

We Have What Believers Have, Can Have, and Shall Have In Jesus Christ

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Jesus' disciples were just as human as people have always been, and still are today. One day Peter asked the Master, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27). By using the plural, Peter was no doubt speaking for the rest.

"Look, Lord, we have left everything to follow You." That's good. That is what Jesus asked them to do. Essentially, that is what Jesus asks every disciple to do when He calls us to follow Him. That is the bottom line. Jesus Christ is first. All else is secondary and subordinate, even life itself.

"So, what's coming to us?" A reasonable question. So Jesus gave them a reasonable answer. Later He told them about persecutions and possible martyrdom, yet He kept their focus on the kingdom. As they continued to follow Jesus and learn of Him—especially after His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—they learned what they were going to receive. Also, they learned what the followers of Jesus Christ have right here and now in Him. We also learn.

God gives many things to everyone, abundantly and unconditionally. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27, 28). He then went on to say, "that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Jesus assures us, "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). "Your Father knows that you need all these things" (Matthew 6:32; also Luke 12:30).

James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

Paul said to the pagan Areopagites of Athens, "He [God] gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25).

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Command those who are rich in this present

age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

In contrast, the riches of Christ belong only to those who are in a right relationship with God. A person must first be reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ. "Be reconciled to God" is the divine command (2 Corinthians 5:20). Believers live in a covenant relationship with God, and the riches of Christ are the blessings of that relationship. To access and enjoy the provisions and blessings that we have in Christ, we must abide by the conditions of our covenant relationship with God.

We must remain in Christ. Jesus said that we must abide (remain, dwell, "stay put") in Him, just as a branch must abide in the vine. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). Because this is a relationship, to continue to have what comes through the relationship we must remain in the relationship.

In "The Fullness: Filled By The Spirit With All The Fullness Of God In Jesus Christ," we identified some of the basic blessings that believers have in God's fullness in Jesus Christ. That opened the way for us to explore the vast, limitless riches of Christ that are ours in Him by grace. We now pursue the adventure of searching at least some of those "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

For many, this will be a journey of discovery. So please observe carefully and remember purposefully. As we follow the biblical path, we pause often to examine the priceless gems that we encounter at practically every step. These appear in the form of such words as: "given to us," "we have received," and the faith-building statement that greets us most frequently—"we have."

Our "tour," our "journey of discovery," is not for curious sightseers. It is for people who are seriously committed to living the relationship to the full. They are the ones who diligently "ask, seek and knock" (Matthew 7:7).

The best feature of this tour is that we can pick up and keep everything we find as our very own. No sign says, "Look, but do not touch." In fact, everything says, "Free for the taking." We can do so joyfully, knowing that there is plenty for everyone. What we take and keep does not diminish the supply. It is inexhaustible!

So where do we begin? Here is a good place. "But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him' [Isaiah 64:4]. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:9 - 12).

There it is! The Holy Spirit is given to believers so that we might know and understand what God has freely given to us.

WE HAVE.

So, what has God freely given to us?

Everything.

"All things are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21).

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

"Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

Himself.

First, God gave us Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ gave Himself.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4).

Paul declared, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Believers are to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2).

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:5, 6).

We are "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:13-14).

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman He met at Jacob's well, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). The gift of God was Jesus Himself! She found the Gift, received the living water, and her life was transformed.

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Eternal Life.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

God has granted to all who will come to Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, "repentance to life" (Acts 11:18).

"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

In His great high-priestly prayer Jesus said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:1 - 3).

Eternal life is not a detached, self-contained "package" that we receive from God, and then take with us as we turn around and go our own way. Jesus said that eternal life is a vital, personal relationship with the Father and the Son. To continue to have eternal life, we must remain connected to the Source of eternal life in an on-going personal relationship with Him.

"He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:10 - 13).

We know that God has given us eternal life because we have the Son of God and life in Him. We have the witness in ourselves by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16; more about this later). We know that we have the gift of eternal life because we have the Giver. Eternal life is in Jesus. The Giver is the gift. He gave Himself.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one" (John 10:27 - 30). Believers have this eternal life in our secure, continuous relationship with the Father and the Son (John 17:3). We must remain in this relationship. We must continue to follow Him. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. So then, Jesus has no sheep who do not follow Him. Also, our Shepherd has ways to make sure that His sheep are following Him.

Redemption.

In Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Redemption is freedom from the guilt and penalty of sin because by His blood Jesus Christ provided what was necessary to set us free.

Mercy.

Before we came to Christ, we were "not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). Grace is getting what we do not deserve; mercy is not getting what we do deserve. God saved us because of His great mercy on us through Jesus Christ. Concerning his ministry, Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1). Because all of us have so much through God's mercy, we also must not lose heart.

Grace.

The basic definition of grace is "unmerited favor." "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Israel sought after righteousness but did not attain to righteousness because they sought it by the works of the Law and not by faith (Romans 9:31, 32). "Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect [Jew and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ] have obtained it [righteousness], and the rest were hardened" (Romans 11:7 NASB).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4). That applies to all believers; therefore we also should be thankful always for the grace of God that God has given and still gives to each of us by Christ Jesus.

Grace should keep us humble. We have all things because of God's grace, and only because of His grace. Our natural life and giftings are given to us by God through creation and procreation; our spiritual life and giftings are given to us through grace. "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). We are to develop the gifts that we received from God, but never assume that we created them in the first place.

Grace was not an afterthought in the mind of God but was always a vital part of His eternal purpose and plan. In his last epistle, written to Timothy, Paul affirms that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

God's grace "superabounds," overflowing and fulfilling every need. No matter how great is the need, God's grace is greater. This is especially true in regard to man's sin. "But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's [Adam's] offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (Romans 5:15).

They who truly believe in Jesus Christ are "justified freely by His [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). God's grace is not a careless, irresponsible disregard for sin. That would not be grace, and that is not the way God in His holiness and justice treats sin. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross forever demonstrated that. Christ's sacrifice provided a condition that made it morally and governmentally possible for God to forgive confessed and repented sin, and confessed and repented sin only. By the blood of Jesus Christ God demonstrated "His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). God is just in the way He justifies and in the result.

Grace is not passive. It is an active, sanctifying work of God in the believer. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age" (Titus 2:11, 12). Grace keeps us from disgrace.

Receiving God's grace is a faith-act of the will done in a moment of time. However, that faith-act of the will is not an isolated decision, but a soul-commitment that begins a new life and launches the soul onward to its eternal destiny.

"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Peace, access, and boldness.

"Having therefore been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1, 2).

Not only do we have peace with God, we have also the peace of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus said to the disciples, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

"Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

Ephesians 1:7 says that believers have the forgiveness of sins. Romans 5:1 goes even further and says that we are justified. Justification goes beyond forgiveness. Justification means that we stand before God as though we had never sinned. Believers in Jesus Christ are not pardoned sinners; we are justified saints—not justified in sin, but justified from sin. Having been justified by faith, we have peace

with God. God is not displeased with us. He does not put us on probation. We do not have to “prove” ourselves before He accepts us. By His grace “He has made us accepted in the Beloved [Christ]” (Ephesians 1:6).

We also have access into this grace in which we stand. We did not enter into grace by earning spiritual “merit badges,” or progressing in spiritual maturity. We were given access into grace by faith. Faith in Christ gave us full introduction into grace. We stand in grace by faith, and grace by faith will make us stand. There is our security. His grace is all-sufficient for an overcoming, victorious life.

“For through Him [Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). Furthermore, in Christ “we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:12). Boldness is confidence in action. “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21). “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14, 15).

So, do not hold back. The Holy Spirit is your escort. Step right in by faith into God’s grace, into this secure relationship with the Father and the Son provided for you. It cost God everything so that it will cost you nothing. Nevertheless, you will gladly give Him everything—your eternal gratitude, love, obedience, and joyful devotion.

Reconciliation.

In Romans 5 Paul goes on to say that through our Lord Jesus Christ “we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:11). “Reconciliation” is one of the most beautiful words in human language. The world is full of alienation. Alienation from God because of sin results in alienation from others, and even alienation from oneself.

People become alienated from themselves when reason and passion conflict. Truth, reality, reason are on one side; pride and passion are on the other. The two are mutually hostile. When a person lets pride and passion rule, the person becomes alienated from reality and reason. The person’s mind is at war with itself. Reason uses conscience to remind him of his moral insanity and to make it as uncomfortable as possible. As long as he selfishly pursues his pride and passions against reason, so long will his self-alienation continue. He is the “wretched man” of Romans 7.

Although some seek reconciliation by balancing mutual self-interests, true reconciliation is possible only in Jesus Christ. We have widening circles of relationships. At the center, the “hub,” is our relationship with God; next comes our relationship with ourselves; then our relationship with family; then our relationship with the larger society. Alienation from God dislocates all the rest. Like a wheel, if the hub is destroyed, all the spokes fly apart. So reconciliation begins by becoming personally reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. The rest will follow, some immediately, some in time. God is the great Reconciler; He reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ and Him alone all other reconciliation is truly possible.

Adoption.

The New Testament Greek word for adoption is *huiiothesia*. It means "the placing of a son." Adoption means being placed into sonship—sonship in relation to God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

God has "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5).

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:11, 12).

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:4 - 6).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14 - 17).

Jesus Christ is uniquely the "only begotten Son" of God (John 3:16). Believers in Christ are children of God by adoption. We are not spiritual "foster children." We have been "placed into sonship," with all the privileges of that position. By the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of adoption—we believers have an inner awareness of our intimate son-Father relationship with God. The witness of the Holy Spirit is so clear and definite that we respond spontaneously, "Abba, Father!"

Fellowship.

What we have in Christ is very personal; however; it is not private. We possess it together in fellowship with all believers. The apostle John said, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (verse 7).

High Priest.

The Epistle To The Hebrews was written to reveal the contrast between the Old Covenant of the Law and the New Covenant of grace. The key word of the epistle is "better." Everything is better in Christ, not comparatively better but superlatively, absolutely better by contrast. The new completely displaced and replaced the old.

Among the features of the New Covenant in contrast to the Old Covenant is the absolute superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ over the priesthood of Aaron. The Aaronic priesthood is gone forever. Jesus Christ is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:17, quoting Psalm 110:4). The Melchizedek priesthood has only one Priest—Jesus Christ.

"We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14 - 16). Someone has said that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help "in the nick of time."

"Having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:21, 22).

"My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Our great High Priest is our Advocate, our "attorney in heaven." "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus Christ is always in session, ever interceding before the Father on behalf of His own. Come to Him. He is able to save you "to the uttermost," that is, completely and forever. It has been said that Jesus can take people from the "guttermost" and save them to the "uttermost."

Hope.

In modern usage, the word "hope" has been greatly diminished. Today it is expectation without certainty, as in "I hope so." In the Bible "hope" has not the slightest hint of uncertainty. There it means the anticipation of what is absolutely certain, based on God's character and His word. God "has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thessalonians 2:16).

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

"Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie [His promise and His oath], we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus,

having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:17 - 20).

Real, biblical hope is a certainty that we do not see yet we know is there. It is already stored up for us in glory (Colossians 1:5). "For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:24, 25).

Several years ago my wife and I toured Alaska aboard one of the huge cruise ships of the Holland America line. As the ship docked at one of the ports, I stood on the rail observing the large anchor lines that went out in several places and disappeared beneath the surface. As I thought about those anchors, the two passages of Scripture you just read came to mind. I did not see the ship's anchors, but I knew—and so did everyone else—that they were there, holding the massive vessel firmly in place.

Like the anchors of the cruise ship, the hope that we have in Christ is the sure anchor of the soul. Though we do not yet see it, we know it is there, fastened "sure and steadfast," to the Rock Christ Jesus. Just as I could not see the anchor lines below the surface of the water, even so we cannot see the anchor lines of faith above the "clouds" of our present human experience. Nevertheless, we know the anchor—our steadfast hope in Christ—is there because the word of God says so, and also because it is keeping our souls from drifting.

The ultimate point of reference of the hope that we have in God is the hope of the resurrection. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:19, 20). The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is an established factual event in time-space history.

Paul said before Felix the governor, "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15).

Earlier he had written, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). We have it. It is already there, eternal in the heavens. It is waiting for us, and we are waiting for it. It is certain. What a hope!

"Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3). Live prepared for the hope.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Know the reason for your hope and be prepared to share it.

"Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech" (2 Corinthians 3:12).

Liberty.

Distinct from man-made religion, that is based on what we do, the gospel of Jesus Christ is based on what He did. Christ's death and resurrection is a completed work. We cannot add to it. The human tendency has been to add something that we must do to what Christ did.

The Jewish believers had a tendency to hold to the requirements of the Law of Moses as being necessary for salvation, and in some cases insisted that the gentile converts must do the same. The key issue was circumcision.

Paul went to Jerusalem to confer with the rest of the apostles and elders concerning this matter. Later he wrote, "But this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Galatians 2:4, 5).

Believers in Jesus Christ live in liberty, not legalism. Legalism adds non-biblical requirements for salvation and imposes them on people. Christian liberty is not permission to commit sin or to violate one's conscience. Christian liberty is the right of every Christian to live before God in all good conscience according to the light one has and can obtain, without the imposition of non-biblical rules and requirements. Imposing non-biblical rules and requirements for salvation is a violation of the gospel and has the effect of nullifying Christ's completed, all-sufficient work of redemption.

"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" (Hebrews 13:10). Believers have a spiritual "altar." Christ was sacrificed for us once and for all. We are permitted to feast at His "altar" only if we trust fully in His sacrifice alone, and thus move out from under the Law and into grace.

So we are urged, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Verse 13).

"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

The Word of God.

At the very foundation of the Christian faith is the determinative authority of the written word of God—the Bible. Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Just before His crucifixion He prayed to the Father for His disciples, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). The Holy Spirit revealed to its authors the

content of the Scriptures, including every word Jesus spoke that was necessary to be recorded.

Paul stated, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The apostle Peter also assures us, "We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [disclosure], for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19 - 21).

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1).

No matter what the denominational expression, at the center of all genuine Christianity is an essential faith that is common to all. It is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

We have the spoken word of God, now written, inerrant, infallible, authoritative. The Bible has withstood every assault against it, both from without and within the Church. It endures forever (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25).

The Holy Spirit.

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart [innermost being] will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37 - 39).

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus said to the disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments [*i.e.*, commands]. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you" (John 14:15 - 17).

This promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1 - 4).

We are reminded that our keynote passage of Scripture is 1 Corinthians 2:9 - 12.

Verse 12 says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

Next in importance to God's gift of Himself in Jesus Christ is the gift of Himself by the Holy Spirit. God "has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 4:8).

When we came to Christ, we received the earnest [deposit, firstfruits] of the Holy Spirit. God gave "the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:22 KJV). He has given to us "the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 5:5 KJV). The King James Version follows the Greek more closely in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5.)

"We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body [resurrection]" (Romans 8:23).

First, we were born of the Spirit. "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24). "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

We received the promise of the resurrection. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

We began following the Spirit instead of the flesh. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:13, 14).

Then, after we receive the earnest (deposit, firstfruits) of the Spirit in our heart at salvation, it is normative for believers also to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the seal of the Holy Spirit, which in turn is the earnest (deposit) of our future inheritance. "In Him (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in (by) whom also, having believed [*i.e.*, after you believed], you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee [earnest, deposit] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14). Though this inheritance is eternal and begins with our resurrection, we have the deposit of it now in the seal of the Holy Spirit.

This is why Paul asked the group of believers he met at Ephesus, "Having believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 19:2; literally, "If the Holy Spirit you received, having believed"). Paul assumed that they had believed and therefore were believers. His question was whether or not they had received the seal of the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience following saving faith. He is referring to two distinct experiences—believing, and receiving the Holy Spirit—receiving following believing—subsequent, not simultaneous, though not necessarily separated by any length of time (Acts 10:44 - 47).. Any other interpretation, however widely held, makes nonsense of Paul's question. Evidently these believers had heard the gospel from Apollos, who "spoke

and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25). Had Apollos known of Christian baptism, he would have known that the baptism in the Holy Spirit normally follows repentance and water baptism, as Peter had stated on the Day of Pentecost.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38, 39). Peter assured them that they would receive exactly what they had just witnessed: the pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. That was what Paul asked the disciples at Ephesus if they had received.

We receive the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith, not the works of the law (Galatians 3:2; 14).

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32)

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13).

Understanding.

Because believers have the word of God and the Spirit of God, we have been given understanding.

An angel of God was sent to the prophet Daniel with a message concerning the last days. In the message the angel said, "Many shall be purified, make white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (Daniel 12:10).

Centuries earlier the psalmist wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (Psalm 111:10). He also wrote, "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:99). A person who pays attention to the Scriptures has the key to understand what a secular teacher who has more knowledge does not understand. We observe this daily and wonder, "why don't they see this?"

In answer to the disciples' question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus said, "Because is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:10, 11).

Later, James wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). That promise has given comfort and hope to all of us who have done dumb things at times. It is no sin to be ignorant, but it's very inconvenient and sometimes very painful.

In First John 5:20 we read, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." So then,

the primary purpose of God in giving us an understanding is that we might know Him in Jesus Christ. All understanding and wisdom is built on that. Without that divine premise, all else is skewed.

The reason we have understanding is we think like Jesus Christ. "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We know His purposes, His principles, His attitudes, His commands and instructions—all because we have His word and His Spirit. So, before we ask "What would Jesus do?" we need to ask, "How and what would Jesus think?" "Let this mind [way of thinking, humble and obedient attitude] be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Anointing, Authority, Power.

Let us return to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 1, and look at verses 21 and 22 together. "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit" ("the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts"—KJV).

In this passage we see a natural progression, beginning with the present and working back step-by-step. The only verb in this passage that is in the present tense is "establishes." That is an on-going process in believers, and Paul says that he and Timothy were part of that continuing process, together with the believers. It is happening now in believers together. The other verbs refer to past acts of God in believers, in step-by-step progression from the present to the preceding. God anointed us; before that He sealed us; before that He gave us the deposit of the Spirit in our hearts. The process began with the deposit of the Spirit at salvation; then the seal of the Spirit at the baptism in the Spirit; followed by the abiding anointing of the Spirit for Spirit-established living and Spirit-empowered witness and service.

The apostle John wrote, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (1 John 2:20). Some manuscripts read "you all know." Verse 27 says, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him."

This does not mean that because believers have the Holy Spirit we do not need sound biblical teachers and teaching. We most certainly do. It means that because the Holy Spirit has revealed Christ and His word to us, contrary religious doctrines and philosophical systems have nothing to teach us. They are devoid of the truth. Jesus Christ is the truth, not a part of the truth (John 14:6). All truth is personalized and revealed in Him.

Jesus appointed twelve apostles "that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power [*exousia*, authority] to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15).

He said to His disciples, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and

scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19).

After His resurrection and just before His ascension to the Father, He announced to the disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (*epelthontos tou hagiou pneumatos eph' humas*, "having come the Holy Spirit upon you"); and you shall be witnesses to Me [My witnesses] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This must apply to more than just the original disciples, because world-wide evangelism only begun with them.

When Paul and Barnabas preached at Iconium, the Lord "was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3).

It did not end with the apostles and the early church. All believers can claim 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear (*deilea*, timidity), but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

One day when Peter and John went up together to the temple to pray, a lame man sitting at one of the temple gates saw them and asked them for money. As Peter and John looked intently at him, "Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3:1 - 8).

Peter had the unfailing word of God, the all-authoritative name of Jesus Christ, and the all-powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. Peter knew what he had, and he knew what to do with it! Do Spirit-filled, anointed believers today know what they have, and do they know what to do with it? They should. Jesus said, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8), and His word speaks to us today.

This is given to us to give to others. It is to glorify Christ, not us. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels (clay jars), that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Glory.

In His great high-priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus asked the Father, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (John 17:5). Later in the same prayer He said concerning His disciples, "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one" (John 17:22).

In His request (John 17:5), Jesus is talking about His pre-incarnate glory—that is, the glory that He had co-equally and co-eternally with the Father. To become man to die for our sins, Jesus had temporarily laid that glory aside. Now He was asking that it be restored upon the completion of His redemptive mission. That is Jesus' glory that He wants believers to behold when we are eternally with Him where He is (verse 24).

This request is one of the strongest evidences of the full deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, because He was asking for something that He knew belongs only to God. God declared, "I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

In His statement (John 17:22), Jesus said that He had given His disciples the delegated glory that the Father had given to Him as the Son of Man on earth. He received that glory when the Spirit of God descended on Him immediately after He was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32, 33). That glory accomplishes the unity of believers that Jesus had just prayed for (John 17:21). It is given to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. That was affirmed when Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) and was fulfilled on the Day Of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:11), and He fills believers with the glory of all the fullness of God in Jesus Christ. That is what Paul prayed that believers would receive (Ephesians 3:19). Believe it; receive it; live it.

Gifts And Ministries.

The New Testament identifies three groups of spiritual gifts and ministries.

1 Corinthians 12:4 - 6 introduces the three groups: gifts, ministries, active workings. Verses 7 - 11 proceed to list the members of one group—the nine supernatural gifts of the Spirit (*pneumatika*, "spirituals"): word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues. These are all the work of the Holy Spirit, given to each one individually as He wills for the good of all (verses 7, 11).

Ephesians 4:11 names the overseeing eldership ministry gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Paul said, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?" (1 Corinthians 3:5). "I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power" (Ephesians 3:7). Later he wrote to Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14). "Stir up the gift which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).

"Active workings" (practical ministries) are mentioned at various places throughout the New Testament, from "giving a cup of cold water" (Matthew 10:42) to doing all kinds of practical things for others, even "to the least of these" (Matthew 25:40).

Examples from all three groups are mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 12:28—apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

Also, in Romans 12:6 - 8 all three groups are represented as functioning in the church, the body of Christ. "Prophecy" represents the nine supernatural gifts of the

Spirit. "Ruling" (leadership), "ministering," "teaching," "exhortation" ("encouragement") represent the overseeing eldership gifts. "Giving" and "mercy" represent the vast opportunities of the "active workings" group. These are "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Verse 6). We are to use them as we have received them.

WHAT WE CAN HAVE.

Up to this point we have been exploring what believers in Jesus Christ have now. It is marvelous, wonderful, abundant, precious. Jesus said, "Hold fast what you have till I come" (Revelation 2:25). "Hold fast what you have that no man take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

In addition to all that believers have now in Jesus Christ, we can have much more right now because much more has been promised and provided.

Paul posed this rhetorical question: "He [God] who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

All things! All that we need "for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

People who value what they have in Christ gain. People who do not value what they have been given lose what little they have. We see this in people raised in church. Some learn the Bible, hear the gospel, believe, grow in grace and knowledge, and continue to experience the riches of Christ. Others learn the Bible, hear the gospel, do not believe, and lose what they had received. Twice Jesus said this very thing. "Whoever has to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (Matthew 13:12; 25:29). Satan takes spiritual riches from some people as easily as taking candy from a sleeping baby. It comes down to whether or not a person has a proper sense of eternal values and the spiritual priorities of life.

Do you want more of God, more of the unsearchable riches of Christ, more of what God has promised and provided in Christ, all that is yours "for life and godliness," all that you can be and are destined to be in Christ?

Then, go for it!

God's promises go clear back to the Old Testament. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11). "The desire of the righteous will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a

serpent? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7 - 11; see Luke 11:9 - 13).

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:12 - 14). "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23, 24).

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Conditions.

As was said earlier, to receive these promises, we must abide by certain necessary conditions. These conditions have to do with our character, our attitudes, and above all our relationship with God Himself in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

Receiving these promises is conditioned also on faith. Jesus said, "All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22; also Mark 11:24).

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

James is very forthright on this point. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5 - 8).

James also tells us that our motive must be pure, not selfish. He said, "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss [with wrong motives], that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3, 4).

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31). We must never put our pocketbook above God's book.

Also, the apostle John emphasized the necessity for obedience as a condition of receiving from God. He wrote, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because

we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

John also affirms that our prayers must be according to the will of God. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

We must ask in Jesus' name. He said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14). In ourselves, we have no authority, no standing before God. Jesus Christ is seated in the highest possible position, with full standing and authority with the Father. God always honors the name of Jesus Christ. When we ask in Jesus' name, we invoke the authority of His name. It is just as though Jesus Himself asked the Father.

We must also be givers as well as receivers. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). In his instructions to believers who were in a master/slave relationship, Paul wrote regarding doing good and receiving the same. "Whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free" (Ephesians 6:5 - 9, verse 8). It has been said that grace is a gift from the Father to be shared by His children. We receive it freely and without merit, and we give it freely and without merit.

WHAT WE SHALL HAVE.

We have. We can have. We shall have.

Inheritance.

Some things are certain for believers in Jesus Christ. As the children of God, we have a glorious inheritance. As we saw earlier, the hope of it is our present possession. The reality is stored up for us in Heaven (Colossians 1:5). We know that we have "a better and an enduring possession for ourselves," (Hebrews 10:34), and it is awaiting us in heaven. It is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4, 5).

Jesus "is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

"The wise shall inherit glory" (Proverbs 3:35).

In Christ "we have obtained an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11). We give "thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Colossians 1:12).

And so, whatever we do, we are to do it "heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men,

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23, 24). "Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12).

In his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul said, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

This should have an effect on how we respond to others, "not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

Believers shall inherit the earth. We are all familiar with Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). This promise goes way back to Psalm 25:13 and Psalm 37, verses 9, 11, 22, 29, 34. The promise is found also in Isaiah 60:21.

Most of all, we inherit eternal life. Jesus said that those who forsake all for the kingdom of God will receive "many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life" (Luke 18:29, 30).

Jesus said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He said that at the judgment of the nations, "He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:33, 34).

He who sat on the throne said to John the apostle, "He who overcomes will inherit all these things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7).

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

A Crown.

Paul spoke of the Christian life as a race. "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:25).

We must remember that the course is a marathon, not a one hundred yard dash. The hope of the believer is not "pie in the sky when you die." It is "grace for the race that you face." "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:36). So, "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will

receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

In his last epistle, Paul said to Timothy, "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

Much earlier, he wrote to the church in Thessalonica: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20). He wrote also to the Philippians, "Therefore, my beloved and longed for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

The apostle Peter gave explicit instructions to the elders of the Church, closing with this promise: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4). Paul planted. Apollos watered. But God gave the increase. "Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:5 - 8; see also verses 9 - 17).

Jesus said to the love-lacking pastor of the church in Ephesus: "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

To the persecuted church in Smyrna He said: "Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

To the faithful church in Philadelphia He said: "Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

To the lukewarm church in Laodicea He said: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

The crown of life. The crown of righteousness. The crown of rejoicing. The crown of glory. Hold it fast! We are destined for the throne!

"We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

John records, "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb [Christ] has come, and his wife [the Church] has made herself ready.' And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:6 - 8).

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

The Divine Invitation.

If you are not reconciled to God by faith in His Son Jesus Christ, you do not have these precious possessions and promises. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). He said to some very religious people, "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40). Oh, the stubborn will—the big obstacle to real life!

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Also, people who receive God's mercy must also be merciful. In the Sermon on the Mount, one of the Beatitudes that Jesus gave is "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Jesus invites you, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

To anyone who thirsts, God will give of the fountain of the water of life freely (Revelation 21:6). "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

Remember, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well that if she would ask Him, He would give her living water . . . springing up into everlasting life (John 4:10, 14). Jesus also said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Come to Him; ask of Him—and live!