

Getting to Know Jesus in the 21st Century



“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40).

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*Reading the Bible in the 21st Century **

The Divine Presence “I Am”

Traditional Stations of the Cross Prayer and Meditation Cards

** See back cover for an extended excerpt from this essay.*

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“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him’ ” (John 14:6-7).

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Foreword: To Whom It May Concern

This little book is for “unbelievers” who feel drawn to Christianity— or who would like to understand what a friend or family member might see in it—but who have yet to hear it explained to their satisfaction. It is also for “believers” who have yet to experience the joy of their salvation. And, finally, it is for pastors and intelligent laypeople who are troubled by skeptical questions or criticisms that they are unable answer to their own satisfaction, much less to the satisfaction of the incorrigible skeptic or critic. *

* ***Note to skeptics and critics:*** Please understand that the biblical texts cited herein are employed illustratively and inspirationally—they are not offered as “proof-texts.” The written word points to *the living Word*. When it comes to *the living Word*, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Chapter 1: “Belief” versus “Faith”

The Greek word for *faith* in the New Testament is usually some variation of *pistis*. The verb *pisteuo* is often translated “believe” but did not originally have the heavy connotation of “intellectual assent” or “dogmatic belief” that it does today. Indeed, when *getting to know Jesus*, it is better to think of *faith* in terms of “trust” and “reliance” rather than *belief*, in the modern sense of the word. And to discover what it means to *live by faith*, in this more original sense, let us bracket (for the time being, at least) any rigidly dogmatic or ideological beliefs about Jesus or the Bible. As it is written:

“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40).

As such, if we would really come to Him, let us sidestep the endless debates about the historical Jesus or the authority of scripture and look, instead, to *the living Reality that IS Christ-in-us— the only Reality* in which we may fully *trust* and on which we may completely *rely* —a *Reality* which *IS* prior to and independently of that which we may *believe* or *disbelieve* or otherwise *think* about it.

“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Revelation 3:20).

As we begin to awaken to this *living Reality*, we can begin to revisit the traditional teachings associated with the name of Jesus and truly understand them for the first time.

Chapter 2: The Image of God in You

“...from now on know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet from now on know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 5:16-18a, *KJV 2000*).

“[Who] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17).

Perhaps you have heard that we are created *in the image of God* but that His image *in us* has become obscured or darkened by sin. What you may not realize is that Christ *IS the image of God in us* and, at the same time, He is the image of God *in which* we— and, indeed, *all things* —are said to have been created. To recognize (*re-cognize*) this image within ourselves— *to know it again* —is to inherit eternal life which is the birthright of those who are also said to have been *chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world* (cf. Ephesians 1:4).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6) and proclaims that “before Abraham was, I Am” (John 8:58). Another of his names is “Emmanuel”, which means “God with us” (Mathew 1:23), and he is also said to be *the Word of God* that *was* (or *IS* in some sense *prior* to creation) *in the beginning with God; the light that lights everyone who comes into the world* (John 1:2, 9). Moreover, *the Word* is compared to a kind of *Divine, incorruptible seed* that is sown among us and which— given the proper attention —brings forth much fruit (cf. Mark 4:20, Luke 8:8ff; cf. I Peter 1:23; I John 3:9). It is also compared to *the water of life* of which it is said that *whosoever will may come and drink freely and never thirst again* (John 4:14; Revelation 22:17; cf. John 7:37-38).

In the book of Hebrews, as well, *the Word of God* is associated with Jesus who is said to be *the Image of God* (1:1-3); and, in Colossians, *the*

image of God is also described in terms of *the rich and glorious mystery* which is *Christ-in-you* (1:15, 27). Moreover— as indicated above —the *faithful* are said to have been *chosen in Him before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4) and we are told that all things are created *in Him, through Him, and for Him* (Colossians 1:15-16). At the same time, it is proclaimed that if we *abide in Him* as He abides *in us* (John 15:4) he will be *formed in us* (Galatians 4:19) in such a way that we, too, will be *the light of the world* (Matthew 5:14-16; cf. John 8:12); that we will *bear much fruit* (John 15:5); and that we will *be found in Him* (Philippians 3:9) *holy and without blame . . . in love* (Ephesians 1:4).

This is all very beautiful, to say the least— and it is *good news*, too — if, indeed, it happens to be true. But how can we really know it? Where is Jesus *really* to be found? And what does it mean *to trust Him*— especially for sincere skeptics and honest critics for whom scripture holds no *a priori* authority? Have not many sought him with tears in their eyes and seemed to come up empty handed!? And are there not many others who are counted among the faithful— many of those who say, *Lord, Lord*, perhaps —but who have never really experienced the *joy of their salvation!*? (cf. Matthew 7:21; John 15:11, 16:24; Psalm 51:12). How is it possible that *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* can fail to satisfy? How can *the water of life* fail to quench our thirst? Is it not written, *seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you?* (Matthew 7:7). If this is true and yet we are not satisfied— if we remain thirsty —it must be that we have looked for Him in the wrong place or put our trust in the wrong thing!

On the other hand, if we do, indeed, know Him, why are we unable to introduce Him to others more effectively? Why do we find ourselves (so often) *at a loss* in the face of sincere skepticism and honest criticism!? And why does our rhetoric so often fail to encourage those who find themselves in perpetual survival mode—struggling through life in vain (or so it seems), merely surviving from one crisis to the next!?

As suggested above, these failures and shortcomings are often the result of our mistaking “belief” for “faith”—confusing the *acceptance of* (or the giving of *mental assent* to) this or that set of *doctrines* or *beliefs* (about the historical Jesus, for example, or the Bible) with an authentic, living faith in *the living Word of God*. And as a result of such

misunderstanding and confusion, two groups of people remain ignorant of Jesus, each in their own way:

- The first group has rejected such beliefs for reasons which— as far as they go —may be logically coherent, empirically astute, and morally defensible. In the process of rejecting such beliefs, however, these people have inadvertently thrown the baby out with the bathwater.
- The second group has *accepted* the beliefs— embraced the bathwater, so to speak —for whatever reasons (be they more or less compelling), but have totally overlooked the baby which is concealed therein!

Perhaps you belong to one of these groups. Or perhaps you have inadvertently enabled one or even both of them by participating in common modes of religious discourse that promote a less than authentic understanding of faith—a *plan of salvation*, as it were, which rests on mere *concepts* instead of the living Christ. Either way, it is time to *get real*—it is time to focus on *the living Reality!* And in the chapters that follow, we will do just that. You will be introduced (or reintroduced) *to the Way, the Truth, and the Life— to the baby Jesus in the bathwater, so to speak —to the Reality that IS Christ-in-you, the hope of glory!* In the process, you will have opportunity to discover— or rediscover —*the joy of your salvation!* It is also possible that pastors and intelligent lay people who read this will discover new ways of communicating their faith to people outside (or on the margins) of their particular faith tradition.

Chapter 3: The Living Word of God

“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

At this point, the possibility of distinguishing between *the Reality that IS Christ* and “*beliefs about Christ*” (or beliefs about “the historical Jesus” or “the Bible”) should be clear. As such, it is time, without further adieu, to meet *the Reality that IS Christ-in-you*:

The “I Am” presence within you IS the living Christ

This is the same *Divine presence* and *living Word of God* that is said TO BE prior to Abraham (John 8:58); that spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14); and that continues to speak within the heart of every human being (cf. Revelation 3:20).

Once again: ***The “I Am” presence within you IS the living Christ.*** And, in accordance with the scriptures, *the “I Am” presence* also comes to light as:

- *Emmanuel*—aka *God with us* (Matthew 1:23);
- the living water that Jesus offered to the woman at the well (John 4:14; cf. John 7:37-38);
- the light that lights everyone that comes into the world (John 1:9; cf. Psalms 36:9);
- the grace of God which has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11);
- the free gift of eternal life that is ours for the taking if only we are willing to turn toward Him in faith (Romans 6:23; cf. John 3:16).

To turn to *the “I Am” presence within you* is to simultaneously *confess* and *repent* [for *everything exposed to the light becomes visible* and *everything that becomes visible is light* (Ephesians 5:13-14)]. And to fully place your trust in *that light* and to rely wholly on *that living presence* is to experience *salvation by grace through faith* (Ephesians 2:8).

Once again: **To turn to the “I Am” presence within you is to simultaneously confess and repent. And to fully place your trust in that light and to rely wholly on that living presence is to experience salvation by grace through faith.**

Of course, many objections will immediately spring to mind—this is understandable and perhaps unavoidable. But if you will please suspend your objections for just a moment and simply rest in silent awareness of the “I Am” presence within you, you will make contact with *the Word of Life*. At that point, you need only learn to *abide in Him as He abides in you* (John 15:4). As it is written:

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).

The fact is this *presence* is not entirely new to you. Indeed, the chances are that you already associate it in a confused sort of way with *the presence of God* in your life. What may be new is the idea that this *light of awareness* or *living presence* (which is universally accessible) is *the fundamental Reality* toward which our scriptures and traditions are pointing—the only *Reality*, once again, in which we may fully trust and upon which we can rely *unconditionally*:

“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!” (Psalm 36:9-10).

But it must be stressed— and it can hardly be stressed sufficiently — that **this is not an abstract idea to be “believed” in.** Rather, it is our point of contact— *living and powerful* —with the One in whom *we live and move and have our being* (cf. Hebrews 4:12; Acts 17:28). Moreover, this *living presence* is immediately accessible and fully verifiable *here and now!* Indeed, “**Now is the acceptable time . . . now is the day of salvation!**” (II Corinthians 6:2). *Whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely!* (cf. Revelation 22:17; John 7:37-38). **Good news—the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**

Chapter 4: Getting to Know Jesus

The “I Am” presence within you IS the living Christ

It bears repeating: **If you will please suspend your objections and simply rest in silent awareness of *the “I Am” presence within you, you will make contact with *the Word of Life.****

NOTE: If you merely “think about” this *I AM Presence*, confusing it in your mind with some idea you have— perhaps an idea about your “body” or some detail of your “personality” or “autobiography” —you will continue to miss the point; you will continue to miss *the living Reality* toward which our scriptures and traditions are pointing.

You will move closer to *Him— closer to the living Reality* that is *Christ-in-you* —if you simply *think “I Am”* without associating this thought with any other object of thought or experience.

This, too, bears repeating: You will move closer to *Him— closer to the living Reality* —if you simply *think “I Am”* without associating this thought with any other object of thought or experience.

But you won’t really begin to know Him intimately until you *simply feel the “I Am” presence in the stillness of the present moment*—in the space between the out-breath and in-breath, for example, or in the silence between each heartbeat. **“Be still and know that *I Am God*” (Psalms 46:10).**

Let those who doubt *come and see!* *Come and see the one who told me everything I ever did!* (cf. John 4:29). Let those who are tempted to belittle or underestimate the profundity of this simple spiritual exercise consider the story of Naaman, in the Old Testament, who was healed of his leprosy as follows:

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the

name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy (II Kings 5:10-15, *NIV*).

Likewise— *if you would have life and have it more abundantly* (John 10:10) —don't turn away in a huff, but simply and humbly immerse yourself in *the "I Am" presence which is Christ-in-you, the hope of glory!* But don't stop at 7 times— or even *70 x 7* —but learn to *abide in Him and continue in his Word* (cf. John 15:4, 8:31). So doing, you will learn what it means to *pray without ceasing* and will become *a vessel . . . fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work* (cf. I Thessalonians 5:17; II Timothy 2:21).

Nothing that is said herein should be taken simply "on faith" (in the way that expression is ordinarily used or misused). *The "I Am" presence which IS the living Christ* is perfectly verifiable— it can be examined —*touched and handled*, as it were (cf. John 20:24-29; I John 1:1). **"Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalms 34:8).**

There is no need to accept any doctrine or dogma that seems false to you—or to give your unqualified assent to any proposition that seems doubtful. What is required, however, is that you exchange your will for God's will; exchange that which you imagine to be desirable for that which *IS*— that which *always IS* —*that which is the same yesterday, today, and forever!* (cf. Hebrews 13:8). If and when you really do so—and you can only do so *here and now* —the (super)natural response will be to bow before Him and say, "My Lord and my God" (cf. John 20:28).

All doubts will dissipate in this light and the knottiest of theological and philosophical conundrums will begin to fall away. Indeed, many (previously obscure) aspects of the tradition will become clear for the first time.

“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it” (Genesis 28:16).

Moreover, *this Reality— which IS the living Christ* —is accessible to all men, regardless of who they are and where they were born; regardless of what they may or may not believe about Jesus or the Bible. Once again: ***Whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely*** (cf. Revelation 22:17; John 7:37-38).

Whether you are a nominal “believer” or “unbeliever” is irrelevant at this point. The only question is whether or not you can step beyond that which you “think” or “believe” (or disbelieve) and simply and humbly *abide in the “I Am” presence which IS Christ-in-you*. A good point of entry into *the Way of Life* is to:

- *be silent and listen* (cf. Deuteronomy 27:9);
- *feel the “I Am” presence— always with you —between each breath you breathe* (cf. Matthew 28:20);
- *listen to the still small voice in the silence between each heart beat* (cf. I Kings 19:12; John 18:37b);
- *be still and know that “I Am” God* (Psalms 46:10);
- *open your heart and dine with Him* (cf. Revelation 3:20);
- *taste and see that the Lord is good* (Psalms 34:8);
- *trust God to work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13).

This does not mean that you will always be quiet or passive— quite the contrary. Sometimes you will *make a joyful noise unto the Lord* (cf. Psalm 98:4-6). Sometimes tremendous inspiration will well up within you as extraordinary things are accomplished in and through your life. Perhaps you will *declare boldly the mystery of the gospel* (cf. Ephesians 6:19-20). Perhaps you will live an apparently ordinary life in the strength and power of the Spirit. But *whatever you do, you will do*

it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men (Colossians 3:23, *KJV*). You will no longer be striving to achieve personal fulfilment in external accomplishments. Indeed, when such accomplishments do come about, you will no longer claim them as your own, knowing that *it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13). As such, any good works or extraordinary accomplishments in your life will come light as the (super)natural manifestation of the completeness and sufficiency that *IS Christ-in-you*. All that really *needs* to be done will be done—not in your own strength, but in the Spirit and the power of the Lord:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

There is no need, at this point, to engage in the fearful or frantic efforts of the world-weary soul:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Moreover, when these scriptures begin to ring true, that is a sure sign that an awakening is already underway. And as we become more intimately acquainted with *the “I Am” presence (which IS the living Word of God in our hearts)*, more and more of that which we read in the Bible begins to resonate in this way.

Chapter 5: The Written Word of God

As indicated earlier, the biblical texts cited herein are employed illustratively and inspirationally—they are not offered as “proof-texts.” While much of that which we read in the Bible may appear fanciful—the stuff of myth and legend—sincere skeptics and honest critics would do well to keep in mind that *a myth is a story that is true on the inside* whether or not it happens to be true on the outside.

So, at this point, without belittling *historical-critical method* or even, at times, *a hermeneutics of suspicion*—both of which have their place—we would do well to look for the *inner truth* of scripture and to keep an open mind with regard to what may or may not be true as far as the externals are concerned. *The written word* points to *the living Word*. And when it comes to *the living Word*, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

As such, for those who are *getting to know Jesus*—those who are becoming acquainted with *the “I Am” presence* which *IS the living Christ*—the truth of scripture comes alive. For wherever we happen to have been born and whatever we may *think* we know about the Bible or the historical Jesus, it soon becomes clear, through first-hand experience, that the *“I Am” presence* within us *IS*:

- our point of contact with the One in whom we *live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28);
- the living Word of God in our heart (Hebrews 4:12);
- the Divine Intelligence (or *logos*) through which our world is framed (John 1:1-3; cf. Hebrews 1:1-3);
- the image of God which *IS Christ-in-you, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:15, 27);
- the One who *IS* before Abraham was (John 8:58);
- *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14:6);
- the only *Way* to *The Father* (John 14:6);
- the Word (or *logos*) which is *made flesh* and which dwells *among us* (cf. John 1:14);
- *Emmanuel*—aka *God with us* (Matthew 1:23);
- our point of entry into the kingdom of heaven which is said to be *at hand; within us; among us* (Matthew 3:2; Luke 17:20-21);

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- the fountain of living water of which it is said that:
 - *whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely* (cf. Revelation 22:17; John 7:37-38);
 - *they that drink thereof shall never thirst again* (John 4:14; cf. John 7:37-38);
- the pearl of great price which is worth *everything* that we must give in exchange for it (Matthew 13:45-46; see also 16:24-26);
- the stone that the builder rejects, but which, in the end, becomes the head of the corner (Psalms 118:20-24; Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11).

And looking back on our earlier life, it seems obvious, in retrospect, that as a natural by-product of our birth and social development as human beings we grow up eating of *the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. As such:

- We are enthralled by a false image of ourselves.
 - This is often referred to as *the carnal mind* or *the mind of the flesh*.
 - It is sometimes referred to, in more modern parlance, as *the egoic mind*.
 - It is thrown into bold relief as soon as we recognize *the “I Am” presence* which it has long obscured and away from which it continues to tempt us.
- Identifying with this false self-image:
 - We are alienated from the image of God in us (which is our only point of contact with *the Good* which is absolute and eternal).
 - We are, at the same time, alienated from our fellow human beings (who are erroneously conceived of as *separate* and *other*).
 - We become preoccupied with the pursuit or avoidance of that which merely appears to us to be “good” or “evil” (based on our erroneous ideas of *self* and *other* in a world where our crude conceptions of time, space, and material existence are mistaken for *Reality*).

Deceived in this way by an erroneous conception of *ourselves* and *our good*, we become outcasts from of the garden of God and are cut off

from the tree of life. Lost in the mental and emotional labyrinth of the carnal mind and shackled by an ever increasing burden of guilt and sin, we struggle to redeem our past and secure our future, but to no avail:

“Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it” (Luke 17:33).

The agenda of the carnal mind is clearly a losing proposition—a dead-end street if ever there was one. But by the grace of God we are born again— *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible* (I Peter 1:23) —as we become aware of the “*I Am*” presence and begin drinking freely from the fountain of living water that flows just beneath the surface. This life-giving water is *always* available— and *only* available —*here and now!* And it is, indeed, *freely* available—*whosoever will may come!* All that is necessary is *to repent—to turn* from our time-bound, *mind-made* sense of self and *abide in Christ (the Divine presence* within us which is always the same—yesterday, today, and forever). In the process:

- We lay aside the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (cf. Genesis 2 and 3). Thus it is written:
 - judge not (Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37);
 - resist not evil (Matthew 5:39);
 - be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).
- We take up our cross— i.e. *the Cross of Christ* —which points the way back to the garden of God and the tree of life (cf. Revelation 2:7). This involves:
 - drinking that cup and being baptized with that baptism (Mark 10:38-39; Matthew 20:22-23; John 18:11);
 - presenting our bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1);
 - surrendering our own priorities and submitting to God's will for our life (Philippians 3:7-9; cf Luke 22:42).

By the grace of God:

- Our “old man” or “carnal mind” is (or begins to be) crucified with Christ and we are raised with him in newness of life (as described in Colossians 3, Galatians 5, II Corinthians 5, and Romans 6).

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- We put on the “new man” which is “created after God in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24, *KJV*).
- We *see through* the pretense and hypocrisy of the carnal mind [which is said to be *hostile to God* (Romans 8:7) but which becomes transparent in the light of Christ (cf. Ephesians 5:13-14; Hebrews 4:12)].
- We abide in Christ, *here and now*, instead of indulging in an inordinate preoccupation with the past and future. Among other things, this means:
 - *having the mind of Christ* (I Corinthians 2:16);
 - exchanging *the cares of this world for the pearl of great price* (Mark 4:19; Matthew 14:35);
 - taking no thought for tomorrow (Matthew 6:34);
 - learning in whatever state we are therewith to be content (Philippians 4:11-13);
 - enjoying the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Living in this way, we are citizens of the kingdom and begin to enjoy, even now, eternal life in Christ:

- We realize the kingdom of heaven within us (Luke 17:20-21).
- We truly experience the joy of our salvation (Psalm 51:12; cf. John 15:10-11; Philippians 4:4-7).
- Christ-like we can say:
 - My Father is Greater than I (John 14:28).
 - I and my Father are One (John 10:30).
 - My neighbor is myself (cf. Mark 12:31).
 - *We are members of one another* (Ephesians 4:24-25).
 - *What is done to the least of these is done unto me* (Matthew 25:31-45).

Indeed, living in this Way, *our joy is complete* (John 15:11) and we naturally begin to proclaim the *good news* of the kingdom (whether in verbal or nonverbal ways). “Come and see!”— we are tempted to shout —“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” (John 4:29).

Chapter 6: Living By Faith

“You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also” (Matthew 23:26).

“What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15).

“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. . . . And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:16-18, 24).

The ultimate concern of those who are born of God is *to abide in Christ*—to simply and humbly abide in *the “I Am” presence*, totally surrendered to the will of God; trusting God to *work in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13). Christ-like, they wisely say *not my will but yours be done* (cf. Luke 22:42). We see this same spirit of submission in the letters of St. Paul who at some point writes:

“I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

On another occasion, when he felt especially bedeviled by some “thorn in the flesh”, Paul asked the Lord three times to remove the thorn, but in the end accepted the Lord’s answer that, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:9). Whatever the turn of events, he knew that:

“All things work together for good to them that love the Lord, to them that are the called, according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

The “good” indicated in this verse does not refer to a more favorable *turn of events* or to some new set of material conditions specifically

tailored to the expectations of the carnal mind. But neither, for that matter, is it exclusively a reference to Paul's understanding of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. Rather, it also refers to the *present realization* of that which is both *eternal* and *at hand*—that which is intuited *here and now* by those who, having *the mind of Christ*, both live and walk in the Spirit.

Remember that the Spirit of God is described as *the earnest of our inheritance* (Ephesians 1:14) and is given to *guide us into all truth* (John 16:13). In a similar vein, Paul writes:

“as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. . . . we have the mind of Christ” (I Corinthians 2:9-12, 16).

And thus having *the mind of Christ*,

“we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (II Corinthians 4:16-18).

By faith, then, we dwell in the kingdom, *here and now*. This is a *living Reality* which, as indicated above, is *at hand; within us; among us* (Matthew 3:2; Luke 17:20-21). This is not a matter of *pretense* or *make believe*—*it is for real*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we are never tempted by our old way of seeing.

Keeping our eyes on the Lord

The point at which we recognize the “*I Am*” *presence within us TO BE the living Christ* and begin to learn what it means to *abide in Him* is an occasion of great joy. It is the first step in a process through which *self-consciousness* (i.e. the carnal mind or egoic mind) begins to decrease, giving way to *Christ-consciousness* (i.e. the mind of Christ *in us*) which begins to increase. The end of this process, as far as this life is concerned, is to be *crucified with Christ* and to *walk with him in newness of life* (cf. Romans 6). In Galatians, Paul writes:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:19-20).

Ideally, the time will come when we simply cease trying to tinker with God’s plan for our lives, our carnal mind having been effectively crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). But why put it off? Why do we not submit wholly to *His will, here and now*? Elaborating on the themes of *submission* and *contentment*, touched on earlier, *Paul* writes:

“I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:12-13).

At first, however, it is common to find oneself alternating (more or less frequently) between the carnal mind and the mind of Christ—a kind of oscillation between the perspective of the flesh and the perspective of the Spirit. For in spite of (and perhaps even because of) our new found *joy*, it is *tempting* to begin *imagining a future* in which all will go smoothly—all according to “our” expectations. What we fail to appreciate is that by imagining our future in this way, we are forgetting that *the Way of life* is also *the way of the cross*. And by lapsing once again into that mode of thinking which is typical of the carnal mind—imagining ourselves to be separate from the body of Christ as a whole; thinking, once again, in terms of *our good* and *our evil*; attempting again to secure *our life* and *our future well-being* in a manner

unbefitting of a child of God —we temporarily *lay aside the cross*, so to speak, and place our hope, once again, in fortune and circumstance as we fantasize about this or that *turn of events* that we *think* would be more to our liking. From this *carnal* or *egoic* standpoint, it is inevitable that the apparent trajectory of our life, as it seems to be unfolding in space and time, will come into conflict with one or more of our *preferences*—i.e. with our *personal* desires or expectations with respect to the future (conceived of in isolation from our place in the body of Christ and God’s will for our life). As such, it is inevitable that we will be tempted, once again, to despair. Indeed, at times like these, we can compare ourselves to Peter who— stepping away from the relative security of his boat —walks out on the water toward Jesus:

“Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’ And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’ ” (Matthew 14:29-32).

Like Peter in this gospel story, we take our eyes off the Lord— turning away from *the living presence* which IS *Christ in us* —and become preoccupied, instead, with the swirling of the wind and waves around us. Perhaps we become obsessed with maintaining complete control over other people in our lives; perhaps we are attempting to anticipate every possible contingency before we trust the Lord’s leading in our circumstances; perhaps we have become consumed, once again with accumulating riches or worldly honors; or perhaps— *God forbid!* —we are attempting yet again to achieve (what we imagine to be) spiritual goals through the strength of the flesh. Whatever the case may be, the point is that we tend to forget, at times, the futility of looking to anyone (or anything) other than Christ. We fail to remember the admonition of the Psalmist:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

For, indeed, by trusting and abiding in *His living presence— here and now* —we have access to the water of life itself:

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

And as we drink from this eternal spring, which is *the living Word of God in us*, we become attuned to a level of intelligence which is both deeper and higher and in every respect more profound than “our own insight” (i.e. the *cleverness* of the carnal mind). Indeed, as we begin to receive that anointing of the Spirit that *guides us into all truth* (John 16:13), we learn to interact with others as equals, forging relationships founded on mutual respect and consideration, instead of manipulation or coercion. Moreover, in *the awareness of Divine presence* which is characteristic of *the mind of Christ*, we tend to be intuitively and optimally aware of our circumstances without becoming fearful and obsessive about things which might possibly go wrong. And insofar as the world continues to appear threatening, we are prepared to *take up our cross* and embrace God’s will for our lives, whatever the turn of events. Over time, we learn that there is nothing to be gained by taking our eyes off the Lord so as to attend to the wind and waves around us; nothing to be gained by depending on our own efforts instead of the power of the Spirit that is ours through faith in Christ.

Additional Examples of Living by Faith

Part of the beauty of the Judeo-Christian scriptures is that the heroes of faith described therein are as instructive in their failures and shortcomings as they are in their successes. Peter is certainly a case in point, since the gospels record not only his tremendous faith and love for the Lord, but also his doubt and his denial. We will revisit the life of Peter when, in the Book of Acts, we notice his momentary reluctance to trust the leading of the Lord when his traditional allegiance to Jewish dietary law is challenged. But first, let us consider the reluctant obedience of the prophet Jonah and, then, the way in which Saul of Tarsus *kicked against the goads*.

Jonah: Reluctant Obedience

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.’ But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:1-3a).

The prophet Jonah provides another good example— or, rather, a *counterexample* —of what it means to live by faith. When the Lord commands him to go to Nineveh, he immediately begins to question and calculate, worrying about all the possible consequences of his actions and second guessing the Lord in his own mind (Jonah 4:2). He quickly decides *not* to obey the Lord, *attempting* instead *to flee from His presence* by boarding a ship bound for Tarshish:

“He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3b).

You can run, as the saying goes, *but you cannot hide*. The ship that he is on encounters severe storms and the cargo is jettisoned in an attempt to save the ship and passengers (1:4-6). Shipwreck is narrowly avoided, but only after Jonah explains himself to his comrades and persuades them to throw *him* overboard, as well (1:7-16). He is then swallowed by *a great fish* and, after calling upon the Lord from within its belly, is spit back up onto dry land. (1:17 - 2:10).

One lesson to be gleaned from this story is that much of what we experience as external adversity actually reflects our own inner conflicts—often our own stubborn refusal to submit to the will of God for our life. Jonah’s decision to go to Tarshish was a desperate attempt to evade both his duty and his destiny; to live in deference to his *fears* instead of his *faith*; to substitute his shortsighted *preferences* for God’s *perfect will*. In other words, this was a desperate attempt on the part of Jonah to circumvent God’s clear leading in his life. Alas, at the end of the story, Jonah remains very troubled, reluctantly obeying God, to be sure, but still not trusting him wholly (3:10 - 4:8).

In contrast to the *counterexample* provided by life of Jonah, consider the prophet Isaiah’s description of the life of faith—a description which

is echoed, later, in Jesus' story of *the wise man who built his house upon the rock*:

“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace— in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock.” (Isaiah 26:3-4).

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock” (Matthew 7:24-25).

These verses also invite comparison to *the peace of Jesus* described in the fourth gospel:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Unlike Jonah, those who “trust in the Lord”— those who “hear His words” and “act on them” —will circumvent unnecessary conflict and adversity while at the same time retaining a foothold in *His perfect peace*, whatever the turn of events. This is the same peace that is described by St. Paul as *the peace which surpasses all understanding*:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

In the words of the old hymn, “Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in a time of storm.” However, that rock is not accessible through mere *belief*, but is only to be found through an *authentic, living faith in the living Word of God*—i.e. *by trusting in and relying on the “I Am” presence which IS Christ-in-you*.

Indeed, as we shall see, not only is that rock not accessible through mere belief, sometimes our attachment to personal and traditional beliefs can prove to be a positive hindrance.

Saul of Tarsus: *Kicking Against the Goads*

Prior to his conversion, the apostle Paul— then known as *Saul of Tarsus* —was a Pharisee who was extremely zealous in his beliefs and who was so *furiously enraged* at those who trusted in Jesus that he persecuted them in every way imaginable. The following is a *first person account* of his activities as dramatized in the book of Acts:

“I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. . . . Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:5, 9-11).

His beliefs were very orthodox and, quite clearly, he thought that by persecuting Christians in this way he was offering service to God (cf. John 16:2). But, as it turns out, he was *wrong at the top of his voice*. His beliefs, together with his righteous indignation, were, in fact, hindering him from discerning God’s will (cf. Romans 12:2). Like Jonah— only more so —he was working at cross purposes with God. And like Jonah, he had a rendezvous with destiny:

“With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road . . . I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’ ” (Acts 26: 12-15).

Thus, while *Saul of Tarsus* was very proud of his position and very confident in his beliefs, he did not realize that his obsession with these things was contrary to *the living Word of God*. Indeed, he *received mercy*, it is later said, *because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief* (I Timothy 1:13). That mercy came, on the road to Damascus, when he came to know and trust *the living Christ*. He received *an attitude adjustment*, at that point, which not only changed his life, but also changed the course of history:

“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith” (Philippians 3:4-9).

We have seen, then, that *Saul of Tarsus* was very confident in the flesh. His *egoic mind*, as we have referred to it, was very much invested in both his identity as a Pharisee and in his efforts to persecute the fledgling Church. On the road to Damascus, however, he learned that *it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless* (cf. John 6:63; II Corinthians 3:3-6). From that point forward he is known as *the apostle Paul*.

Unlike the prophet Jonah, the apostle Paul provides an example of whole hearted obedience to the Lord—not in his own strength, but in the strength and power of the Spirit. But this required that he be willing, when necessary, to rethink his personal and traditional beliefs as he grew in grace and knowledge of the truth. As we shall see, the apostle Peter—who got to know Jesus very early on—was also called upon to rethink certain aspects of his traditional orientation.

Peter: *What God Has Made Clean...*

Peter's reaction to the vision of the unclean animals, as reported in the book of Acts, also provides an example of the way in which the *carnal mind* (or *unsurrendered ego*) may assert itself— or reassert itself —by way of our attachment to various personal and/or traditional beliefs. For, occasionally, such beliefs will be challenged by the clear leading of the Lord. In Peter's case, it happened like this:

“About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of fourfooted creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.’ The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane’ ” (Acts 10:9-15).

Similarly, as we continue to live— faithfully and steadfast —*in the presence of the Lord*, we may find that our lives begin to unfold in directions that seem to conflict with some of our personal and/or traditional preconceptions as to what is true or good or right or appropriate. And like Peter— who was somewhat notorious in this regard —we may be tempted to say NO to the Lord, imagining that our own preconceptions (or the preconceptions of those around us) should take precedence over His clear leading in our lives. Eventually, however, we learn to *test the spirits to see whether they are from God* (I John 4:1). And as we continue to sense that a new direction *really is* in order, we know better than to let the inertia of the past quench the leading of the Spirit, *here and now*.

NOTE: The intention, here, is not to discuss any particular beliefs or behaviors or possible courses of action that might be contemplated by an individual Christian OR to address any particular vision for social reform or cultural renewal that may be on the agenda of this or that Christian community. The intention, rather, is to encourage all of us, individually and collectively, *to abide— faithfully and steadfast —in the presence of the Lord*, trusting Him to *work in us both to will and to do of his good*

pleasure, without imagining that our personal or traditional beliefs or values should never be called into question; and without imagining that God's leading in the lives of other human beings and other human communities will always appear perfectly in sync with his leading in our own life or with our own preconceived notions about how things *ought to be*. Keep in mind the words of the Psalmist:

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved” (Psalm 127:1-2; cf Acts 5:38-39).

And, as indicated above, remember this Proverb:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Moreover, regardless of how the Lord seems to be leading us, in our own lives— or the vision of the future that we feel is most appropriate for our own Christian community (or for our nation or, for that matter, the world) —we must realize that there has always been a diversity of opinions in the body of Christ and probably will be for the foreseeable future. In addition, it is not given to one member to comprehend with complete clarity the purpose and function of all the others. It is also worth noting the scriptural admonition that we be considerate of others— and gentle with them — whether they are weaker and may be offended by our liberty (I Corinthians 8; cf. Romans 14) or whether they have gone astray, perhaps, and need to be *restored in the spirit of meekness* (Galatians 6). In any event, their accountability— and ours —is ultimately to the Lord. Rather than judging one another harshly, let us encourage one another to remain *present with the LORD, abiding in Him as he abides in us* (John 15:3-5). Insofar as we are able, let us give one another the benefit of the doubt as we continue to walk in the light that is given to us. From within *His presence*, that which needs to be done IS done. And by virtue of *His peace*, we can, together, sort through the topsy-turvy world of our family, community, and political relationships, responding *in love* to every challenge that presents itself while continuing to live (unconditionally) in the presence of God— *here and now* —whatever the turn of events (cf. Romans 12:4-18).

Chapter 7: Let Us Walk in the Spirit

“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts” (James 4:1-2).

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23).

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

In contrast to *the perfect peace and rest* which is characteristic of *the “I Am” presence within us*, the carnal mind— aka *the egoic mind* —is constantly lost in thought and in time; scheming and calculating; looking to redeem the past and secure the future; seeking to complete itself though some anticipated but perpetually elusive set of circumstances or turn of events. This brings to mind the foolish man who built his house upon the sand:

“And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (Matthew 7:26-27).

It is worth noting that those whose lives are dominated by the carnal mind are not necessarily voluptuaries, incessantly pursuing their favorite avenues of sensual indulgence—quite the contrary! They may, in fact, be very religious and may succeed, after a fashion, *at making clean the outside of the cup*, but like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, they are like *whitewashed tombs* which, within, are *full of the bones of the dead and all kinds of filth* (Matthew 23:25-28).

In the final analysis, then, those actions which are initiated or pursued solely from the standpoint of the carnal mind— whether putatively “sinful” or apparently “holy” —can be reduced to “self-will.”

Uninformed by *the mind of Christ*, such actions can only serve to perpetuate our alienation from *the Garden of God* and *the Tree of Life* (if we have yet to recognize the image of God in us) OR to slow our spiritual growth or *sanctification* (if we are already aware of His *living presence* in our lives). *Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin* (Romans 14:23).

Fortunately, it is a universal law that we reap what we sow. To the extent that our lives are dominated by the carnal mind, our actions and attitudes generate suffering—both individually and collectively. By the grace of God, however— as that suffering becomes more and more intense —we become willing to *take up our cross and follow Christ*. So doing, *the Way of life* opens up before us:

- Whereas, before, we sought personal fulfillment in the pursuit of money, fame, and sensual pleasures;
- Or, for a time, perhaps, we tried to become righteous or spiritual by dint of our own efforts, in deference to some (merely abstract) ideal;
- We are now ready to exchange our will for God’s will, trusting God to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.
- We no longer play tug of war with our appetites and inclinations, realizing that this is a battle that can’t be won (cf. Romans 7).
- Nor do we engage in the hypocrisy of the legalist who is content to rest in ritual observances or self-righteous acts to which he or she is already habituated and takes personal pride in (cf. Matthew 23:23-27).
- Rather, we learn to simply observe the vanity of the carnal mind in the light of that spiritual awareness or “*I Am*” presence which is the mind of Christ (cf. “confession” and “repentance”).
- Dwelling in that light, *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and of death* (Romans 8:2).
- *Being found in Christ*, we are righteous—holy and without blame. For *everything exposed to the light becomes visible* and *everything that becomes visible is light* (Ephesians 5:13-14).
- Elements of the carnal mind may persist, but over time we are *sanctified*— are made “perfect” or “mature” in the faith —as we continue to *abide in Christ*.
- Though our outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day (II Corinthians 4:16).

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- The law of love remains in effect (John 13:34-35; I Corinthians 13).
- The fruit of the spirit is manifest in our lives (Galatians 5:22-26).

Insofar as we live and walk in the Spirit, it goes without saying that we will promote Christ-centered ideals within our communities and encourage one another— by precept and example —to cultivate virtue in our lives. Nevertheless, we must understand that our ideals cannot become actual— our virtue cannot begin to be perfected —until our self-will is substantially surrendered and the fruit of the Spirit is generated from the inside out. The particular shape this will take, in terms of behaviors and lifestyles can vary widely between individuals (according to their education, temperament, and circumstances) and between communities (depending on the particular culture and subcultures involved). But what is undeniable is the healing power and unconditional love that is to be found in *the “I Am” presence which IS the living Christ.*



“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life ’” (John 8:12).

Afterword: I Am With You Always

“I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh” (I Corinthians 3:1-3).

“the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account” (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Enough has been said—perhaps too much! Let us avoid, in any event, projecting various elements of this mode of discourse into an imaginary world and an imaginary future in such a way that we miss *the Reality*—*miss **this Reality** —the eternal Realty* which is accessible **here and now** through **the mind of Christ**. This is not merely a future hope but a present realization of unlimited potential (cf. Ephesians 3:16-19).

Whatever the future holds, *we have eternal life—here and now*. All that separates us from *the joy of our salvation* is a counterfeit reality—an imaginary projection of the carnal mind which fabricates a complex illusion through which we are impoverished, imprisoned, blinded, and oppressed. Jesus proclaims deliverance from this illusion:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Although the *carnal mind* rebels at the prospect, we can neither *think* our way to heaven nor *work* our way to heaven. Nor is there any call for us to sacrifice today in our desperate desire for (or fear of) a tomorrow which never comes. Rather, we are called upon to sacrifice our obsessive preoccupation with both the past and the future in deference to *the day of salvation* which is always *here and now*:

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- *Take no thought for tomorrow . . .* (Matthew 6:34).
- *Now is the acceptable time . . . now is the day of salvation* (II Corinthians 6:2).
- *Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God* (II Corinthians 5:16-18, NKJV).

By abiding in the “I Am” presence, we are storing up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:20; cf. Luke 10:39-42). Rather than merely believing in Jesus, we know and trust the living Christ and are, in a very real sense, present with the Lord, here and now!

The limitations of *mere belief*— of merely giving *mental assent* to *doctrines* and *dogmas* —are clear enough. Such beliefs can never fully prepare us to face the storms and temptations of life. They offer a conceptual construct which, if mistaken for *Reality*, is yet another example of a house that is built upon the sand (cf. Matthew 7:26-27). While doctrinal teachings and dogmatic traditions can convey a profound wisdom (insofar as they point to *the Reality that IS Christ-in-you*), they can also conceal as much or more than they reveal. The “map” is not the territory and the word “water” will never quench our thirst. Moreover, when more emphasis is placed on *believing the Bible* or *the creed* than is placed on *recognizing and honoring the living Christ*, the result is a sectarian *belief* that reflects a spirit of conformity (achieved through indoctrination and conditioning) rather than an *authentic, living faith in the living Word of God*. As such, it tends to breed a sense of superiority and self-righteousness among the so-called *faithful* and a spirit of intolerance toward those who *think* or *believe* otherwise.

In contrast, *the “I Am” presence*— *which IS Christ-in-you* —can and does withstand the storms of life. *How firm a foundation!* Resting in this *living presence*, we transcend the perspective of the *egoic mind* (even if it persists, on some level, and continues to reassert itself from time to time). Moreover, as the Spirit *guides us into all truth* (John 16:13), we lose our defensiveness in the face of ideas or circumstances which may occasionally call into question our personal beliefs or challenge our traditional points of view. For whatever we may *think* and whatever *the turn of events*, *the living Christ IS* (and remains) *the*

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same— *yesterday, today, and forever* —and is always accessible *here and now*. *Whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely*. The requirements never change. They are very simple and very profound—very difficult and very easy. It is difficult, initially, to discern this *road less traveled* and to turn away from the way of the multitude:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

But when we are continuously struggling in the mental and emotional labyrinth of the carnal mind— consumed by *what if's* and *if only's* — we are NOT on the narrow way. The difficult thing is to *let go* of those struggles and to simply and humbly *abide in the “I Am” presence which is Christ-in-us*. When, however, by the grace of God, we begin to *recognize and abide* in this *living presence*, we also begin to *see through* the carnal mind which becomes transparent in the light of Christ. At that point, we can simply observe such struggles as they play themselves out within *that pristine awareness which IS the mind of Christ*. And at that point *the Way* becomes easy:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

When the distinction between these two roads is clearly realized, we find ourselves less and less willing to waste time and energy on *the way that leads to destruction*. Indeed, we become more than willing to exchange everything which that road *seems to offer*, for *the pearl of great price*, which is *Christ-in-us*:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46).

This does not mean that life will be pain free or that we will never be tempted to despair. *The Way of life* will continue to be *the way of the cross* and (for *at least* as long as any trace of the carnal mind remains) every new plateau will give way, eventually, to new challenges. But through it all, *we have an anchor*—the “*I Am*” presence which *IS the living Christ*.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39; cf. Psalm 139).

In the final analysis, then, to really *live by faith* is to *trust in* and *rely on* the “*I Am*” presence which *IS Christ-in-you*. But where to begin? What to do? As indicated above, *the proof of the pudding is in the eating!* ***Learn to feel the “I Am” presence in the stillness of the present moment***—in the space between the out-breath and inbreath, for example, or in the silence between each heartbeat:

- *Be silent and listen* (cf. Deuteronomy 27:9).
- *Be still and know that “I Am” God* (Psalms 46:10).
- *Open your heart and dine with Him* (cf. Revelation 3:20).
- *Taste and see that the Lord is good* (Psalms 34:8).
- *Abide in Him as He abides in you* (John 15:4-5).
- *Pray without ceasing* (I Thessalonians 5:17).
- *Trust God to work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13).

And whatever the turn of events, don’t forget:

I Am with you always...

Reading the Bible in the 21st Century

Language and culture change over time and the rate of change has been accelerating tremendously in the modern (and so-called *post-modern*) age. As such, it is difficult enough to retain a good sense of the literal meaning of these ancient texts, much less to really stay connected to them ***in Spirit and in Truth***. Clearly, some set of hermeneutical principles (or general interpretive framework) is required if we are to begin to make sense of the Bible in the 21st century. And while most people absorb some such set of principles as they attend church— or from materials that they read in conjunction with their personal bible study —all too often, such principles emphasize doctrinal and dogmatic “belief” in a way that does not always facilitate ***living faith in the living Word of God***. As such, for those who feel *stuck* in their current understanding— for those who feel a pressing need to *grow in grace and knowledge of the truth* —below are some additional interpretive guidelines to consider. Chances are these five principles will enhance your understanding of scripture even as they facilitate the fulfilment of the two greatest commandments in your life: 1) Love God with all your heart, and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. Moreover, these are the same guidelines that are operating (both implicitly and explicitly) in ***Getting to Know Jesus in the 21st Century***. So as you read this little book and continue with your personal study of the scriptures, you will have ample opportunity to test their validity. The five principles are as follows—visit *Yeshua21.Com* for additional discussion of each:

- 1. The Written Word Points to the Living Word***
- 2. The “I Am” Presence Within Us IS the Living Christ.***
- 3. “Faith” or “Belief” ≈ Trust and Reliance***
- 4. The Carnal Mind ≈ The Egoic Mind***
- 5. The Cross of Christ is Our Cross***