

Colossians and Ephesians

You have no doubt noticed the similarities between the epistle of Ephesians and the epistle to the Colossians. It is almost as if Paul had the same outline or parchment for both, and did a rewrite to address any special problems that he both remembered from his ministry there and the words about the churches that came to him from messengers, especially from his own sons in the faith like Timothy and Titus.

We do know from the history of the development of the New Testament Canon of 27 books that when church councils met to decide on which books would be in the list for the Canon, one of the most decisive criteria was how generally accepted were all the epistles and books for the Canon in practice among the churches. In other words the councils only put a stamp of approval on what was widely circulated and accepted in the early churches, which immediately tells us of a practice whereby the church at Laodicea would also share the epistle to the Colossians, etc. We see the beginnings of this in Colossians 4:16.

“Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” (Colossians 4:16)

Since we do not have in our Canon an “epistle to the Laodiceans”, and since the ministry of Paul to Ephesus was really a ministry to all of Asia Minor--“And this continued for two years {the ministry at Ephesus}, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks”--is it then possible that Colosse like Galatia was a region and one of the specific churches of the region was the church

at Laodicea. We certainly know that as near the end of the first century as persecution of Christians increased, and as the Apostle John--which tradition has as the pastor of the church at Ephesus--wrote from exile on the isle of Patmos, just off the coast of Asia Minor and Ephesus, that both Ephesus and Laodicea were two of the seven churches of Asia Minor to be specifically addressed in the book of Revelation.

“What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to (1) Ephesus, (2) to Smyrna, (3) to Pergamos, (4) to Thyatira, (5) to Sardis, (6) to Philadelphia, and (7) to Laodicea.” (Revelation 1:11)

We also know for the context of Revelation 1 that the Ascended Christ, “the Son of Man”, chose for John to write to these seven churches, perhaps not only because of the unique problems of unsound doctrine and practices in each church as presented in Revelation 2 and 3, but also because that these seven churches, seven is always a number of completion in Scripture, were typical of the problems in all the churches of Asia. While we know of the specific problem in the church of Laodicea during the life of the Apostle John was lukewarmness--“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:16), we do not either how seriously the church at Laodicea took the epistle of Colossians when Paul wrote it, if indeed Colossians was written to them; nor how seriously they took the message from Christ through John to be “zealous and repent” (Rev 3:19). We are encouraged by the oft mentioning in early church history of a Bishop at Gaul {France} who came out of the church of the Laodiceans. {By the way, we also have encouraging words of faithfulness from Bishops in Antioch, Symrna, and Alexandria. We are discouraged by the developments in the church at Rome whereby, under the decree of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the bishop of the church at Rome was declared in 313 A.D. to be a head bishop of all bishop, a “Pope”. We are also discouraged that secular government had such control over early church affairs, although we might be encouraged that this Emperor made Christianity the official religion of the state, mostly for unity in the Empire reasons, which stopped the persecution of Christians according to Fox “Book of Martyrs”. We find that persecutions of Christians and churches the first three centuries were by the government of the Roman Empire, and encouraged by Jews throughout the Empire, the persecutions then well after 313 AD came more from Rome and the Roman Catholic Church as they attempted to force a conformity and orthodoxy on churches throughout the Empire that was based on unsound doctrine, practices, and extra-biblical revelations based on an authority of the Pope and his officials who took to themselves an authority of writing Scriptures that were the Word of God; and in some cases, making orthodox only these interpretations of Scripture from Rome.}

18-1: Some Background on the Asia of New Testament Times.

The only mention in Scripture of the word "Colosse" is in Colossians 1:2 where Paul addresses "the saints and brethren at Colosse", obviously not addressing a specific church in the city of Colosse. Young's Concordance provides this definition of "Colosse": "A city of Phrgian Pactiana, on the confines of Caria in Asia Minor, near the conflux of the Lycus and the Maeander." {Does this mean that the church in the city of Colosse to whom Colossians was written is the church at Pergamos of the seven churches?} The church of Revelation 2:12-17 that: (1) how they held fast to the name of Jesus in spite of environmental and governmental efforts to make them deny the name of Christ in favor of the name of the Roman Emperor; (2) suffered much persecution as sort of a center of opposition to Christianity, having one of the first martyrs, Antipas, and how in spite of this intense persecution in their city did not deny the faith of Jesus; (3) had some unsound doctrine in the church which they allowed to be taught, perhaps more by a minority than the majority, the doctrine of Balaam which allowed God's people to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality in the name of idol worship; and (4) they also allowed a group of church members to hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, a doctrine hated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some maps of early Christian churches {before 100 A.D.} do show a church at Colosse, just below a church at Laodicea in Asia Minor, while the church at Pergamos is shown between Troas and Thyatira. One of our great conservative and trustworthy Bible scholars of all time, recently passed away, F. F. Bruce notes how the intense missionary activity of Paul and companions spread the word from Ephesus to all of Asia from 52-55 A.D., and how through the ministry of Paul's companions the work went beyond Ephesus to many churches where Paul never visited. "Among these last," Bruce writes in his commentary on Colossians in the NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARIES, "were the churches planted in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis, which appear to have the fruit of the missionary activity of Epaphras. This is plainly to be inferred from the references to Epaphras in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (1:7f and 4:12f)." And you know how we love the informative, preachy, and more expository than exegetically style of B.H. Carroll in AN INTERPRETATION OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE; well, Carroll always a lover of history and knowledgeable on history, writes--

"Colosse is only sixteen miles from Hierapolis and only six miles from Laodicea--all right there together, all on the Lycus, a tributary of the Meander. The man who planted these three churches--who directly established them--was Epaphras, an evangelist, who lived at Colosse. He established the churches, but Archippus, the son of Philemon, was the pastor at Colosse--a rather slow-going pastor. He had to be stirred up right sharply, and Paul takes occasion in two of his letters to stir him. These people ethnologically were Phrygians, but politically they belonged to the Roman province of Asia."

While we are in Carroll on Colossians, we should also get the benefit of his insight from history and the Bible about the reason for the writing of the epistle to the Colossians.

“The occasion of the letter to the Colossians was the visit of Epaphras to Paul in Rome, giving him an account of the state of affairs in the Lycus valley **{so the problems being dealt with in Colossians at Colosse as well as in Revelation in the church at Laodicea would be problems of the Lycus valley}**. The conditions were much sharper at Colosse than elsewhere, but the same errors prevailed somewhat in the whole province. Hence, while he wrote a special letter to Colosse, he used the main thoughts of the letter and elaborated them into a circular letter. {You see, we did notice similarities between Colossians and Ephesians, not to mention the also noticeable and oft mentioned in this commentary place of Ephesians as a summary of the doctrine and the first ten epistles from Paul}.”

“The letter to the Ephesians was certainly not addressed primarily to Ephesus. A great many copies were distributed among the churches of Asia....There is a reference in Colossians to a letter which they would receive from Laodicea, which doubtless is the circular letter which we call the letter to the Ephesians. As the letter to the Romans elaborates the line of thought presented in Galatians, making it an abstract discussion, so Ephesians elaborates the line of thought in the letter to the Colossians, making it an abstract discussion. **{Don't you just love the boldness, generalizations, and comments of Carroll in a set of commentaries not verse by verse or strictly exegetical, but more topical, practical, and a total look at all of the Bible as well as some of the best of scholarship?}**”

One more thing from Carroll before we get into the messages of Colossians and Ephesians; and that is a definition of what Carroll and others consider to be the problem about which the epistles primarily deal, the problem of “Gnosticism”, which is so important to us today because it is very similar, if not the same, as the many “extra-biblical revelations” that we are hearing from Pentecostals and other charismatics today. **{You know what I mean, “God told me”, or “God gave me a special word for you”, or something similar not specifically based on any Scripture.}** Paul calls “Gnosticism” the common problem of the Lycus valley which, of course, would include Colosse and Laodicea. **{Thus the problems of Colosse and Laodicea would be similar to those of the book of Revelation; in fact when in approximately 250 AD a council of churches was held at Laodicea, the same heresies dealt with there were the heresies dealt with the epistle of Colossians.}**

"Gnosticism is derived from the Greek "gnosis", which means "knowledge", like "agnosticism," which means ignorance--not knowing. The knowledge to which they pretended was a mystical knowledge above that which was written {extra-biblical and away from the Scripture, at least beyond the Scriptures without any pretence otherwise}, and it took the place of the written word. {Oh how horrible we would say, for what any Bible teacher or preacher would say to take the place of the Word of God; but yet so subtle of the many itching ears Bible teachers today of the Falling Away, that we fail to recognize what they say, while sounding good, as taking the place of the Written Word.}."

From NT times to now there have always been men and women, inspired by Satan and his disciples, who practiced such "gnosticism" but who have used different words. In the time of B.H., it was "The Spirit moves men now as well as he did in bible days", so that they go on "Spirit knowledge", saying things in Carroll's day like "I just feel that it is so", or they spiritualize, saying "the letter is nothing, the Spirit is everything" and "you must not interpret the Bible literally".

I don't know about you; but I am getting anxious to get into both epistles for an exposition of the Word itself. All these historical and background matters hardly make any difference at all as long as we get the messages of the Word, to be used where possible and if possible to assist us in the understanding of that Word. Where I think it is helpful is to see that even as Solomon said of his time, "there is nothing new under the sun", that the problems faced by Christians in Colosse, Laodicea, in Ephesus, and in Carroll's day are so similar, often only modified by the words used to express the same heretical thoughts.

18-2: OT quotes in Colossians and Ephesians.

Even as the Amplified version translates the words of description of the work and ministry of Paul in Thessalonica and in Acts 17, where Luke records of the preaching and demonstration of the word, the demonstration interpreted by Amplified as how Paul quoted OT verses to prove the Christ, so also those OT quotes in both books can prove some of the similarities and differences.

1. OT quotes in Ephesians.

(1). Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8.

**"When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."
(Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8)**

Paul uses that as a basis of authority to support the authority of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as authority from the Ascended Christ, the head of the church. Christ gives the gifts for such and gives the authority for such ministry of the gifts; and the implication is that there are to be no other authorities of gifts. {Recall also how we discussed in I and II Corinthians of how the gifts are given to churches, not individual churches, even as the members like a toe,

foot, eye, and ear are members of the total body rather than each local church having all the foot/eye/ear etc. members of the body; therefore how also some churches proliferated for extra-biblical reasons may not have any or all of the members, thus may not also have any of the gifts.}

(2)., Zechariah 8:16 in Ephesians 4:25.

"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another." (Zechariah 8:16 and Ephesians 4:25)

Even as the region of "neighbors" grew throughout the Empire, the extent of the one body of the one church also grew and the many neighbor-members of whom the church at Ephesus was spiritual joined. However, it should be added that the dominant thought of the Ephesians 4:25-32 passage is not to "grieve the Holy Spirit". {I have often wondered why it is necessary for God to withdraw the Holy Spirit from the earth before the end of the last days, although of course it is not my place to question God as the clay should never question the potter; but often wondering that if somewhere in the recesses of the OT is not a simple statement to explain a reason for the loosing of Satan by the withdrawal of the Spirit. I could do without it, for one; and the only reason so far I can think of is in order that Satan and his leader, the man of sin, might collect all the unbelievers in the world for the great and final battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat. The gathering of such a large group of nations of unbelievers would otherwise not be easy, and it does facilitate God's work of separation between believers and unbelievers as well as making it easy for the Returned Christ and His angels to in one swift blow destroy all the rebellious and unbelievers, that is, that live at the time of the Second Coming. This kind of speculation is always dangerous as it gives the wind bag with all the answers an opportunity to step in with a solution! Of course, he has an answer just like he or she has answers on all questions, difficult or otherwise.}

(3). Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26.

"Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath." (Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26)

Not easy but it is possible to get righteously mad and not sin. One way to guard against the kind of angry that does sin is by not letting the sun go down on that angry. In other words deal with it like any other problems with action and prayer, and do not allow the devil to take advantage of you here as in any other problems. Even as it is possible to get angry without sinning, and to not let the sun go down on your wrath, so it is also possible to judge righteous judgment. {Don't you know that you will be judges in the life to come, and that God has placed you here on earth as unique creatures that are afforded the authority to make righteous judgments on many matters.}

(4). Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:31,32 and Genesis 2:24)

Always and ever in the Scriptures of the Word of God, Paul wants every local church and every member of every local church to know that they are first of all members of the total body of Christ, the church; and as such become members of Christ with the necessity of first of all recognition of the authority of Christ over the church, then also of apostles and prophets through Scripture, and the pastors, teachers, and evangelists to propagate the Scriptures consistent with what Christ, the Apostles and the Prophets put in there. “Wives submit yourselves to your husbands in the Lord” should primarily be wives submit to the authority of Christ and Scriptures; “husbands, love wives as your own bodies” should first of all be husbands love Christ and the total body of Christ more than your self; and so on.

(5). Deuteronomy 5:16 and Ephesians 6:3.

“that is may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:3 and Deuteronomy 5:16)

You know what this is another way of saying: obey the Word of God as well as the teachings of your father and mother from the Word of God. Acknowledge and respect the authority of the Scriptures!

2. OT in Colossians.

Well, this is easy as there are not direct quotes of OT Scriptures in the book of Colossians, so momentarily we will look at the possible paraphrases on the five quotes in Colossians that Paul uses in Ephesians; and we will look for other possible paraphrases as well as references to the OT. **{Although it really does not make that much difference, and with all due respect to Carroll and others, this lack of similarity of quotes between Colossians and Ephesians--especially this lack of any quotes in Colossians which puts it in a category of when Paul stopped quoting and summarized in epistles; leads me to think that Ephesians was written before Colossians, although the distribution to the churches may have been vice versa, perhaps Paul writing Ephesians as a preliminary parchment at Tarsus before the missionary journeys.}**

(1). Colossians 1:15.

The “He “Christ” is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” of Colossians 1:15 reminds us of Hebrews if not of OT, especially of the first chapter of Hebrews where there are so many OT quotes. Like the “You are My Son, today I have begotten you” of Hebrews 1:5 and Psalm 2:7; like Romans 8:29 where we are to be “conformed to the image of His Son” by the One Baptism, also Christ as the

firstborn among many; like I I Corinthians 4:4 where Christ is the image of God; and like in Hebrews 12:23 where the total body of Christ is called the assembly of the firstborn.

(2). Colossians 1:18, Christ remains the head of the church.

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)

We might consider this as necessary in our study flow on Colossians and Ephesians as a definition of the firstborn as “the firstborn from the dead”. Also we might note that Carroll considers the book of Hebrews to be a supplement to and a commentary on Colossians and Ephesians. Increasingly as we progress through the first 10 epistles of Paul with the foundation in all the OT quotes, and progressively as those quotes peter out in Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians, we also have sufficient foundation in the OT and NT Scriptures combined of the first ten, to start to use them as authority on other NT Scriptures, like on Colossians and Ephesians. **{The old guideline of comparing Scripture with Scripture gets additional justification in the internal evidence of the Bible itself.}**

(3). While we would have difficulty in summarizing all of the OT Paul had in mind as he wrote of “the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”, we know it is OT based even as we know all wisdom and knowledge like treasures and mysteries, were based on OT Scriptures. We also know that this knowledge and wisdom was supplemented in the life and ministry of Paul when He met Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he was taught by the Ascended Christ in Arabia, and when the Spirit worked with him back during the so-called 7 silent years at Tarsus as he read back through the OT with the help of the Spirit and based on what had previously been taught and learned, recording all the OT quotes that he intended for the epistles like Colossians and Ephesians to come. In short, I think Paul knew at the time in Tarsus, even in Arabia, and as you can see written here in Colossians of his ministry as chief editor of the NT. Don't you see that in Colossians 1:25?

“...of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.” (Colossians 1:25)

To “fulfill the Word of God” would be to complete the Word of God by writing personally 14 books of the 27 of the New Testament and then to sponsor three more with parchments for John Mark and Dr. Luke. And certainly you see in the larger context of Colossians 1, especially in 1:26 with “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints”, an awareness of Paul that part of his ministry was revelation, “to reveal” those mysteries to the saints.

(4). The "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit" bespeaks of both Paul's total education as a Roman citizen as well as a lawyer of the Hebrew nation, requiring extensive knowledge of the law and the Prophets. How would this "philosophy" from the Greek education and this empty deceit from both the Greeks and the education of the Romans come, even of the Jews who denied the Christ? (a) According to the tradition of men, and even today, what is considered the best of the traditions of men up to this point in history come to us in education-philosophy, government, law, ethics, and etc.; (b) According to "the basic principles of the world"--that is, much of what we learn of custom and tradition are of the world, come from the world, and is considered like the wisdom of the ages; and (c) not according to Christ--that is, where we must often part company with custom, tradition, the world, and education is when it is not according to Christ. When it obviously contradicts Christ and all we know of the teachings and life of Christ, all that comes to us from the Apostles of Christ in the Word of God. We have problems when we start listening to this extra-biblical proponents, then called the Gnostic, now called Pentecostals and other charismatics. It is the very same problem that Paul dealt with in I and II Corinthians where women and other church members acted as either (a) the Word of God came to them only, and that is what the Gnostic did with their unique knowledge above and beyond the written words of the Apostles; or (b) the Word of God came out of them only, and that the Gnostic readily admitted to, would also that so many extra-biblical Bible teachers today would do the same. What an ego, to think when surrounded by all the Wisdom of the Word of God, that we in our little time and generation could come up with some new Word of God! That is sacri-religious, heretical, and is an avenue for profit-taking and ego building, the same problem of which Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders of how after his ministry would come some from both within the churches and from outside the churches who like wolves would scatter the flock, making disciples to themselves.

(5). We will find in the "circumcision" discussions of Colossians 2:11-23, really a discussion and presentation of the One Baptism, both much Old Testament about circumcision, law, and the real covenants with God and much of the NT previously presented by Paul in epistles where OT quotes were made. Paul often and ever tries to make it clear that even as the primary and One Baptism is "hands-off" so also is the true circumcision that really matters.

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands {you, when you hear the word "circumcision" you think immediately of the circumcision of the OT that definitely required other hands; but this spiritual circumcision is "made without hands" even as the One Baptism is a spiritual baptism without the hands required in a water baptism}, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:11,12)

Surely you do not think that you are buried with Christ in water baptism, and surely you do not think that are raised with Christ in water baptism. You are raised with Him “through faith in the working of God”, that working of God being salvation, and the salvation coming through faith: that is the One Baptism. How in the world the church of Christ got water baptism mixed in here as a requirement of salvation is beyond me; but any people who can claim to be the only Christians because they had placed a sign in front of their church building which says “the church of Christ” show the foolhardiness of their understanding of Scriptures. They are the same people that can hardly face up to spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism. The One spiritual baptism that comes immediately after “believe”; the One spiritual baptism, the true identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, that is as far from water baptism in importance as the spiritual circumcision is from the physical circumcision of the Hebrews.

What follows in 2:12 of the formerly “dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh” and then the “made alive together with Him”, you must see as the same argument of the Before In Christ (BIC) and the After In Christ (AIC) of Ephesians 2.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...” (Ephesians 2:1-6)

Ministry of the Mystery

And that Colossians was written before and it partly the summarizing basis for Ephesians is seen in Ephesians 3 where Paul writes about “the mystery” previously written to them, and of how the recording of this mystery was part of His designated ministry. And as always, part of that Ministry in Ephesians and Colossians, is that Gentiles are fellow heirs of the same total body of Christ, the church.

“how that by revelation {always the writings or epistles of Paul are by revelation so that they are Word of God, Scriptures in the same category as the OT Scriptures, as also Peter testified to} He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)...” (Ephesians 3:3,4)

Here is the way it goes: an Apostle like Paul or a Prophet by “revelation” is given some understanding of the mysteries of God and Christ, which is not similar but not exactly the same as the understanding that any reader must have in order to know what it is all about. The similarity is a matter of degree rather than of kind, in that the Holy Spirit is both the common source of the Revelation to an Apostle and the source of the illumination of that same Revelation to a reader. I think if you nowhere else in this commentary saw the Ministry of Paul as both writer of Scriptures and chief editor of the NT, you should begin to see it here. The call to any Apostle is the call to write books of the Word of God even as the call to a

Writing Prophet of the OT was the call to write Scripture; and what was unique in the call of Paul to the ministry of Apostleship was the fullness of his understanding of the plan of God, not only for one body of believers of Jews and Gentiles, but also of the place the complete Bible Canon, of which Jews were made custodians, would play in the Fulness of the Gentiles as the Gospel was preached to every nation.

The Form that the Gnostic Special Revelations were Taking

We spoke of how gnosticism was a movement, much like the "God told me" charismatic movement of this day and much like those of the time of Carroll, that claimed special and extrabiblical revelations to supplement and replace the written Word of God which can come only through the 12 Apostles. We know the problems it creates in the kingdom and church today, and in the time of Carroll, and know we come to the problems that it was creating in the early churches like Ephesus, Laodicea, and Colosse (Colossians 2:16-23): (a) little matters of formality and imposed regulations for worship were placed forward as important as true worship, like certain food or drink, or about a special festival, new moon, or Sabbath--all more in the category of I Timothy as proofs of "a form of godliness without the power thereof {these are shadows not the substance}; (b) false delight and humility in the worship of angels which God never intended to be worshipped as Hebrews makes clear; (c) "not holding fast to the Head", that Head of the church is of course Christ, and any time that Christ is not allowed to run the local church, we have a practice of extrabiblical revelations; (d) don't subject yourselves to special regulations that are man-made like "don't touch, don't taste, and don't handle" as these are "according to the commandments and doctrines of men" (2:22); and then a summary in 2:23.

"These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom {you know how when you hear these special revelations on TV, etc. they do have that "appearance of wisdom", with a real problem for the hearer to tell where they have departed from the Written Word to get into special revelations--of course a key is always words like "God told me", or "God gave me a word", or "The Spirit told me" as in the day of Carroll} in self-imposed religion {you must see much of this from the itching ears teachers of TV and best selling books is SELF-IMPOSED religion, and if that is what you want that is exactly what you can get; however remember that it can "cheat you of your reward" (2:18)}, false humility {this is certainly a humility that we do not want}, and neglect of the body {it is not even physically healthy as God has ordained these meats and drinks for our own welfare}, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Colossians 2:23)

NOTE: Brother and brothers if we want the SBC back of our youth, we must get back to the Bible and the Christ of Carroll and Truett and Scarborough, of Dr. R. G. Lee; and of the Apostle Paul.

18-3: The One Baptism Presentation of Colossians 2 and 3.

Volume 3: Believe and Be Baptized

As we come near the end of the 14 letters of the Apostle Paul, near the end of this commentary on "Believe and be baptized", the great commission and one of the prime messages of the Apostles as well as the topical subject of this commentary, as we make our last effort to deal with the doctrine of the One Baptism in Colossians and Ephesians, we are also talking about the general subject of the 5 commentaries entitled LEARN CHRIST FORM THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS. That is the twin subject of both how to learn Christ, and how to do it according to the only designated manner by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Revealed words through the Apostles and Prophets.

1. Not only is the One Baptism fundamental and consistent throughout all the letters of the Apostle Paul, of Peter, and the whole Bible; but here in Colossians 2 and 3 it permeates every other doctrine as you will see it does when we come later to the Seven major ONES and doctrines of Ephesians 4:4-6. Salvation, another way to say the One Baptism, depends on all the other six major doctrines; and salvation for every man that believes is the natural outgrowth of all the other doctrines. God is the God of salvation; God the Holy Spirit is the effecting cause of salvation in the world and in our hearts; Jesus Christ is the author and finished of the faith of our salvation; and so on and on as we will discuss in the seven ONE's of Ephesians. If Ephesians is a summary of all Paul has previously written, and I believe it is, then the Seven ONES of Ephesians is a summary of both Ephesians and all previously written by Paul where he quoted so often to prove the ASI, that is that "no Scripture is of any private interpretation". You interpret I Corinthians and Hebrews and Romans in the ASI light of the OT; then you interpret Colossians, where there are no OT quotes in the light of the previously 10 written epistles of Paul; and then you come to interpret all in Ephesians. Here, even as in I and II Corinthians and as at the beginning of Ephesians 1, Paul challenges the reader and the hearer for "understanding", understanding on "the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ". You Greeks of Asia Minor and elsewhere, in Corinth and Athens and Thessalonica, want some wisdom; okay, find your wisdom from God and Christ as the Source, find it in the mystery God has made known through such foolish Apostles as Paul.

"...and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:2,3)

Look to Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden!

2. Go back to the fundamentals of Christ and the Word rather than "anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4).

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him". (Colossians 2:6)

You know how “to walk” and “walking” is a favorite word of both Colossians and Ephesians as a description for our style of living and life, and before we conclude this final chapter we must summarize much of how both books tell us of “how to walk”.

(1). “Rooted and built up in Him” (2:7) which will take you out of the category of seed planted on stony ground where there is no root so that when any adversity comes because of the Word, there is stumbling.

(2). “Established in the faith” (2:7) as on a solid rock and foundation.

(3). “as you have been taught” (2:7), much like the LEARN CHRIST of Ephesians 4:21 where “if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus”, the teachings of the Apostles, Jesus, and the Prophets.

(4). “Abounding in it with thanksgiving (2:7), the “it” being abounding in the faith; by the way the One Faith.

3. If you have been “raised with Christ”, the second phase of the One Baptism and after death with Christ, then a natural outcome of such an inward commitment and experience is: “seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”. (Colossians 3:1)

(1). “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”. (Colossians 3:2)

The One Baptism causes this natural focus above where Christ is as in the ONE Baptism “you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (2:4).

(2). As the final outcome of the One Baptism will come glorification in your life, that final aspect of salvation, where you will appear like Christ at His Second Coming.

“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)

(3). What dies with Christ is the initial phase of the One Baptism?

The members which are on this earth: fornication, uncleanness {**this is an uncleanness, not the filth of the flesh in the sense that water can wash it off, but is an uncleanness that the death with Christ, much like repentance, can wash off**}, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry {**often today you as a church member and an American may not think that you commit idolatry, but according to the Word of God if you covet anything--say your neighbor's wife or house or job, etc.--then you are also an Idolater**}.

(4). Put off all these things, and again we recognize the similarity to Ephesians: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth, and do not lie.

As your One Baptism of salvation continues in Christ, the process we like to call sanctification, an opposite of no root and stumbling and the cares of this world, these bad identifications with death should fall by the wayside.

(5). Ah, the famous "new man" of Colossians and Ephesians.

"...and have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all." (Colossians 3:10,11)

"...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:24)

18-4: How To Walk?

Whatever you do in the home and at work under supervision, do all "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (3:17) based on Colossians 3:18 through 4:18.

1. How to Walk in Ephesians?

(1). Walk by "not grieving the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Goodness we will be without the Holy Spirit here on earth soon enough well into the Falling Away, as according to Daniel "the power of the holy people is completely shattered", having then only the Spirit that remains in our heart. Let us not also cause His withdrawal from our own heart!

(2) Walk in Love (Ephesians 5:1-7).

Walk in love as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us.

(3). Walk in Light (Ephesians 5:8-14).

Part of the rising from the dead of the One Baptism, a matter also of waking up to the differences between light and darkness, is that as you ask for it "Christ will give you light." {Wow, there are a lot of implications of the Gospel of the One Baptism; far too many, to give over to the unnecessary and man-made requirements of extrabiblical revelations.}

(4). Walk in Wisdom (Ephesians 5:15-21).

Walk with a positive goal and goals and then circumspectly, carefully choosing each decision and each path of your life, asking for and receiving the guidance of Christ and the Spirit.

(5). Walk in the pattern and guidelines of marriage, church, and supervision as originally given by God, as reinforced by Christ, as echoed again here in the Word of God through the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 5:22-6:9).

(6). Live daily by each day putting on practically the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).

2. How to Walk in Colossians?

You will find even as the whole content of Ephesians and Colossians are similar, so also is the how to walk of Colossians similar to the how to walk of Ephesians.

(1). Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility {oh, there is that word again}, meekness {now, how can a civil service worker or a military man be meek today if he wants to get anywhere, although bearing the name of Christ--I jest according to what the men's' Sunday school class at Lexington Park told me}, longsuffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. (Colossians 3:12,13)

18-5: One Hope of the Christian Calling, the Message of Ephesians 4:1-16.

It is easy to get lost in the details of Ephesians 4:1-16, not recognizing the connection between the first words of "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" to the last words of a (1) unity of individual growth "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; and (2) unity of church growth (a) the growth the whole body, "joined and knit together" as every joint {every member and every gift and every grace}, and (b) with every member of the total body doing their share, the whole body grows.

Rich Warren with his now famous "protect the church" concept based on the seemingly rapid success of an isolated local church called Saddleback has missed completely the difference between a stable unity built on borders and extrabiblical requirements and a dynamic and growing unity as we find in the message of 4:1-16. For one thing you can only have the peace and unity of 4:1-16 when it is the total church body: it can not possible apply to such an isolated church as at Saddleback. Not only do they not have and can not have all the members--recall the arguments of I and II Corinthians--where it takes all the toes, fingers, eyes, and ears of the larger body of Christ, alias all the gifts, all the graces, and all the members.

As we consider again Ephesians 4:1-16, let us proceed in such a manner as to keep the first connected to the last, the one calling to the one church fulfillment in this life. {Remembering that Paul's knows that this will be his last if not one of his last opportunities in the writing of Scriptures to promote understanding of how the call of one Christian can find the dream of the fulfillment of "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love".} What Warren seeks is "protection": what the Apostle Paul seeks is "promotion"! With all the denominations and churches in America, is it futile to even have such a dream, muchless to expect to realize it. Just the vast denominational organizations alone would prevent such a fulfillment in the name of survival of their own positions and organization. Yet, I think, the message is that we can operate in our own "hope of the one calling" as if it is so and as if it is possible! It will not happen on earth, especially during this time of the Falling Away as the gap between church members and local churches and the Christ widens; but our focus comes more on the kingdom of Christ where it should be in the first place, and on the church which is the "assembly of the firstborn written in heaven". Mr. Warren, one overwhelming reason that you can never have the unity in your local

church ordained for only the unity of the one church is that you will never be able to contain the Apostle Paul alone to Saddleback, muchless Peter and James and John, nor will you be able to have all gifts and graces in your church, nor will you even be able to say we have all the members of the physical body in our local church, surely you will at least be missing one finger, toe, eye, or brain that is in another local church.

1. First and last, from “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” to “may grow in all things into Him who is the head--Christ”. This was not even achievable during the time of Paul as we know all the divisions and disputes in local churches and lack of unity with other first century churches. Yet this is our goal. This is what we work for; and as we work for it and make it a primary goal, we will come much closer than if we ignore it completely, or work against it. Any local church can, or any denomination as far as that goes, can just go so far in the achievement of this goal, although each may start with the “one hope of the calling”. A local church like Saddleback or Prestonwood gets quickly to their limitation, not based on the quantity of their members, but based on the quality of their members in having all the graces. A small local church with all the gifts, graces, and physical members could come closer to achievement of the goal; however, it is still impossible for any one local church to get all the way to the goal.

2. First and last, from “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” to “speaking the truth in love” in the larger body.

Something no local church or church pastor wants to admit, that he and his local church are accountable to the total church body. He needs their approval for what he does and says, as does every deacon and semi-member of that local church. You see, though, if you think you have all the truth, then this becomes difficult.

3. First and last, from even as there is one hope of your calling with the inherent unity of one body and one Spirit (4:4) to “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (4:12).

4. First and last, from “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (4:5) to “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:13).

5. First and last, beginning and fulfillment, from “one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (4:6) to “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry” (4:12).

6. First and last, beginning and fulfillment, from “to each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift (4:7) to “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13b).

7. First and last, beginning and fulfillment, from “He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (4:11) to “that we should no longer be children **{be children in our group}**, tossed to and from and

carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting..." (4:14).

18-6: A "Learn Christ" equivalent in Colossians of Ephesians 4:17-24?

This is critical as it is maintained by this writer than "Learn Christ" is the main theme of Ephesians even as it is used as half of the main theme of the five LEARN CHRIST commentaries, LEARN CHRIST FROM THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS.

1. The LEARN CHRIST of Ephesians.

It is impossible to learn Christ properly if you learn any of Christ by the examples of the other Gentiles around you, church members or not. You just can not walk or live like the majority of Gentile Americans.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." (Ephesians 4:19)

Even if you desire to be nice to your American neighbors, this is the adequate description of all who have not made a wheat and sheep commitment to learning Christ: (1) although wisdom seeking often and miracle seeking also it is the walk of a Gentiles without Christ, though American and based on the American Mind and character, it is a "futility of the mind"; (2) dark understanding is hard to measure but it is there in the American Gentile mind; (3) alienated from the life of God, and that is most often obvious to you as God is never spoken of, thought of, or considered, though they may be called "good people" and may be a community of good ole boys; (4) yes, it is based on the ignorance of God, Christ, and the Bible; (5) but their heart was blind before their minds became ignorant as people do more what they want to, based on the heart, than they do what they should, based on the mind; (6) long ago your American Gentile neighbors ceased to have real feelings on these spiritual matters of God, Christ, and the Bible; and (7) becoming the victims of lewdness, uncleanness, and greediness.

You must be different from the American Society and community around you.

"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus..." (Ephesians 4:20,21)

How do you learn Christ? (1) You must hear Christ for yourself, personally and in your own heart; (2) You must be taught by Christ, as He and God the Father knock on your door and come in to live with you and teach you; and (3) as the truth is in Jesus, the job of communicating the truth to you today is the job of the Holy Spirit. And we will explain these aspects from the teachings of Christ Himself below as given in

Volume 3: Believe and Be Baptized

John 14. It revolves around three apostles--Thomas, Philip, and Judas {not Iscariot}; around three questions asked by these 3 apostles near the end of Jesus life; and in particular on the three answers of Jesus Himself to the three questions.

2. The LEARN CHRIST of Christ and of John 14.

(1). Question #1 from the Apostle Thomas.

"Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5)

(2). Answer from Jesus to the question #1 of Thomas.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one come to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

(3). Question #2 from the Apostle Philip.

"Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.'" (John 14:8)

(4). Answer from Jesus to the question #2 of Philip.

"Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.'" (John 14:9-11)

(5). Question # 3 from the Apostle Judas.

"Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22)

(6). Answer from Jesus to the third question from the Apostle Judas.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him.'" (John 14:23)

3. The LEARN CHRIST of Colossians.

Since I hope we have come to believe that Colossians was written after Ephesians, then with what we have of the Learn Christ in Colossians will have to be the bottom line for us. We can recognize where the passage is in Colossians by identification with the new man of Ephesians, with the putting on and putting off.

"...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind {yes, your mind has a spirit}, and that you put on the new man which was

created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

The beginning of the end Colossians version is in Colossians 3:10 and following.

“...and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...” (Colossians 3:10)

- (1). Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering (3:12)
- (2). Bearing with one another and forgiving one another even when there is a legitimate complaint for that is the way Christ forgave you (3:13).
- (3). The individual bond of personal and individual perfection is love, so put on this bond of love (3:14).
- (4). Let the peace of God rule in your heart as that is the calling of the one body (3:15a).
- (5). Ever and in always and in all words of prayer, be thankful to God (3:15b).
- (6). Allow the word of Christ and of God {the teachings of Christ and of God in the Word} dwell inside of you like God and Christ want to dwell inside of you, and teach you, but make sure that it is based on the revealed wisdom that is in the Word, not any extrabiblical wisdom (3:16a).
- (7). Then you can teach and worship properly (3:16b).
- (8). Whatever you do in word and deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:17).

18-7: Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians and I, II, and III John harmonized.
By the way, three of the last epistles from Paul--Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians will not be covered in this volume as they were covered as part of the harmony between the little epistles of the Apostle John with some of the last epistles from Paul under the chapter headings of “The Security of the Believer” in the second volume of the LEARN CHRIST FROM THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS commentaries, the “Christ for Individuals” that deals primarily with the five books written by the Apostle John. Those five, which I like to call the new Pentateuch since there are five and because of the preface of the book of John where “while the law came by Moses, grace and truth came by the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, are in the order most likely written if not distributed of Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the three little epistles of I, II, and III John. And why does it take 19 chapters to cover only 14 epistles of Paul which he personally wrote; that is with the three of Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians not covered in this volume for deference to volume 2, why does it take 19 chapters to cover 11 epistles. Well, I could blame it on the wordiness of Paul, and myself, especially in I and II Corinthians where three chapters were required to be adequate on Bible understanding, Revelation and wisdom, and with

many other problems caused by an inadequate concept of where Revelation came from and how they came; likewise by the necessity to include some of the Old Testament from which Paul so often quoted in two chapters, one on Isaiah and one on "The Message of the Writing Prophets", you guessed it most of the 16 major and minor Prophets. Always, the effort has been to keep in total context, that of the OT and NT, that of the book of Acts, and to follow the flow of the life of the Apostle Paul as he carried out his commission as chief editor of the NT, a Ministry of an Apostle that was called and commissioned and trained by the Ascended Christ Himself to complete the profitable work of the Hebrew and Jewish people as "custodians of the oracles of God". A part of the Ministry of an Apostle, the Apostle Paul, that has reached more people and exerted more influence on the churches and Christians; that is as chief editor of the NT, than has even the missionary journeys of Paul. **{In the first few centuries were converted in the short period after the Crucifixion, 5,000 at the first day of Pentecost after the Resurrection.} Paul would be the Apostle of choice by the Ascended Christ, and His "alter ego"—the Holy Spirit--to take the Gospel of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles; at the same time, explaining what both happened to the Jews as the former chosen nation of God, and how the Gentiles would with the "Fullness of the Gentiles" take their place in the kingdom of God. {That mantle of Gentile leadership we know from history and church history fell on the United States, until recently, as America became the leader among the believers of the world; and as the US sent missionaries to every nation of the world in obedience to the great commission.}**

"Believe and be baptized", words from Jesus Himself, best summarize the message that Paul delivered to the Roman Empire. It also best summarizes the many messages that Paul delivered in Jewish synagogues and Gentile houses throughout the Empire in two missionary journeys; and in the most significant and lasting influence in the Gentile world with a few Jews, the writing of 14 New Testament books and the sponsorship of 3 more. You know how a decision made by early church fathers about a New Testament Canon included the criterion of authorship by an apostle or an associate of an Apostle; but a little known fact which can only come out of the internal evidences of the New Testament is the supposition that Paul left manuscripts and parchments **{those same books and parchments that Paul requested Timothy to bring to prison in Rome while Dr. Luke was there, and at the same time to bring John Mark since he was profitable to Paul's ministry as chief editor of the New Testament (II Timothy 4:11-13)}** for John Mark and Dr. Luke to write respectively Mark, Luke, and Acts. Stop to think about it a few moments since hindsight is better than foresight; and since we can look back over the actual history of the last two thousand years, realizing that the total influence the books of the Apostle Paul is much greater, by any measure you might chose, than the influence of his missionary journeys. Instead of extending approximately

one century as did the influence of His immediate life and journeys, the 14 letters with three supplements have extended for over two thousand years. And to think that this was not in the plan of God and the implementation in the kingdom of Christ is as foolish as overlooking the ways God has worked and continues to work in history as the Great Maker of History, the same truth noted by the Apostle James at the great Jerusalem conference when after quoting from Amos 9:11,12, says "known to God from eternity are all His works." (Acts 15:18)

"Believe and be baptized" best summarizes the message that is needed today to explain why the local churches and denominations are about to be overwhelmed by the tares as in the Falling Away of I I Thessalonians and Daniel, as "the power of the holy people is completely shattered" (Daniel 12:7). We in the kingdom of God and of Christ have never learned the details of the parable of the seed and the sower, or some of the details of that parable has become part of the time and doctrine we will no longer be endured during the Falling Away. Remember the part where church members, whose hearts like seed sown on stony ground, receive initially the Word with so much enthusiasm {the exact words of the explanation of Jesus in Mark 4:13-20 is "immediately receive it with gladness"} that it is interpreted by the evangelist and local church as a conversion, then how Jesus explains that, having no root and because of persecutions and tribulations for the word's sake, they endure only for a time and stumble. Like the citizens of Jerusalem during the day of the Prophet Jeremiah, who lived as they wanted during the week then came to the temple on the Sabbath to say "We Are Safe" (Jeremiah 7:10), we also think we are safe in our beautiful, comfortable, and many church buildings, not realizing that the bad behavior of church members, like of the temple attendees, has overtaken us (I I Timothy 3:1-9), that our intolerance of sound doctrine has sealed the God determined fate of our demise (I I Timothy 4:1-4), that we have completed our usefulness as a nation to God in the evangelization of the world and in the Fullness of the Gentiles, and that our pride in Bible knowledge, Bible teachers, and preachers has really become more the vast "heaping up of teachers with itching ears" (I I Timothy 4:1-4) of the end time false prophets and teachers more than any signs of revival. What we really have in our nation is not signs for encouragement among the few truly members of God's kingdom who remain, sort of like the thousands who had not bowed to Baal during the time of Elijah, is a like in all the times of the OT Prophets a lot of false prophets saying peace when there is no peace, a lot of pastors and teachers convincing their audiences that they are the people of God when there is only a remnant of those people left in the whole nation, and an innumerable heaping up of misleading teachers that help place a fortress of protection and security, and by the way ignorance, around the so-called "people of God" of many churches and denominations.

We are far too “tolerant” today and in our country to admit that Satan has placed the tares in the churches and kingdom for the very purpose of subversion and destruction. Look again carefully at the parable of tares and wheat taught by Jesus and as explained by Jesus to His disciples, and if you can not find eyes to see and ears to hear this parable with explanation then you like most religious leaders of Jesus’ day do not have the spiritual understanding of the ASI **{Authorized Semi-Public Interpretation}**. What you see and hear Jesus saying is that “the enemy who sowed them is the devil” (Matthew 13:39), and if the Devil sowed those tares in the churches as well as in the larger kingdom then like the nature of Satan Himself as destructive and as a liar, then the tares in the local churches and denominations have the same goals as Satan himself, that of THE LIE and lies, deception, and destruction. Of course, if your sound doctrine has never progressed to the extent of believing in Satan as the prince and power of this world, then your doctrine will also “be slow to believe” all the Prophets and Apostles said of both Jesus and Satan!

“Believe and be baptized” is the message that Jesus wants to spread His influence in this time as in the time of the 12 Apostles. It is the complete message that will go beyond initial “belief” only which can not save to the “uttermost”; that is, can not save to the extent of a corresponding inner change which is nothing less than a 9 month new birth, a progressing sanctification, and then a glorification that is a real visual of Christ in the finalized kingdom of the new heavens and new earth! As I told a Chinese friend recently, one who was surprised that a simple belief could bring salvation, there are two “beliefs” in the Bible as the Apostle James makes clear. There is one belief which the devil have and tremble, knowing the facts of hell and their God determined fate there and of their fall; and then there is another faith, one which shows itself in works and that is a righteousness by faith apart from works. This later faith which saves and converts all the way, and with an adequate concept and more importantly practice of a 9 month new birth as contrasted to an instantaneous new birth of the fundamentalists and of the immediate joy of the seed on stony ground, is the “believe” of Jesus that is coupled with the power of God acting on that individual belief summarized as “and be baptized”. Sorry if you thought “and be baptized” related to water baptism. NO, NO, and NO, NO, NO. It is the “baptism” that Paul speaks of most often in the book of Romans; it is the baptism that Paul writes of most often in his 14 letters; it is the “one baptism” of Ephesians; and most importantly it is the “and be baptized” that Jesus gives to all His disciples as a great commission. If you do not see this on the positive side of Mark 16:16 where you have the two divisions in “believe and be baptized”, one you do in the exercise of your freedom of choice and then the second which God does on you in response to the proper belief and attitude of repentance and belief which when He sees, He starts an act of God in you; then you should see it in the negative side of Mark 16:16—that is, in the “but he who does not believe

will be condemned." You know and I know if Jesus had made water baptism necessary for salvation, in spite of all seeing it as a work rather than of grace, he would have said something like, "but he who does not believe and be baptized will be condemned". Right, you know it to be true even though you must face up to an onslaught on unsound doctrine to the contrary.

Popularity of Bible teaching, like a best-seller, is now a bad sign; and the popularity of many Bible teachers, both male and female, is a sign of how far we are into itching ears and the time of itching ears teachers as in "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (II Timothy 4:3,4) I would have to say, like Jesus said of His first disciples who at first would not endure the sound doctrine of His resurrection, that you "are slow to believe" the signs in your local churches, in the denominations, and in particular the signs of the warfare in the SBC, if you can not see in all this, and more, the signs of the Falling Away as given by the Apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit of God in the two verses of II Timothy 4:3,4. What you do see in your local churches, denominations, and the larger kingdom of God is: (1) a vast heaping up of popular Bible teachers in conferences, on television, and in books and on the radio {have you ever seen or heard of so many Bible teachers and preachers, and does it not for even one second make you stop to think of how Jesus and the Apostles, especially Paul, told you that there would be many false prophets and teachers—and where do you think those are coming from}; (2) the motivation for such church members is twofold—(a) they have passed beyond ignorance of sound doctrine to a point of no return where they "will not endure sound doctrine", and this intolerance toward sound doctrine is aided by an increased popularity in the churches and denominations which they detect so that they "can come out", so to speak; and (b) it is motivated by "their own desires" for comfort, security, inertia—in that they have a desire for things to stay like they know them, they like their lack of root convictions, they have become comfortable with their cares of this world and the things of this world, they like the deceitfulness of riches of the Gospel of Prosperity and the corollary of success; (3) the turning of ears away from truth while like the religious leaders of Jesus' day practicing vain worship with a substitution of the teachings of men for the doctrines of God came so slow and gradual with years as to be unnoticed, and they like the people of Plato who lived under ground so that they thought the reflected light to be the real light, the vast number of church members today do not know that they have turned into fables.

Jesus said certain "signs" would follow along with the believers.

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:17,18)

Instead of these signs in our churches today, we have the signs of the Falling Away such as (1) distortions of God's concept of marriage among church members; (2) the taking of God's name in vain as a common practice among church members so that like in Romans 1, men consider by themselves as teachers of the law have become something else, the name of God is blasphemed throughout the world; (3) the popularity of Bible teachers with itching ear teachings, especially as related to the Gospel of Prosperity, success, the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, in churches and outside in the larger kingdom; (4) the rebellion against the authority of Christ in churches as trusted in the pastors with the unheard of large number, in the name of democracy, who run off their pastors, choosing ones less demanding in the preaching of the Word; (5) the accepted but bad church behavior of church members like that enumerated in I Timothy 3:1-9 where they exhibit a form of godliness but deny the power and presence of God; (6) the unrighteous and rebellious gap between churches and Christ that most see with any spiritual understanding at all; and (7) the warfare between “fundamentalists” and “moderates”, between the Texas State Baptist Convention and the present leadership of the SBC, a warfare that started in this largest Protestant denomination in the world 20 years ago as Criswell announced for his cohorts like Stanley, Rogers, Falwell, and LeHaye that “they would keep fighting until one side or the other won”, and which the fundamentalists did until they took control of the SBC, the kind of fighting which shows a bad spirit even if you can not see the non-conservative nature of the fundamentalist's superficial, hunt and peck method of Bible interpretation, a method based more on Scofield notes than on real ASI Bible. **{You don't think this has hurt the SBC; well, it is all over in a matter of a short time for the SBC unless the real southern Baptists rise up to take control of their own convention, which can hardly take place during the time of the Falling Away as the Holy Spirit is withdrawn and as the power of the holy people is completely shattered. In other words, don't plan for it to happen!}** Granted that some of the signs which follow legitimate believers mentioned above are still going on with a very small scale and hidden from most, even like the healing work of God that Jesus said He saw God doing before His life on earth and which is still going on. Granted likewise that many tares and the leaders of tares have learned to simulate the signs of Jesus, like Jannes and Jambres to simulate the works of God up to a certain point, and then join the people of God when they can no longer simulate. However these signs did follow the life, teaching and preaching of the Apostle Paul as we have looked at in this volume from the book of Acts.