- quite naturally.

3:16 Jesus' life wasn't taken from Him, but He "laid it down" (Jn. 10:17). He gave His last breath as an act of the will, a consciously controlled outgiving of life rather than dying because men took His life from Him by murder. This intense level of self-giving is applied to us. When Jesus died for us in this way, we were far away in understanding, appreciation and spirituality. And so it will be with our fellow believers for whom we are to likewise die.

3:21 Although our conscience isn't always reliable (1 Cor. 4:4), we should aim like Paul to live every moment in good conscience before Him (Acts 23:1).

4:2,3 See on 2 Jn. 7-9. Our understanding of the nature of Jesus is therefore very important.

4:10 God took the initiative in loving, and we are asked to love others in this same way. We should be thinking how we can initiate loving acts towards others, rather than simply responding to others' love to us by loving them back.

4:20 It's therefore impossible- although very tempting- to claim to be a Christian if we continually find excuses why we can't have contact with other believers. Love is to be something active, concrete and meaningful in practice; we therefore can't be 'out of church believers', we need active engagement with our brethren in order to reflect God's love to them as we are commanded here. Private Bible reading in our room, understanding doctrine correctly, praying to God alone, may sound all very good; but we can't actually love God unless we love His children, for He is manifested in them.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

5:13 The Bible teaches that we are mortal and don't consciously survive death. We "have eternal life" in the sense that from God's perspective He remembers us after our death and knows we will be immortalized at Christ's return. Further, insofar as we live the kind of life which we will eternally live in the Kingdom, we have and can live the eternal life right now.

5:14 Answered prayer is therefore a great encouragement to us that we are of God.

5:16 God is prepared to forgive some sins for the sake of others' prayers to Him about them. If third party prayers are this powerful, we should like Paul be praying for our fellow believers all the time.

5:21 Anything that detracts our focus from the simple fact that we shall live eternally in God's Kingdom is an idol, and we should shun it.

### 2 JOHN

:6 Love isn't the passing emotion which the world calls love. Love for God and each other involves keeping His commandments; it's not enough to just be vaguely attracted to the ethos of Christianity in a casual manner.

:7 It could be argued that those who believe in the Trinity have denied that Jesus was in the flesh. Whilst we can leave all judgment to God, the question of the nature of Jesus is therefore crucial- because according to our understanding of Him, so will we live our lives.

:10 The early preachers travelled from home to home, and were supported by Christian families who welcomed them into their homes (3 Jn. 6). John is saying that missionaries who don't teach the right thing about Jesus shouldn't be given this support.

### 3 JOHN

:3,4 If our idea of joy is purely self-centred, we won't find it. The writings of John and Paul show they felt joy because of the spiritual health of their brethren.

:7 The early preachers were motivated in their work by God's Name- they wished to share with others the personality and character of the Father and His Son. As this was their focus, they weren't so interested in taking money from their audience.

:10 This is exactly the kind of 3rd party 'guilt by association' which has destroyed so many churches today- believers are excluded because of their inclusive attitude to other believers, and John condemns this very clearly.

### JUDE

:6 The Greek word translated "angels" is also translated 'messengers' or 'followers' (e.g. Mt. 11:10). It doesn't always refer to cosmic beings. Jude is building an argument based upon the

example of Israel in the Old Testament, and so he is referring to historical incidents found there rather than to any myths of Angels sinning in Eden. The allusion here is to the earth opening to swallow Korah and his rebels (Num. 16:32).

:12 *Love-feasts*- A reference to the breaking of bread service, which is intended to celebrate the love of Christ in dying for us.

:15 People are condemned because of their words- how we think and speak is of huge importance to Jesus (Mt. 12:37).

:23 *The fire*- Fire is used here symbolically, as often in the Bible, for condemnation. People aren't literally on fire as we see them fall away from the faith; they are however effectively falling into condemnation and losing their hope of eternal life. We should urgently do all we can to pull them out of this rather than saying nothing or pretending not to notice.

:24 We will be seen by Jesus at the last day as "without blemish" in His eyes, because His righteousness has been imputed to us.

## REVELATION

1:1 Revelation speaks of things future to the time of John in the first century. Therefore the later references to events concerning Satan, the adversary, aren't descriptive of anything which happened in earlier history, e.g. in the garden of Eden.

1:6 We will be King-priests in the future Kingdom of God on earth (5:10), but by status we have been given this position now in that we are even now redeemed in Christ.

1:7 The return of Christ will be literal and visible to all (Acts 1:9-11). Those who crucified Jesus will see Him again- because they will be resurrected to judgment at His coming.

1:12 The candlesticks represent the churches; yet the voice and person of Jesus came from them. This shows how closely Jesus is associated with His people.

1:20 Not only do we as individuals have guardian Angels, but groups of believers, churches, have a specific guardian Angel also.

2:4 *First love*- Greek 'agape'. Their defence against false teachers and hard works (v. 2) had been done without *agape* love. If we lose love as our motivation, all defence of the faith and labour for Christ becomes meaningless and places Jesus "against" us (see 1 Cor. 13); we have "fallen" from the true faith.

2:10 The Greek word translated 'devil' is *diabolos* and means 'a false accuser'. The 'devil' here is clearly the anti-Christian local authorities, and not any cosmic being.

2:11 When Christ returns, the responsible dead will be raised and judged, and the unworthy amongst them will die again. This will therefore be for them their “second death”.

2:13 The ‘satan’ [‘adversary’] here refers to the local Roman authorities who were against the Christians.

2:17 In Semitic thought, a name refers to a personality or character. There will be something very intimate between Jesus and us throughout eternity, which only He and us can enter into; we will enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus for eternity.

2:21 Jesus doesn’t react against sin immediately, He gives time for people to repent and respond. We should be the same in dealing with people.

2:23 Jesus searches our minds, what we are thinking, and repays us for our works. Thus our thoughts are paralleled with our actions. Constantly, even as we sleep, Jesus is searching our hearts. To be spiritually minded is therefore of utmost importance in our Christian life.

3:4 The faithful in the church in Sardis are recognized by Jesus as such; He doesn’t rebuke them for not having separated from the others who were obviously weak.

3:5 Our names are written in the book when we are baptized, but we can turn away and thus have our names blotted out. When Moses asked for his name to be blotted out of the book so that Israel could enter the Kingdom, he was therefore offering to lose his place in eternity (Ex. 32:32). Whilst God doesn’t operate on the basis of substitution, this incident shows the selfless extent of spiritual love for others to which it is possible for a man to rise.

3:12 Jesus even after His resurrection and glorification still speaks of God as “my God”. Yet He parallels “my new name” with the Name of God. Jesus was given the Name of God after His resurrection- hence He calls it a “new name”, which He had only recently been given at the time He gave the Revelation. As God’s Son He operates in the Name of God, but this doesn’t mean He is God Himself in person.

3:15 Jesus like any lover hates indifference and passivity on our part; an appearance of commitment to Him which is only external (3:1).

4:8 *Full of eyes*- Through the cherubim Angels, God knows all that is happening on earth and in our lives. They were full of eyes “within”- perhaps indicating their total self-knowledge. One of the greatest joys of being immortalized with God’s nature is that we shall know ourselves fully.

4:8 *Day and night*- In the Kingdom, we will praise God and serve Him every single moment. Our service of Him in this life cannot be a mere occasional hobby; if we are seeking to eternally serve Him every moment, then this will be our desire in this life; and our life decisions relating to education, career and use of our personal time will reflect this.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

5:1 This scroll is the book of life; the opening of the possibility of eternity for those written in it was made possible by the death of Christ (v. 9).

5:4 John's weeping suggests our frustration at not being able to enter eternity by our own merits. Hence his and our extreme gratitude for the sacrifice of Christ.

5:10 Our hope is to be the future King-priests in God's Kingdom upon earth- no mention is made of eternity in Heaven after death.

5:11 This may be a vision of the Angels welcoming the resurrected Jesus into Heaven after His ascension.

6:1 If the scroll is the book of life, the seals represent what stood in the way of the book being opened. The book will be opened at Christ's return (20:12). They refer to various periods of history between the time John was given the vision and the return of Christ, and the events within them all have special relevance to God's people. They were opened on account of Christ's death. Thus He became the Lord of history; all history and world political events occur under His control and all play a part in bringing on the day when He shall return and open the book of life.

6:9 Although the Bible teaches that the dead are unconscious, God remembers the dead and is in a sense outside of time as we know it; therefore "all live unto Him" (Lk. 20:38). So here the Bible speaks about the unconscious dead as if their blood, their lives, demand from God a response in judging their murderers.

7:3 The seal is on the forehead, representing the mind. God identifies who is really His by their attitude of mind. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

7:4 Most numbers in Revelation are symbolic; 144 is 12 x 12, perhaps suggesting that the community of the redeemed will be based upon the twelve tribes of Israel in that the Christian hope is "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20), "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) in that the promises which comprise the Gospel of the Kingdom were made to Abraham and his children (Gal. 3:8).

7:9 People from every language and ethnic grouping will be redeemed in Christ when He returns. This means that the Gospel must go to every ethnic group on earth before Christ returns. The internet has hastened this possibility; for since the time of Christ the majority of those groups were ignorant of Christianity. In this context we must understand the Lord's teaching that once the Gospel goes into all the world, then He will return (Mt. 24:14). In this sense our world-wide preaching can hasten His return.

7:14 This could imply that during the great tribulation just before Christ returns, the persecution will result in the Gospel going out to every ethnic group and gaining converts (see v. 9 note); just as persecution led to the spreading of the Gospel to the Gentiles in the first century (Acts 11:19,20).

8:5 The visual image of incense smoke ascending to Heaven and then fire and Angelic activity ensuing shows the power of prayer- the silent words of a man praying at a bus stop really reach Heaven itself, and call forth Angels running hither and thither, causing dramatic events on earth.

8:13 Terrible things are to come upon earth in the very last days, but those who have kept the Lord's word will be kept from them (3:10). The Hebrew and Greek words translated "earth" can just as well refer to 'the land'- of Israel. Perhaps these Angelic judgments are specifically to occur in the land of Israel.

9:4 The seal is on the forehead, representing the mind. God identifies who is really His by their attitude of mind. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

9:11 Not only does each believer have a guardian Angel, but groups of people on earth, including armies of unbelievers, have a representative Angel in the court of Heaven. We can take comfort from this that man is not alone, but the exact situations we are in on earth are represented accurately before God in Heaven through means of His Angels.

9:20 Demons therefore refer simply to idols, not to any actual cosmic beings.

9:21 These awful judgments aren't simply the wrath of an offended Deity; their intention is to lead even the wicked people of the last days to repentance. God's passion is for human repentance; when we repent we therefore so thrill Him.

10:6 *No more delay*- In one sense the coming of Christ is delayed, just as the bridegroom delays in Mt. 25:5, because God is so passionate for as many people as possible to come to repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). In another sense we can hasten the coming of Christ by our spiritual development (2 Pet. 3:11,12) and spreading the Gospel worldwide (Mt. 24:14). But the apparent delay in Christ's return can lead His people to selfish behaviour (Mt. 24:48); and we must beware of this danger.

10:10 God's word is indeed sweet, but it can have bitter consequences if we seriously accept His demands of carrying the cross of Christ and upholding His standards in this wicked world.

11:2 42 months is the same as 1260 days or three and a half years, all time periods which occur in the various prophecies of the last days. It could be that there will be a literal three and a half years of tribulation immediately before Christ's return; and it's possible that if this tribulation is largely spiritual, that this period has already begun.

11:6 Closing the skies through prayer is an allusion to the work of Elijah, who prayed and stopped rain coming for three and a half years (James 5:17). The same period of 42 months is in view here too (v. 2). This suggests that there will be an Elijah ministry in the last days, seeking to prepare Israel to accept their Messiah (Mk. 9:12; Malachi 4:5).

11:15 The Kingdom of God will subsume the kingdoms of men; therefore, the Kingdom of God shall come literally on this earth at Christ's return.

12:7-9 Bible teaching about Satan is explained in the doctrinal summary at the end of this Bible.

Note:

- The language of "cast down" and "cast out" does not require literal downwards movement- Babylon is "thrown down" in Rev. 18:21. 'Cast out of Heaven' means a loss of power

- After the drama of :7-9, v. 10 says that *now* is the Kingdom of our God. These verses speak of the future rather than telling us what happened in Eden (1:1). There is rejoicing that the devil has been cast to earth. Why should there be rejoicing if his coming to earth was the start of sin and disaster for man?

- The dragon had "seven heads and ten horns" (:3), therefore it was not literally the serpent. It being called "that old serpent" shows that it had the characteristics of that serpent in Eden, in the sense of being a deceiver, as the serpent was. Thus the devil is not literally the serpent, it is a political power, manifesting sin. Pharaoh is likened to a great dragon (Ez. 32:2).

- The dragon drew a third of the stars of heaven to the earth with his tail (:4). If this is read literally, the sheer size of the dragon is immense - a third of the whole universe could be contained just on his tail. There is no way planet earth would be big enough to contain such a huge creature sprawling over it. And remember that all this happened, or will happen, after the first century A.D., when this prophecy was given.

- "Heaven" can figuratively refer to a place of power. Revelation being such a symbolic book, we would expect this to be the case here. The woman in "heaven" then delivered her child, who was "caught up unto God and to his throne" (:5). God's throne is in heaven. If the woman was already in heaven, why would her child have to be "caught up" to heaven? She must have been a symbol of something on earth, although in a figurative "heaven". She then flees "into the wilderness" (:6). If she was in literal heaven, this means there is a wilderness in heaven. It is far more fitting for her to be in a figurative heavenly place, and then fleeing to a figurative wilderness on the earth. As all other references to "heaven" in Revelation 12 are figurative, it seems only consistent that the "war" was in a figurative heaven. There can be no rebellion or sin in literal heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13).

The conflict in figurative heaven - i.e. a place of authority - was therefore between two power groups, each with their followers, or angels.

## Commentary on the New Testament by Duncan Heaster

13:10 This alludes to Christ's teaching that whoever takes the sword shall perish by the sword (Mt. 26:52). Those who follow Christ do not use violence to anyone but seek to love their enemies.

13:11 *Like a lamb*- There will be a power system in the last days which is a false imitation of Jesus, the true lamb. He 'plays God' by appearing to be able to do the work of creation which God alone can do, giving life to a dead body as He did to Adam (:14).

13:14 Even if a person appears to be able to do miracles, we should not follow them if they are not teaching according to God's word (Dt. 13:2).

13:16 The forehead represents the mind. The mark may not be anything literal, but rather an attitude of mind. God's people are likewise sealed on their foreheads (7:3; 9:4). The difference between the believer and the world comes down to where our inner heart is.

14:1 144,00- see on 7:4.

14:4 The true believers are engaged to be married to Christ; to unite ourselves with the world is to be unfaithful to Him and lose our virginity.

14:5 *Was found*- The believers have of course been sinful and blemished. But they are seen by Jesus as perfect; for love imputes perfection to the beloved, and the love of Christ is the ultimate love. He will see us as if we are perfect. We can rightly rejoice in His love.

14:7 *Him that made*- The silent reality of creation ought to be an imperative to both us and the world to repent and turn to our maker.

14:10 Fire destroys; it doesn't burn anything for eternity. The allusion is to the destruction of Sodom with fire and sulphur; this is described as "eternal fire" in Jude 7. But Sodom isn't literally burning today; eternal fire refers to total destruction which has eternal consequences. In this manner Jerusalem is described as having been destroyed with eternal fire (Jer. 17:27). The punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

14:15 When human sin has reached a certain point, Christ will come and judge it. That day cannot surely be far off.

15:3 We shall sing this song, by God's grace! As Moses rejoiced that God's people had escaped from Egypt, so we shall rejoice that we have finally and irreversibly left behind the flesh and this world.

16:9,11 Again, even the very final judgments of God upon sinners are intended to bring them to repentance rather than simply express the wrath of an offended deity. God is so passionate for human repentance; including our own, today.

16:15 The allusion is to the virgins who were tempted to fall asleep because it seemed that Christ, the bridegroom, delayed His return (Mt. 25:5). The garments refer to the white clothing of Christ's righteousness which we were given at baptism (19:8). We keep these garments on by continuing to believe that this is truly how we stand before God, and thereby keeping awake in our watching joyfully for Christ's return. Our eagerness for His coming can only be maintained if we are humbly confident of our acceptance by Him then.

16:19 So many cities are built on fault lines, this may have a literal fulfilment.

17:1 Babylon appears to refer to a political or religious system which the rulers of the earth [or, 'the land', the area promised to Abraham] give material support to in return for benefit and temporary pleasure. This system will persecute God's people, both natural and spiritual Israel.

17:16 The victory of Jesus against this system (:14) will be through the various members of the coalition turning on themselves; internal division was how God so often destroyed His enemies in the Old Testament. If we choose to be divided, we are choosing and living out Divine condemnation for ourselves.

17:17 *Put it in their hearts*- God confirms sinful people in the desires of their mind. If we wish to be fleshly in our thinking, God will psychologically confirm us in this; and He will do the same in response to our endeavours to be spiritually minded.

18:4 To leave the system of the world in the last days will be difficult and painful, just as it was for the Jews to respond to the initial historical call to leave Babylon and return to rebuild the ruins of Judah. Many of them were doing well in Babylon and preferred to remain there; the same temptation will occur for the believers in latter day, symbolic Babylon.

18:6 To be given a cup of wine to drink from God is a double symbol- both of condemnation and of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). This is why when we take the cup of wine at the breaking of bread meeting, we must examine ourselves- for we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28,29). This makes the breaking of bread an intense experience, as we face up to the only two possible destinies which we face.

18:21 This figure of a millstone being cast into the sea is used by Jesus to describe the fate of those who cause His little ones to stumble (Mt. 18:6). To do this means that we are just as bad as Babylon with all her apparently more gross sins. Those who do this will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), i.e. they will be resurrected, judged, and sent back into 'Babylon' to share her judgment.

19:3 *For ever and ever*- Babylon herself will be totally destroyed by fire, not eternally subject to conscious torture (18:8). But the smoke, the reminder of the eternal consequence of her destruction and the eternal future she missed, will be with God's people for ever throughout the ages of eternity.

19:7 We are the betrothed wife of Christ, the lamb. We should be preparing ourselves in this life for the great day of marriage. There's no uncertainty about it- He loves us and is eager to marry us!

19:19 When Christ returns there will be organized mass opposition to Him- because people simply prefer their lives and world to carry on as it is, for all their complaints about it and apparent desire for something better. The same mentality is at work today when people refuse the Lordship of Jesus in their lives.

19:21 The word of Jesus is so powerful. Yet we read that same word in the New Testament today, and should allow it to have its power in our lives.

20:2,3 It seems that the first part of the Kingdom of God on earth will last for a "thousand years", during which time the "devil"- power of sin and all opposition to Christ- will be greatly restrained. We will reign on earth as King-priests (5:10), ruling over the ordinary mortal people who are alive on earth at the time of Christ's return. In this sense we will be given towns to rule over (Lk. 19:17). There will then be a rebellion at the end of the thousand years ('the Millennium') which will be put down. The mortal people who die during the Millennium will be resurrected at the end of it and judged; the wicked amongst them will die a "second death" and the faithful will receive eternal life. Sin and death will then finally be no more.

20:5 *The rest of the dead*- This is from the perspective of the end of the Millennium, looking at "the dead" as the sum total of all humans who have ever died. The dead who died "in Christ" during this age will be resurrected at His return. The mortal people alive at the time of His return who live and die during the Millennium will be resurrected at the end of it.

20:14 The lake of fire is therefore symbolic of death- which the Bible defines as total unconsciousness.

21:1 Heaven and earth are often used in the Bible to describe a system of things on earth; the 'heaven' can refer to those in power, and the 'earth' to the ordinary people. There is no need for God to destroy and replace literal Heaven where He dwells.

21:3 This is the hope which Job had- to actually see God in person (Job 19:27). God therefore exists in a personal form; and ultimately we shall see Him. Heaven will be transferred to earth- hence the Kingdom of God on earth is sometimes spoken of as "the Kingdom of Heaven". Not the Kingdom *in* Heaven, but Heaven's Kingdom coming onto earth.

21:17 *A man... an Angel*- In the Kingdom of God, we shall be made equal to the Angels (Lk. 20:35,36), who cannot sin any more and who share God's eternal nature.

21:24 When Christ returns, we shall be resurrected, judged, and made the rulers in His Kingdom which He will establish upon earth (5:10). We will rule over the ordinary mortal people who are alive on earth at the time of His return. The rulers of this world will bow before us and give all

their glory to us- we who in this life are as nothing. We shall be the light of the world in that we shall teach the nations the light of Christ, who is the light of the world. But we must be and want to be the light of the world now if we are to be it in the future age.

22:3 Eden will be restored. The curse that came upon the earth and all creation as a result of Adam's sin will be removed. Again we see that God's plan is to establish His Kingdom here on earth- hence the language of paradise restored.

22:12 The coming of Christ will be "sudden" and we must therefore remind ourselves throughout each day that Christ really might come any time- and be prepared for Him. Christ brings the reward to us, from Heaven to earth (1 Pet. 5:4); we don't get the reward on death by going to Heaven.

22:15 *Lovers and practisers*- People can love sin without personally practicing it by loving to watch and read of these things, participating in them from a distance.

22:17 If we grasp the wonder of the eternal future made possible, our natural reaction will be to invite the person next to us to come and share in it too. Good news about something doesn't remain silently within anyone.