

Who Deserves Our Loyalties?

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We will begin in Matthew 24:4-13. It is a convenient lead-in by setting the stage for the immediate times we are living in and the immediate future as well.

Matthew 24:4-13 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Two years ago, I gave a "the handwriting is on the wall" sermon showing, by way of statistics that I have searched out from a wide variety of sources, that Christianity was already by that time the most persecuted religious organization in the entire world.

A Catholic Church source proclaimed in an article that about seventy thousand Christians had been killed worldwide the previous year. Almost daily we hear on a news broadcast of persecution taking place against the Coptic Christians in Egypt. In Syria, rebel forces are extremely vicious against those who bear the name "Christian" living there.

They are doing things like beheading those who are captured, and one man was even pictured killing another man, cutting his heart out in front of the camera and taking a bite out of it. This is a Syrian Muslim. The Christians, whether in Egypt or in Syria, and many other places on the earth as well, are caught between government forces and the Muslim Brotherhood and are held as the enemy of both. Their churches are burned to the ground and membership is killed or least very harried, one after another, while all the while all they want to do is to be left alone so that they can be at peace.

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I am grateful that the intensity of persecution has not yet reached this nation. However, the level of persecution is increasing here. Much of the persecution touching us, I believe, can be described as the taking away of liberties formally taken for granted because we were in a "Christian" nation, but the courts have been eliminating those liberties left and right.

We used to be free to pray in schools, to have Bible readings in schools. Children could have Christmas parties, decorated Christmas trees and so forth. They do not understand the true doctrines, but nonetheless something called religion had a favored position in our society, but that favored position is very quickly being taken away.

In the U.S. now, many families are homeschooling their children, and they are doing it primarily because they do not want their children going to the government schools because of the harassment that they get there, and because of the subjects that are being taught there, so charter schools are forming all over the United States.

North Carolina passed a law not too long ago, and within one month, eight new charter schools formed in the state capital, Raleigh. People are leaving the government schools because of the persecuting nature.

Most of these persecutions are not occurring because of God's revealed truth or from His word, but because of their ignorance of those attacking anything that seems to them to be Christian, and so it just irritates them, because somebody else is inspiring them.

In the beginning of these persecutions, the separation of church and state was the cry of those who want no part of anything regarding God to be part of public life. Last evening I described what the source of much of this rising intensity is—it is simply resistance against God.

The "nones" are becoming aware of their numbers and power, and the invisible leader of the "nones" is moving his forces to crush all resistance. We must prepare because it will rise considerably more.

The theme that we are continuing today owes its existence partly to an article I read concerning a religious group of people here in the United States who had as a matter of their faith (one of the most far out beliefs I have ever heard of)—that one should do nothing in preparation for Christ's return. Their idea was basically that one should leave everything to God. Whatever that meant to them...I do not know.

I had to read it twice in order to see that I was not wrong in reading it the first time, but I

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am still not really sure of exactly what they meant. I found it almost impossible to believe that such an idea could even exist anywhere, let alone among people who call themselves professing Christians.

As we begin today's message, we will take a clear look at just a few more examples of preparation for what is on the horizon of our life with God. God is clearly showing us that if we want to be in His image, we must get into the habit of preparing.

Preparation is a necessity for success in overcoming and growing. Looking around us, looking ahead, and looking within, there ought to be things that we ought to see that irritate us, make us angry, put us on edge, give us anxiety; and what are we going to do as these things approach closer and closer.

I ask a simple question: "Why do we train our children while they are young?" We all know Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child when he is young and when he is old he will not depart." Are we not, when we are training our child, preparing them for life as they grow up, so that they are mature enough to meet the next things that are going to happen in their lives?

Why do we send our children to elementary school? Again, the preparation is there. How about high school? How about college? Many young people go off to college; why are they going? Are they not going to prepare themselves better for a life of being employed?

Preparation is everywhere; it is a major part of life. Anybody who pays any attention at all to athletics...now we have the National football league. They are really alert; they know that those who are best prepared have the best chance of winning the football game. They have studied their opponents, and they have prepared themselves athletically to be in a position where they can follow through, earn their income, and of course win the game.

Preparation cannot be separated from our life under God. We cannot just leave everything to Him, because it is our God-given responsibility to respond to His efforts to create Himself in us.

Luke 14:25-33 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not

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sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

The ministry almost invariably expounds on these verses before baptizing a candidate. Why do we do this? So that the person is helped toward being enabled to count the cost of giving his life to Jesus Christ and thus be prepared to forsake all he has. Counting the cost is a preparation for the long haul of dedicated Christian living. So there we have it coming right from our Savior, who wants you to be prepared in mind, to be able to give yourself over to His efforts to create us in the image of the Father.

Certainly Christianity is not at all like learning to swim by being thrown into the pool of water. Christianity is a way of life, learned by small progressions with each step preparing one for the next stage. God begins the process by commanding this specific truthful preparation even before baptism. He want us to be prepared. That is easily understood, and it ought to make a step into the future unprepared, with being able to count the cost correctly as we possibly can.

John 14:2-3 “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also.”

Jesus is saying by this statement that not everything is already totally arranged within what God is planning, because there is proving what we have to do, in order to fit into what He is planning. He is working, preparing us, so that we fit into a position that He is preparing for us. Certainly the outline is totally prepared, from what God is doing, but that does not mean that every detail is already fulfilled. God, through Jesus Christ, is still preparing for the arrival of more of His family.

Luke 12:47-48 “And that servant who knew his master's will [we do not know every detail of our master's will, but we certainly have an accurate overview of what His will is], and did not prepare himself [right straight from God...we

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must prepare to be in His kingdom. We cannot just sit there thinking somehow we are being prepared because we are hearing something; it takes hearing plus action; it takes hearing plus doing in order to be prepared.] or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few, for everyone to whom much is given from him much will be required. And to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

This is instruction directly to us from our savior as to what our approach should be as we look forward to His return. We know that it His will to return; we do not know every detail of exactly when. Thus while we look forward to His return, we are continuing to prepare for it, despite the conditions in our environment.

God is well aware of the conditions in our environment, and if He permits us to go through it, then we know that we have already been prepared to the place where we can endure it, overcome, and be better prepared, because we have gone through the training session that He has prepared for us. We have really been given a great deal.

In some ways, we have probably been given more than the average Christian in the first century under the apostles, because they did not have the rest of the Bible. They were writing as they were preaching, and we have been able to look back on two thousand years of history since that period of time, and we are schooled by that as well. We know so very much in regard to those fulfilled prophecies.

My sermons during this feast are going to continue to follow this line of preparation for the immediate times that we are living in and for the more intense ones that will follow. I want you to understand that what I am saying, here, and very concerned about—they are not given from the stand point that the roof is going to crash in on us at any moment. Rather, it is that we still have time to continue our spiritual preparations, but do not waste time as we pass through it.

Much of the news that we are hearing is indeed almost overwhelming, like a worldwide tsunami; and this flood is not of ocean water surging inland but one of mostly disturbing information. We have a glut of information impacting on our minds and just hearing it is really wearying. It is enough to discourage and make us feel hopeless. We do not want that, though; we just heard a sermonette on how God enables us to survive. It is not luck, but God is telling us right now, He very much wants us to work in the preparation with Him, and we will survive because He is faithful to us.

The information we are hearing sometimes produces enough anxiety that one wishes there was a safe, comfortable hiding place, somewhere. Like David who wished that he was a bird and could fly away. God did not relieve him of that feeling. God made David go through those things so that he was prepared for God's Kingdom and further prepared even for ruling under God in an earthly manner.

Every once in a while, we hear “calls.” I would say that they are not real loud calls yet, but more frequently people in the United States are feeling that something has got to be done. Are we [the nation] going to overthrow the government? That is a possibility that will be gone into. On the other hand, we read that the government is preparing for such a thing far more thoroughly, far more powerfully, to reject any group of people who would indeed try to do such a thing.

Americans have the reputation for being a violent people. This is because so many people are armed in the United States—three hundred and ten million people; and there are probably six hundred million guns in the United States. Everybody has more than enough. Nonetheless, the thing that I heard was actually very encouraging—this reputation that the United States has of being a violent people is not really earned. We are not anywhere near as violent as most of the other nations on earth, despite all those guns.

Do you know that the way things are right now, statistics prove that we are the third most violent nation on earth? Am I contradicting myself? No, because what I learned this week is that if you take out the total numbers of murders in Chicago, Illinois, Washington DC, Detroit, Los Angeles...if you take out those four cities, then the United States falls all the way to the bottom of the list. There are only two other nations on earth that have less violent people than the United States of America.

Our reputation is not earned except in those four cities. Everybody else is actually fairly peaceful. They are hunters; they go after deer and elk and so forth. So why have Americans been so quiet with the government that is supposedly serving us while at the same time taking our liberties away and transforming us into an absolutely socialist and on its way to communist nation because they want to control?

The reason they have not had a revolution is because their nature is not to be violent with those guns. The statistics prove that. I do not know what it is about Chicago, Los Angeles. Washington DC—those cities are hell on earth for their citizens.

As I was preparing this sermon, I was thinking about an uprising within the United States, but it looks to me as though it is not really going to happen because there is not

enough of the right kind of leadership to produce that kind of thing. So it is just going to continue on the way it is. But let us say that something like that would begin to form. Would you as a Christian be willing to join with a group that might promise to you the liquidation of the government as it now is, restoring of our constitution, and the kind of quality of religion that supported this nation for two hundred years until these last twenty five or thirty years?

For many of us, that might be something that is appealing, but I want you to understand by the time we get to the end of this sermon that there is nothing that we can do in this regard that will in any way enhance our relationship with God and make us better prepared for the Kingdom of God, because a forceful sweep of effort to do such a thing is completely beyond the bounds of our responsibility to God.

Let me assure you that even involving ourselves in any kind of an formed uprising is clearly not the responsibility of the Church of God. We must maintain a position of neutrality, and that is difficult for anyone having some fair measure of patriotism.

This sermon will focus on the whys and wherefores of this neutrality. And the reason why we must be prepared to some degree is because a neutral person soon finds himself the enemy of both sides of the issues that are at hand. So it must be solidly established by practice to what and to whom our loyalties are owed, because the pressures applied to Christianity and Christians may indeed get greater. We are going to be hated by both sides; I can guarantee you that.

We are going to have to be prepared in a sound minded way even to maintain our neutral status. We are beginning, here today, because I want us to be on firm spiritual ground regarding Christ's position regarding our neutrality, regarding the issues that concern this world. I will give you three reasons why I believe that we should be prepared to make sure that our loyalty goes completely to the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

First, because we believe God, and His word warns us that we have almost arrived at the consummation of the age. In other words, time is running out and a major war between God and the spiritual forces that are forming and even a raid against Him is just over the horizon; it is coming. We need to know where we stand because this may present a major loyalty issue.

Second, is directly linked to the first: We need to be able to be focused so that we can continue to carry out our spiritual preparation responsibilities to God and each other regardless what is going on outside of our world.

Third, our world is the church. Our world is the Kingdom of God. Accusations and persecutions against neutrals in a time like this are a historical reality. History records that very solidly, and we must be able to act decisively. Those who are of a mindset to act decisively in a time of crisis have the greatest chance of surviving the crisis.

During the American Civil War, neutrality became a major issue. Why? Because people want to know where everybody stood, and neutrals were not trusted by either side, and suspicions rose, and people want to be sure of how they act around others. They want to be safe. We need to be firm about our beliefs, but not abrasive about them.

I wonder if you have seen the movie "Shenandoah." James Stewart was the star; he had a very prosperous farm and ranch. I think there were four or five children, boys and girls. They were teenagers and young men at that time, and within the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia was a battle ground. War was going on all around him; somehow or another he maintained not getting involved with either side for a long period of time, but both sides kept wearing against him, and eventually he was involved. He created his own little army out of his family in order to protect himself, but still some of his children were killed in his efforts to actually protect their neutrality.

He negotiated with both sides and neither side, the Yankees or the Confederates, trusted him. There is a little bit to learn in that picture about what happens to those trying to maintain their neutrality.

There is ample biblical evidence for those who believe God's word regarding this doctrinal position that I am going to give you. Jesus made His and His church standing within nations that we live in, very clear. We are going to begin with the key verses that contain what Jesus is directly stated when He was on trial before Pontius Pilate

John 18:33-37 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself on this or did others tell you this about Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said, to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Here are the beginning elements of the foundation on which we stand regarding our loyalties. In verse 33, Pilates question was, "Are you a king?" Jesus answers in verse 37, "You rightly say that I am king," "Yes I am," I might add here, "I came here to make this truth known; this is what My preaching is about." Jesus did not hide His stand on things regarding His relationship to the nation.

However, Jesus clearly expands in verse 36, "My kingdom is not of this world." The word world here is *cosmos* in Greek; *cosmos* means an orderly arrangement. It describes an interconnected operating system. It indeed is the universe—that is the God created system of planets, moons, and stars. In this context, *cosmos* is stipulating an existing organized system of nations, peoples, social, military, governmental, and religious systems—all working together to produce that nation.

Here is a little item that is helpful. The word *cosmos* or as translated here, "world," in New Testament usage, comes to mean anything not part of the church. There is a clear division between the world and the church. That is a code word that would let anybody understand you are not talking about something that is worldly. This has to do with the church.

The next thing we are going to notice, here, is the word "of this world," specifically in verse 37, the word "of." "Of" means coming from, originating at, connected with, associated with. "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus coming from Nazareth, originating from, connected with Nazareth, associated with Nazareth. Ludwig Van Beethoven—Ludwig was the same thing: he was coming from Beethoven.

Jesus said that His Kingdom is not in any way associated with, connected to, nor does it originate from and is not included as part of the systems that we are now living in referred to as the world.

Are you beginning to see why of the world means anything outside of, separated from the church. They are not of the same organization or systems. Thus each—the Kingdom of God and the world—are a separate entity, but operating, working, on the same earth. Therefore both the Kingdom of God and the world have citizens on it present at one and the same time; and of course very often intermingled within the cities, working in the same jobs, on and on. Yet those who are in the Kingdom of God, as far as God is concerned, are completely separate from those they are associated with who are in the world. That is why the word became a code word to mean "separate from."

There is more implied in Pilate's question in verse 33. It is another question, and this

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question is the reason Christ added His response in verse 36. Pilate's implied question is, "If you are a king, why do your servants not raise a ruckus, fighting for your release from the Jews and me?" He wanted to know why.

Jesus' response to this implied question is, "If My Kingdom were of this world then, My servants would fight." So His answer put the idea of them taking part even as something serious as a trial for Jesus death; it was outside of their responsibility to the Kingdom that they belong to, and they were to keep hands off.

The physical reality is that true Christians live on the earth—the same as the citizens of this world; but there are major differences that separate Jesus' Kingdom and its citizens from this world from those nations and their citizens that are of the world. Now recall again the phrase Kingdom of God and the preposition "of" directly connects Jesus' Kingdom with a personality. It is the Kingdom of God; that Kingdom is directly connected to a spiritual God, the Creator. That clearly connects that the head of Jesus' Kingdom is separate from every human personality.

It is not a kingdom of Pharaoh, it is not a kingdom of the Caesar, it is not the kingdom of any line of human kingdoms. It is the Kingdom of God. Right there we have a very clear distinction that should mean something to you and me.

Matthew 13:24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field."

Matthew 13:31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field."

Matthew 13:33 Another parable He spoke to them, "The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

Eight times in this chapter alone, Matthew refers to Jesus' Kingdom as the Kingdom of heaven. In fact He did it twenty eight times in the entire gospel that He wrote. He always referred to what everybody else referred to as the Kingdom of God. He referred to it as the Kingdom of heaven.

Using the same definitions used earlier for "of," back in John 18, Matthew says, Jesus'

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Kingdom comes from, originates in, is connected to and associated with heaven, thus clearly stating a location.

Jesus' Kingdom is distinguished from other kingdoms on earth by both personality—Kingdom of *God*—and location—the Kingdom of *heaven*. However, that Kingdom does have representatives living and walking about on earth, even as nations located on this earth have representatives or citizens living in other nations of earth.

True Christians do not go to war, nor do they join in concern with other citizens in many other national affairs. Why not? The evidence is beginning to pile up, but the simple clear and true answer is because Jesus forbids such a practice. That is exceptionally clear in John 18.

For the citizens of His Kingdom, we are forbidden, not just because we are citizens here—there is more to it than that—we are absolutely forbidden, to involve ourselves in those things. What makes the difference to the Christian is that they believe what Jesus plainly says, and that is no minor point. The matter of belief is no minor issue.

We are going to take a look at a simple and clear statement as to why Christians so firmly believe. We are in Matthew 13:9

Matthew 13:9-11 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

Matthew 13:16 “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear,”

The depth of belief in God's spiritual truths that the truly converted have is a reality that cannot be explained by physical means. The depth of this belief is given by spiritual means by a spiritual God who is located in heaven. The depth and the clarity to the Christian is a gift given for God's purposes that He is working out; it is a gift directly from Him so that we can rightly represent Him. If He did not give us these gifts, we would be just like the people in the world.

This is not something that we have just come up with. It is something that has been given for us to fulfill God's purpose and not embarrass Him.

These gifts are not earned by anyone who truly believes; it is a matter of God's grace that enables them to hold fast in submission to God's truths and not react in the same manner as the world's citizens who do not have this God-given gift.

Look how fast Jesus reacted when Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. "Put that away," He said. We do not do those things. Peter learned a lesson in a hurry. He must have been a fighter; he had a quick temper or quick reaction to things.

By way of contrast in this sort of situation, Christians of this world may sincerely believe that they should rise up in defense of this nation, and that is a normally admirable quality, but in this case it is not good spiritual reasoning. Those Christians want to rise up and go to war as the Israelites of old did. But the New Covenant is not the Old Covenant, and the church is not the Israel of old. These spiritual realities separate the Kingdom of God, of and from the kingdom of heaven and from the kingdoms of the men of this world.

God's purpose is in major ways different now than in His dealings with the church under the New Covenant from what it was regarding His dealings with Israel under the Old Covenant. We will make this difference more apparent so that we may know even more clearly where we stand.

John 1:15-17 John bore witness of Him and cried out saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We will look at these three verses again. "Grace and truth" for the benefit of the church in God's purpose at this time, from the time Christ came. Jesus Christ, as John is speaking of Him here, was not available to those under the Old Covenant in the manner that He is available now to the church. Things have changed. The ability to grasp God's truth to the breadth and the depth (of those who are truly converted understands spiritual matters) is a gift of God's grace, which was not available to those under the Old Covenant.

This breadth and depth is to those who have it—like the apostle John—is evidence, as it says in the verse here, of "grace upon grace," meaning, one gift after another. That is what grace is—it is a gift, and when it is said in a phrase like that in the Greek, it means

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one gift after another. They keep piling up, and all those gifts are coming from the same force and from the same purpose.

The force is the Great God in heaven through Jesus Christ, and they are given to those who are His children for carrying out the purpose that the Father in heaven wants them to carry out within the operations of the church. God simply did not give ancient Israel spiritual gifts in the abundance that He gives to the church.

We will add some more information here, from Romans 9—11. It is important to this subject. Within this wonderful epistle, Romans 9—11 gives foundational doctrines for the church from the apostle Paul. It is a three chapter inset explaining the position of the nation of Israel now that the church has come on the scene within God's purpose, and God has in addition opened salvation to the Gentiles.

People wanted to know: Now that there is a church and God is calling Gentiles, what does that mean in regard to the nation of Israel that He worked in and through for such a long period time? That is what Romans 9—11 is explaining. Here comes assurance from the apostle Paul regarding Israel:

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

We were just reading about how God gives us gifts in order to perform the operations that He wants us to perform to glorify Him within the Kingdom of God, but He has not given these things to the nation of Israel and their people that He has not called. And so, that is why Israel is blind to what is going on.

Romans 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

He is assuring Israel that this is a temporary wrinkle in the history that God is working out. God has not forgotten about Israel; He is not treating them in the same manner that He is treating the church.

Romans 11:26-27 “The deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

There is going to come a time when God is going to save Israel; He is going to take away their sins.

Romans 11:28-32 Concerning the gospel, for right now, they are enemies for your sake but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,] For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. [God will not go back on His word to the Fathers.] For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

So, what is the story here? Israel has been set aside in God's purpose for a period of time until His business and operations with the church are completed. We are part of the church, and we are a part of that operation, so we have been gifted, blessed, with the understanding that has been withheld from this nation, Britain, France, Norway, Sweden, Finland, where ever the Israelitish people are, they are blind because God has not opened their minds. But He has opened the minds of those in the church.

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

If God wants to have compassion on Gentiles, that is His business. He is the Boss, Creator; He is the one running things through Jesus Christ, and these people—some of them Israelites—wonder why in the world is God calling these Gentiles into the church. God can use anybody He wants to. I think that already He is beginning to show things about Himself by using people out in the world who understand a small portion of things, especially pertaining to prophecy that might be helpful for us.

I think that with God who opened up the minds of enough people in the past to write these commentaries that are available for us to look into, and to get ideas and concepts and so forth so that we can preach it to you with a right application, much of what those people wrote is correct. God made these resources available. He can use anybody He wants at any time but He does not give His spirit to everybody, just those ones He chooses very specifically to give it to.

Romans 9:16-24 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but

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of God who shows mercy, for the scripture says to Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory. Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.

To get the full impact on that we almost have to put ourselves in to that and realize what an awesome gift that God has given. It is not just the gift that He has called us with, but all the other gifts on top of that, that He has given for His purpose that we might glorify Him.

In order to work things out, God has given us spiritual gifts, so God's work under the New Covenant is overwhelmingly spiritual in nature, and it is this difference that makes the difference between the church and the world.

The church is a spiritual organization having its source in heaven and being sustained and inspired by heaven. The world is just the opposite. So the physical aspects of God's purpose for Israel are not completely set aside. He is still using them, but they are minor compared to the spiritual issues with the church.

We must not let this aspect slip from our minds, so what we have just gone through, I will remind you: This is why we can grasp spiritual realities that those in the world are mostly blind to in terms of motivating them to willing submit to God. So God is working out His purpose in ways that are often mystifying but His hand is moving events and forming what we call history, and we have to by faith search that out and follow His leading.

These next verses that we are going to go to are quite important to our understanding. I once heard Herbert Armstrong say (I think it was on a Friday night Bible study in Pasadena a while ago, but it kind of surprised me because he rarely said anything like this) that Ephesians 1 is his favorite chapter in the whole Bible.

Ephesians 1:3-10 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him,

Paul's spiritual teachings here is awesome. It is staggering in its dimensions and importance compared to the insignificance of our physical lives, because it reveals that we have been made part of a huge, time-consuming operation. In fact in terms of time alone, what Paul says here is an eternal operation. This paragraph is speaking of what God has purposed for us from before creation, before the foundation of the earth. What a mind! It is awesome to think about this.

First, notice verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 all contain the pronoun “us.” In verse 7, Paul changes the pronoun to “we.” The “us” and especially the “we” show the subject material that he is speaking on there directly pertains to the sons of God—that is church members—and nobody else at this time in the out working of God's purpose.

The book of Ephesians, the epistle of Ephesians, among other books, is a letter written to congregations of the church. The pronouns pertain only to church members. "Blessed" is the first word in verse 3; it literally means "adorable." This tells you a great deal about what Paul thought of God. We admire things that are adorable, and we speak well of them. This is the way Paul is showing the way that he felt about God; he wanted to crawl up into His lap. He admired Him, emotionally, for what He has talking about here.

In this case the specific word is used in the Bible exclusively in reference to God alone. Nobody else is called adorable in the Bible, in Greek, thus indicating the very highest of praise and thanksgiving is warm and emotional, given by Paul for who and what God is.

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The second "blessed" is a different but related word to the first "blessed," and is implying a magnificent quality or value. It is putting emphasis on something different: the magnificent quality or value and quantity of the spiritual gifts that we have been given by the Father through Jesus Christ

Note again in verse 3, the phrase, "spiritual blessings in heavenly places." Again, he is showing clearly the source of all these blessings. It is a spiritual source. The word "places" is not in the original Greek. It is inserted by the translators in the hope that people will understand a little bit better, however most modern commentators believe (and I think correctly) they should have inserted the English word "things," as we are going to see proof for.

Paul is talking about the spiritual gifts, many of them, many things that are spiritual in nature. So "places" is not wrong, it is just vague. At least it denotes the source location of the blessings—heaven, where God is. "Things" is more descriptive, indicating that the blessings given are in reference to heavenly subjects and heavenly matters thus spiritual, not physical.

I am showing you how apostles looked at the Kingdom of God and its source and where all the blessings and everything are coming from. It is spiritual in nature from beginning to end. This is contrary to what the world is. The world is everything material and under the rule of Satan, and the gifts that they receive from Satan are destructive of themselves and others.

In verse 10, which is the end of that long sentence that began in verse 3, the word "heaven" occurs and the major thought in that long sentence is given. An overview of what Paul was teaching here is that every spiritual blessing given us is traced back to God in heaven. He is a spiritual being and is the Father of His spiritual family. All the gifting we receive can be traced back to our election, our being chosen, by God through Jesus Christ.

This appears in verse 4, in reference to the words "chosen us in Him." John 6:44 comes to mind. Here comes one of the most amazing declarations in the entire Bible, but we will add one more thought. Does not Jesus state in John 6:44 that our calling is personal and individual? "No one can come" to God unless God Himself said this person's mind is going to be opened.

Even if they hear the gospel and volunteer, and maybe they want to be a part of it. If God does not do the actually drawing, those people blindness will remain and no spiritual gifts will be given at this time. So John 6:44 is a clear statement of election by

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the Father—individual and personal.

According to verses 4 and 5...this is one that you have to let your mind cogitate on. Election, brethren, occurred even before the actual creation began, thus predestining us not only to be called but recipients of these spiritual gifts. That is a mind-bending thing.

These spiritual gifts are given us; they are gifts that He predestined to give us; they are not earned. They are given because God's eternal purpose is being worked out in and through Jesus Christ, and He is in us. We are part of His body. Thus, because of this, we are not only elected, but also gifted with being led to repentance, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of His holy spirit, the spiritual blindness is lifted, spiritual faith is given, redemption is accomplished, access to God is through prayers given, adoption into His family becomes a reality and the actual inheritance of the Kingdom of God with Christ in due time.

All of this before the foundation of the world...the ultimate purpose of this predestination is the eventual recognition in all of creation of God's merciful dealings with men and His dealings with us are now a major portion of His glory and will thus give Him praise. All of these things and more are aspects of His will that is of His desire that He is working out. That out-working is the mystery that He in His pleasure has already revealed to us and thus to us it is no longer a mystery.

In due time it will be revealed to all when the fullness of times is complete and harmony will be restored to the entire universe. This entire plan and purpose involving the Church is spiritual; that is what separates it from the world. It is spiritual and its source is in heaven.

We will continue building on this important concept. The word "heaven" also means either the location of God's throne or in some locations the sky above the earth. The word "heavenly" is similar, but it indicates either the realm of the stars and planets or the army of spirit beings as in "heavenly host." There is an exception to the usage of the term heavenly used mostly by the apostle Paul. In the New Testament, heavenly becomes a code word; we have heard of that before. To those understanding it indicates "spiritual"—anything that is heavenly has its origin in heaven.

I went into this in order to help us to understand the seriousness of this issue—the Kingdom of God is not of this world. It is a spiritual organization that was planned before the creation, and it is being directed and formed by God to fulfill His purpose. It is easily seen to whom we owe our loyalty. The Kingdom of God is other-worldly in source, other-worldly in purpose, other-worldly in operation.

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Now we will add a little bit more. We are going to begin by showing that we are indeed legal citizens of another nation.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

This clearly states that a Christian's citizenship is in a nation not on this earth; this nation's capital city is located in heaven. How many people did Jesus, a citizen of that Kingdom, wage war against while on earth? None. And neither will His brethren until the Father gives His okay.

Galatians 4:25-26 For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

In this context two Jerusalems are clearly compared. There is the earthly one which is a physical reality and then there is the other one which is a spiritual reality; and it, too, absolutely exists, but not on this earth. It nonetheless exists just as surely as the one in the Jewish nation. Jerusalem above is our capital city. You know that is not going to appear on earth until Revelation 21. And then it will come down here, and it will be the capital city of planet earth as well.

John 17:13 is the prayer that Jesus made on that Passover evening. I just want to touch on the things that He said, and I want you to apply them to the vision that you have of what is going on now and what is going to be the major theme in our preparation right on up to the time of Jesus Christ's return. This prayer is going to be answered.

John 17:13-20 "But now I come to You and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 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. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth Your word is truth. As You sent Me into world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

This prayer is for you and me, not just the apostles, you and me.

John 17:20-24 I do not pray for these alone but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one as You Father are in Me, and in You, that they may be one in Us, [In one family.] that the world may believe that You sent Me, and the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one, [absolutely totally unified with the Father and the Son.] I in them, and You in Me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual Kingdom, and it is to that Kingdom that our loyalties are pledged, so let us do our all to honor it.