

REVELATIONAL ROAD MAP



TO THE CROSS

If someone wants to be religious, or express their faith in some way, then he must make a very important choice concerning the validation of his faith. How one either validates or expresses his faith determines if one seeks to be the center of reference to his own religiosity, or to reflect his faith in response to the written word of God. Therefore, one must seriously determine whether his or her faith is based on one of the following two options:

1. One can base his or her faith, and the expression thereof, on **objective truth**, that is, the word of God.
2. One can base his or her faith on the meritorious performance of religious ceremonies or emotional experiences.

Because of the lack of knowledge of what the Bible teaches, the overwhelming majority of people of faith today have chosen to base their faith on the second option. Therefore, since we too often focus on ourselves – there is a little narcissism in each of us – and our desire to be free to make our own choices, it is quite difficult for some to allow any authority outside themselves to be the foundation upon which they would base their faith. This was the “road map” that Israel took, which

road map led them away from God and into the apostasy of idolatry. It eventually ended them up as a people into the captivity of unbelieving nations.

The people of Israel went astray because they chose the preceding second option, that is, to follow after their own religious inventions that they determined for themselves. In following down this road, they first forgot what their “Bible” said, and then they simply constructed a religiosity after their own desires to replace that which they forgot. This was the historical context in which the following judgment was made by God:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of the word of God], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (See Hs 4:6).

In order to bring His people back to the authority of His word, Jeremiah confessed, “*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. **It is not in man who walks to direct his steps***” (Jr 10:23; see Pv 16:1; 20:24). This is an axiomatic truth – it is self-evident – that has been demonstrated many times throughout history.

In their ignorance of the word of God, religious people will always seek to subject themselves to themselves in order to create a religion after their own desires. **This is subjective religiosity.** For this reason, almost all religions today are subjective in the core of their nature and the behavior of the adherents in their “worship.” This is exactly what Paul described in Colossians 2:22,23 in reference to those religions that existed in the first century:

All these concern things that perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men. These things have indeed

*a show of wisdom in **self-made religion** and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh.*

When people forsake the word of God as their final authority in all matters of faith, they will often remain religious, but will create a religion after their own traditions or man-made religious rites and rituals, if not some system of meritorious self-sanctifying good works.

Chapter 1

The Spirit Of Subjectivism

Experiential religiosity is based on subjectivism. Experiential refers to behavior that originates from within the thinking and emotions of the individual. **Subjectivism is the teaching that one comes to God on the basis of his own conditions**, or what he or she personally feels within one's heart or experiences as a part of his or her religiosity. The subjectivist thus subjects himself to himself, and then asks God to accept his own emotional experiences in order to be validated righteous (See Rm 10:1-3).

Whatever is determined to be right in one's own eyes is the standard by which the subjective religionist seeks to please God. Subjective religiosity, therefore, is the teaching that one's salvation, and continued validation of faith, **is based upon what one feels, regardless of any Bible authority that would judge the individual's expression of faith.** The subjective person would say, "I know what I believe because of what I feel." Or, "I know that God is leading me because of what I experience in my life." Or, "It feels right, therefore, it must be right."

The authority of the Bible in matters of faith almost always comes in second place to the subjective emotional authority of the subjectivist.

A. Contrast between the subjectivist and objectivist:

Subjectivism can be better understood by comparing it to objectivism. Objective faith means that one's faith is based on the foundation of revelation from God. The objective person of faith today affirms that his faith is based on what God has revealed through His word, the Bible. Therefore, the faith of the objectivist **is based on something outside himself.** The objectivist is not personally the validation for his own faith.

The basis of objectivist's faith is concrete, and thus outside the subjectivity of his or her own feelings. This is the principle of Romans 10:17: ***"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."*** The faith of the objectivist is based on what he objectively reads in the Bible, and subsequent response in obedience from what he or she reads (See Jn 20:30,31).

There is a vital contrast between subjectivism and objectivism: The subjectivist would say that he believes because of what he feels or experiences in his life. The objectivist would say that he believes because of what God has revealed through His word. The subjectivist is directed by his personal experiences or inner feelings. The objectivist is directed by what is communicated to him through the hearing of the word of God. **The subjectivist is thus his own authority in spiritual matters of faith, whereas the objectivist stands on the authority of the word of God.** The objectivist allows the word of God to proclaim when he is saved. The subjectivist, on the other hand, self-proclaims his own salvation that he assumes he received because of some inner emotional experience or utterance of some uncontrollable jargon that may have proceeded from his or her mouth.

The subjectivist is led by the word of God only when it conforms to his own emotional experiences. His experiential religiosity, therefore, is based on himself as the final authority

in matters of faith. The objectivist, on the other hand, maintains faith on the basis of what God says specifically in His word. The problem with the subjectivist, therefore, is that his salvation is based on his own personal experiences and self-proclaimed validation of his faith. In fact, the experiential subjectivist will often reject the conditions for salvation that are objectively revealed in the Bible in order to follow his own feelings. He will do so in order to cling to his own established creed of personal experiences, rather than validating his faith with the word of God.

Those who live subjectively in reference to their faith respect the Bible, but the Bible is usually not the final authority or validation of their faith.

B. Objective responses:

The objectivist functions in another paradigm than the subjectivist. The objectivist will have confidence in his salvation only because he can put his finger on the commands of God that he has obeyed, and subsequently, leads him to the forgiveness of his sins (See At 2:38; 22:16). This is not legalistic obedience. It is a response to the grace of God that was revealed through the word of God. When the objectivist reads in his Bible about the incarnational suffering of the Son of God, he is objectively moved to respond to what he reads.

Those who live objectively in their faith must be cautious about not allowing their emotions to be expressed.

C. Subjective behavior:

Subjectivism was a special problem with the nation of Israel during the days of the judges (See Jg 17:6). In forgetting the commandments of God, the Israelites subjected themselves to their own religious desires, and thus, **they did that which was right in their own eyes**. Their subjective religiosity thus led them away from God by following after their own misguided religiosity. The same happens today. Whenever

religious people become subjective in their own self-generated responses outside the authority of the word of God, they, as Israel, are always on their way away from God.

Simply because something emotionally feels right in the expression of our faith does not mean that it is right according to the word of God.

D. Subjective conclusions:

Having no controlling standard of faith, subjectivism is a religious behavior wherein everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. The period of the judges was a time when the people of God had forgotten the law of God. And when religious people become ignorant of their Bibles, they will become a standard of law unto themselves. This is subjectivism.

Subjective religiosity is a spiral down into idolatry wherein people create religious beliefs and behavior after their own desires. Religious rules are based on subjective conclusions. It is for this reason that subjective religiosity is spiritual anarchy against the word of God. The religious subjectivist always moves away from the God of the Bible because he has rejected the only authority upon which our faith must be founded.

We must never forget that when people of faith forget what the Bible teaches on any matter of faith, then they are moving out on their own. They will often remain religious, but their religiosity is simply an expression of a religion that is foreign to God. And thus, they are taking a road map to eternal doom because they have denied the very essentials of God's gospel road map into eternal glory (2 Th 1:6-9).

A religious cult is identified by the fact that the adherents in the cult live subjective lives.

Chapter 2

Religious Subjectivism

Some of the Achaians – those to whom the Corinthian letters were directed (2 Co 1:1) – were caught up in subjective religiosity. They were thus moving away from God. If it were not for the corrective letters of Paul, and his future visit after the writing of the letters, they would have moved right on into religion that was no better than the temple religion from which they were converted. As a result of their return to the behavior of temple worship, the disciples throughout Achaia were divided among themselves. They divided between the authority of God that came through the apostle Paul and the religionists in the province who could not get themselves away from idolatrous temple behavior, specifically the idolatrous temple worship in the city of Corinth.

When one believes that his or her emotional subjective feelings determine that which is right, then he or she can be assured that he or she is moving away from God, simply because the word of God has little influence in one's life.

A. Subjectivism assumes division:

Paul sought to correct those throughout Achaia who were caught up in the confusion of subjective religiosity. He did so in order to produce the unity for which the church is to be known (See Jn 13:34,35). In the context of his corrections, therefore, we must always understand that **confusion and division will always prevail between subjective and objective minded members.** These two spiritual views of authority cannot reside together in unity. The reason for this is quite simple. The subjectivist assumes that his personal experiences validate his faith, whereas the objectivist submits all this personal experiences to the word of God. In all matters of faith, and the behavior therefore, must be based on the word of God.

In order to correct the Achaian division, Paul exhorted that the members throughout the province of Achaia “*all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions*” (1 Co 1:10). This was an imperative command, and thus, we must understand, especially the subjectivist, **that our emotional behavior is to be brought under the control of our own self-will. Therefore, unity cannot be based on the members comparing their experiences with one another, even though their experiences, in the case of the Achaians, were in their exercising of the spiritual gifts** (See 2 Co 10:12). On the contrary, unity can be established only on an objective and obedient response to the revelation of God. No disciple, therefore, has a right to exalt his or her personal experiences over the experiences of fellow disciples. Unity can happen only when we submit to one another on the foundation of the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended and reigning Son of God (the gospel), regardless of our personal experiences.

Unity cannot prevail when members of the body subjectively validate the work of God in their lives according to their experiences.

B. Subjectivism challenged and corrected:

In order to correct the disunity among the disciples throughout the province of Achaia, Paul first challenged the subjective experientialists of the church: “*If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Co 14:37). This is the very foundation upon which objective faith and unity must be established. It is simply senseless to compare emotional experiences between parties in order to determine who is right on any matter of contention. Unless the word of God is accepted as the final authority in all matters of faith, there can be no unity between subjectivists and objectivists.

The experientialists in Achaia needed to submit objectively

to the commandments of the Lord that were revealed through Paul. Peter stated the same principle: *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pt 4:11).

Experiential subjectivists need to be cautious about using their experiences as the validation of their faith, and by doing such, exalt themselves above others. They need to be more concerned about listening to and affirming the oracles of God. Instead of speaking where their experiences have led them, they should speak the oracles of God in order to be led back to God.

Though each member of the body may have different emotional experiences, there can be no unity in the body unless all the members agree that the word of God will be the final authority for establishing unity.

C. Disunity is inherent in subjectivism:

Subjectivism will destroy unity. When we forsake the “oracles of God” as the final standard for unity and the authority for our faith, then there is no standard for fellowship other than the feelings and experiences of individual members. Members may accept one another’s experiences, but when disagreements occur over personalities and methods, doctrinal agreement over fundamentals is usually not strong enough to guard the church from division.

When our personal experiences are elevated above the authority of the word of God, it is very difficult for individuals to come to some sort of equal fellowship that is based on personal experiences. The experientialist wants to judge the objectivist of being “without the Spirit,” or just indifferent to the “moving of the Spirit. Taken completely out of its historical context, one of the favorite judgments the subjectivist often makes is, “Do not quench the Spirit.”

When two people who disagree on a matter and both say, “God told me,” then there can be no unity unless someone confesses up that they lied about what God told them. If there is to be unity among the two, then both must conclude that God told one of them the wrong thing. If we were to exercise any sense in this matter, both of the “God-spoken-to” individuals must remember that God directly tells no one today what He desires. He has already done all His “telling” through the written word of God. If one wants to be “told what God wants,” then it is time to open one’s Bible and read.

The Achaians needed to remember that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit that they prized so highly, and experienced in their personal lives, **would soon pass away**. Specifically, their experiences with the gifts of prophecy and tongues would pass away once the complete word of God was written and distributed throughout the church. Add to this the fact that the two gifts over which they often competed with one another in the assemblies were not considered the greater gifts. There was a gift that was far greater.

Their exercising of the gifts with an unloving spirit resulted in their being divided as they exalted one over another. In other words, their personal experiences in administering the gifts became a point of division because of their competitive, and thus, unloving attitudes. Their unloving behavior was revealed in the fact that some claimed that their gift was more important than the other gifts (See 1 Co 12:4-26).

Those who experienced the miraculous gifts, needed to remember that these gifts, by which they were administering with a competitive manner, would eventually pass away.

D. The more excellent way:

In the midst of his discussion concerning the gifts of prophecy and languages, Paul wrote, “*But earnestly desire the greater*

gifts. *And yet I show to you a more excellent way*” (1 Co 12:31). The more excellent way would be the foundation upon which the disciples of Jesus are based and blessed, which way would continue with them for eternity (See Jn 13:34,35). Therefore, they must not forget that *“the same Spirit works all these things [the gifts], distributing [the gifts] to everyone individually as He wills”* (1 Co 12:11).

In the function of their individual gifts, the “more excellent way” would solve their divisiveness surrounding, specifically, their experience with prophecies (inspired teaching) and languages. Paul continued in 1 Corinthians 13 – right between his instructions on the gifts in chapters 12 and 14 – that love is the foundation upon which all the gifts are based, and thus, unity maintained. When the miraculous gifts passed away, the “more excellent way” of love would continue. Therefore, they should not sacrifice their unity by disputing concerning that which will eventually pass away. The subjectivists should pay close attention to these matters.

Though one might take pride in the ministry of his special gift from the Holy Spirit, he needed to remember in the experience of his gift that the miraculous gifts would eventually pass away. Only love would continue.

E. Passing of the miraculous gifts:

Paul reminded those who were puffed up in the ministry of their gifts that the gifts would soon pass: *“But when that which is complete has come, then that which is in part [the gifts] will be done away”* (1 Co 13:10). The miraculous gifts were only “in part,” that is, through them only a part of the complete revelation of the word of God was being revealed.

At the time of Paul’s writing, the inspired letters were in the process of being written. So that which was “complete” (or, perfect) was greater because it was not based on the per-

formance of any individual. The gifts were only a function through which teaching and direction initially came to the early church. But the final teaching and direction itself would come through written letters that were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16).

The miraculous gifts were “in part” because of the whole that would eventually come, which whole would be perfect.

F. The completion:

Paul concluded chapter 13 by stating, “*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three. But the greatest of these is love*” (1 Co 13:13). Notice that the phrase “and now” assumes the fact that the “complete” had not yet come at the time he was writing an inspired letter. Reference to the “complete” could not be heaven, for heaven at the time of writing was far in the future. Reference must be to the complete revelation of the truth that Jesus had personally promised to the apostles, which “completeness” would continue after the passing of the gifts, though the “completeness” was being carried out at the time Paul wrote.

The very letter of 1 Corinthians was part of this complete fulfillment of the truth that Jesus promised the apostles (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). However, the complete revelation of the truth of the gospel had been finalized by the time Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians. However, all truth of the New Testament was still in the process of being written. This final account of the truth would be the foundation upon which they could be united, for it is through this written truth **that we objectively stand on the revealed gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(We must not misunderstand what Paul was saying. The gospel had already been revealed at the time he wrote. It was the Achaian response to the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and reign of the Son of God that made

them the “church of God” in Corinth (1 Co 1:1) They had responded to this gospel (1 Co 15:1-4). However, there was other truth yet to be revealed in written form. When all this truth was eventually revealed through the apostles as Jesus had promised (Jn 14:26; 16:13), then God’s instructions were complete. All the New Testament is the truth, therefore, but not all the New Testament is the truth of the gospel. The New Testament is the written report of the events of the gospel, and the explanation of what transpired on earth through the events of the gospel. The New Testament is an inspired record of how the gospel affected the lives of those who responded to the gospel.)

All the truth of the gospel had been revealed through the apostles by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Jd 3; 1 Pt 1:3,4). This truth was initially preached by the apostles in Acts 2, but would eventually be written. It was this truth upon which the unity of the body could be maintained throughout the ages, not the personal experiences of individuals, whether in the ministry of the miraculous gifts, or in one’s individual ministry.

Since the word of God is able to furnish the disciple of Jesus completely unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16), then it is right to conclude that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were only temporary until the time when all the documents of the New Testament were completed.

G. Mandates for order:

In order to correct the subjective religiosity of some in the church of Achaia, Paul enjoined upon them several mandates that would bring order to their chaotic disunity. He reminded them that it was the Spirit’s choice as to who would function with the gifts, and not the individuals who exercised the gifts (1 Co 12:11). This fact took the function of the gifts out of the hands of the individuals who possessed the gifts. For this reason, Paul condemned them for minimizing one another’s gifts, for the body is one, though it is made up of many mem-

bers (1 Co 12:15-26).

They must remember that the origin of the gifts was the Holy Spirit, not themselves personally. He thus judged them for being jealous of one another's gifts (1 Co 12:28-31). He judged them for speaking in a language in the assembly that no one understood (1 Co 14:9-11). In doing such, they were personally exalting themselves. He exhorted them to pray and sing in a language that could be understood (1 Co 14:15). He exhorted them to be mature, and not think and behave as children (1 Co 14:20). He chided them for behaving in their assemblies as madmen, which behavior was typical of those who carried on as madmen down at the local pagan temple (1 Co 14:23). He condemned them for causing confusion by speaking at the same time in their assemblies, which thing children and temple worshipers would do (1 Co 14:20-23). He reminded them that all things must be done for edification of everyone, not just for one or two individuals who possessed the gifts (1 Co 14:26). For this reason he concluded that all teaching must be conducted in an orderly manner (1 Co 14:27-31).

According to the mandates that Paul gave in the 1 Corinthian letter in reference to the assemblies of the saints, there should be no occasion when the assemblies are conducted in a disorderly manner.

H. Self-control and sobriety:

Paul taught that no prophet (teacher) is subject to the influence of the Holy Spirit against his own will, but that each teacher must manifest self-control in exercising his gift (1 Co 14:32). God does not work in an assembly that is out of control (1 Co 14:33). Assemblies that are chaotic are driven by the spirit of man, not the Holy Spirit of God. Even the wives of the prophets must keep silent in the general public assembly in order that they not embarrass their husbands when they are teaching (1 Co 14:34,35). And uncontrollable and hysterical wife in an assembly is evidence that a man does not have his

house in order (See 1 Tm 3:4,5,11,12).

And just in case someone might think that Paul's instructions originated from himself, he reminded them that what he taught was "*the commandments of the Lord*" (1 Co 14:37). Everything that Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 12–14 in reference to orderly assemblies of the saints is totally contrary to the out-of-control assemblies that are led by experiential subjectivists.

Those who have fallen victim to subjective experientialism often forget one very important teaching of Paul in the context of his instructions of 1 Corinthians 14. Verse 32 states, "*Now the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*" The "spirit" (or attitude, character and demeanor) of the mature teacher **is under the control of the prophet**. If a teacher loses control of himself, he must blame only himself, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never moved any individual to lose control of his personal demeanor. If a prophet lost control of himself so as to behave senselessly during an assembly, then he can never blame the Holy Spirit for such foolish behavior. He can blame only himself for behaving without the composure of sobriety.

The assembly of the saints must be an opportunity for each member to participate in the assembly with a teaching that will benefit the entire church.

Chapter 3

Objective Gospel Response

It is not coincidental that Paul immediately begins the subject of gospel events in 1 Corinthians 15 immediately after concluding his instructions in reference to assemblies in 1 Corinthians 12–14. In speaking of the core gospel events, he first reminded the Achaians that they received, and by their

obedience in baptism, stood on the foundation of their common obedience to the truth of the gospel (1 Co 15:1,2). Their faith rested on the fact of the gospel events of the sacrificial death of the incarnate Son of God for our sins and His resurrection to reign for our hope (1 Co 15:3,4). Therefore, the disciples throughout Achaia did not stand justified before God on the basis of their own personal experiences or performance of the miraculous gifts. On the contrary, their justification before God stood only on the truth of the gospel and their obedience thereof.

A. The objective gospel:

The Achaians' stand upon the historical truth of the gospel that was objective, not subjective. They believed and responded to what Paul had previously preached to them through words of communication by which he revealed the incarnational offering of the Son of God (1 Co 1:17; 15:1,2). Their trust in what he communicated, therefore, was based on the historical fact that the gospel actually occurred. It did not stand on the function or experience of the spiritual gifts, or on those who personally experienced some hysterical phenomenon. On the contrary, the spiritual gifts would eventually pass away, but the recorded historical events of the gospel would stand for eternity. And because the effects of the cross would endure, they needed to take their focus off their religious experiences and focus exclusively on the Lord Jesus Christ. Their profound error was in establishing their faith on their personal experiences that would eventually pass away with the spiritual gifts.

An objective response to the gospel is the foundation upon which all unity is based, regardless of the personal experiences of the members.

B. Salvation through gospel, not experiences:

In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul also reminded the Corinthians, *"For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did*

not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching [the gospel] to save those who believe.” Through its own self-educated wisdom, the world could not discover God. In the context of 1 Corinthians 1, therefore, Paul was saying that the world could not save itself through its own religious inventions.

There is simply no such thing as meritorious justification before God through the religious behavior and legal performances of man-made laws or religious traditions. In view of this unquestionable truth, God had to invade the world with the historical soul-saving revelation of His Son in order to reconcile all people to Himself (See Ti 2:11). Paul’s conclusion for the Achaians, therefore, was that only those who objectively learned of and obeyed the gospel could be saved. It has always been and always will be as Jesus pronounced: *“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be **taught** of God.’ Therefore, everyone who has **heard** and has **learned** from the Father comes to Me”* (Jn 6:45). We objectively hear and learn of the gospel today **only** by studying our Bibles.

That which is the foundation for our salvation in the body of Christ is received through teaching, and understood through learning, not through any personal experiences on the part of anyone who would claim to be saved.

For this reason, the Achaians were greatly mistaken to believe that their was some salvational benefit to their individual performance of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in their assemblies. And for sure, they were deceiving themselves if they believed that they could save themselves through some personal emotional experience, through which the visiting unbelievers would think that they were mad. If this was true two thousand years ago, then certainly it is true today.

Personal encounters, or spiritual experiences, cannot be a means to salvation simply because such experience originate

from the faulty performance of the people. It is for this simple reason that there are no means of salvation revealed in the Bible apart from knowing and obeying the gospel, which gospel is **totally** communicated to us through the written word of God. This is so biblically evident that Peter asked a question that he knew every Christian should be able to answer correctly: *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us, **what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?**”* (1 Pt 4:17).

We all know the answer to Peter’s question (See 2 Th 1:6-9). It is because there is salvation by no other means than an objective knowledge of and positive response to the historical event of the gospel, that Paul, and the other first century evangelists, preached Jesus and His crucifixion (See At 4:12). This was the basis for what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2: *“For I determined not to know anything among you except **Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**”*

Every member of the body must believe that in order to become a member of the body of Christ, then one must obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by being immersed into death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. The gifts were not for salvation or self-promotion:

Where the Achaians, specifically those in the city of Corinth, seem to have gone wrong is that they took so much pride in the experience of the function of the spiritual gifts that they trusted in their performance of the gifts. In doing so, they forgot that the gifts were only a means to an end, not the end within themselves. In their narcissistic, self-promotional assemblies in exercising the miraculous gifts, they simply forgot that the end of all matters in reference to our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ, and His incarnate sacrifice for our sins. Unfortunately, they had taken their minds off the gospel and obsessed over gifts. And in order to restore their faith to the foundation of the

gospel, they need to read carefully the inspired letter that Paul was writing. And while they read, they needed to remember that the letter was the commandment of the Lord.

D. Wrong priorities:

The Achaians had reversed the order of importance in reference to our faith in Jesus. They believed that coming to Jesus was the means by which to experience the spiritual gifts. They took pride in the performance of the gifts, but marginalized their “names-being-written-in-heaven” because of their obedience to the gospel. They needed to remember that their obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ should reveal that one must focus exclusively on the Lord Jesus, not on the gifts. They need to remember that the gifts were only a temporary work of the Holy Spirit to initially build up the early church. In focusing on the temporary gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore, one would be glorifying the Holy Spirit over the Lord Jesus. This seems to be the primary error of those who used the ministry of gifts for their own self-exaltation.

The work of the Spirit through the gifts should have continued their focus on King Jesus until that which was complete, or perfect, had come. And since their faith should be based on the revelation of the perfect word of God, then they should keep their minds continually focused on Jesus, not on their performances of the miraculous gifts, which gifts would soon pass away (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). Their experiences with the gifts, therefore, should never have taken their focus off the sacrificial price that the incarnate Son of God came to pay at the cross.

No person can self-declare his or her own salvation, and thus membership in the body of Christ.

E. The glorified Son of God:

When people minimize the word of God in order to experience some emotional manifestation of the Holy Spirit, they are tak-

ing their focus off Christ. They are thus doing exactly what the Spirit warned against. It was and is the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus, not Himself. Experiential religionists need to remember what Jesus warned His disciples in John 16:14: "*He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will declare it to you.*"

Jesus is the discovered pearl of great price (Mt 13:45,46). He is the hidden treasure that is found (Mt 13:44). He is the fullness of the Godhead (Cl 2:9). He is the Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). We do not minimize Jesus Christ by narcissistic ally obsessing over the supposed work of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives. On the contrary, we seek to submit our spirit to God. **Our total focus is on Jesus.** This means that we are obsessed with studying our Bibles in order to learn more about Him.

Even the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is on Jesus. Jesus promised during His earthly ministry that when the Spirit came, He would take that which was His in order to focus the minds of all people of faith on Him as the incarnate Son of God. He would do this by means of the Spirit-inspired Scriptures (Jn 16:13,14). If Jesus is not foremost in the minds of those who claim to be Christians, then they have marginalized Jesus, and subsequently glorified the Holy Spirit over Jesus. However, Jesus, not the Holy Spirit, is the center of our attention.

In whatever Christians do or experience in their personal lives they must never forget that all glory must go to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4 Overcoming Humanistic Theology

When one forsakes, or marginalizes, the Spirit-inspired word of God, he or she has no alternative for religious validation other than his or her own religious experiences or ceremonial

performances of law. Those who resort to such validation for faith have become subjective religionists in their own imaginations. Feelings, subsequently, determine one's behavior in such a faith that is produced and maintained as a system of religion. The experiential religionist, therefore, determines whether something is either right or wrong according to how one personally feels about a particular situation. In most of these cases, the word of God has been set aside, or at least minimized. The validation of one's faith, therefore, is anything but the word of God.

What happens in the religious life of the experientialist is that one subjects himself to himself. Personal emotional feelings become the criteria to reject the commandments of God. When the word of God is rejected entirely, then a group of religionists becomes a cult. There are thousands of religious groups throughout the world whose adherents have no respect for the Bible, even though they believe in some "higher power," or at least in some man they have exalted in their minds as their leader.

Whenever the Holy Spirit is exalted above Jesus, then the gospel of the cross is marginalized.

A. Love and law:

The experientialist often forgets that the law of love and the love of law are not exclusive of one another. They are mutually inclusive because law and love cannot exist apart from one another in reference to our relationship with God. This truth was brought out in Jesus' following statement: "***If you love Me you will keep My commandments***" (Jn 14:15). John spoke of the same principle, but expanded this love beyond loving the Father and Son: "***By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments***" (1 Jn 5:2,3). The religious experientialist

would many times believe and behave contrary to this. He loves his brother, but marginalizes his love for the commandments of God. He has thus set aside the “commandments” in order to focus on experiences as the validation of his faith, as opposed to allowing the commandments of God to be the final authority in all matters of faith.

God’s love does not do away with His law for us. Because He loved the world, He gave law in order that we not lead ourselves astray in doing that which we considered right in our own eyes. For this reason, it is not possible for us to return God’s love for us by ignoring His law. The one who truly loves God, therefore, **is an ardent Bible student.** He or she is a student of the word of God in order to determine how to please the One who extended great love for him through the gospel offering of His Son. For this reason, it is impossible for one to love God outside the realm of God’s law. God lovers are Bible lovers.

If one truly loves God, then the word of God will have priority over anything that one either does or experiences.

B. Religiosity without law:

Religious people who are ignorant of the law of God have established a foundation of love that is based on their own standards and their own experiences. Their undoing in their relationship with God, therefore, is that they have sought to do that which was right **in their own eyes**, not that which is right in the eyes of God. Subjective religiosity, therefore, **is the religion of one coming to God on the foundation of his or her own religious experiences apart from the law of God.** In this way, any relationship with God is humanly performed through self-imposed religious behavior, and not directed by the word of God.

C. Taking heed to the word of God:

It is relevant in this context of discussion to notice some of the final words of Paul to the evangelist Timothy: “*Take heed to yourself and to the teaching. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will both save yourself and those who hear you*” (1 Tm 4:16). Notice that Timothy was to take heed to “the teaching,” not to any personal experiences he may have had in reference to himself. Timothy was to base his faith on “the teaching.” In doing this he would save both himself and those who obeyed what he taught. **This is objective faith,** not subjective emotionalism.

Timothy was not exhorted to take heed to some spiritual experience, nor to recount some experiences that Paul may have related to him in his own personal ministry. Timothy was not to use his own personal experiences as a Christian as the message to convert people to Jesus. If he did such, then he would be taking attention off the Lord Jesus Christ and placing it on himself. No man’s religious experiences are to be the foundation upon which anyone’s faith should be based.

Though one would offer to the Lord Jesus the totality of a changed life, one’s changed life is not the message upon which we would replace the message of the gospel. We must not forget that our lives continue to be transformed as we grow in the realm of God’s grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pt :18). It is for this reason that we study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Tm 2:15). Nevertheless, we must remember that it is gospel, not our changed lives, that is our message to the world (Mk 16:15).

We must continually remind ourselves that we are not perfect in our Christian behavior. Therefore, our personal lives can never be used as the standard to motivate people to respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus. People must listen to Mat-

thew, Mark, Luke and John in their New Testaments in order to understand the life and teaching of the Son of God who would motivate them to do all that is necessary to establish a relationship with God.

Since our lives are never perfect, then the experiences of our lives should never take the place of, or exalted over, the perfect word of God.

Chapter 5

Supplementing Grace?

One of the very first attacks against the work of God through the cross and salvation by grace was the legalistic teaching of the Judaizing teachers of the first century. These teachers went among many of the newly established Gentile churches and preached that unless the Gentiles, who had obeyed the gospel, were also circumcised, they could not be saved (See At 15:1,2; Gl 2:11-21). The actual premise upon which their teaching was based was that **through works of law – in their case, circumcision – one must supplement the grace of God in order to be saved.**

A. Sin of performance-oriented religiosity:

The Holy Spirit argued clearly through Paul in the book of Galatians against performance-oriented theology. It was a theology that placed emphasis on the performance of the individual in order to make oneself right before God. The Spirit countered these legalists by stating that “*man is not justified by [meritorious] works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:16). This same principle would also apply to religious experientialists, for such folks use their personal experiences as a means to be meritoriously justified before God.

If ever we use our good works, or the experiences of our lives, as the validation of our faith, then we have replaced the word of God as the final authority in reference to our faith.

B. The rise of Gnosticism:

By the end of the first century, another similar theology was making way into the fold of the flock of God. This was the theology of **Gnosticism**. The Gnostic taught that through the knowledge of one's inner light he would be salvationally enlightened, and thus, saved through some abstract personal self-awareness. As with the doctrine of the Judaizing teachers who focused on the meritorious performance of law, the Gnostic teachers focused on the spiritual performance of the individual in order to be justified before God.

Both theologies – Jewish legalism and Gnosticism – were similar in that **they focused on man**, not on what God had done for humanity through the incarnation of His Son into this world, and onto the cross. **These were “supplemental theologies” in the sense that both centered on the need for performances of the part of the individual in order to be self-sanctified before God.** Both taught that the grace of God needed to be supplemented by some work (circumcision), or some spiritual enlightenment (experientialism), in order to make the grace of God effective in one's life in reference to salvation.

Our good works and personal experiences can never be used to establish or validate our relationship with God, lest such things set aside or marginalize the grace of God.

C. Supplementing grace:

Many religious groups of these modern times fall into the same category of seeking to supplement the grace of God by the personal experiences of the adherents. In these groups it is assumed that some “spiritual” performance on the part of the individual is necessary in order to be acceptable to God, or at least validate one's faith. These emotional meritorious performances often manifest themselves as to whether one has been “baptized in the Spirit,” “speaking in tongues,” or having some experiential encounter through visions or dreams.

Because of this supplemental validation on earth, as in Israel, the word of God is forgotten and the religionists carries on with what sometimes becomes hysterical religiosity.

The core of this theology is the same as the legalistic Judaizing teachers and the spiritual arrogance of the Gnostics the latter part of the first century, whose teaching carried on into the second century. In all three theologies (Judaism, Gnosticism and experientialism) the grace of God is supplemented, or at least marginalized by the personal performances or experiences of the people.

When considering specifically the theology of experientialism, we would encourage that those who were baptized in these religious groups should possibly reconsider the reason why they were baptized. If the baptism of the adherents of these groups was a work of law in order to supplement the grace of God, then the baptism became a simple work and performance on the part of individual. Such a reason for baptism falls somewhat short of biblical teaching that baptism is a response to the grace of God, and thus for remission of sins in order to be saved (Mk 16:16; At 2:38). Everyone who has been baptized into Christ must always grow in their knowledge of what actually transpired at the time of baptism. We must keep in mind that few people actually understood everything about baptism at the time they were baptized. At least this was the case with the Christians in Rome.

It seems that some of the Roman disciples knew little about their baptism as it connected them with the grace of God. The Holy Spirit wrote an entire letter on this subject that was eventually added to the New Testament canon of Scriptures. In the letter, the Holy Spirit did not call for the Roman disciples to be rebaptized. On the contrary, He explained many things about what transpired when they were baptized (Read Rm

6:1-6). They needed to carry on with a better understanding of why they were baptized in response to the gospel.

If baptism was a “follow-up” to one’s personal self-declared salvation because of some emotional experience that was claimed to be directly from the Holy Spirit, then such a belief would disconnect salvation from baptism (Mk 16:16), remission of sins (At 2:38), or washing away of sins (At 22:16). Therefore, if being baptized is simply a follow-up on a “salvational experience” that one has already had, then baptism is irrelevant in reference to salvation.

That which defines the existence of a religion is the very thing that is contradiction to the fact that we are saved by grace.

D. Meritorious salvation:

The Judaizing teachers made circumcision a meritorious work of law in order to be saved (At 15:1,2). The Gnostic likewise made a requirement for salvation one’s personal experience of discovering his inner light. The experientialist makes his spiritual encounters with the Holy Spirit meritorious in order to be pleasing before God, and thus, self-declaring his salvation that is based on a subjective experience. In other words, one must have the “work of a personal experience” with the Holy Spirit before he or she can proclaim a spiritual relationship with God. Theologically, therefore, there is no difference between the Judaizing teachers, the Gnostics, or the subjective experientialists in reference to being meritoriously saved. Unfortunately, all three groups are/were man-centered religions that focus on the performances of the individual in order to supplement the grace of God.

In our discussion of these matters we must never forget that religion is a system of self-sanctification, which can often become narcissistic, that is, an obsession with the performance or experiences of the individual as opposed to the performance

and experience of the incarnate Son of God coming into this world in order to go to the cross.

The experiential religionist realizes that he or she sins. Therefore, in order to feel good about oneself, he or she must perform some meritorious system of reconciliation with God. If one has laid aside the Bible, then he must invent for himself some system by which he will feel justified before God through self-sanctifying works.

Sometimes, the legalist and experientialist turn Sunday into an assembly of self-validation. The experientialist believes that he or she must have some emotional, if not hysterical, experience on Sunday in order to be validated as faithful for another week. The legalist, on the other hand, feels that he or she must also seek some sort of validation for his or her faith on Sunday morning. The legalist, therefore, will often structure some legal system of religious ceremonies, when properly performed, will allow the attendees to go away from the assembly being satisfied that their relationship with God is restored and validated for another week. In either case, actual worship of God is marginalized for an assembly of self-sanctification.

The world is filled today with religions that are self-oriented, and misguided. Such was the world into which Jesus came. The Jews were the masters of creating religion for they had created a religion with some sprinkles of the Sinai law, but primarily, their own religious traditions that were more important than the word of God (See Mk 7:1-9; Gl 1:13,14).

The Jews' focused was on keeping the traditions. By keeping the religious traditions, one could feel justified before God through one's personal performance of the traditions. But such thinking only brought them into the bondage of their

own religious inventions, which is the curse of all self-oriented religions.

We can thank the Lord Jesus Christ for setting us free from self-imposed religious bondage. And for this reason, the Holy Spirit exhorts every Christian, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

When we use the word “meritorious” in reference to the validation of our faith, then we have set aside the grace of God in order to depend on our own ability to save ourselves.

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. Why does a lack of knowledge of the Bible lead one to base his or her faith on subjective experiences?
2. What did Jeremiah say people are not able to do in reference to determining the foundation of their own faith?
3. Why is subjectivism an invalid foundation for our faith?
4. What is the difference between the subjectivist and the objectivist in reference to the validation of faith?
5. Why must the Bible be our only authority in matters of faith?
6. Why does subjectivism always lead to disunity among believers?
7. In reference to the things that Paul wrote to the Christians in Achaia, what was the principle thing he wanted them to acknowledge concerning what he wrote?
8. What was that over which the Achaians took pride, and thus caused disunity, but would soon pass away?
9. In reference to the word of God, why did Paul say that the miraculous gifts were “in part”?
10. Why is love greater than faith and hope?
11. How should self-control and sobriety be characteristic of our assemblies together as the church of God?
12. Why is our response to the gospel in baptism an objective response?
13. Why is it not valid that one would self-declare his or her own salvation?
14. Why is it not possible for one to save himself or herself on the basis of meritorious keeping of law?
15. How do people often supplement the grace of God?
16. Why must our salvation always be by the grace of God?
17. Why is meritorious cultism or religion totally lacking in reference to salvation before God?

ABBREVIATIONS**OLD TESTAMENT**

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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