

II. Our experiences in life do not trump the Word of God.

Our experiences in life don't make us an exception in eternity outside the boundaries that God has declared from the foundation of the world.

It doesn't matter:

- where we come from,
- our family,
- our culture,
- our good deeds,
- bad deeds, or
- ugly deeds or
- that of our family and ancestors...

Truly all of us and all of the world have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no one good, no not one.

The **good thing** is that, out of the 7+ billion people on earth and the many more people that have lived and died over the last approximately 6000 years of human history, **God has a remedy**. He alone has made away to reconcile man to Himself and, contrary to public opinion, there is not a myriad of ways that He has made.

- Ecumenicalism (all Christian denominations are legit)
- Syncretism (all world religions are legit)

There is only one way and I'd like to touch upon that tonight as I challenge us to consider our experiences in life and present state of being in the light what we find in the Word of God.

Are we aligning our experiences and our beliefs according to the Word?

Or are we still trying to save ourselves in our own power, clean ourselves with our own "cleansing ways", and heal ourselves with our own thoughts of what it takes to be healed?

When I look upon the religious world of Christianity today, I can't help but be reminded of a buffet. If you have ever eaten in a buffet, there is a smorgasbord of choices for your meal.

In Christianity today, there are a smorgasbord of choices.

- Methodists,
 - Lutherans,
 - Baptists,
 - Seventh Day Adventists,
 - & Presbyterians.
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- Catholics,
 - Anglicans,
 - & Orthodox.
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- Charismatics,
 - Pentecostals.
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- Mormon's,
 - Jehovah Witness',
 - and many other such choices.

According to recent research, it is said that there are presently over 45,000 different "Christian denominations" in the world today. So as I sit back and think on all this I ask myself, "How did it come to this?"

Then, as I study the Word and look into the history of civilizations in the eyes of the Word, it is quite apparent to me that "In the beginning"... it was not so.

In the beginning, according to the letter of Ephesians...

Eph 4:4-6 NKJV *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

There was only ONE body, ONE faith, ONE baptism, ONE Spirit, ONE Lord, ONE God and Father of all creation.

In the beginning there was only ONE **gospel of the kingdom**... started by the one crying in the wilderness making straight the way of the Lord, John the Baptist.

Mat 3:1-2 NKJV In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Mar 1:14-15 NKJV Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Mat 4:23 NKJV And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Mat 9:35 NKJV Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Mat 24:14 NKJV And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

That gospel was first preached by a Jewish man named John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the Lord. When he was put into prison, the man Jesus Christ not only continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom, but also fulfill it.

Peter and Paul wrote in their letters to the churches about this gospel. What's interesting to note is that these two apostles of Jesus Christ, specifically chosen and sent by Him, in two separate letters, spoke of this gospel of the kingdom and coupled with some eternally very severe consequences...

1Pe 4:17-18 NKJV For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of **those who do not obey the gospel of God?** (18) Now "IF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IS SCARCELY SAVED, WHERE WILL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?"

2Th 1:8 NKJV in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on **those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Peter said that judgment will begin in the house of God, and if God will be that severe with His own people, what will be the end for those who DO NOT OBEY the gospel of God? Paul said that our Lord is coming back in flaming fire taking vengeance on those that don't know God and that DO NOT OBEY the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The messages of both apostles are virtually the same. They both agree that there are very dire consequences waiting for those who DO NOT OBEY the gospel.

The sinner's prayer, as we know it today, was invented by twentieth century preachers as a quick and easy way to save people. Unfortunately, it is a false doctrine. It uses words found in the Word, but it is not rooted in biblical principles found in the Word.

Paul stated that he declared to them the gospel.

1Co 15:1-4 NKJV Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, (2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

The gospel is simply "...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:" (1Co 15:3-4) ACCORDING TO THE WORD!

Virtually most, if not all, of Christianity believes the gospel. So then what's the problem? How does this explain the various sects and denominations that make up Christianity?

The problem, the root of all this division, is their differences in **how one obeys the gospel.**

Some obey according to their own individual beliefs and opinions; some obey according to their denominational affiliations, but very few obey and believe on Him **"as the scripture hath said"** (John 7:38).

Joh 7:37-38 NKJV On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes in Me, **as the Scripture has said**, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

After reading what Peter and Paul wrote in the scriptures mentioned above concerning NOT OBEYING the gospel, I came to realize two things:

1. I need to know what the gospel is, and
2. I need to figure out how to obey it.

Finding out the gospel was the easy part, but because of almost 2000 years of heretical teachings and the development and rise of different popular denominations, finding out how to obey was much more difficult.

However, if I would have just kept my nose in the Word, I would have found the answer much more quickly.

Mat 7:7-8 NKJV "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Sometimes the problem for us is that it's easier to listen to popular, well-meaning and well-intentioned individuals, rather than study for oneself to find out the truth. The problem is well-meaning and well-intentioned individuals, though extremely sincere in their message, genuinely believing that what they are sharing is the truth, can be sincerely and genuinely wrong nonetheless. On the day of judgment, listening to sincerely and genuinely wrong individuals will not excuse us for not obeying the gospel.

I figure, if I am willing to spend 18+ years of education in grade school, high school, college, and post-graduate school to earn a diploma, I really have no excuse why I can't search for the truth myself in the scriptures and find it out for myself.

Looking outside the truth for the truth is foolish and inexcusable.

Now, having shared all this, I've come to realize that the most neglected book in all the Bible, at least as far as my experience is concerned, actually had the answer to the question, "How does one obey the gospel?"

- Did anyone here sit down and eat with Jesus?
- Did anyone here hear him teach as he traveled about the countryside?
- Did anyone here see him nailed on the cross, broken, bloodied, gasping for his last moments of air before saying "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?"
- Did anyone here walk and talk with him on the Emmaus road or see him for 40 days after He resurrected and before He ascended into heaven?
- Was anyone here alive and walking with Jesus and his disciples turned apostles of Jesus Christ in the 1st century?
- Did anyone here witness what the apostles of Jesus preached and taught after Jesus ascended?
- Did anyone here witness what the apostles expected of hearers of the gospel of the kingdom as they went about preaching and teaching?

The only way to find out is to review the testimony of those that could answer yes to all these questions.

No one has given us the divine authority to make up our own ideas as to how one needs to obey the gospel.

In the book of Acts, there are explicit and unambiguous examples of how the early Church obeyed the gospel. I have come to find out that the book of Acts is the only book in the Bible that has the examples of the obedience to the gospel of the kingdom needed for salvation.

I've narrowed down to 5 examples (witnesses) in Acts of how the early 1st century Church disciples obeyed the gospel of the kingdom.

In Acts 2

The 120 had received the promise of the Father, the blessing of Abraham, the gift of God – the Holy Ghost. They began to speak in tongues as the Holy Ghost gave the utterance. Many Jews who lived abroad, coming to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem, heard them speak in their own language from abroad. They didn't understand how local Jews in Jerusalem knew their language. They even went so far as to accuse them of being drunk.

This is when Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, spoke up and declared the gospel of the kingdom under the banner of the New Covenant. In a nutshell, he preached:

1. Jesus was the Messiah.
2. He was crucified for their sins.
3. Yet he rose again on the third day.
4. This same Jesus, was made both Lord and Christ (this is the same gospel Paul spoke of in 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

When the listener's heard Peter's words, they were convicted and pierced in their heart because they realized they crucified the Lord of glory, whom they were expecting. This was the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews.

A greater question may not have been asked in all the bible than when the Jews asked Peter and the apostles, **“Men and brethren what shall we do?”** Two thousand years ago, Peter answered this question without ambiguity. He plainly declared to them that they needed to respond to the gospel they just heard by repenting, being baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). A simple and clear commandment was given in response to a very simple question.

1. Why can we not make the same statement to others today?
2. Why is there so much division in Christianity?

Because they all tell their listeners to obey the gospel differently from one another, **but more importantly differently from what the apostles of Jesus Christ commanded and expected in the first century.**

The next witness can be found in Acts 8.

Philip the evangelist then went to minister the gospel of the kingdom to the half Jews, the Samaritans. The Samaritans believed on the gospel that he preached to them (the same gospel Peter declared on the day of Pentecost) and they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard this, they sent Peter and John to Samaria because they had yet to receive the Holy Ghost (“believe you receive” - doctrine of error). When they arrived, they prayed and laid hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost just as 3000 did on the day of Pentecost. The same gospel of the kingdom resulted in the same response of obedience to the gospel for the half Jews.

Acts 9

Paul’s Testimony

Act 9:6 NKJV So he, trembling and astonished, said, **"Lord, what do You want me to do?"** Then the Lord *said* to him, **"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."**

Act 9:17-18 NKJV And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may **receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" (18) Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, **and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.**

Act 22:12-16 NKJV "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, (13) came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. (14) Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. (15) For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. (16) **And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**'

The same gospel of the kingdom and the obedience was required of by Saul, who became Paul.

In Acts 10

Act 10:5-6 NKJV Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. (6) He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. **He will tell you what you must do."**

Peter is sent to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter begins to declare the gospel of the kingdom to his household, and before Peter can even finish, Jesus displays his stamp of approval on Cornelius and his household by baptizing them in the Holy Ghost. The Jews who traveled with Peter were quite taken aback by this. They were literally astounded because they realized that the “unclean” Gentiles had been granted repentance unto life because they witnessed the Gentiles also receive the Holy Ghost, for the Gentiles spoke in tongues as did the apostles and Jewish disciples did on the day of Pentecost, approximately 10 years earlier.

Although Peter himself was surprised at this whole turn of events, he does not dare to quibble or wrestle with Jesus over what he so adamantly established. He basically says who are we that we should forbid them to be baptized in water, and straightaway he baptized Cornelius and his whole household in the name of the Lord Jesus. The same gospel of the kingdom results in the same response of obedience to the gospel for the Gentiles.

My last witness to share is from Acts 19

Many people believe that since their parents or grandparents or close family relatives are "Christian", than they themselves must be alright too. Again, they lay their foundations on, and put their trust on things outside of the Word. Yet for those who believe there is no need to ever be re-baptized (if they were baptized previously as an infant, or by sprinkling, or any name other than the name of Jesus) you may want to consider this particular account in Acts 19.

Paul's treatment of some "apparent" disciples may shed some light on your present state and situation. He was traveling along the countryside and ran into some "apparent" disciples. After talking with them for a little bit, Paul all of a sudden asked them, **"Did you receive the Holy Ghost, since you believed?"** The "apparent" disciples answered that they had no idea what he was talking about. So Paul asks them another question, **"What were you baptized into?"** They answered into John's baptism. Paul then realizes that these were converts of John the Baptist, but not disciples of Jesus Christ. For Paul, we see it was not only important, but also very necessary to be baptized in the Holy Ghost and to be baptized in water in the name of Jesus.

Paul then declares to them that John the Baptist indeed did the baptism of repentance, but even he spoke of one that would come after him, that they should believe on Christ Jesus. Paul then takes them into the water and baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus. He then lays hands on them and they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, as evidenced by them speaking in tongues.

Once again, the same gospel of the kingdom is given to all, no matter whether you were a Jew, Gentile... no matter your tribe, color, or ethnicity. The same response of obedience was necessary from all people - Jews, half Jews, Gentiles, and those walking in the ignorance of their own beliefs. Somewhere, we all fall into one of these 4 categories.

Eph 4:15 but, **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

The one gospel of the kingdom has opened up the doors of heaven to all people who will believe on Him, as the scriptures says (John 7:38)... to those who obey the gospel.

So the question now is, have you obeyed the gospel as the scriptures have said?

This is the one thing that matters.

Rom 1:16 NKJV For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

1Ti 4:16 NKJV Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Today is the day of salvation. Don't let another moment go by without addressing these three areas of the covenant that agree in one in the earth:

1Jn 5:8 NKJV And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

These are **the baby steps** that will start our walk with the Lord in this New Covenant age we live in. Doesn't matter where you started... the one thing that matters is what you did when you heard the gospel of the kingdom preached to you and did you continue faithfully in the gospel of the kingdom enduring to the end?