THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 1

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God…."

In a meeting with a small group I asked the question: What is the Kingdom of God? There were as many answers as people. There was an element of truth in all that they said.

I sense within me urgency for clarification on this important subject because of the times that we live in. These are perilous days, but they are also days of great opportunities that lay before the people of God. We cannot afford to miss taking advantage of them.

There are some questions that come to mind when we think about the Kingdom of God. Is the Kingdom of God 'the church?' What did Jesus mean when He started His preaching ministry by saying “the Kingdom of God is near?” Later He said that “the Kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21) The Gospels bring out that the “Kingdom of God” as well as the “Kingdom of Heaven.” Are they interchangeable or do they have different meanings?

These are just a few questions that come to mind, but I am sure that has we progress many more questions will pop up. I would like to say at the very beginning that I am not a theologian, but more of a strategist and it is from that point of view that I am tackling this question. One of the main goals in this is to see something of the Father's mind or heart and be able to work along with Him, to fit into His plan and not try to get Him to fit into ours. We do not want to squeeze ourselves into the Trinity and make it a foursome.

I was watching some surfers on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro riding the waves. The thought that came to me was how this was like the work of God or how the work of God should be. A good surfer would position himself in the right place at the right time to catch the wave and let the wave carry him on. When I saw this it seemed so easy and natural. So often we are out trying to make waves and in the process wear ourselves out. What we are wanting to do in these weeklies is to see what the Lord is doing and position ourselves in such a way that we ride the wave of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing that which the Lord wants: "His kingdom come and His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven."

We read in the first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God…" Before there was anything else there was God. He is the One in charge, in total control. He always existed and out of nothing He created all things. I might add there was only one will and that was the will of God. The reason I think this is important is because in Matthew 6:10 Jesus tells us to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In other words, we started out with the will of God, but now something happened that we should and need to pray for God's will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven. The question is: What happened? How does this affect the Kingdom of God?

Genesis 1:2 states: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” From what I understand this also could be translated that the earth became formless and empty. What happened to make the earth formless and empty? We know from Isaiah that God did not intend the earth to be empty. Isaiah 45:18 “For this is what the Lord says - He who created the heavens, He is God; He who fashioned and made the earth, He founded it; He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited - He says: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other.’”

The question that comes to my mind is: Did something happen between verse 1 and verse 2 to bring about the emptiness and formlessness that is mentioned? If so, what? Also, what does that have to do with the Kingdom of God?

It is these questions that we will be looking at next.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 2

Matthew 6:10 "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We saw in our last weekly that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Jesus in instructing His disciples how to pray - told them to pray for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Why would He ask us to pray for this since God created the heavens and the earth and He is in control?

Yes, He is in control, but we need to keep in mind that God moves or acts within His own attributes of who He is. For example, God is 'good' and He will do that which is good. God is a God of mercy and He will act with mercy. He is a God of grace and He will act with grace. He is also a God of justice and He will act with justice.

When we read Scripture we see God revealing Himself by His Names. God wants to be known and it is through His names that we can know about Him and His attributes. Also, it is through His names we can reap the blessings that they bring.

For example, God reveals Himself to Moses at the burning bush as "I AM." This is interesting because it is not a complete sentence. It needs a direct object and you get that by asking the question: What? I AM what? When we go through Scripture it seems that the Lord fills in the object for us. We see that He is the God who shows wonders; He is Jehovah-Jireh, the God who supplies. He is Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals, etc.

When we consider what happens next, it is very important to know who God is and that He does not move or act outside of His attributes. We had mentioned last week that something must have happened between verse 1 and 2 in Genesis 1. God did not create the earth empty and void, but this is where we find it in verse 2. This begs the question: What happened?

I am not dogmatic on this but it seems that Ezekiel 28 fills in some of the blanks for us. It is in this chapter that we see a 'created' being that rebels against the One who created him. He was the 'model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty'. We read that 'every precious stone adorned him,' that he was anointed to be 'a guardian cherub' and that he had access to the government of God. He was highly placed and seemed to be one of the main prime movers in God's government.

We also read that “wickedness was found in him.” Isaiah 14:13-14 gives us indication of what that wickedness was: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” Instead of God's will, we now find that there is another competing 'will' in the universe: Satan's will. We know that a conflict is nothing more than a clash between two wills.

So Jesus tells His disciples to pray. How? That His will be done on the earth. We know that from Ezekiel 28 that God did not destroy Satan, but we do read that he was cast down to earth. Could this be what happened between verse 1 and verse 2 in Genesis 1? Some Bible scholars think that this is a very real possibility.

However, what we find now in God's kingdom is another powerful being who at one time walked in the very counsel of God, cast down to earth and is opposed to all that God stands for and what He is wanting to do. So we are to pray for God's will to be done.

So, how does God deal with this situation without going outside of His attributes? In one sense, this is what the Bible is all about. God reveals His plan and what a marvel it is. We will see this as we move on.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 3

The Bible teaches us that there is another being who is challenging God. We read from Isaiah 14 that this created being (Satan) proudly raised himself up and said: ‘I will….”

Satan is cast down to earth where he is under a canopy of darkness. We read in Genesis that “darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” How long Satan sat under this canopy of darkness - we do not know.

We do know from Scripture that God begins to speak: “Let there be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_” and there was. The crowning achievement in God’s creative acts is found in verses 26-27 “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Speaking to several hundred India village pastors I recently asked the question of how does Hinduism answer this question: Where did we get this universe? Since most of these pastors came out of Hinduism one of them spoke up and said that Brahma created the universe. Along with that question I then asked them another question dealing with creation and that is: Why is man different from all of the animals and other created beings? What does Hinduism say about that? No answer.

The Bible along with the Judeo/Christian worldview gives the right answer. We are different because we have been made in the image and likeness of God. We see in these verses that God puts man/woman in charge of the earth. We see that His intention was for man - made in His image and likeness - to be in control and to rule and reign. We were to know the Father’s mind and to see it executed here on earth.

God created all the resources that man would need to go out and build a civilization. This was the mandate the Lord gave him. This would take in all that one needs in society: education, government, medical institutions, commercial enterprises, a judicial system, etc.; everything that it would take for man to live.

Man was placed in a perfect environment with only one restriction. “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."  Genesis 2:16-17

Having been cast down to earth, Satan saw all that the Lord did and he heard what was said to the first man. Satan recognized the authority that God gave man over all that was on the earth.

Satan in his great envy saw what man had and he wanted it. The battle begins or like Donald Barnhouse says, “We now have the ‘invisible war.’” Writing to the Romans, Paul says in chapter 1 what happens when men of depraved mind are set loose; that they are full of ‘deceit.’ This word in the Greek means ‘fish bait’ and by extension came to mean: to lure, to ensnare, to beguile, to deceive.

This is what Satan does with the first man and woman. He deceives or lures, or ensnares, or beguiles them to do the one thing that the Lord told them not to do: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

When man/woman ate of the forbidden fruit, transference took place. Satan became the ruler, the prince of this world, the overseer of the kingdoms of this world. When Jesus appeared on the scene and in Luke 4 during the temptation of Christ listen to what Satan did and said: “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.’” Luke 4:5-7

When were the kingdoms of this world and their splendor - given to Satan? It must have been at the temptation in the Garden with Adam and Eve when Satan came along and deceived, or lured them to this transference. This is where the battle, this invisible war begins down here on earth.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 4

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

After the first man and woman decided to do their own will, God comes down and addresses Adam and Eve, and the serpent. To the serpent He says that out of a woman will come a seed (child) that will give out the deadly wound to him. The serpent was a tool of Satan to get the first man and woman to do their own thing. What happened was that ‘transference’ took place. God had given to man the responsibility to rule and reign, to be the prime minister on earth and to know the Father’s will and see it implemented.

It is important for us to understand something of the dynamics that took place between the serpent and the first man and woman. It is a worldview that we call DIAPRAX. This word “DIAPRAX” is made out of two words: DIALECTIC which means to dialogue, to resolve a conflict. The other word is PRAXIS which means to practice.

In this worldview there are three essentials: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. So how does this play out in the Garden of Eden? First, we have the thesis where God says that they should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Secondly, the antithesis is where the Serpent comes in and shows the benefit of eating it. Thirdly, we have the synthesis or the result; which is that the fruit is good food, and so they ate it.

We see this type of worldview being played out here in the West regarding homosexuality. In Romans chapter 1 we see God’s view (thesis) that homosexuality is sin. Then man’s reasoning (antithesis) that Jesus loves everyone and we should love everyone. Synthesis: that the church accepts, or tolerates the sin because we love the sinner.

This to me, is why a Biblical worldview is so important. We need to start thinking Biblically. According to George Barna's research, few Evangelicals are operating from a Biblical worldview. It was because of a non-Biblical worldview (DIAPRAX) that the first man and woman fell and a transference took place and if we are going to take back the ‘gates’ of society then we need to come back to a Biblical Worldview. If we are going to see His Kingdom come and His will be done then we are going to need kingdom thinking; a Biblical Worldview.

The cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground,’” is now changing to a “redemptive mandate.”

It would seem to me that the Lord's desire for man is to rule and reign again. But in order for man to rule and reign he must be redeemed. So in Genesis 3:15 God draws a line in the sand and lays out a step that He will take. A child will come out of woman that will eventually destroy Satan. He does not say or tell us what woman or when this will take place, but only that a seed will come from woman and that by him the serpent will receive a deadly wound.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 5

The usurper (Satan) came along to the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden and got them to do their own will instead of God’s will. Thousands of years later Jesus tells His disciple that when they pray they are to pray for “His kingdom to come and His will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven.”

This prayer, that we call the Lord’s Prayer, is also an indication of how the Lord is working. First, God put man in charge of planet earth (Genesis 1:28) and this has not changed. God still wants man to reign, but he must be redeemed first.

Secondly, God is working to see His will being done here on earth as it already is in heaven. We know from Scripture: “In the beginning…” that we start with the ‘will of God’ and that we will end with the ‘will of God’ because we also read that at the end of all things, “the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28) So we start with the will of God and we will close history with the will of God being done.

Since at the very beginning man fell and turned his authority over to Satan the question comes: How is God going to bring about His will being done here on earth as it is in heaven? This to me is what the Bible is all about. It shows us God’s plan and how He is working to bring about His will and His Kingdom being established.

In Genesis 3 when God is addressing Adam, Eve and Satan He begins to lay out His plan. He says to Satan: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15

God does not tell us how He will do it nor does He give us all of His strategy or timing when this will take place. From this we know that out of a woman will come a child that will give the deadly wound (totally destroying) Satan. The battle lines are drawn. God’s kingdom will reign!

It would seem at this point the Lord faces two problems in bringing this about. First, God does not act outside of His attributes. How will God destroy Satan without going outside of His attributes of justice, etc.? When Adam turned His authority over to Satan, Satan now has jurisdiction over this world. This is why Paul calls him the Prince of this world. When the temptation of Christ took place and Satan offered the Lord the kingdoms of this world, Satan had them to freely give.

Secondly, when the Lord gave the task for man to rule and reign it was before the temptation and fall of man, so for man to be in the place of spiritual authority he must be redeemed. God’s commission, that is laid down in Genesis 1:28, are for a redeemed people.

In Genesis 3:15, the seed coming into the world would answer these two questions. God now begins the task of taking back what Satan usurped. Understanding the goal that the Lord has in mind, we see as well how we can now work along with Him for mankind’s best interest.

Like I said, the line has been drawn in the sand and the battle lines are formed. What Barnhouse calls the “INVISIBLE WAR” has begun. We cannot be spectators in this war. We are either for or against one or the other. There is no straddling the fence.

I think that the words of Joshua to the children of Israel are appropriate here: “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD Part 6

1 John 3:8 “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

So we see God’s plan to redeem man and take back what Satan stole through deception. I mentioned in part 3, what happens when men of depraved minds are set loose: they deceive. To repeat: the word “deceit” in the Greek means ‘fish bait:’ to lure, to ensnare, to beguile, and to deceive. This is what Satan did in the Garden with Adam and Eve.

Our text says that the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) What “works” are being talked about here? Dake’s Annotated Bible mentions 25 works of the devil:

1. Sin/rebellion (Genesis 3:2 and 2 Corinthians 11:3)

2. Works of darkness, including moral sedition and sex perversion (Ephesians 5:11, 6:12, Acts 16:18, Romans 1)

3. Works of wickedness (Colossians 1:21)

4. Spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4)

5. Stealing the Word of God (Matthew 13:19)

6. Deceptions and false religions (2 Corinthians 11:14, 1 Timothy 4, Revelation 12:9)

7. To kill and destroy (John 10:10)

8. Sowing tares, tempting, and sifting saints (Matthew 4:3, 13:25, Luke 22:31)

9. Promoting counterfeit worship and miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, 1 Corinthians 10:20)

10. Causing storms (Job 1:18-19, Ephesians 2:2)

11. Ruling nations (Matthew 4:8-9, Daniel 10)

12. Executing death (Hebrews 2:14-15)

13. Accusing the brethren (Revelation 12:10)

14. Hindering prayers (Daniel 10:12-21)

15. Opposing the gospel (Ephesians 6:1-18)

16. Supervising demons (John 12:31), fallen angels (Revelation 12:7-12), and fallen man (Ephesians 2:2, 1 John 3:8, John 8:44)

17. Causing sickness and disease (Matthew 4:23-24, 9:32-33, 15:22, Acts 10:38)

18. Causing infirmities (Matthew 8:17, Luke 13:16, John 10:10, Acts 10:38)

19. Causing lunacy and mania (Matthew 4:23-24, 17:14-21, Mark 5:1-18)

20. Urging suicides (Matthew 17:15, John 10:10)

21. Agitating lusts (John 8:44, Ephesians 2:1-3)

22. Lying and false prophecy (1 Kings 22;, Matt 24:11,24, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

23. Propagating false doctrines (1 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy 4, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation 13)

24. Oppressing men (Acts 10:38)

25. Persecuting Christians and warring on saints (Ephesians 6:10-18, 1 Peter 5:8-9)

Christ came to cancel all of these works of the devil. Sin and rebellion, Satan’s rule over the nations, the reign of death and Satan's continued opposition to the saints will be done away within the Millennium reign, but we can have complete mastery over the rest of the works of the devil already in this age.

So, if Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil then we need to be asking ourselves: How should we be working along with the Father in doing this? The first thing is to make sure that the devil does not have any toe hold or a beach head in our own lives. Ephesians 4:27: “Do not give the devil a foothold.” One of the first things we need to accomplish at this time as well is learning to evangelize by telling people the “good news.”

Secondly, there is a need for God’s people to occupy the different ‘gates’ in the city, state or country. Often these places of authority (gates) where decisions are made, contracts are signed, etc. are held by the opinion makers. These are people who form the opinions of society. We, God’s people, need to be opinion makers as well. We should know God’s ultimate truth and make it known in these gates.

Thirdly, we also need to recognize the existing ‘structures’ of sin in our cultures as well as those that are in the process of being built, and see these ‘structures’ dismantled.

So, we see that God has created His kingdom and He has put man in charge. However, man sinned and turned his governance over to another: Satan, who now rules and reigns. But, God has also initiated a ‘plan’ to take back what Satan stole through guile; a plan to restore man and to cause Satan’s works to be destroyed.

We will we be looking at this more and marvel at the GREAT WISDOM of God.

 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - Part 7

Genesis 4:8 “Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.”

When God gave His plan in Genesis 3:15, that a “seed,” child, would come into the world we entered into what Donald Barnhouse calls the “INVISIBLE WAR.” It’s invisible because we cannot see it with our physical eyes, but nevertheless it is a war that is even more deadly than World War 1 or 2.

We saw in the past letter that God made the statement that the seed coming into the world would give out the deadly blow to the ancient serpent (Satan) and that the seed, which is Christ, would destroy the 25 works of Satan.

When we read in Genesis chapter 4 that God is blessing Abel, not Cain, so Satan begins to move. Not knowing when and where the seed will come into the world Satan takes no chances and he (Satan) moves upon Cain to kill his brother Abel. Hence we have the first murder.

We see the physical side of a jealous sibling rising up and killing his brother, but we need to be able to discern the ‘real enemy’ behind this act - Satan. As a matter of fact as we go along we will see when God makes a statement about His plan, Satan is there trying to thwart it.

For example, in this same chapter in verse 25 we read that, “Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, 'God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’”

The definition of Seth is “substitute.” Instead of Abel we now have Seth and we read, “at that time men began to call on the name of the Lord.” It would seem that a spiritual renewal took place and God’s purpose and plan continues on.

One of the problems that we have today is people’s disconnect with history and reality. There is no 'big picture' or 'story' that makes sense to them. Creation, fall, redemption have been ruled out. 'Reality' is in bits and pieces. Because of this we have no link with the past and no link to the future; consequently no future to look forward to.

The Bible is the absolute truth. Because our society has cut itself off from the Word of God we see that “truth” is whatever we perceive it to be. We see this being played out in our society today in the realm of politics, economics, education and anything else that man is involved in.

This is why it is important for us to see what God is doing. He made the heavens and the earth and He put man in charge. Usurper (Satan) came along and through deception took away what God had given to man.

God still wants man to be in charge on planet earth. That has not changed. But man must be redeemed first and for doing this God is laying out His plan. A child will come into the world to destroy the works of Satan and to restore fallen man.

Man is created in the likeness and image of God and because of that - man is highly esteemed by God. In Genesis 1:28 God gave man the cultural mandate that has now become the redemption mandate because of the fall of man. We will see in the New Testament how it becomes the Great Commission. We see these three giant steps that the Lord is taking, punctuated by thousands of years, so different from man’s reckoning of time.

God starts out with His rule and He will end with His rule. In following this through we see the big picture. We see that there is a purpose to life. It is all not just an accident and the big questions of life: Who we are? Why are we different? What is our purpose? These questions are being answered.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD Part 8

Genesis 6:1-3 “When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the Lord said, ‘My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”’

Genesis 6:8-9 “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”

We need to keep in mind that God has appointed man to rule and reign over the earth, but because man fell God is now working out His plan of redemption to bring man back to the place that He first ordained. However, in this unfolding drama we see that Satan took over the rulership and is now trying to hinder God's purpose. What is God's purpose? It is to bring into the world the seed of Genesis 3:15 that will destroy the works of Satan.

In our last e-mail we saw how Satan was able to move upon Cain to kill Abel. However, God raised up a substitute, Seth, and the plan and work of God - continued on. Now we see in Genesis 6 another attack of the enemy in trying to pollute the blood-line of man, which in turn would affect the seed of Genesis 3:15.

In looking at Genesis 6 we need to ask several questions. First, who actually are the "sons of God?" Some Bible scholars say that the sons of God come from the line of Seth, but is this accurate? It would seem from Genesis 5:3, 6 and 9 that Seth did not have a son until 235 years after creation, and his son did not have a son until 325 years after creation. It says in Genesis 6 that these marriages took place when men began to multiply upon the earth and it would seem that Seth at that time did not have sons of marriageable age.

I personally believe that they were the fallen angels of 1 Peter 3:19, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6-7. God said: “And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” (Genesis 6:12 KJV) It would seem that with the exception of Noah and his family, mankind, all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth before the flood and became a mixture of angels and men, or giants. The only exception was Noah's family who were blameless.

Genesis 6:9 “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” (KJV) It is said of Noah that he was “perfect in his generations.” Hebrew for perfect is: “tamiym” and it means “without blemish.” It is the word for physical perfection, not moral perfection. It is a word that is used for the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament which had to be up to God’s standard: pure stock and without blemish. This would seem to indicate that Noah and his sons were the only pure Adamites left and because of that purity were brought into the Ark.

One can begin to see Satan's plan trying to pollute the bloodline that would hinder Jesus Christ, Son of God from coming into the world. There had to be pure blood for this once for all - sacrifice.

We see in this, God’s overruling and the plan of God continuing on. His Kingdom come and His will be done - will become a reality.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 9

Genesis 9:18 -19 "The sons of Noah who came out of the Ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth."

As I said before, one of the problems that we face in our postmodern culture is that there is no big story or reality. Everything is in bits and pieces. It is important for us to see how things fit together. We need to realize that history is really God's story as he deals with fallen man, fallen angels and the devil - to restore man back to the place that God intended. When we understand this, we can also begin to understand why things are happening in the world. We understand that God is sovereignly working all things towards His goal.

After the flood, we find that Noah plants a vineyard and at harvest time he takes the grapes, makes wine and drinks too much. We read that he laid uncovered in his tent and Ham, the father of Canaan, saw him. We read that he looked upon his father's nakedness and went and told his two brothers about it. The two brothers backed into the tent with a blanket and covered their father.

When Noah woke up and discovered what Ham had done he gave out a prophetic curse and said: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave." Genesis 9:24-27

In these verses Noah utters a prophetic word about the nations. God makes a statement about what will be and Satan goes about doing his utmost to counterattack what God proposes. The physical conflict we have here on earth shows us the spiritual battle that is being fought. From this statement we observe how in every battle that was fought up until the fall of Carthage, Ham was trying to gain the ascendancy over Shem. Today in the midst of terrorism, we live in the days of Japheth.

When we read history and think of the great battles that were fought before the first coming of Christ we need to keep this in mind; that Satan found a willing vessel to work through in Ham. We do not know exactly what happened in the tent of Noah but we do know that from Ham's lineage comes Sodom and Gomorrah who were given over to sexual immorality and ultimately - homosexuality.

We will see running throughout Scripture the same pattern unfold. God makes a statement about what He is going to do and takes another step in His story. Again, we see Satan trying to stop and hinder the will of God. However, in every instant we find that God moves on towards his plan and its fulfillment.

We need to keep in mind that God's plan in the Old Testament is twofold. First, He is working towards redemption of man and secondly bringing His Son into the world to destroy Satan's works. The pivotal point in God's unfolding drama is the coming of His Son; the way that God will restore man back to the place that God gave him and to see the kingdom of God established here on earth.

It is also important to see that in every major move of God there is a covenant that He makes with those that He works through. For example, after the flood we see that God makes a covenant with Noah and He says in Genesis 9 verse 11: "I establish my covenant with you: never again will all life be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." Then He tells us in verse 13, "I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

We need to keep in mind that a covenant is a contract made between two parties. Here we see God, who is not a man that He should lie, making a covenant with Noah and his seed. God will fulfill His Word. Let it be written; let it be done.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 10

Genesis 11:1 “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.”

In looking at these high-lights taking place in the Word of God we need to keep in mind that God is working towards establishing His Kingdom here on earth with man being in partnership with Him in this endeavor. Because Satan deceitfully stole from the first man and woman the right to rule over this planet, God is working to reverse this.

To do this God must do several things. First, man must be redeemed and secondly, Satan and His works need to be destroyed. We already saw in Genesis 3:15 that the seed from woman that would come into the world will eventually destroy Satan (Revelation 20:2, 10) and at the same time bring in righteousness for man, so a fallen man could be redeemed.

Satan is out to stop it, but all to no avail. Here in Genesis 11 we see another attack of Satan. We need to look at several things. First, we see the judgment of God, the mercy of God and also the plan of God in His ongoing purpose for His kingdom established.

Satan found a willing vessel in Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, to work through in trying to hinder the plan of God. Here under this dictator we find mankind rebelling against God. Instead of spreading out over all the earth we find them gathering together. We see the unbelief as well. God said that He would not destroy the world by water again, but here they are building a tower using water-proof material. “They said to each other, ‘Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’” Genesis 11:3-4

God came down and confused their language, and in so doing He scattered them. His plan was to divide and conquer. God broke humanity into little families, language groups and then they began to scatter. How often we have tried to witness to a group of people only to find them encouraging one another in their rebellion against what is being said. The idea is to divide and conquer.

In this confusing of tongues we see God’s judgment in dividing the human race, but we also see His plan. He is now out to win them one by one, language group by language group, family by family.

But to do this He must choose one. This is why we read in Genesus 12:1-3 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”

So God chose Abram and blessed him so that all peoples on the earth would be blessed through Abraham line. Another major step has been taken by God for the redemption of man and the establishment of His kingdom here on earth.

If we look at history with this overall view of what the Lord is doing we see that there is a purpose, a plan in what is taking place in the world. A student was asked: “What is history?” His reply was, “It is just one d\*\*\* event after another.” I am afraid that this is what history is to most people - event after event with no rhyme or reason to any of it. History is more than that. It is God’s redemptive plan to bring man back to God’s original intention and establishing His kingdom here on earth. “His kingdom come; His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

 THE KINGDM OF GOD Part 11

Genesis 12:1 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.’”

As I said in my last letter God divided the world into small families and language groups with the idea of winning them one by one, but to do that He had to choose one. This is what He does in Genesis 12. The first four verses of chapter 12 are some of the most important verses in the Bible.

It is interesting that God said “go to the land that I will show you;” He did not say “go to the land that I will give you.” That came later. First Abram had to obey. Once he took the steps of faith then the promise came to Abram that he and his descendants will be given the land.

I think it is important to see how the Lord trains the men that He chooses. Like I said before that when men want to get something done they will form a committee, but when the Lord wants to get a job done He looks for a man. Once He finds a man, this man will go through God’s refining fire getting him ready for the task that the Lord has for him.

We see this training taking place with Abram. What did God say to Abram? "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.” However, when Abram leaves he has his nephew Lot with him as well as his father Terah. Later on we see Abram separated from his father Terah through death and from Lot through quarreling.

Abram sets out for Canaan and when he arrives the Lord gives the promise that He will give the land to him and his offspring. “The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.’” Genesis 12:7

God is preparing Abram to be the father of faith, of our faith. God brings him into the land of Canaan and promises his offspring the land. When Abram arrives, he finds that there is a famine in the land and we read that he sets off for Egypt. Why? Genesis 12:10 “Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.” God did not tell Abram to go to Egypt. We find that Abram puts his wife in danger and lives a life of deceit in Egypt.

When Pharaoh finds out about the truth of Abram’s wife (that she is actually his wife and not his sister), he scolds him and then treats Abram royally making Abram him a rich man as he leaves. This is interesting because when Lot is taken prisoner by the kings of the East later on, the king of Sodom tells Abram that he can keep all of the goods, but just return the people. Abram says: “I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share." Genesis 14:22-24

The question is: When did Abram raise his hand to God and took an oath not to take anything so people will not be able to say: “I made Abram rich?” I would tend to think it was after the experience in Egypt that Abram took the oath. Abram was learning to listen to the Lord and grow in faith in order to be the father of faith.

In going through the life of Abram you see test after test that in the end strengthened Abram’s faith. Of course, the last and most severe test was in Genesis 22 when the Lord asked Abram to sacrifice is son Isaac. In all of this we see a pattern being formed that God brings His people through so that they might be instruments fit for the Master’s use. First, we have the command to go. When there is obedience to God, then comes a revelation from God; then there is a test and when the test is accomplished the Lord gives a greater revelation and vision.

God is going to establish His kingdom here on earth and He will do it through men/women that have been redeemed, and tested and have come forth from the refining fire, and are now fit for the Master’s use. Abraham is not only the “father of faith,” but he is our example that Paul uses later on in Romans.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 12

Genesis 12:1 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.’”

God blessed Abram and the blessing went to Isaac as well as Jacob. However, like Abram they too went through their own trials and testing that brought them to the place where they could be used by the Lord.

I left off with the last letter these words: “God is going to establish His kingdom here on earth and He will do it through men/women that have been redeemed, tested and have come forth from the refining fire and are now fit for the Master’s use.”

The person that God uses is a man/woman of character. What is character? ''Character is higher than intellect. A great soul will be strong to live as well as think.'' (Ralph Waldo Emerson quote)

''Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.'' (Abraham Lincoln quote)

''Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.'' (General H. Norman Schwartzkopf quote)

''Characters do not change. Opinions alter, but characters are only developed.'' (Benjamin Disraeli quote)

''Of all the properties which belong to honorable men, not one is so highly prized as that of character.'' (?)

James 1:3-4 "Testing of your faith produces perseverance...” Romans 5:3-5 “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Character is not developed in a test tube; it doesn't come from a class-room study on the subject. Neither will it come from reading a book on character.
Character comes through the trials and tests of life. These trials and tests will come to us all. Billy Graham said: "Life at its best is full of problems." When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and walking daily in the Spirit the Spirit will lead us through these trying times and be doing the work in us that He wants.

However, we need to understand what God is doing in our lives.
Why did Paul write: "We rejoice in our sufferings.." (Romans 5:3) We rejoice because "we know" what it will produce.

In all of our political campaigns here in the States as well as in other countries, a question that comes up is this: Does character in the candidate matter? Often people say it is not character that matters, but the issues are what is important. Is it? Something that Chuck Colson wrote some time ago brings out what I am trying to say here. In his magazine BreakPoint of April 14th, 1992 Chuck Colson wrote in his article “Private Morality and Public Policy:”

“There's an issue that crops up in every major election campaign, and it's been debated already in this one: Does a candidate's private morality have anything to do with his public life? For years, liberals have said people can do anything they like in private and it doesn't affect their ability to govern. And now a conservative leader John O'Sullivan, editor of national Review, has said the same thing, writing that he'd rather be governed by a competent sinner than by an incompetent saint. The assumption here is that governing requires only technical competence. But that's a mistaken assumption. ln reality, governing involves a whole philosophy of life, and that in turn involves our personal choices and behavior.”

Let me give you just one example: a very important one.
Nearly all forms of modern philosophy borrow from the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, an 18th century French writer. Rousseau's political ideas are described in his book The Social Contract, where he says the ideal state is one that demands total allegiance. Rousseau wanted the state to take responsibility for raising children so it could indoctrinate them to devote their whole selves to its service.

These were the ideas that fueled the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. They were adopted by Marx and Lenin and became part of communism. They even influenced Pol Pot and his cadre of Paris educated communists, who slaughtered a quarter of the Cambodian population in their pursuit of a ‘totalistic’ state.

Where did Rousseau get such an awful view of the state?

If we look at his life, the answer becomes clear. Rousseau was a drifter and a Bohemian. He had several affairs and lived most of his life with a mistress, a young washer woman, named Therese. When Therese gave birth to a baby, Rousseau faced a major challenge: Would he settle down and accept the responsibilities of family and fatherhood? The answer was a flat no. Children, Rousseau said, would cramp his lifestyle, would undercut his celebrity in the high society of the day.

He persuaded Therese to give up the infant to an orphanage. (Today it would be an abortion). Over the years Rousseau had five children. Each one was deposited on the steps of the orphanage. When his friends criticized him, Rousseau tried to justify his actions. He hit upon the argument that giving up his children was actually the best thing for them - that the state could do a better job of raising and educating them; that the state was a better father. These ideas later became a key plank in Rousseau's political philosophy.

Having asked the State to be a father to his own children he devised a theory of the state as father to us all. The state should be responsible for forming our minds and our loyalties. In the words of historian Paul Johnson, Rousseau portrayed all citizens as "children of the paternal orphanage."

Rousseau might have been appalled if he had known that so much of the barbarism of the 20th century with the Concentration camps, the mock trial, the genocide all resulted from his efforts to justify his own irresponsibility.

Everything stems from character...When it comes to ruling and reigning in the Kingdom of God it will be men/women of character; the character of Christ.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 13

Genesis 32:28 “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

This year, 2008, we are now celebrating the 60th birthday of the birth of Israel. Although God established Israel, through chastisement of the Lord the people of Israel have been scattered for almost two thousand years all over the world. In 1948 they have come back as a nation.

What does this mean as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned? We must keep in mind that when God divided the human race into little language groups and families that His plan was to win them one by one, language group by language group, family by family. However, to do that He had to choose one group and bless them, to make them to be a blessing to all.

This He did by choosing Abram who later became Abraham. Out of Abraham came Isaac and Jacob and we read from our text that Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, meaning a “prince with God.” Jacob begat 12 sons/tribes and they eventually became known as Israel.

Israel was God’s chosen people to represent Him to the nations. God was going to work through Israel to make Himself known and to bring His Son into the world. God had told Abram to leave and go to the land that He would show him, and later on give to him. This land was located on the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and was a very valuable piece of property. It was a connector to Africa, Asia and Europe. Any army or any trade that took place - would move through Israel.

God’s plan with Israel was to be centripetal. Everybody would come into Israel and they would see that here are a people, a nation, that are different. Why are they different? They are different because they worship the One and only true God. Israel would be a witness for God, either of God's mercy, grace and favor, or a witness of His judgment on man’s rebellion. Israel could choose which one they wanted.

A good example of this is when the Queen of Sheba came to see and hear the wisdom of Solomon. 2 Chronicles 9:3 “When the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, as well as the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, the cupbearers in their robes and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.”

The history of God’s people is an up and down history. What I mean is that there were times when they had great leaders and they went forward in God’s favor, but often it seemed that they slipped into spiritual lethargy and then God’s judgment came into play. Even then they were a testimony that God is holy and just; He remains the same.

We read in Deuteronomy 29:24-26, “All the nations will ask: ‘Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?’ And the answer will be: ‘It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.’”

God raised up the prophets. Twelve of the prophetical books are pre-exilic, and five post-exilic (before exile and after exile). The five post-exilic prophets are Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. All the others belong to the period preceding the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile of the Jews - except Jeremiah, the last of the pre-exilic prophets, who actually lived to witness that tragic event, and wrote his "Lamentations" as a sad memorial to it.

These prophets came with a word from the Lord. Often we read: “Thus says the Lord.” They cried out to Israel that they were the people of God and challenged the people to keep before them the destiny that the Lord had for them. Sometimes they listened to the word of the Lord coming from the prophets, repented and God’s kingdom marched on, but often they did not listen and eventually were taken away into captivity. This is why we have pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets and prophetic books.

At the end of Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 1 we read that he is "on his face" when the Spirit sets him "on his feet." (2:2) "I saw," "I fell" and "I heard." That is how prophets are made. Let us read, mark and learn!

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 15

Ezekiel 22:30 "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”

How true it is when God wants to get something done He looks for a man. When man wants to get something done he forms a committee. God’s method is men. We see so far in the Old Testament how the ‘cultural mandate’ that the Lord gave became the ‘redemptive mandate’ as the Lord moves towards His goal: “Your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven.”

This statement made by the Lord in telling us how to pray is not so much as an appeal as it is a prophetic word that His kingdom will come and His will is going to be done here in earth.

In tracing this through in the Word of God we see so far one common denominator coming out. God is using ‘redeemed’ man to bring about His plan and goal. When we begin to think about this we see the tremendous privilege as well as the responsibility that is being laid upon us.

In Genesis 3:15, after God makes known His plan, we see God moving through Abel: “The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering.” (Genesis 4:4) After Abel is murdered by his brother Cain God raises up another, Seth, whose name means “substitute.”

Later, when the world is being destroyed by the flood because man’s heart is wicked we read: “The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” (Genesis 6:5) We see that God finds the man Noah and through Noah His plan can march forward.

We saw that when Nimrod came along leading mankind away from God that the human race was divided into small families and language groups; that again the Lord finds a man. Abram who later becomes Abraham is how the Lord’s plan moves on. We see the same thing with Abraham’s son Isaac and his grandson Jacob whose name becomes “Israel” after the Lord’s work is finished in him.

When the children of Israel are in slavery in Egypt what does the Lord do? He sends a man whom He has prepared to bring about their deliverance. It is through this man, Moses, who with just a staff goes back into Egypt, confronts the superpower of that day and sees a great deliverance. It is through Moses that the children of Israel wander in the desert until they are battle hardened to go in and take the Promised Land; the land God gave to Israel and all his descendants.

It is a man named Joshua that the Lord chooses to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land of great walled cities to conquer the giants and to eventually secure the land for God’s people. And there eventually the seed of Genesis 3:15 will come into the world for the sake of fallen man.

Later there is another man, a young man, a shepherd boy by the name of David that the Lord has prepared to use to establish the kingdom. When all the others fled, he is the one who confronted Goliath with a sling shot and a stone. He shouts:"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Samuel 17:45) God was using a mere boy who later became the King of Israel and established the kingdom.

There was another man, the prophet Elijah, who stood on Mount Carmel alone against the Baal worshippers and saw fire come down from heaven and consume the burnt offering that was laid out. The children of Israel cried out: "The Lord - He is God! The Lord - He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39) In standing for God, Elijah, a man like us, brought the Israelites back to the kingdom.

Like it says in Hebrews 11: “And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

God is still looking for men and women He can work in and through to accomplish His kingdom coming and His will being done here on earth as it is in heaven. Glory!

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 16

Habakkuk 1:3 “Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.”

In my travels with so many ‘bad’ things happening in the world I often get the question: “Why does the Lord allow these things to happen?” This seems to be the question that the prophet Habakkuk is asking as well; that of why the Lord chooses a nation that is worse to be His vessel for chastising another nation?

Who can understand the full depth of God’s mind? His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than ours. Like Habakkuk asks: “Why, Lord do you allow evil, injustice, violence, etc. to keep taking place? Why can’t you step in and do something about it?”

We have seen from our studies on the Kingdom of God that we are in our mess because of our sin. In the distant past, a created being (Lucifer - the devil) that was a model of perfection (perfect in beauty and full of wisdom) wanted to be like God. (Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14:13-14) He was not destroyed, but instead he was cast down to earth.

When God created Adam and Eve they were perfect with a free will. Only one restriction was given to them and that was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Being tempted by this “created being” they decided to do their own will and not the will of God. God said that there would be dire consequences if they did so and we see this being played out in the fallen world today. Wars, riots, injustices, violence, man against man, disease, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc. are all part of a fallen world.

To answer the question that is being asked: God is working towards the goal of bringing order to where there is disorder; justice to where there is injustice; peace to where there is no peace. Sometimes God has stepped directly into the affairs of man to immediately bring about His will, but for the most part He does not unless asked. Does this mean that God does not care? Is He a God who creates a world with a universe, winds it up like a clock and then lets it run down to a stop? We know that He does not because when we study the Scriptures we see that God has a plan for bringing about the type of world that He wants. My sister-in-law wrote about this type of world in her poem called “IMAGINE” which is quoted down below.

Imagine a world, this world, where everyone honors and serves their heavenly Father;

where everyone uses their God-given abilities, authority and power with which to benefit others.

Imagine a world where absolutely no one goes unnoticed and everyone is valued, even in the womb;

where every child is cherished and raised to their full potential.

Imagine a world where there is no need of protection and no insurance to be paid;

where the threat of harm, terror and deception are unheard of.

Imagine a world where trust is as natural and as certain as the law of gravity;

where the laws of God are taught and upheld in every home.

Imagine a world without death and despair;

where words like disease, addiction and infection are found only in history books.

Imagine a world when the only tears that fall are tears of joy and gratitude;

where respect for all God's creation is as certain as the air we breathe.

Imagine a world where a cemetery can't be found;

where every family member is known personally through endless generations.

Imagine a world without greed and corruption; where the only debt that’s felt – is love;

where no one goes hungry or thirsty or homeless.

Imagine a world where the whole earth gives forth a plentiful harvest in every season;

where God's good earth receives her seventh year
rest from producing.

Imagine a world where sports, construction, entertainment and
sales have nothing to do with selfish ambition and vain conceit;

where every song, movie, bill-board, commercial and human endeavor is rooted in virtue.

Imagine a world where there are no warnings and ratings necessary;

where every form of entertainment and education increases godly wisdom, creativity, productivity and joy on the earth.

Imagine a world without a monetary system; where integrity barters;

where Father blesses all productivity in the world and makes everyone to succeed in life and love.

Imagine a world where our God is welcomed by all and His favor is on each family;

where there is no demon, darkness or doubt in man.

Imagine worlds on planets yet to be fashioned by the talented and gifted children of God;

where man’s imagination is holy to the LORD and eternity is filled with the worship of our Father God.

Try to imagine what our Father God imagined; for it shall be just as He imagined.

(Carol Dietz)

God is working to bring about this type of world. It can be looked at in three gigantic steps with thousands of years between these steps.

It begins when God brings man into His counsel; when He gave us the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:28.

1. Man fell from grace and so we enter into the Redemptive Mandate where God is preparing a way for His Son to come into the world to redeem man.

2. Once the Son came, died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose again - the Great Commission was given along with the Cultural Mandate; that to preach throughout the world the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and to occupy until He returns.

3. Soon and very soon we shall see the King in all of His glory and we shall rule and reign with Him for 1000 years to build the Kingdom that He wants.

Yes, God is concerned about all that is taking place down here on planet earth and He is working to bring about justice, peace and tranquility, but He works within the bounds of His own attributes. What a God, what a Savior!

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 17

Galatians 4:4 “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.”

When God gave the first man and woman the “cultural mandate” to rule and reign, it was to establish God’s kingdom here on earth. It was to build a civilization based on God’s principles, decrees and commandments.

However, man fell through disobedience and so the “redemptive mandate” stepped in. God began to work to bring about redemption so that redeemed man could carry on God’s original purpose. Satan, the usurper, was able to get a toe hold through man’s disobedience and build his kingdom which we see operating today all over the world.

Through every ‘gate’ we see Satan’s system operating, whether it is political, economical, with media and entertainment, educational, marital or judicial. Last month (May 2008) four men on the California Supreme Court decided that marriage as we have known it for the past five thousand years is "outdated" and should include two men or two women (homosexuals) having the right of marriage, and not just a man and woman.

Babylonian Talmud states that the only other time in history when homosexual marriage had the states’ approval was in Noah’s time. There has always been homosexuality throughout history, but never having the states approval except in Noah’s day and now in this day that we live in. What did Jesus say? “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark.” Matthew 24:37-38

In the Old Testament we see God working to bring about His “redemptive mandate” to bring man spiritually back to where he would know the mind of God and be His representative down here on earth. To accomplish this He sent his Son into the world, born of a woman, born under the law - to redeem those who trust in Him instead of their own righteousness.

When Jesus started His ministry His first words were, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17) From that time on Jesus began to preach.

Just before Jesus began his ministry He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil. I think it is interesting that the last temptation of the devil was to give Jesus the kingdoms of this world if He would only fall down and worship the devil. “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’” Luke 4:5-7

Jesus knew something that Satan did not know: The kingdom of God was about to invade the kingdoms of this world. The King had arrived and His ministry was beginning and so Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is near.” And, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” 1 John 3:8

I have already listed 25 works of the devil that Jesus came to destroy. In His ministry we see Jesus dealing with every one of them. Sin and rebellion, Satan’s rule over the nations, the reign of death and Satan's continued opposition to the saints – will be done away with His Millennium reign, but we can have complete mastery over the rest of the works of the devil already in this age.

It is important to see what the Lord is doing. These are perilous days that we live in, but at the same time days of great opportunity. It is essential for us to know what the Lord is doing so that we might work along with Him.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 18

Matthew 4:17 “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

Jesus began His ministry by saying that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand or near. This was said in the context of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness before He began His ministry.

The last temptation for Christ was that of Satan offering Him the kingdoms of this world if He would only fall down and worship Satan. Jesus knew something that Satan, I don’t believe knew, and that is the kingdom of God was about to invade the kingdoms of this world. This is why, I believe, the Lord was saying that the kingdom of heaven is near or at hand.

It would seem that in the Old Testament ‘preparation’ was made for the King to come into this world. We saw that in Galatians 4:4 that at the right time Jesus was born. Jesus made His entrance into human history.

It is important for us to understand that Satan has locked the human race into little kingdoms. It is not bars of steel that keep us locked into these kingdoms, but acceptance and the fear of rejection. One of the main human needs, no matter where we are, is acceptance. We want to be accepted.

When my two girls were growing up their peers became very important people to them at the time. My wife and I would find them doing strange things in the way that they wore their hair, clothes that they would wear, music they listened to, etc. What was the reason in back of this? They were locked into their prison or little kingdoms because acceptance was very important for them. If they kept up with the fads at that time they were accepted, if not, they were rejected.

These kingdoms can be of different styles, etc. For example, my wife and I went for a drive into the mountains and while there we asked a camping group of people who all had jeeps for directions to a certain place. This was a jeep club that they belonged to and on weekends or holidays they would all get together. This was their little kingdom and being able to stay in that kingdom they had to agree to the terms so that they would not be rejected. Acceptance was the bar that kept them locked in.

Many years ago I worked my way back from India to America on a steamer ship. For six weeks I was locked into this group of sailors or merchant seamen. This was another kingdom. A kingdom can consist of shared interests, dislikes, work, behavior, belief, language, etc.

For us to be able to communicate the Gospel properly we must understand what we are up against and how these kingdoms work. I did not understand fully the dynamics at work when I was on that ship working my way back to America, but when I came on board I was bringing the kingdom of heaven on board and for six weeks the kingdom of heaven was invading this particular kingdom that Satan had set up consisting of these merchant seamen.

One of the sailors was on the verge of making a decision for Christ, but he held back. When I asked him why, his response was that he was afraid that he would not be able to give up his cussing. This was the behavior of the seamen that I worked with and this particular man was very astute in his cussing. It was the way that he was accepted. When we challenge people to leave the kingdoms of this world, that they are locked in, so that they can join the kingdom of heaven, their needs to be acceptance that they can visualize and experience.

In extending the kingdom of heaven we need to take the kingdom of heaven that is within us (Luke 17:21) into the world and invade the different kingdoms of this world.

I think of the jeep club mentioned earlier. We need people who have the kingdom of heaven within them to be able to join this club and in so doing bring the kingdom of heaven into their midst. Since they meet on week-ends this might mean missing church on Sunday.

Right now I am working with some people who want to use a training ship in Sierra Leone to train the thousands of young men to be merchant seamen. These are young men who were enlisted as children to be child soldiers in the civil war that was being waged at that time. Now the war is over. What is to be done with these young men, who have no education, no work, no hope and no possibilities?

In training them to be merchant seamen we also have the possibility of leading them to Christ and see them become disciples of the King and when they get jobs on other ships they can be bringing the kingdom of heaven into this particular kingdom.

Eventually: “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.’” Revelation 11:15

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 19

Romans 12:2 “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

God is requiring a paradigm shift in the Body of Christ. A paradigm shift is a change in the way we think. This is what Paul is bringing out here in Romans 12 with the renewing of our minds. When it comes to the church we need to change our thinking to the mind of Christ.

So often we have thought of the church in terms of a building where we gather together at a particular day for a time of corporate worship, teaching from the Word (sometimes this is not the case) and occasional prayer. With some churches there might be healing times, testimonial times, etc. In a city or town ship there might be many of these different gatherings taking place. They have different names and they might emphasize certain doctrines above others. We call these gatherings the local church and they meet on Sunday, which is commonly known as the Lord’s day. This, for many, is what is known as “church.” This is where we need a paradigm shift with our thinking.

We need to understand what church is. “Ekklesia” is a Greek word for “church.” In the New Testament the meaning of ekklesia is “the people of God.” In the New Testament that word ekklesia is used in two different ways. It’s used sometimes to describe the people of God when they’re all gathered together, and it’s used other times in the New Testament to describe the people of God when they’re scattered out in the workplace. They are still “the people of God,” or “the church” seven days a week.

Generally speaking, one day a week you’re gathered, six days a week the church is scattered. I would like to mention that the word ‘ekklesia’ was also used in Greek times for people called out of the populace in order to govern and make decisions on behalf of the populace. They were in the governing body. I would like to add that what we call the church, or “the people of God,” are to be the governing body that the Lord can govern through.

Remember that in Genesis 1:28 God gave us the Cultural Mandate. That has not been revoked. We were meant to be His governing body down here on earth. At the temptation in the Garden of Eden man gave it away. In the past letters I have shown how the Lord has been working to redeem man so that the redeemed man could be His governing body here on earth.

We need to understand that the kingdom is not confined to the four walls of a local church. The kingdom of God, doesn’t have political boundaries, can’t join the United Nations, it doesn’t issue passports, the kingdom of God is wherever there’s an individual for whom Jesus Christ is Savior, Lord and King. So, if Jesus Christ is your Lord, wherever you go, the kingdom of God goes with you.

His desire is that the values, blessings and the prosperity of the kingdom of God are not just to be confined to those who are already in the kingdom, but that they spread from us through whole societies and throughout the world. Why? So that the whole world can benefit and be blessed by God.

So the goal that God has now placed on the agenda of the Body of Christ in the last few years, much more than we can find in the past, is to transform our society to see the values of the kingdom of God in all aspects of our society. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

We need to be kingdom-minded people.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 20

Luke 17: 20 - 21 “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, here it is, or there it is, because the kingdom of God is within you.”

I had mentioned in my last letter that the church consists more than just a building with walls to meet in each week. We are so accustomed to this idea of the church that it is hard for us to think otherwise. This is why I also mentioned in my last letter that we need a paradigm shift, a new way of thinking.

One person explained the church in terms of a family where you have the nuclear family (father, mother, children) and the extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc). Perhaps this is the way that we could begin to understand the church. On Sunday we meet together for the time of worship, prayer and teaching (this is the nuclear family coming together), but Monday through Saturday we have the extended family that is scattered out in the marketplace, community, etc. All of this is the church.

The cultural difference between these two is vast and it would seem that the leadership in the nuclear family does not fully understand this difference. The church that is out in the marketplace and the community is where the rubber hits the road. The nuclear church needs to become the learning place for an impact into the marketplace, the community, etc. This is going to require training, equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.

Isn’t this what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 4:11-13? “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Equipping the extended church into reaching out into the areas where they are during the week - Monday through Saturday - we will find that the values and blessings and prosperity of the kingdom of God is not just for those of us who believe, but to spread throughout society so that in our neighborhoods, communities, cities, states and countries we see the values and blessings of the kingdom of God.

So the goal that God has now placed on the agenda of the Body of Christ in the last few years, much more than was in the past, is transforming our society. The way that this will be done is by learning to occupy the gates in our cities. Gates are the places where decisions are made that affect us all.

Occupying these gates are what I call the “opinion makers.” Often these are people who use words to make a living. They tell us what to think, believe, buy, etc. My point is that we, who have the kingdom of God within us, should be in these places of authority to bring out God’s opinion. This is the extended church and we are to be spreading the opinion, values, blessings and prosperity of the kingdom of God in all aspects of our society.

Of course, this starts with the Gospel of Jesus Christ being preached. We change a community, city, nation - one person at a time. When that person comes to Christ, the Bible says he is a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Like a baby, we care for him and train him to be effective wherever he might be from Monday to Saturday.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 21

In our last letter we talked about the church being like a family where you have what we call the nuclear family as well as the extended family. In the nuclear family we all live under one roof, but in the extended family we are more scattered. But it is all the family. We think of the nuclear church meeting one day a week (Sunday) and the extended church meeting the other six days. These both are the church.

When we think of the church like this we also need to realize that these two forms of churches have different cultures and they are quite different. In other words the cultural gap is quite wide between the church meeting one day a week and the church that operates the other six days of the week.

Another factor involved in this is that each culture where the church operates has different principles or rules and it is important for us to understand what those different principles are. It doesn’t mean that one set of principles is right and the other is wrong it just means that they are different. It is similar to a missionary going to a country with a different culture where they operate from different parameters than what you might be used to in your own country. It doesn’t mean that yours is right and theirs is wrong; it just means that they are different and we need to appreciate the difference.

One of the problems we have in the church is that the leadership of the nuclear church does not really understand the principles operating in "the extended church" whereas the leaders of the extended church do understand the principles of the nuclear church because they operate in both cultures. Again, using the analogy of the missionary going into another culture other than his own, he eventually understands both cultures (his and the one that he is has gone to), because he operates in both of them.

The reason this is important is because Christian ministry is not limited to the nuclear church. If that was the case then only about 1% of the body of Christ would be involved with ministry. The gospel of the kingdom of God must be propagated throughout our communities, cities, nations and the world. This involves the extended family, the church in the market place.

Back in the 30’s, 40’s, 50’s if a person came and said he would like to be involved with ministry often he would be encouraged to be a senator, judge, lawyer, doctor, journalist, pastor, teacher, missionary, etc. But in the 60’s that began to change - to become a pastor, evangelist, teacher or missionary. We, the church, backed out of the gates of the city and consequently other philosophies, ideologies and new age thinking took over. Today we see the consequences of this in our universities, laws being passed, judicial activism, the break-down of the families, corruption in our governments as well as in civil services and business.

However, we need to understand that whatever you do during those six days, whether driving a bus, nurse, doctor, business owner, construction etc. - you are in ministry. The word DIAKONIA is where the word “deacon” comes from. Half the time that word is translated “ministry” in our English Bible. When we read in Ephesians about “equipping the saints for the ministry” that is DIAKONIA. At other times this word is translated in English as “service.”

So if you are a bus driver you are serving those people on the bus. If you are building you are serving those people you are building for and so on. We need to keep in mind that whatever we do, we do as unto the Lord. We are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 22

Ephesians 4:11-13 “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

I had mentioned in a previous letter that the church is a “called out body.” The church is a called out body of people making decisions for the rest of the populace as representing God’s government here on earth. If we read the above verses then we see that the church has a God-designed government which includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

It would stand to reason as well that if these offices mentioned in the above verses were given to the church then it would be to both the nuclear as well as the extended church that we have been writing about. This to me would mean that out in the business, political, educational, arts, media, entertainment, etc. world there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

One of the problems that I see is that we (the body of Christ) have not *recognized and released* them for the ministry in our society and communities, cities, states and country. However, there seems to be a move within the body of Christ where this releasing is beginning to take place. This is the whole new paradigm shift that we are talking about. This is the new way of thinking that is needed.

I meet with a group of intercessors several times a week. Also once a week we have a prayer conference call where a number of us who are in different locations can come together and pray. One of the things that the Lord is laying on our hearts is ‘God’s governmental order.’ How does this governmental order function, what does it look like, etc.? These are some of the questions that we have in our mind and are seeking God about.

God tells us in Romams 12:2 that we should “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” How often I have heard the remark that the church is like a business, the senior pastor is the CEO, etc. Is it possible that we have taken the patterns of this world and adopted them into the church rather than seeking God’s face about His divine order?

We see this in the nuclear church, but do we have the same pattern as the world when it comes to the extended church in business, education, arts, media, entertainment, politics, etc.? I am afraid so. In our education, not only in the secular universities, but also in our Bible schools, seminaries and Christian universities we are following the ‘patterns of this world’.

The church we ‘go’ to is important; it is our nuclear family. Our pastor who ministers to us every week in trying to get across Biblical truth is important, small groups where people can come together to pray, fellowship and share are all important. However, when we are out in the market place during the other six days it is not so important what church we belong to. But, what is important is that in the market place you are the people of God, an ambassador for Christ representing the Kingdom of God. “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20

Peter Wagner made a statement that I am still trying to think through. He said: “The only way to overthrow a government is with a government.” What I think he means by this is that Satan has a government and the only way we can overthrow his government is by God’s government and for this to happen - God’s government must be in place.

Might God give us understanding in all of this.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 23

Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

From a casual reading of Scripture it would seem that Satan has his government set up. Even in the above verse we see that there are rulers, authorities, powers of darkness and evil in heavenly realms.

Coming into the last days we see the evil trinity making its mark; that of Satan, Anti-Christ and the False Prophet taking over the world system. There is no doubt that Satan has his government of evil on the move.

When Jesus was being tempted by Satan, He was shown all of the kingdoms of this world and was promised that if He (Jesus) would fall down and worship Satan that He would be given “all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me (satan), and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Luke 4:6-7

However, like I said before, Jesus knew something that Satan didn’t; that the kingdom of Heaven was about to invade the kingdoms of this world. This is why we read that when Jesus started His ministry He said: "The time has come…" and "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15

In other words, like Peter Wagner said: it takes a government (the kingdom of heaven) to overthrow a government (Satan’s government).

In my 6th letter I mentioned 25 works of Satan that we are to destroy. Jesus appeared "to destroy the devil's work.” 1 John 3:8

As the Kingdom of God extends out we are in fact dismantling Satan’s government. The works that we are to destroy are sin and rebellion, Satan’s rule over the nations, the reign of death and Satan's continued opposition to the saints; which will be done away during the Millennium reign. But, we can have complete mastery over the rest of the works of the devil already in this age.

It would seem that the Kingdom of God has a God-designed government that consists of: “apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

It would stand to reason that if there are these men and women in these offices in the nuclear church that they would be in the extended church as well. So when we think in terms of the gates that we are to occupy: political, education, media, business, entertainment, arts, etc. we do already have some of these men and women in these places. I am not sure if they are being recognized as such, but they are there already.

But, I do ask the question: Where are the apostles, prophets, etc. in most of our churches today? If we are going to see done what needs to be done, it would seem or stand to reason that these people with these callings need to be released into the ministry, both in the nuclear as well as the extended church.

Peter Wagner rightly brings out that unless we see God’s government coming into place, we will not see a transformation in our societies or even the transfer of wealth that has been spoken of for the extension of the kingdom of God in the last days. Now is the time.

Isaiah 60:11. “Therefore your gates shall be opened continually. They shall not be shut day or night that men might bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles.”

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 23

Matthew 13:3 “Then he told them many things in parables.”

Matthew 13:10 “The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

Matthew 13:11 “He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

Of all four gospels I would say that Matthew is one of the hardest to understand, because in this gospel Jesus pulls back the curtain and allows us to see into the spiritual realm.

First, there are several important things about Christ’s parables: They illustrate truth and make it clear by comparison with something that is already familiar. They impart instruction and rebuke without causing offense (2 Samuel 12). They create interest and hunger for further information (Matthew 13:10-17, 2 Samuel 12).

In this chapter of Matthew we see that Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven in parables and He gives the reason for this in verse 11 “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” Starting in Matthew 11 we see the beginning of the rejection of Christ. It is said that He came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him. Even here in chapter 11 we see that there were doubts in John the Baptist’s mind about Christ when he sent his disciples to Jesus saying, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Matthew 11:2

In chapter 12 we see the ongoing rejection of Christ by the Pharisees. They began to look at Jesus through colored glasses as well as ascribing His work to Beelzebub. In chapter 13 where we have the parables of the kingdom and where we see the consequences of this rejection: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” This is why Jesus was describing deep spiritual truths to His disciples in parables about the Kingdom of God.

Through chapter 13 to chapter 16:12 we see the continuing rejection of Christ. It is at this point that Christ asks His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The answer was, “John the Baptist,” “Jeremiah” or “one of the prophets.” No one answered with “the Son of God.” That didn’t come until Jesus asked His disciples and that is when Peter said:”You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16) Jesus did not deny it, but said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17) Jesus is the King of the Kingdom.

When Jesus said that He had to go to Jerusalem and there he would suffer many things, Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him. What Peter was saying to Christ was: “Pity yourself, why should you have to suffer? You are the Son of God!” That is when Jesus rebuked him with the words: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Matthew 16:23

In the remaining verses of Chapter 16 Jesus begins to lay out the life style of people in the Kingdom of God. His first words are: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (vs. 24) What a contrast. Satan says, “Pity yourself,” but Jesus said, “Deny yourself.” We choose which path we take; that to pity ourselves or to deny ourselves. Jesus lays out the blessings of denying oneself.

1. Vs.25 “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” What He is saying here is that real life is found in denying oneself and not in self pity.
2. Vs. 26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” Here He is saying that here on earth we have only so much time and the best way to make the most of it is in following hard after Him.
3. Vs. 27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.” Jesus is coming back and when He does, He will come as the King of kings, Lord of lords. When He comes we want to be found still following Him.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 24

Looking at these parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 we need to ask ourselves the question: What do we learn from them about the kingdom? It would seem that each one is bringing out a certain truth. We do not have time to go into each one of these parables in detail, but I do want to bring out the truth that each one gives us. Putting them all together will give us the complete truth about the Kingdom.

First, we have the parable of the “sower” that teaches us certain things about the Kingdom of God that we need to know about. In this parable we see that down through the age of grace there is a mixed multitude in the kingdom represented by the conditions of the soils when seed is sown on each type of soil: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the good soil.

In this parable we have the explanation or interpretation of what the parable means represented by these different soils. (Matthew 13:18-23) Perhaps a question that we could ask ourselves is: What kind of soil am I? Perhaps we need to take the time to prepare our heart’s “good soil.” To me, good soil does not just happen, but it takes work to prepare. If we want to produce hundred, sixty, thirty fold the we need to have the right soil.

In Christ’s parable of the weeds we see that the good and the bad are mixed together in the Kingdom. At the present the wheat and the tares are growing up together. At the end of this age the two classes will be separated; one for hell and the other continuing on in the Kingdom forever.

Another important truth coming out here is: “Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” Believers will increase in knowledge, but the unbelievers will go more and more into ignorance and darkness. What “he has will even be taken away” is the result of man’s own unbelief and rebellion as well as the work of Satan. The law of life seems to be: What we do not use, we lose.

We know that at the harvest time, or end of this age, God will send forth the angels to separate. When one sees a field of wheat where tares are mixed in it is hard to tell them apart, but when it comes harvest time the wheat will begin to bend over, but the tares will stand straight up. Humility is a sign of the real thing.

In the parable of the mustard seed there are a couple of thoughts that come out here. First, there is the school of thought that this is representing abnormal growth in the kingdom from a small beginning to a tree, becoming a refuge, a home, and a sphere of operation for demon powers. We know that the wheat and the tares are growing together. “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible.” Matthew 24:24

Also, this parable shows that the beginning of the Gospel would be small, but the latter end it would increase and the Kingdom of God among us would be set up in the world. When Christ came it was in a small insignificant family that He chose to be born. He never wrote a book, never traveled outside of his country, never led an army, never did anything that men would ascribe to greatness, but look today. Even our calendar is divided upon His birth.

We see the same thing with the Apostles. They were known as unlearned men, but they were the ones that turned the world upside down. “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Verses 27-30 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” 1 Corinthians 1:20

So it is with the Kingdom of God. It started small, but it grows significantly that even the nations will be shaken by it but eventually find shelter.

One of the things that I see coming out among God’s people is the desire to ‘occupy the gates.’ We know that in every culture there is what we call the “opinion makers.” These are people who use words to make a living. They form opinions. Those who have the Kingdom of God within are beginning to understand they too are opinion makers. We need to get God’s Word out, His opinion and gospel to see a culture change. It starts small, but it becomes mighty.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 25

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

We read in Scripture: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” Matthew 11:12

Over the weekend my wife and I had the privilege of having in our house a Nepali believer who has been greatly used of God in his country of Nepal, a little country situated between China and India.

My wife and I have just discovered that when we lived in Nepal in the late sixties that at that time this man was in prison for preaching the Gospel.  He was three times in prison for months and over 20 times in police custody for advancing the Kingdom of God. While in prison they broke his leg believing that by doing this it would stop him from walking and preaching the Gospel. The only means of transport in this Himalayan country is by walking. He has walked into 72 of the 75 provinces of Nepal. Now this country of 26 million has the freedom to preach the Gospel and to see His kingdom established in what was once known as the only Hindu Kingdom of the world. We are now seeing the process of a Hindu kingdom being transformed by the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is advancing.

When we dropped this brother off at the airport for his journey home the thought that came to me was this passage in 1 Corinthians mentioned above. As far as the world was concerned there was nothing outwardly that was attractive about him. This brother, standing at five feet and two inches limping towards his gate to catch the plane was very inconspicuous as far as the world was concerned, but how different in the eyes of God. In God’s sight he is very precious.

We are admonished in the Word of God not to despise the day of small things. (Zechariah 4:10) As I mentioned in my last letter: “When Christ came it was in a small insignificant family that He chose to be born. He never wrote a book, never traveled outside of his country, never led an army, never did anything that men would prescribe to greatness, but look today. Even our calendar is divided upon His birth. We see the same thing with the Apostles. They were known as unlearned men, but they were the ones that turned the world upside down.”

Here is a brother who has been used of God to start 650 churches with an average of 100-300 people in each. At the moment he has 37,000 people who have finished the Bible correspondence course, accepted Christ and are waiting to be gathered for 56 hours of discipleship training before being baptized. This correspondence course is sent only to Hindus and Buddhists. They are the ones who can read and write and will be and are prominent in leading the country.

This brother is 68 years old now, but his prayer is that before the Lord takes him home, he wants to see 500,000 baptisms, 5000 churches established and 1000 Nepalese missionaries moving out.

What this shows me is that God can take men like this Nepali brother and use him to extend the kingdom of God then He can do the same thing with us. What He wants is our obedience.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 26

We see in the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 that false doctrines, heresy (which is truth pushed too far) will come in to hinder the work of God. We see this down through the ages as well as today.

Reading Matthew chapters 11 through 16 we see the attitude of the people towards Christ. What we see then is what we see now. It is important for us to see that we have in the kingdom of God today the good, the bad and the ugly. We know that a separation is coming, but until that happens we need to be wise in discerning what is good, bad and ugly.

What are some of the attitudes in Matthew’s gospel so that can we learn from them today?

1. John the Baptist was undecided (11:3). It is amazing to think that the very forerunner of the Lord was undecided. When we read the Old Testament about the Messiah, we see that it was often with the expectation of Him coming in power and reigning; that the Messiah would defeat the Romans and bring in His Kingdom and would reign for evermore. When that did not happen we see doubt coming in. Don’t we have the same thing today? Jesus did not respond the way we thought He should, so we begin to doubt.

A good friend of ours stayed with us for the last couple of weeks and he mentioned about an Indian brother who lost his two suitcases at the train station. When he discovered that they had been stolen his comment was that, “if Jesus could not protect his two suitcases then how could He keep his soul.” Today he is not walking with the Lord.

2. This generation is unresponsive (11:17). Reading this passage about Jesus’ generation we realize that it was basically unresponsive. Looking at the West (USA and Western Europe) I would also say that ‘this generation’ in calling themselves Christians are basically unresponsive. Not so in other parts of the world. Today we are seeing Hindus and Muslims coming to the Lord like never before, but in our so-called Christian western countries this is not the case.

3. The Pharisees were unreasonable (12:10,14,24). What can one say about Christian leadership today? Unreasonable? When I think of how quick we are to pick apart one another when we do not come from the same line of thought (denomination) we separate into our little corners or build our own little kingdoms and miss the big picture of all that the Lord is doing.

4. The Apostles had glad recognition (16:16). When Jesus asked the question to His disciple: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded with: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” We see he had a heart of “good soil” mentioned in the parables of chapter 13.

This is the most important question for us (who claim to be disciples of Christ) WHO IS CHRIST? The brother I mentioned in my last letter is seeing the kingdom of God expanded in Nepal because of the importance he gives to making disciples. He looks at the Lord’s Great Commission that has been given to us the way we all should look at it. First, we are to GO; secondly, we are to make DISCIPLES; thirdly, we are to BAPTIZE; and fourthly, we are to TEACH them to obey all that has been commanded. Soul winning should be done in that order.

If Christ is the Lord (and He is) and He died for me (and He did), then is there any sacrifice too hard or difficult for me to make for the sake of His kingdom? What does Christ want? I believe that He wants “glad recognition” of who He is and our willingness to obey Him.

We need to be like CT Studd who founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC) and was used of the Lord to open the heart of Africa to the Gospel. When asked what he was doing when he was reading the New Testament, he responded that Christ said if we love Him we should obey Him. “I am looking,” he said, “to see what the Lord has commanded me to do and bring my obedience up to date.” This is a disciple.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 27

When we think of the prevailing winds that are blowing across our landscape here in the Western world there are several things that we need to think about.

First, we need to realize how biased our news outlets have become. It is not that they do not publish the truth, but often they present it in such a way that it is distorted or brings out an agenda they have.

Secondly, we need to understand the underlying philosophy that we are dealing with here in the Western world and how it stacks up against the Word of God. What did Paul say: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” Colossians 2:8

The philosophy that is running rampant here in the West is what we call MODERN LIBERALISM. It is different from the liberalism of the past and that is why it is calledModern Liberalism. It is imperative that we understand this otherwise we will be caught in its web.

There are two legs to this philosophy: RADICAL INDIVIDUALISM and RADICAL EGALITARIANISM. What does this mean? First RI sounds good. When I think of America it was founded by rugged individuals who came over from the old world. To survive it took rugged individuals.

However, this individualism had to be within boundaries because the way of man’s nature is down and not up. We know from Scripture that man is fallen. This does not mean that man cannot do good things, but it means man is basically evil and therefore he will have a tendency to do evil things. Since nations are made of men who have a propensity for evil, then evil things will happen unless there is check and balance.

What are the checks and balances that God has given us to keep this individualism in check? There are three.

First, we have the family. This has been the building block of a society. Take away family and what will you have? All we have to do is look around at our society today and we see some of the things happening. The family instead of being restored is being redefined and now we have two men or two women in marriage and the whole definition of marriage is being (or trying to be) redefined. Is this redefinition of the family structure by design, evolution or just happenstance? We as God’s people must always realize that we have an enemy - Satan - and that he is out to kill and destroy.

Secondly, we have the church. God gave us this institution in order to keep radical individualism in check. I think it is interesting to see the attacks that have come upon the church in the last 30 or so years. There is a definite move to keep the church within the four walls. I keep hearing all the time the lie of the devil that my faith is private. My faith is ‘personal,’ but not private. We are to propagate our faith wherever and whenever. We see through news outlets, courts, etc. the effort to keep the church marginalized.

Praise God I do see signs of the church beginning to break out of their walls and be the church in the public square. But the church through its moral teaching is to keep RI (radical individualism) in check. Because we have kicked God out of our schools, businesses, courts, we see some of the detrimental things taking place today. Look at the financial institutes that are failing and because of the greed of man. Morals have gone out the window without the Biblical restraints on greed and corruption in the society. The church needs to get her voice back.

Thirdly, we have the rule of law. USA is to be *a republic*, not a democracy. A dictatorship is one man rule, a democracy is majority rules, but *a republic is rule by law.* The Finnish constitution states: “use of public authority must be based on law.” One of the main things that are happening is what we call “judicial activism.” Judges, instead of interpreting the laws, are now ‘making’ their own laws.

The end result of RI will be a hedonistic society where everybody does what they think is right in their own eyes. We see this coming out with the whole concept of truth. We do not have ‘absolute’ truth anymore, but rather ‘relativism:’ my truth might not be your truth, but how can you say that my truth is wrong? And when we leave God and His Word out what do we have left? Again, when I think of the financial system failing because of greed and corruption, I’m certain that these people don’t see the error of their way because this is the end result of a post-modern society where there is *no absolute truth*.

The second leg of MODERN LIBERALISM is RADICAL EGALITARIANISM. What this means is equal outcome; that we all need to be equal. This was the basis of communism and to a certain degree this is what we see in socialism as well. Are we all equal? Yes, we are equal as human beings, but we are not all equal when it comes to different gifts, talents, knowledge, environments, etc. We have different roles to play in our society. When I was the director of our OM ship Doulos we had 325 people on board from about 40 different countries. Were we all equal? The new recruit that walked up the gangway, was he equal to the captain of the ship? Yes, he was equal before God, but not equal to the captain in knowledge and experience. His years of training and experience had given him the right to be the captain of the ship.

This article comes from a Cuban who escaped in 1968 from Cuba.

“In the late 1950's, most Cubans thought Cuba needed a change, so when a young leader came along, every Cuban was at least receptive. When this young leader spoke eloquently and passionately, denouncing the old system, the press fell in love with him. They never questioned who his friends were or what he really believed in. When he said he would help the farmers and the poor and bring free medical care and education to all, everyone followed.”

“When he said he would bring justice and equality to all, everyone said,
‘Praise the Lord.’ And when the young leader said, ‘I will be for change and I'll bring you change,’ everyone yelled, ‘Viva Fidel!’”

“But nobody asked about the change, so by the time the executioner's guns went silent, the people's guns had been taken away. By the time everyone was equal, they were equally poor, hungry, and oppressed. By the time everyone received their free education, it was worth nothing. By the time the press noticed, it was too late, because they were now working for him.”

The end result of RE (radical egalitarianism) is dictatorship. This is what we see in the former Soviet Union, China and in this article on Cuba. To bring about RE will take a strong authority and the only one that will be strong enough is the government. Could this be the reason why our governments in the 20th century killed over 150 million people directly? This is not through war, but by direct orders for people to be killed.

What about the church? Where is the church in all of this? Where was the church when Hitler rose to power in Europe? Where was the church when the communist takeover came into the former Soviet Union?

“God is requiring a paradigm shift in the Body of Christ. A paradigm shift is a change in the way we think. This is what Paul is bringing out here in Romans 12: the renewing of our mind. When it comes to the church we need to change our thinking.” (Quote from my recent letter.)

So often we have thought of the church in terms of a building where we gather together at a particular day for a time of corporate worship, teaching from the Word (sometimes this is not the case) and occasional prayer. With some churches there might be healing times, testimonial times, etc.

In a city or town ship there might be many of these different gatherings taking place. They have different names and they might emphasize certain doctrines above others. We call these Sunday gatherings *the local church* that meet on what is commonly known as *the Lord’s day*. This, for many, is what is known as church. This is where we need a change of thinking, to have a paradigm shift.

We need to understand what church is. Ekklesia is a Greek word for “church.” In the New Testament, the meaning of ekklesia is “the people of God.” In the New Testament that word ekklesia is used in two different ways. It’s used sometimes to describe the people of God when they’re all gathered together, and it’s used other times in the New Testament to describe the people of God when they’re scattered out there in the workplace. The church is the people of God - seven days a week.

Generally speaking, one day a week you’re gathered, six days a week the church is scattered. I would like to mention that the word ‘ekklesia’ was also used in Greek times for people called out of the populace in order to govern and make decisions on behalf of the populace. They were in the governing body. I would like to add that what we call the church or the people of God, are to be the governing body that the Lord can govern through.

Remember that in Genesis 1:28 God gave us the Cultural Mandate. That has not been revoked. We were meant to be His governing body down here on earth. At the temptation in the Garden of Eden man gave it away. In my past letters I have shown how the Lord has been working to redeem man so that the redeemed man could be His governing body here on earth.

We need to understand that the kingdom is not confined to the four walls of a local church.

The kingdom of God, doesn’t have political boundaries, can’t join the United Nations, it doesn’t issue passports, the kingdom of God is wherever there’s an individual for whom Jesus Christ is king, is their Lord. So, if Jesus Christ is your Lord, wherever you go, the kingdom of God goes with you.

His desire is that the values, blessings and the prosperity of the kingdom of God are not just confined to those of us who are already in the kingdom, but that they spread from us through the whole society. Why? So that in our neighborhoods, communities, cities, nations where we live we see the values and blessings of the kingdom of God.

We need to be kingdom-minded people. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven - your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

So the goal that God has placed on the Body of Christ, which seems much more intense than we can find in the past, is to see the values of the kingdom of God in all aspects of our society.

So many things that the Lord has told the church to do we find many governments trying to do. It is imperative for us to see what the government’s role is and what the church’s role is and not confuse the two. God’s people are to occupy until He comes back. We are to be involved in helping the homeless, the poor, the widows, the orphans, the children born out of wedlock, etc, but also to be involved in the ‘gates,’ those places where decisions are being made so that we might bring in God’s order instead of that of the world's or Satan’s agenda. We have been told to GO and make DISCIPLES, BAPTIZING them and TEACHING them all that He has commanded us to do. We are to be involved in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and throughout the uttermost parts of the world. *This is our mandate and we MUST be obedient.*

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 28

When my wife and I were in Northern Europe taking in meetings, we are hit with the reality of three crises’ that we are faced with, not only in the Northern European countries, but in the Western world as well.

These three crises are dealing with truth, radical Islam and what does it mean to be human.

I was talking with a brother in Finland about a Dutch documentary regarding a premature baby that was born possibly with some brain damage - although they were not even certain about this.

The documentary was based on a discussion of the doctors, nurses and parents. It was not on how can we help this child? The discussion was on why the child should be allowed to die. It begs the question: What does it mean to be human? This is a crisis.

The crisis of truth is that there are no absolutes. Because there are no absolutes, we create our own truth. When one follows this to its logical conclusions we see that the end is despair: no hope. Without hope people do not function right or long. We are seeing this being played out in the shootings that took place in Finland (2010?) where a 22 year old walked into his trade school and killed ten people before taking his own life.

The other crisis that we are faced with is Radical Islam. Europe is dying. To keep the infrastructure up and running either they will have to increase their taxes or import people. They are doing the latter and most of the new workers are coming from the Muslim world. These people coming in are bringing in a different worldview (a way of thinking) that is different than the worldview operating in the West at the moment. In several European countries we already see a clash of worldviews.

In the midst of all of this we are called to extend the kingdom of God. One of the things that is becoming of paramount importance here in the Western world is - if we are to be kingdom-minded people then we need to operate from a Biblical worldview and not from the prevalent worldview that we have today.

The prevalent worldview in the Western world is a post-modern, humanistic, Darwinist worldview. In this worldview time and chance is the theory of how we have come to be. We are no better than the animals. The reason the world is in such a mess is that man, not wanting any rules and regulations in which to live by, has moved into sexual promiscuity, crime, drugs and alcohol, and we see the result of this today that man is more bound up than ever before. This is the result of a philosophy and worldview that has permeated the Western world. What did Jesus say? “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

This wrong worldview has come into the church more than we might like to think. Kingdom-minded people are people whose minds are being renewed or transformed by God’s Word.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 29
 WORLDVIEW AND CULTURE

Every one of us grows up in a culture that has a particular worldview. A worldview is the way we look at the world around us and how we screen everything that comes our way and based on that worldview we make our decisions, whether good or bad.

In the heart of culture, in a community, you have three things: beliefs, feelings and values. In a community of shared beliefs, feelings and values people can form a mental picture or MAP of the world. Through this mental picture we create our worldview, our way of thinking. We base our decision-making on it - that in turn forms our actions. Culture can then be said to be a peoples’ mental map of their world, not only a map of the physical world, but also a map for determining action. It provides a guide for decisions and behavior.

So our beliefs, our feelings and our values form what we call a worldview or what is basically real to us. If this mental map is off or wrong when it comes down to what is ‘real,’ then our decisions and choices that we make will be off as well. This is why it is important that we operate from the right mental map, God’s worldview.

A question that we could ask ourselves is: In our village, town, city or community where we live, what are the prevalent beliefs, feelings and values? There are probably many superstitions that people have; many beliefs as well as feelings and values coming from our backgrounds. These form your worldview and how you make decisions that affect you and your family.

The reason why it’s so important that our worldview is a Biblical worldview is so that we screen everything through the truth of God’s Scriptures. We might think that we are doing this but we need to ask ourselves if this is really true in our lives. Could this be what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

As Christ’s followers, we are learning to take our beliefs, feelings, and values to bring them into obedience to Christ and His teaching.

Many of us here in the West have come out of a culture that is more humanistic and postmodern. This is what is affecting our thinking and still in a great way also affecting the church today.

To be a person with a Biblical worldview can be seen in several things. First, in our character as we become more like Christ, and secondly, it is to fulfill the commandment that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul and MIND.

The Scriptures tell us that we will become like that which we worship; our lives are shaped by the ‘god’ we worship. What do we worship? Tozer brought out in his book that there is a test we can take to see what it is that we value and worship. When our mind is free from the task at hand, where does it go? Where our minds go when free, that will be what shapes us as well as determines the decisions that we make through life.

In Biblical worldview thinking we need to understand that God is not only our Savior, but He is the Lord of all creation. Because of this we need to interpret every aspect of creation in the light of His truth. This means that everything we do, every decision we make is with this in mind.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 30

One of the tasks that we are faced with is the renewal of our minds. This might be hard and at times painful but we must place everything under the scrutiny of the Word of God. This would include politics, justice, business, education, marriage, family/children, birth control/abortion, religion, ministry, entertainment, etc.; anything and everything that is taking place in our communities, villages, towns, etc.

A worldview with its philosophy must be able to answer three questions. The first question is regarding the universe and where it came from. How did it begin? It also brings in the thought of who are as men and women. Why are we different from other created things - like animals? Why do we love? Why do we hate? Why do we fear death? These are all questions that a right worldview or philosophy must answer.

The second question is: Why is the world in such a mess? When I look around I see hate, wars being fought, neighbor against neighbor, families being destroyed, chaos and corruption, and many other things taking place not only among humankind, but also with the earth itself. Why do we have cyclones, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and so many other catastrophes? In other words, where have we gone wrong? The right worldview must be able to answer that question.

The third question is: What is the solution? How do we get out of this mess? We see that we are in a mess, but how do we get out of it? What is the solution?

We could ask these questions from those in India who hold the prevalent worldviews of Hinduism and Islam. When I asked this question about where the universe came from in an Indian pastors' conference with pastors coming out of Hinduism, the answer was that “Krishna or Brahma created it.” The same was true of Islam that “Allah made it.” Both recognized that there was 'a higher power' involved. But, when I asked the question as to why we humans are different from all of the animals, there was no answer.

The same was true when it came to answering the second and third question: Why are we in such a mess and what is the solution? Those from a Hindu and Islam background had no answers to the two last questions.

When I look at my own worldview in the USA - or basically in Western Europe - it is a humanistic worldview. Most of our young people in our universities are being taught the worldview of Darwinism. What does this mean? If I take Darwinism and try to answer these three questions I come up with the following:

First, when it comes to this universe and where it came from, the Darwinism answer is basically “time and chance.” Over long periods of time life has evolved until we have man as he is today. The answer to the second question of why we are in such a mess, according to the Darwinist worldview, it’s because “man is tied up in knots with a lot of rules and regulations." Consequently, that answer regarding the solution is of course to "set man free." This means that we need to get rid of the rules and regulations that keep man bound and the world in such a mess.

This is what is happening in the Western world today and we see that man, having no rules and regulations to live by, have moved into sexual promiscuity, drugs, alcohol, corruption, crime, etc. and we see the result of this today with our world in a mess.

Man is not free but more bound up than ever before, but this is the result of an incorrect philosophy or worldview that has permeated the Western world. What did Jesus say? “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

If we were to take the Islamist worldview and run it through the gauntlet of these three questions what would we find? First, the Muslim would come and say God (Allah) created it all and they would be right. The second question they must answer is: Why are we in such a mess? And, according to their way of thinking, any orders or commands that come from man is tantamount (equivalent) to man trying to share in the powers and the authority of God. This to them is the root of all evil in the universe. In other words, this is why we are in such a mess.

The third question: What is the solution? Islam must take over every aspect of life here on planet Earth and their “Sharia Law” must be instigated.

One fundamental problem with Islam is its rejection of the idea that all people have equal dignity; a Christian idea (Biblical truth) that was central to abolishing slavery in early America.

What we need is the right worldview, the right philosophy, and this of course comes from the Bible. In the book of Romans Chapter 12 we are told that we are “transformed by the renewing of our mind.” This means that we must move our mind, our thinking, from the worldview that is in our culture; from the humanist, Hindu and Islamic or any other way of thinking, and see it transform into a Biblical worldview and philosophy for the right way of thinking.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 31

In the letter I wrote three questions that a worldview/philosophy must answer. Over the next couple letters we will look at these questions in the light of the book of Romans.

FIRST QUESTION

In our studies on Romans we find that Paul is laying out the foundation of a Biblical worldview by answering these three questions.  Romans 1:19 says: “Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made plain to them.  For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen been understood from what is been made so that men are without excuse.”

Paul says that we can learn a lot about God, His nature and His power by simply studying the things He made. If you want to learn about a carpenter, look at some of the cabinets or furniture he has made and you will learn much about his capability, character, commitment to quality, etc. The same is true with God when we look at His heavens; we see His glory. Examine the firmament and you will see His handiwork (Psalm 19:1)

Even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, studied creation because he knew that God’s wisdom, in part, was embedded in the things He made. We read about Solomon’s godly wisdom in 1 Kings 4: “And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall: he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.”

There are several things that God is telling us here about that first question. First, we see that there is a God. There is really no such thing as an atheist. God is showing that man has within him a consciousness that there is a higher power – God. The problem has been is that we want to suppress this truth.  However, the truth is that what may be known about God is revealed by Him. What does Paul mean?  It means that I can look and see this universe and realize that there is a God.

"That which may be known of God ..." And the next verse shows that the only two things which may be known of God are His eternal power and His Godhead. In modern speech men put these words in a different form. It might well be translated that there is a being, a Supreme Being, so, that which may be known of God is that He is a Supreme Being. And that knowledge alone is sufficient to condemn man, says our text. To know that there is a Supreme Being renders the one who knows it, to be without excuse when he stands before God on judgment day.

“No man hath seen God at any time.” (John 1:18) How can a man see God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all? (1 John 1:5) What is the light that shines and reflects in order to reveal the invisible to us; to our feeble senses? God has manifested Himself in all of nature so we would believe in Him.

When we look at pagan authors we find them speaking of God. A man named, Cicero wrote (forty-five years before Christ): "Nature herself has imprinted on the minds of all - the idea of a God." Ovid wrote: "There is a God within us, and we glow when He stirs us." Seneca wrote: "Call it nature, fate, fortune; all are but names of the one and same God." Tacitus wrote: “God is the ruler of all.” Mohammed and Tumart wrote in his Tauhid: "Time does not contain Him, nor space hold Him. No intelligence can grasp Him, nor imagination figure Him. Nothing is like Him. But still He hears and sees all things." Not one of these quotations is from a Christian writer. They are all evidence that man knew God and that man knows God today, even when he cries - that he does not.

I remember some years ago when I was in Kathmandu, Nepal.  I was talking with a young man about God as we walked down the streets of Kathmandu. He had just made a decision to follow Christ coming out of a Hindu/Buddhist worldview background.  Walking down the streets of Kathmandu we could see the huge, beautiful Himalaya Mountains.  As we looked at them he made a comment: “When I saw those mountains I knew that there was a God who had made them, not the idols that I had been worshiping in my room.” What was he referring to?  It goes back to Romans 1, that the creation, the universe, reveals God’s invisible qualities, His eternal power and His divine nature. What we find in this is the answer to that first question; that God created this world and universe.

                            THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 32

SECOND QUESTION

In Romans chapter 1:18 Paul begins to lay out an answer to the second question of why we are in such a mess. First he says that man has “suppressed the truth.” Barnhouse says: “The man who sets himself up above the truth of God has really set himself up against God. When Lucifer first sinned, it was with the declaration, ‘I will ascend into heaven. I will be like the most High.’” (Isaiah 14:13,14) When a man denies the finality of the revelation of truth, he is really taking (claiming) for himself one of the essential qualities of the Deity of God. He is setting himself up as the judge of truth instead of submitting himself to the truth as the creature who has been revealed by the truth to be what he is. Thus, he is failing to accept the whole plan of redemption. He is making himself equal to God, and the wrath of God must one day be revealed against him.

Isn’t this the problem in the world? Man is trying to take the place of God. Here in the West, in our post-modern society, we create our own truth instead of embracing the truth that has been revealed to us. When we suppress the truth of God we are actually saying, “I am higher than God,” or, “I am my own god.”

What has been the result of men suppressing of the truth? Paul goes on to tell us, and through his explanation we can begin to see why we are in this mess today.

Christendom is rapidly losing sin-consciousness, which means losing God-consciousness; which ends in eternal doom. “As it was in the days of Noah...and it came to pass that in the days of Lot….they knew not.”

What man has basically done is that he has taken the truth that we all know (without excuse) and suppressed it. The way that we have done this in the Western world is to deny that there is anything such as “ultimate or absolute truth.”  Because we have rejected ultimate truth we then invent our own truth.  In other words, what might be true for me might not be true for you. How can you come to me and say that my truth is not the truth? What has man’s suppressing the truth resulted in? The following list in Romans 1:29-32 gives us an idea of results:

Unrighteousness. This is a term used in the Scriptures for injustice in a judge; for unrighteousness of heart and life; unrighteousness by which others are deceived. It is the word used by our Lord in speaking of "deceitful" riches, and the word used for the reward of "iniquity." Like the thirty pieces of silver which Judas received for betraying our Savior. Lord Palmerston, in a letter to Lord Clarendon, wrote: “There is a passion in the human heart stronger than the desire to be free from justice and wrong, and that is the desire to inflict injustice and wrong upon others, and men resent more keenly an attempt to prevent them from oppressing other people than they do the oppression from which they themselves suffer.”

Wickedness. The word is used for depravity, iniquity, evil purposes and desires, wicked ways. It is the word used in Ephesians 6:12 for the followers of Satan in the spiritual realm, a.k.a. the “hosts of wickedness,” and as a kindred word used for the Devil whenever he is called “the wicked one.” When David had the opportunity of killing King Saul in the cave, he refused to do it, even though King Saul was trying to kill him. David cries out to Saul afterwards and reminds him of an ancient proverb: “From evildoers come evil deeds.” (1 Samuel 24:13) Once more it is the human heart that is seen to be the fountain of evil waters.

Covetousness. The word is used in this way in all occurrences except once when it is translated: "greediness." We see people who are grasping, itching for more, and who are extortionists, wishing to make gain from the losses of others. This is the characteristic described for this word. It is much more prevalent than a thought. Liddell and Scott include in its definition: “To take advantage of another's simpleness, to overreach, defraud.” The Holy Spirit defines covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5) and idolatry is the worship of another god, in an created thing or system.

Maliciousness. The word denotes ill will, malice, malignity, desire to injure; wickedness that is not ashamed to break the laws. It is a word that means a ‘vicious disposition.’ Thomas Jefferson wrote to Madison, “Malice will always find bad motives for good actions.”

Full of envy. The Oxford English dictionary defines the word: “to feel displeasure and ill will at the superiority of another in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of some superior advantage which one would like to have for oneself.” We remember that Scripture tells us, in connection with the crucifixion of our Lord, that Pilate “knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.” (Matthew 27:18) It was when the Lord healed the man on the Sabbath day that the leaders of the Pharisees (who were supposed to be holy to the Lord) held a council against Him, for how they might destroy Him. (Matthew 12:14) They knew that He was holy and powerful, and they envied Him, and therefore hated Him.

Murder. The taking of another's life because he has something that the murderer wants, or because he has offended the ego of the murderer, or because the victim knows something that the murderer doesn’t want coming out; for whatever reason – the murderer arrogates to himself the place of God to take the life of human being. Murder follows envy, not only in our list but also in life. There is a remarkable likeness in the two words (in the Greek) with only the label to distinguish them. There is but a breath between envy and murder.

Debate. The revisers have used the word “strife” here, for there is no thought of the original of orderly discussion, but of contention and wrangling. It has been said that debate is masculine and conversation is feminine. At all events wrangling and strife are human.

Deceit. This word in the Greek means “fish bait,” and by extension came to mean “to lure, to ensnare, to beguile, to deceive.” Much of our world’s business life is carried on by such means. Is it any wonder that at the time of the end, Babylon the Great includes the symbol of ‘commercial profiteering’ which has fattened itself on the bait set before the poor fish of the world? The prophet Habakkuk describes men as fishing for other men, and snaring them in their nets. They succeed so well that, “Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.” (Habakkuk 1:16)

Malignity. The lexicon translates it: “bad character, depravity of heart and life, malignant subtlety, malicious craftiness,” and Aristotle defined the word in his rhetoric, as “taking all things in the evil part.”

Whisperers. The form of the word is imitative of the sound that is made by the sibilant rush of breath as one speaks softly. The Greek word is also imitative, and the lexicon translates it “secret slander,” or “to speak in one's ear.”

There is a verse in the Old Testament that throws considerable light on this word. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon says, “The serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.” (10:11) The Hebrew word that means “the murmuring of the snake charmer” is translated in the Septuagint by the verb of our word, “whisperer.” Let it be remembered that God Almighty has thus stamped gossip with the name of “snake bite.” And after the use of the simile, the Lord goes on to describe the emptiness of the words of a foolish man. It was Chrysostom who said that “slander is worse than cannibalism.” Jeremy Taylor, in one of his sermons said, “Slander rends in pieces the very heart and vital parts of charity; it makes an evil man party and witness, and judge, and executioner of the innocent.”

Backbiters. The original is a word that brings a further development of the last vice, whispering. There it was “secret slander,” but here it is the “open” slanderer. For there are some who are not content to whisper into the ear of the listener, but who will publicly flaunt false charges against their fellow man. But ,whether it be the secret gossiper or the public slanderer, we may be sure that all forms of the vice of false witness are rooted in the heart of man.

Haters of God. This is a word that is used once only in the Bible. It certainly does not mean that this hatred originates in the heart of men. That truth is taught elsewhere for we read that “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Romans 8:7) The word here means: “hateful to God.” It is used in the classics by Euripides, for men who are so odious, so detestable, that God must hate them.

Despiteful. The revisers have translated it “insolent.” It refers to “one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others, or does them some shameful act of wrong.”

Proud. It is that arrogant “showing oneself above others, with an overweening sense of one's own means of merits; despising others, or treating them with contempt.”

Boasters. The empty pretender who prates (rambles, rants) about that which he does not possess. It is the empty wagon that rattles.

Inventors of evil things. In the Psalms we read that men provoked God to anger with their inventions (Psalms 106:29), and “that they went a whoring with their own inventions.” (vs. 39) Man turns potentially good inventions to evil uses. Think of the example of ‘Atomic power.” It can either light our homes, cities, factories or can be a bomb that can kill millions and wipe entire cities off the face of the map.

When we look at this list of things that basically reside in the heart of man when he has suppressed the truth - we begin to understand why we are in such the mess we are in with riots, chaos, corruption, wars, murderers, etc..

                            THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 33

THIRD QUESTION

Now we come to the third question: What is the solution?  I would like to add immediately that the solution does not lie with man, but with God.  We need to see Ephesians chapter 2 what Paul is saying to fully understand the solution. In the first three verses of chapter 2 Paul lays out a very dismal aspect of man, of the nations, basically there is no hope. Man is completely lost. First Paul says that man is dead. Secondly, that man follows the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. This resulted in man gratifying the cravings of his sinful nature and because of that we have become objects of God’s wrath.

When we think of the solution we see that there is nothing man can do.  This is why there are two words that we should underline and highlight as we read through the Bible.  Those two words are “but God.” Man does not have the solution; he can do nothing, **but God** can because He has the solution and power to see it through. Those two words, “but God” bring out that the solution lies with God. What did God do?

One of the first things God did was to give us His law. Why did He do this? Romans 3:20 says: “Through the law we become conscious of sin.”  In other words, we recognize sin for what it is and how it has created the mess that we are in today.  If we ask other major religions "what is sin?" often we would just get a blank stare.

When we look at the list of things that are mentioned in Romans we all need to be aware that this has been us before we came to Christ. When Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus he brings out that this is the way we used to be as well. In other words, the whole world is at fault, the whole world is under the condemnation of God. This includes both Jews and Gentiles. Romans 3:10-18 brings this out. Look at the number times where it says “no one:” no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good, etc.

So what the law does is it condemns everyone, no one lives up to it.  No one can boast about being good, claiming they are right, but we each need to recognize we are all under the condemnation of God.

Romans 3:21 says: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.” God, in order to satisfy his attributes of justice and mercy, came into this world as a man called Jesus, and He died on the cross to forgive the sins of the world, all those things mentioned in Romans 1. He took them all upon Himself and tasted death for all men. Remember that the wages of sin is death. Through this act, God’s justice was met and His attributes of love and mercy were demonstrated.

Romans 5:1: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” One of the main consequences of sin has been separation from God and from our fellow man. We see this in our families, our communities, our state, our nation, and the world we live in. We see that there is a lack of peace on earth because we do not have peace with God. This verse shows us that we have peace with God through Christ and because of that we can also be reconciled to our fellow man.

This is the Biblical worldview that should be shaping our thinking and in turn motivating us in the right direction with our lives.

 THE KINGDOM OF GOD - Part 34

Now the question is: HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

We need to understand that our thinking leads us to action whether it is good or bad. Scripture brings out that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. All the way through Scripture we see that the way we think is very important.

Paul says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, that is, by the renewing of our thought process. In the first few chapters of Romans, Paul has laid out a Biblical worldview that should affect our thinking process so that our actions will be in compliance with Holy Scripture: God’s order. So how should we then live?

In Romans chapter 8 through the end of Romans, Paul is laying down some important principles to govern us and actions to take that come through having a Biblical worldview. We cannot go into these in details, but we can see something of the principles that are involved and from that begin to build our lives on the solid rock instead of shifting sand.

In chapter 8 Paul is speaking about “life through the Spirit:” our need to be led by the Spirit and not by the flesh. Holy Spirit is our help in daily living.

Ephesians 5:15-19 “Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Just as we need the Holy Spirit for our work, we also need Him to fit us for the work. Jesus told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. It could have been easy for the 12 apostles to think that since they had been with Jesus for three years (three years of Bible school) that they were prepared to go out.

This, I believe, is a mistake that we are making today; that somehow a Biblical education fits us for the work of the ministry. I am not saying that this is not important, but if we do not have the Holy Spirit leading in this then we are doomed to failure.

Often what we call ‘sacred learning’ is nothing more than ‘secular learning’ because so often there is the absence of the anointing and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, and our dependence upon the Holy Spirit as well.

What we have found throughout the history of the church is that ‘studies’ about God can be more harmful than helpful when there is no humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God. We have too many preachers preaching about God who do not really know the Lord in an intimate way. They know about Him, but they do not know Him.

Psalms 103:7 “He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.” This talks about what I am referring to. There is a difference between knowing the ways of God and seeing His deeds. Moses knew the ways of God and through Moses - God could act. The Children of Israel saw the deeds. I believe that this brings out the difference between a person who has been fitted by the Holy Spirit for the work and those who have not.

It was professor Beck who said: “Gentlemen remember that without the illumination of the Spirit theology is not only a cold stone, it is deadly poison.” The Psalmist said: “If the foundation is being destroyed what can the righteous do?” Our foundation is the Scriptures. Who have been the ones tearing down the Scriptures? It has been our so-called theological professors.

One of the reasons for this is that they think that they can understand the Scriptures by microscopic exegesis and by philosophical analysis. However, we read in 1Corinthians 2:11: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

This seems to be a truth that we have forgotten today in many of our Bible Schools and Seminaries. We read about the two disciples on the Emmaus road that when they were walking with Jesus their hearts burned within them when Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. Later, when Jesus was with the 12 disciples we read: “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.” Luke 24:45

One man of God rightly said: “The Bible is burglar proof against all unsanctified learning. The Holy Spirit alone holds the key to it.” In other words, if we are going to understand the Word of God then it has to be the Holy Spirit teaching us.

Augustine said: “I would affirm that the sufficiency of our learning is to discover that our learning is insufficient.” It seems that the energy of the Holy Spirit is in proportion to how fully we surrender to Him and attach ourselves to Him. Have you surrendered to Him?

Are we looking to Him for our strength for service and for guidance? It costs to obtain the power of the Holy Spirit: humble self-surrender and yielding up our most precious things to God. It costs the perseverance of long waiting and the faith of a strong trust. But when we are really in the power of the Holy Spirit we shall find this difference: that whereas it was hard to do the easiest things, now it is easy for us to do the hardest things.

An Indian by the name of Surenda Nath Banergi said: “What India needs for her regeneration is not simply sermons and addresses and Bible texts, but the presentation of a truly Christian life, the gentleness and meekness and forgiveness such as your Christ exhibited in His life and death.” Mahatma Ghandi told Stanley Jones that if he could find one Christian living like Jesus he would become a Christian.

Translators are needed in the unreached areas of the world, but the greatest translator is he who can translate the example of Jesus Christ into the dialect of daily life, into the speech of universal pain and poverty and suffering for the sake of others entering the Kingdom of God.