

How Does God Help Us? (Part 2)

Liberty, Truth, Faith, and Works

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The title of my sermon on the first Holy Day was "How Does God Help Us?" I was using Israel's release from their bondage to Egypt to show similarities and differences with ours, and there are several of both. I will give four similarities right off are:

- 1) They and we are released from bondage.
- 2) God does virtually everything to accomplish the release, while we do virtually nothing. All we are required to do at that point is believe. It even says that about Israel.
- 3) Once free, a pilgrimage begins with a definite destination in mind, but no specific road.
- 4) On the pilgrimage, God supplied all of their needs, and He supplies all of our needs.

One major difference is that theirs was a release from physical bondage, and ours is a spiritual one. This one difference makes all the difference in the world as to what God does to meet our needs, because our pilgrimage is not geographical, but rather a journey through spiritual, moral, and emotional maturity.

My weekly Sabbath sermon ["The Heart's Self-Absorption"] was another step in seeing some of the particulars of our journey because it showed a major portion of what we are in bondage to, and that is a *deceitful heart* formed through the influences of Satan, this world, and our own personal experiences.

We saw ever so briefly a measure of its deceit in God's description of its self-centeredness. It is this self-centeredness that must be overcome if we are ever going to be mature and in God's kingdom, eternally working under the Father and the Son in the advancement of their plans for the remainder of God's creation.

In that weekly Sabbath sermon, we discovered four areas that pertain to this series:

- (1) The heart is not only deceitful above all things, but *incurably* so. It cannot

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be fixed. That is God's judgment.

(2) We saw 19 expressions of self-centeredness of this deceitful heart.

(3) We saw the reason why God is requiring the works of overcoming the expressions of human nature.

(4) We were shown four tools or disciplines to help us overcome during our pilgrimage.

Those four tools—the tools of suffering—were called:

- The delaying of gratification
- The acceptance of responsibility
- A dedication to truth
- Balance or wisdom in the use of these disciplines.

The use of these four tools, along with God's Holy Spirit, is necessary because God has commanded that a new heart be formed in us, and because He is bringing us to perfection (we might say, 'to spiritual maturity') in preparation for working with Him in God's Family Kingdom. Thus we can see that our growth is a cooperative work with God made possible by faith in truth.

In this sermon we are going to continue to follow Israel's parallel pilgrimage to ours and see how God supplies what we need to reach our destination in His kingdom, liberated from our bondages. One of our greatest needs is truth, and I want us to see and appreciate how important what God's supplies is to our salvation.

We are going to begin in Exodus 13:20-22, and then Exodus 14:19-20.

Exodus 13:20-22 And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. [This occurred before going through the Red Sea.] And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

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One thing to notice here is that their movement, once they started out of Egypt, was a full-time operation. That is the picture we are supposed to get. We are involved in Christianity day and night. There are no vacations, no down-times, if we put it that way. We see there a very clear picture that God is leading His people day and night, all the time, to get to the Promised Land.

Exodus 14:19-20 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face and stood behind them: An it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night.

God is still following through the type that He provides through Israel's experiences. It is no different for us. The application might be a little bit different because ours is a spiritual release and a spiritual journey, but God is still leading and guiding. With Israel, in one sense, everybody was going as a body to one place. With the church, we are all going to the same place; however, God is not dealing with us only in terms as a body, He is dealing with us individually as well. Therefore, for those of us in the church, everybody's path is not exactly identical as it was for Israel because He is not only creating a Family Kingdom, He is also developing us with some specific characteristics for His kingdom. We are thus dealt with more individually *by far* than the Israelites were.

Did you notice that in this instance, in Exodus 14, He not only came between the Israelites and the Egyptians in order to protect Israel, but that He also blocked Israel from going in any direction but forward through *the way* of escape that He opened. There was only one direction that He was going to permit them to go in. This was shown really pretty well in the *Ten Commandments* movie. The wind was beginning to blow, and Moses (played by Charlton Heston) was all excited and agitated, but God said essentially, "*Do not just stand there. Do something! Go forward!*" And so Moses took his rod, and things happened.

When you think about that, and what I told you the other morning about going across the Red Sea, what Cecil B. DeMille put in the movie was puny by comparison to what God actually did. That thing had to be miles wide so that two and one half or three million people could get through there in one night. They went across there en mass. It was not like a parade going down Fifth Avenue. They just dashed for the other side of the Red Sea.

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What I want you to understand is that God is working for your benefit, not only to lead you, but also to block your return to Egypt. Some of those people already wanted to go back. As Richard said in his sermon this morning ["Unleavened Bread and Hope"], they got out of Egypt, but they never got Egypt out of them. The desire to be in bondage was actually still working within them and producing the leaven that would lead them to go back, if they were given the opportunity.

Now, God is working in your behalf as well to keep you on track and going forward. Sometimes we rebel in weakness. We start on our way back but, *you know*, from this analogy He is giving us here, that He will work to keep you from going back. You can bet that He will be faithful to try to stop you in your tracks. What this does, because of His patience, is give us time to develop the strength of faith through experience with God. How often God has had to do this for us, we may never know. But the very fact that He shows He sometimes does this (in this parallel He provides) gives strength to I Corinthians 10:13 and further ensures that He does it fairly often.

I am going to read Psalm 78:14-25 because it has to do with God's provision, but there is more than what just appears on the surface.

Psalm 78:14-27 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the Wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat [food] for their lust. Yes, they spoke against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food. He sent them meat to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven; and by his power he brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea.

What I want you to notice here is the abundance of the food, the water, the guidance, and the correction God supplied. God is not stingy in what He supplies to us.

Again, I want you to reflect back on what I read to you out of that paper regarding the tremendous amounts He had to supply for two and one-half million people or more: 1500 hundred tons of food per day that came to them in manna; 11 million gallons of water every day. That is an awful lot. Whenever He had to get water out of a rock, it even says right here that the waters ran like a river. It was not a little stream that came out of there. It was a gusher that came out of there, and the streams overflowed.

To capture your imagination again just a little bit, remember we are talking about two and one-half million people. We are talking an area at least as large as Mecklenburg County, which is no small county at all. According to that quarter-master, it would have taken 750 square miles for two and one-half million people to camp.

I want to bring to your attention the time that He rained the quail down on them. It says He caused an east wind to blow. I want you to grasp a little bit of the abundance that God gives to His people. This has meaning to us later on in terms of food. Do you realize that it says here the quail were stacked up on the ground like dust, but in Numbers 11, it says that they were two cubits deep, on the ground. Do you know how much two cubits is? That is one yard deep, using the small cubit of eighteen inches. I do not know whether it was two cubits deep over the whole 750 square miles, but it gives you a pretty good impression of how abundantly He responded to those people to take care of them, to provide for them.

One thing that is not mentioned here but it is mentioned in other places very often, is that God dealt with them and their rebelliousness, their stiffneckedness, and their hard-headedness, with a tremendous abundance of patience. While Evelyn and I were at home she looked up a verse in Revelation 6:10. It says there that the people who are dead (martyrs) under the altar, in that vision John was given, cried out to God night and day: "How long, Oh Lord, before You avenge our death?" Let us turn that around. How many times did God say, "*How long, oh man, are you going to refuse to submit?*" He could have blown the whole two and one-half million of them away. At one time He told Moses, "*Stand aside. I am going to start a new nation with you, and I am just going to blow these people away.*" But He did not.

How many times have we disappointed Him? How many times have we revealed our weaknesses to Him? How many times have we deliberately put ourselves into temptation, and He did not blow us away, but nonetheless graciously continued to provide for us because He is confident that He can create in us, with our help, a new heart.

Right after the golden calf incident in Exodus 32, Moses was down. He was depressed.

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He needed to be encouraged, and so God told him, "*I will show you My backside. Stand here in the cleft of the rock, and I will pass by you.*"

Exodus 34:5-6 And the LOORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LOORD. [God preached a sermon about Himself to Moses.] And the LOORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LOORD, The LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

The first thing He said about Himself, in relation to the Israelites, was about His mercy, His grace, His patience. I looked up a number of other places where God says similar things about how gracious He is to Israel, putting up with their stiff necks and hard hearts. That particular one is in II Kings.

Whenever you think of the way God dealt with Israel, and the way He is dealing with you and me, the stakes for us are so much greater that there is no comparison. All they were going to was a physical inheritance. Ours is spiritual and involves everlasting life; the standards for us are exceedingly higher. God expects dedication from us (to the degree we are able to understand) to the awesome hope we have before us, to what He is willing to give us. So He has dealt with us in extreme patience because, brethren, we are very much like our ancestors.

There are two other things that I want to pass on here. In Psalm 78, He mentions two other things specifically: (1) He brought water out of the rock, and (2) He supplied food for them on a daily basis—meaning of course the manna. I think you are well aware that in both cases Jesus said that *He* was food for us. In Ephesians 5:26 water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and it is by the washing of the word that we are cleansed. So there is parallel for you and me.

God abundantly deals with us spiritually in terms of His Holy Spirit, and with food, and that food is the word of God. So we are being taken care of, but it is spiritual. We are to eat of Christ, who is the Word of God, and He described Himself as the personification of truth. Remember, God's word *is* truth, and both of these which He supplied here—water and food—are symbols of nurturing, strengthening, sustaining, and growth-producing types of the truth.

The message of Psalm 78, for you and me, is that God is supplying our need every bit as abundantly as He did for those two and one-half million Israelites, and **more** so. What He is giving us is far more valuable to the end that we are going to than it was for them.

They ate, and they drank, and they died in the wilderness.

All that He is supplying us with takes place somewhat seamlessly in the circumstances of life that He either puts us into, or that we fall into through our own choices. In Deuteronomy 8:1-3, we are looking at the end of their walk across the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3 All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LOORD swore unto your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LOORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, [Why?] to humble you, and to prove [test] you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no. And He humbled you, and suffered [allowed] you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you knew not [meaning they had no prior experience with], neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LOORD does man live.

God deliberately puts us into trials to purify us from our pride. That is why the mention of humility. Why does this have to be so? Because it is our pride that struggles to resist Him, and He does it to test our faithfulness so that He will know that we can be depended upon to be responsible, to be faithful. Understand this—that trials producing hardships are part of God's providence. He is going to supply them to us. Did He not do that to our father Abraham? He gave Abraham one whale of a trial! *"Kill Isaac. Sacrifice him."*

Not many have had to go through that. You can be sure that He gave Abraham other very difficult trials as well. They just are not all listed. To whom much is given much is required. There is hardly anybody who had a relationship with God like Abraham did, so you know God really put that man to the test, and Isaac too, and also Jacob. Their tests were a great more difficult than ours. And David's too. God put him into situations because that man was called to one of the highest responsibilities to be awarded or given away in the Kingdom of God. You know David is going to be right under Jesus Christ as king of Israel. That man's trials were difficult compared to what is given to us.

Now why is He giving us these trials? It is part of our preparation, but I want to give you one very important reason. God wants to see what it is that motivates us. Is it faith in Him, or is it our own gratification? Think of Abraham again and his trial with Isaac. It could have been so easy for him to gratify his feelings for Isaac by not sacrificing him,

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but he used his faith and came to the right conclusion. He did the right thing, thus proving to God that he could be trusted. I think Abraham is going to have a whale of a job in the Kingdom of God too. He faced a supreme test. Not maybe *the* supreme test, but a supreme test—an awesome one.

Let us go back to that scripture I mentioned a couple of times in I Corinthians 10:13.

I Corinthians 10:13 There has no temptation [no test, no trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you [allow you] to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it.

Reading this verse ought to be an encouragement, knowing that God has set limits on our experiences even as He did with Job. With Job, He told Satan, "You can go this far, and no further." God puts the same kind of fence around you and me as well in our temptations. You do it, brethren, with your children. You try to make sure that your child does not get in over his head. You intervene time and time again to make sure they do not step into something that is going to be too big for them to handle and put them at risk, even the risk of their lives. God is no different. He knows us far better than we do ourselves. He knows us far better than we know our children. We can go so far, and no further, and so He measures out our strength to be able to take care of situations.

It is interesting that the main verb in this sentence is in the perfect tense, which indicates that the temptations Paul is thinking of are lasting conditions, and not spur-of-the-moment tests. They are not like little pop quizzes, but something that is going to take a while to resolve.

Now there is, in most cases, nothing new or unusual about the experiences of life that we go through. In fact, we may have had similar situations before conversion because, as Paul said, they are common to men. What is different now is that we have God's word by which to alter the shape and the fruit of the experiences.

Perhaps the main element of all, in this sentence or two in verse 13, is that he is conveying the promise of God's faithfulness. Though all men are unfaithful, God is *never* unfaithful to His children. Never, ever. He always provides a way out.

Let me give you a vivid example of God's patience, of His grace, in a really interesting situation. Consider what happened with Lot. He is a vivid example of God's grace. He deliberately took up residence in sinful Sodom, thus putting himself and his family at

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risk. But God still provided a way of escape for him and his wife and his family as well, and when it was over he rewarded God by getting drunk and committing incest with his two conspiring daughters, two nights running. And yet, at the end of the book, Peter calls him *righteous*. I think we can only assume that Lot had a change of heart. But do you know what? God spotted what was in him, and that is why He saved him. Despite the difficulty Lot put himself in, God still patiently, mercifully worked with him.

The major gift God provides us is His word, His truth. Let us understand some of its value. Let us go to John 6:63. This is really a rich area of instruction.

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

Words are spirit in that they are non-physical. They are the essence of the communication of one mind to another. Whether it is God's mind or another person's, it is simply the essence of the communication from one mind to another. The sound of the word enters the mind, but there is nothing physical there except the brain and all of its operations, but the words are spirit. There is no little man in there manipulating things.

What is in the mind is the invisible, non-physical essence of the communication. Now they are the major tools that enables one to think, and they are power (as Jesus says in this verse), because they instruct us as to how to do, or how not to do. From them we can devise and build, and even make other tools to increase our powers. Words—spirit—give us choices. They empower us to act, or do nothing; to do little, or a lot; to do things the right way, or the wrong; to do one way, or another; to believe, or disbelieve; to love, or to hate. Words show us how to discriminate. Spirit shows us how to discriminate.

I think that you ought to be able to see that the two key elements that pertain to us and this tool that God is providing us in all of this, is:

1. The communication from His mind to ours is truth. Everything you hear on radio and television, etc., is not true. Everything you hear in communication with other human beings is not true. But the communication from God to our mind is true. It can be absolutely relied upon. It is faithful, because God is faithful.
2. The second element that is absolutely necessary for it to be valuable to us is that we must believe it. Truth enables right choices, and this is because truth, plus belief, greatly enhances the probability of us making right choices. We

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will not always do it even though it is given to us, but it greatly enhances the probability that we will make right choices.

John 6:27-29 Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him has God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent.

The major purpose of the manifestation of Christ and His work is that we believe Him. He is the Word. He is truth. This is what man needs above all things—to have truth to work with, and to believe it. If I can put it in real simple terms: Do you understand that this whole mess got started on a lie? That is why Jesus said Satan was "a liar from the beginning." From that time on, there have been arguments in men's mind over what *is* truth. Well, we have it. Do we believe it? That is the key. So God sent Christ to lay the groundwork for getting things straightened out in the World Tomorrow without taking away man's free moral agency.

There is a peculiar revelation here, because the Jews interpreted Jesus' use (in verse 27) of the term "labor" in a physical way. So they were going to go to work, you see. However, when Jesus responded with *His* remark (verse 29) regarding belief, He responded spiritually, and in that He implied that faith is a work. Here is what is peculiar about this: If faith is a work. . . how can that be if salvation is by grace? Is there a contradiction here? Does it not say that salvation is a free gift from God? The Bible clearly states that in Ephesians 2:8-10. So salvation is a gift from God, but man must render to God works that are the product of faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10 states salvation is a free gift of grace, but when you get to verse 10, God mentions that we have to do works that we have been ordained to do. You put the two together, and this process begins to become understandable.

Let me illustrate it this way: The roots of a giant Redwood tree are sunk deep into the ground, and they are doing a great deal of work to support much of the life of the tree drawing water and minerals from the soil as nourishment for the tree. But the roots do not produce the water nor the minerals. The water and the minerals are already in the soil as a gift, and then *used* to do the work. This is such a simple clear illustration; thus it is with faith. It is a gift that we are not merely free to use, but *commanded* to do so in order to produce godly works.

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A little bit earlier I mentioned mankind's limited free moral agency. Why did I say that? Because, as long as blindness inhabits unconverted men, they are limited (restrained) to making choices within the framework of their bondage. This severely limits what man is able to do in terms of spiritual things.

Matthew 13:10-16 And the disciples came and said unto him, Why speak you unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given* unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not [the unconverted] from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they shall see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them: But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

It becomes very obvious, if one believes God, that God is being selective about whom He calls. You might say that He is following a form of family birth control. He is building His kingdom in steps, in stages, and each time a step is accomplished, then the next step becomes larger in terms of those with whom He is dealing. I think you understand that once the church age is over and Jesus Christ is on earth, the conversion of very much of the world during the Millennium then comes. But that is only accomplished when all of the Firstfruits are there to assist Jesus Christ in His operation. Therefore, to those who are unconverted, God withholds the ability to be able to understand.

What is described here in Matthew 13 is that the unconverted, including us before our conversion, simply could not see God or His way of life. It must be revealed miraculously! This does not mean that the unconverted cannot understand any spiritual truth at all. They can, and sometimes they can understand fairly large amounts of it as well, but they cannot put the whole package of doctrines together and yield the proper, true understanding. God gives that to the weak of the world. It is a gift from Him. Is He providing, or is He not? He most certainly is.

The other day I used a scripture in Romans 1:18-20 from Paul, and I want to go back to it again. I want you to see how this blindness works in the minds of some people; not

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everybody, but some.

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold [or rather suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them.

That is an amazing statement, but in the context in which Paul is writing here, he is limiting it to one particular area, and that is shown in verse 20.

Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

The reason I wanted to come back to this scripture is I wanted to mention to you that not only are people blind, but the blindness has an edge to it of antagonism against God. If they were merely blind, they would not do what they do.

As it states here, they actually **suppress** the truth so that others will not see it at all. One of the most common ways is through the theory of evolution. It is really weird, because to believe in the theory of evolution, you have got to have an awful lot of faith, but it is faith in the wrong things. It is faith in a theory, and not in God Himself. The fact that the earth is created is obvious, and yet that truth is suppressed. That is antagonism working—the enmity against God [Romans 8:7].

I am going to read something in conjunction to this same theme. It is taken from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (a Protestant commentary), Volume 8, Page 465. It is part of a long comment on Matthew 22:40, which is where Jesus mentions the two great commandments—love toward God and love toward man. We understand from this that the man who asked the question—"What are the two great commandments of the law?"—was actually testing Jesus to see what kind of response He would give.

It is equally unlikely that Jesus is appealing to these two commandments to abolish the necessity of formal adherence to all other laws, thus entirely abandoning the rabbinical approach to the law, and perhaps even making the love commandment a kind of hermeneutical cannon for interpreting all Old Testament law. This view, in one form or another, is very popular.

I am going to stop right here. I am not really done with the quote, but I just want to make sure you understand what they are saying. They are saying that the idea that Jesus did away with all laws except for these two great commandments is very popular in theological circles. The *Expositor's* is disagreeing with that.

This radical interpretation of Jesus' answer is said to be necessary to make sense of the fact that this confrontation is a test, but the test can be understood in other ways, and the fact that Jesus' opponents are testing Him does not require His answer to be radical anymore than in verses 22 through 33. There is no positive evidence in the text to support this view. If a better one can be found, and Moo [an author] has rightly pointed out that in no case in the Gospels does love serve as grounds for abrogating any commandment. (The Sabbath controversies are no exception since their concern for fellow human beings is recognized as an important factor with the Sabbath law itself.)

Did you catch what this Protestant commentary said? I will say it very plainly. The author said keeping the Sabbath is an act of love, and Jesus nowhere in the Gospels did away with any law, let alone the Sabbath.

Now why did I go into this? It is because this raises another question that demands an answer. Despite knowing this, do they keep the Sabbath, even though they technically recognize that Jesus did not do away with it? They are staring at truth right in the face, and they reject it. This is what I mean about the blindness that is in man before God opens the mind. It has an edge to it. It is actually not mere blindness, it is antagonism against God. That is incredible. I believe the *Expositor's* is a Baptist production.

I hope you are beginning to see what a miracle has happened to you, what God has provided for us, and that we can begin to really appreciate the relationship He has opened up to us.

II Corinthians 3:12-17 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished [or being abolished]. But their minds were blinded: for until this day [the 50s AAD when Paul wrote this] remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. [Paul is saying that when Christ enters our life, He removes the blindness.] But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless

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when it [or they] shall turn to the Lord, the veil [the blindness] shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

Why did he mention liberty in that context? Because when truth is believed and followed, it liberates the person from the bondage we brought upon ourselves by following our own way that seemed right at the time.

Now what does this mean to us in terms of this sermon? It means that God not only gives His children truth, He also enables us to understand it and believe it, and to use it. Are we gifted, or what!

Do you ever think about how small the Church of God has been since the time of Christ? Even Jesus referred to the church, to His followers, as "the *little little* flock." It is a double-diminutive. It is not only little, it is *really* little, when judged against the billions of people who have lived, especially from the time of Christ down to now. Billions upon billions of people, and out of all of those people, God has chosen to open our minds to the thing that we most need to work with to make our lives end at the same place that God's plan is going to end. He not only gives us the truth by a miracle, He switches something in our brain that makes us understand it; and not only understand it, but to give ourselves willingly to use it.

We are going to read John 1:12. This occurs right at the introduction of the Gospel of John, right after Jesus is introduced, and some other remarks are made by John identifying who Jesus is, and what was, and is.

John 1:11-12 He came unto his own [His own tribe Judah—the Jews], and his own received him not. [They rejected Him and put Him to death.] But as many as received Him to them gave he power [authority, or the right] to become the sons of GOD, even to them that believe on his name.

This is part of the gift that is given to us. It is why we understand and others do not. Certainly our understanding is not complete, but it is constantly being added to if we are seeking God continually, little by little, day after day, just like food goes into our body and seemingly disappears, but it nonetheless produces growth and strength. It sustains life. The same thing is true in regard to God's word combined with what we are given in order to empower us to make it to the Kingdom of God, because we not only get truth, we are also given other gifts that empower us to make direct use of God's truth in our

lives.

John 14:15-17 If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter that it may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows it: but you know it; for it dwells with you, and shall be in you.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name, it shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 16:13 Howbeit when it, the Spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth: for it shall not speak of itself; but whatsoever it shall hear, that shall it speak: and it will show you things to come.

Notice "the Spirit of truth." Truth is words. Truth personified is Jesus Christ. The word personified is Jesus Christ. It is no wonder He said, "I will come to you." He is the Comforter. He is the Spirit of truth. He is the *Parakletos*. That is the Greek word translated "Comforter." It means "one who is called to the side to give counsel, to give help [like a lawyer who gives counsel]." This Spirit of truth is Jesus Himself.

Now what did Jesus do in relation to the apostles? He revealed truth. What else did He do? When they did not understand the truth, He gave them understanding, did He not? He most certain did. He was the One who was with them for three and one-half years. He was also then the One who would be *in* them after He was resurrected and was a Spirit Being once again.

I want you to understand that, as our High Priest, those parameters are still His responsibility to this very day. He is following through with them in our lives, and it is He who is with us on our pilgrimage, even as it was He who was in the Cloud, guiding and supplying Israel with their need in those times, and in this particular sense—nothing has changed. It is He who is with us. It is He who is in us. That is comforting to me to know, because He has been this way before, and He knows what to do, and what kind of counsel to give us.

Now I want you to go back to Hebrews 7:24-27. Remember that Jesus is the High Priest.

How Does God Help Us? (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Hebrews 7:24 But this man, because he continues ever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

Notice the word "unchangeable." He is still doing the same things He did with the apostles in their day. The only thing that is changed is His geographical position. God has given Him the responsibility to get us into the Promised Land. He is following through in our lives spiritually. He has an unchangeable priesthood.

Hebrews 7:25-27 Wherefore he is able also to save them [us] to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens: Who needs not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

It is interesting that in the physical sciences that people are always looking for truth to relieve man of his physical bondages, such as the drudgery of housework or the slowness of locomotion. Mankind is looking for different sources of power to give speed and strength and perfection to whatever he does. Many advances have been made in those areas, but what if after discovering scientific truths revealed to them, men never made any use of them? What good would they be? What would they ever produce? What drudgery would they be relieved of? What bondage to slowness would there be in our traveling? They would be no good at all.

The same principle applies to spiritual truths. They are given, revealed, to empower and to enable us to get to the Kingdom of God as best prepared as we can be. As we find in Philippians, He is able to supply continuously as needed. Think of what that means in relation to the Israelites and supplying for forty years food for two and one-half million people, and water, and wood out in a wilderness area, maybe even a desert, so that they could cook. He **can** take care of us.

Now why are you here? It is because you believe the Gospel, which established why you were born, and what the hope for mankind, as seen from God's perspective, is.

Romans 10:14-17 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? [Think of this in terms of unconverted people. Think of it in terms of you and me.] And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? [We see a progression that Paul is going through here.] As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Everybody has faith in something, but only a very tiny group of people has faith in God's truth, and believes it. It has ever been that way. Isaiah wrote what he did because he got frustrated and depressed. Here he was, giving those people the words of life, and they rewarded him, according to the stories, by sawing him in half. If I have my facts straight, it was lengthwise. You can tell that God did not open their minds even though they had truth available to them. The package must be given together.

That is one of the differences between us and Israel. They heard the gospel. It says that plainly and clearly in Hebrews 4:1-2, but God did not give them the ability to understand it that He has...*to you*. A miracle that God worked in your mind *personally* has made this possible. Do we appreciate that?

One of the things it has done, brethren, is that when we believe it, and we start using it, it separates us away from family in a way that is almost mystifying, but that is exactly what Jesus said. "Sanctify them by Your truth." Truth believed and used separates. That is what God has provided. He has left us with the free moral agency. It is still there, but something has been added that makes it possible for us to use our lives in a way that others cannot. That is really humbling.

It is why Paul said in II Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in flesh." I do not know how to explain it. It is so humbling. We have something that angels desire to look into and they cannot quite grasp. "Why would God ever do that for them?" is probably the way they think, but they are good servants though of God, and they work in our behalf. But you can be sure, because of Satan's mindset, that it really burns him up, as we would say. He sees it in an entirely different way and gets upset at it.

Let us go to one more thing about this because it is kind of good. Do you remember the subject of Romans 14:16-18 where Paul mentioned the word "preaching"? Well, Paul says here:

I Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are [being] saved, it is the power of God.

What a gift!

I Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Another humbling thing. Most people, in Romans 1, do not know God. That is why they do what they do in suppressing the truth.

There is one scripture I want to turn to as we finish here. It is one with which Richard just about began his sermon, only I am going to use Luke's version. He used Matthew's. What we have received places a burden on us, a responsibility.

Luke 11:23-28 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathers not with me scatters. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished. Then goes he, and takes to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spoke these things a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the paps which you have sucked. But he said, Yes rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

This is particularly interesting. It is a vivid illustration that basically tells us two things. First, there is no place for neutrality in our life. This is directed at you and me. We cannot be neutral. That is why Jesus said, "*You are either for Me, or against Me.*" There is no middle ground, and of course He wants us to be *for Him, with Him, committed to Him, loving Him*. There is no place for neutrality.

Second, is that it is not good enough to merely be clean; that is, being forgiven; given our liberty. To make the most of this wonderful opportunity we have been given, our efforts must be focused on adding to what we are, on growing.

Regarding verse 25, the *Living Bible* says "clean and empty." The *Amplified Bible* says "swept clean and decorated." The *New American Standard* says, "Clean and put in order." And another commentator I was researching suggested "unoccupied and ready to receive a new tenant." That man really caught the essence of it.

The Greek used here indicates the appearance of an idle person who may look good, and in verses 27 and 28, it shows an interesting reaction by the woman observer. The way Christ responded was a very gentle put-down that He made as a comparison showing that to obey God is exceedingly more important than the observation she made. What she said was the equivalent of complementing something to Mary, Jesus' mother. God just chose to use her. She had no choice in it, or being something akin to a mere outward appearance to be even something like attending church, or talking a good fight, when compared to actually vigorously forging ahead, obeying God to the very best of one's ability. That is what Christ is after.

The person in Jesus' illustration in verses 24 through 26 has actually allowed himself to be worse off after he had gotten rid of the leaven through Christ's sacrifice, gotten rid of the bondage, and then he just stood still and did nothing with what was given.

Now science teaches us that nature abhors a vacuum. When one thing leaves, another enters to take its place, and the person in this illustration has left himself defenseless, and that is why the demon felt free to not only go back, but to invite others worse than himself to go with him because there was nothing there in the man that could resist them. He just stood there with the truth, doing nothing.

Jesus' warning here is, "*There is a war going on! Get moving, or you will be a victim.*" There is no neutrality. Satan is at war against God. Satan is at war against anything that pertains to God, and we are God's children, and Satan and his fellow demons are going to come after us.

Three truths we need to understand at the conclusion of this series are:

- 1) We cannot make a religion or a way of life emphasizing what we cannot do.

Think on that. Anything God requires, we can do. That kind of an approach is non-productive and it will produce depression, I guarantee you, through a guilty conscience. It will not be a happy life, because much of the joy of God's way comes from accomplishment. We know we are overcoming.

2) We cannot stand still.

It is not good enough to have God drive out evil. Good must come in. This is something we have to adjust to. Evil can be conquered, but it cannot be destroyed. As long as Satan is around, and as long as human nature is dwelling in us, we are always going to be somewhat subject to it. We are always going to have a tension there because it is in us, so there must be a new dynamic to life, and that dynamic is serving Christ; or put another way, as Christ put it, pleasing God. We must not let this wonderful opportunity slip from our grasp.

3) The best way to avoid evil is to do good. Make use of the truth.

Do you understand that if we "do good" it becomes very difficult to sin? It just changes us. With the help of God we become good by filling our lives with lovely things. We heard about what aroma smells good to God. The loveliest thing in His eyes is the beauty of holiness: children who are just like Him.

In an overall sense, we must strive to replace self-centeredness with God-centeredness, using God's truth. Idleness is a fatal disease, so brethren, we need to pick up the tools of suffering through confronting problems—those tools which will enable us to overcome.

I think this is a good place to stop. Thank you for your attention, and I hope you all have a good remainder of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.