

“Jesus spoke unto them, ‘All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in Earth. GO ye therefore, and TEACH all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: TEACHING them to observe all things whatsoever I have COMMANDED you...,’” Matthew 28:17-20.

Dear Covenant Friend,

Today we have more to be thankful for than ever before. Although, with all that is going on around us, there are some days that it may not seem like it, but we do. We are Blessed! What other time in history could you go to your local strip mall (or variety store) and buy a copy of God’s Word (in various translations) for only a couple of bucks? What other time could you find wonderful anointed writings, studies, sermons, teachings, and articles within your own home just by surfing a little on the Internet? What other time has there been such great revelation of God’s Word available to anyone willing to seek out His truth? There has never been such a hunger and thirst for the Word of God throughout the world than today. And last, but not least, *no other time in history have we been so close to the catching away of the righteous Saints of the Living God!!!*

All of these blessings come with a warning, a price tag, a responsibility, and an obligation. You can’t believe everything you read, hear, or see because information, or misinformation, is so free and available. There are many people who would deceive the most earnest believer, the casual reader, the careless, or unlearned reader, just because they can. They follow the leading of our enemy in their deceptions.

You have often heard me say that to understand the Old Testament you need to know the New Testament, and conversely, to understand the New Testament you need to know the Old Testament. First of all, to know either you have to be in (reading and studying) the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We have a dear friend who told me that she has stopped reading the Old Testament because it is so *bloody*. She has, in my humble opinion, limited herself to not fully understanding God’s Word. One of the things that made the early Christians such an effective soul-winning force for the New Testament Church was their knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament. This was especially true in the life of the apostle Paul. This level of understanding does not come by merely reading God’s Word. No, the deeper understanding of God’s Word comes only from truly humbling yourself before the LORD before, during, and after reading His Word and asking Him to minister (show) His Truth to you through His Holy Spirit when you read and meditate on His Word.

You know this and I know that you know it, so why bring it up now? Over the past few weeks there have been conversations with believers, fellow Christians, dear Saints of God, when the Holy Spirit has showed me their lack of understanding, humbleness, openness, and willingness to hear the Truth of God’s Word in their lives; and yet they say they want the fullness of God’s Word working in their lives. Now, I’m not pointing a finger, or casting criticism, toward anyone. God knows that I am far from perfect, for only He is perfect. However, **we, the Church, need to be yielding students of His Teachings and Truth until the day we are with Him in Glory.**

The point is that in these last days, with all of this abundance of information, teaching, and revelation of God’s Word available to us, we (in my humble opinion) will be held accountable for what we do – or don’t do – with God’s Anointed Word. Will we seek His Truth and be His Light on the Hills of Harvest, or will we be content to walk in limited knowledge of Power and Victory? Are we satisfied to just walk in our own little world feeling secure in our salvation, or are we challenged by His Word to go out and get to work in His Harvest Fields?

Jesus gave His disciples many commands (commandments – instructions - teachings) over the short term of His Earthly ministry, **“... REPENT: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,”** Matthew 4:17; **“...Follow Me...,”** (v 19); **“Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay ...,”** (v 5:27); **“Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain,”** (v 5:41); **“...Love your enemies...,”** (v 5:44); **“Ask...seek...knock,”** (v 7:7); **“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me...,”** (11:29); **“... Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,”** (v 22:37); **“Go ... teach ... baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”** (v 28:19); **“... Ye must be born again,”** (John 3:7); **“If ye love Me, keep My commandments,”** (14:15), and many, many more that deal with physical, mental, and spiritual life. In fact, there seems to be so many do’s and don’ts (commandments) it may seem impossible to keep them all, at least at the same time.

But what has grabbed my heart these past few weeks in this *‘Post-Easter’* season is the actions that Jesus did and the commandments that He gave after His crucifixion, resurrection, and His ascension. There is so much said and taught about the 3 ½ years of Jesus’ ministry and all of the

miraculous miracles He performed that sometimes we forget the importance of the last chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the first chapter of Acts. The first 95% of the Gospels are the blueprint and foundation that the New Church was built upon. If Jesus had not performed the miracles, the church would never have believed that He was the Christ, nor believed that they could also perform the same miracles in His Name. Most still don't today.

A few of Jesus' followers were mighty in the LORD and powerhouses of the Faith. However, there is little record of some of the disciples'/apostles' works after the ascension of Jesus. **They all received the same blessings, teachings, and mandates from the Lord**, but few rose to the height of notoriety in teaching of the Word, leadership, or spiritual acts. The last 5% of the Gospels are His challenge and instructions to His disciples to teach and spread the **"Good News of Grace."**

We don't know just how many times Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. John said, **"Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book,"** (v 20:30). However, it is recorded that Jesus visited people on 10 to 12 different occasions. He appeared to individuals, small and large groups, His disciples and His apostles. He comforted, encouraged, forgave, upbraided, challenged, taught, healed, and commanded (or set forth mandates).

When we look at the Words and actions of the resurrected Savior, **we see His Love, Mercy, and Compassion** for His many disciples, closest apostles, family, and friends. Case in point, why did Jesus appear to Mary Magdalene before the others? She is mentioned as the one going to the tomb first and probably led the other women as she took sweet spices to anoint the body of Jesus. It was John and Peter that ran to the tomb. Even though it is not mentioned, I am sure that all of the other apostles and many disciples also went in disbelief to the tomb before returning to their own homes. They all saw the empty tomb, however, they all went home in disbelief, **except Mary**. It was Mary who stayed at the empty tomb and wept for her dead (missing) Savior. It was Mary who had supported (ministered to) Jesus and His apostles and disciples with her goods, indicating that she was a lady of substance. There is a strong likelihood (but not scriptural supported) that she was the woman with the expensive alabaster box of pricey perfume, and that she washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, dried them with her hair, and then anointed them with the strong expensive Spikenard ointment for His burial. **For it was Mary who, when she saw Jesus for the second time after His crucifixion, hugged and kissed His Feet.**

Why do I say that? **Romans 5:20** says, **"Moreover the Law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, Grace did much more abound."** In that vein, we read in **Luke 7:47**, **"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to**

whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." The same goes for healing, he who has been healed from much, is more grateful than he who has been healed from little. I think that being delivered from seven demons gave Mary a greater love, gratitude, and dedication to Jesus than most others. While under demon possession, Mary may have been the city's biggest disgrace, living in uncontrollable sin. Unlike the thousands that were healed and walked away, we see that the **"Madman of Gadarenes"** did not want to leave the side of Jesus after the legion of demons were commanded to leave the possessed man. Because of his great deliverance he had great love and appreciation, he wanted to sit and listen to the teachings of Jesus and only departed after Jesus sent him home.

Again, Mary, in her great deliverance from evil, loved Jesus with an undying love and her heart that was broken with great pain at His death. God, both Father and Son, knowing her pain, took the time to speak to her first, be with her, and to comfort her with the news that He lives, even before He ascended up into Heaven to place His **Blood** on the altar.

We also see that Jesus made a special effort to visit Peter before the rest of the tribe. The angels at the tomb told Mary to **"tell His disciples and PETER."** Later, we read that Jesus, on His second appearance, made a point to speak with Peter (Cephas) as recorded, **"Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon,"** **Luke 24:34**, and again spoke to him personally before His ascension. Why? Remember Peter's words before Jesus was arrested, and his denial of Jesus during His trial? **"Peter remembered the Word of Jesus, which said unto him, 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice.' And he went out, and wept bitterly,"** **Matthew 26:75**. Jesus showed His concern for the soul (feelings) of man. Without a doubt, bitter disappointment, disbelief, and self-condemnation gripped Peter's heart because he had denied knowing Jesus. Though the tomb was empty, the pain was still there in his inner man, even with the faint hope that Jesus was alive. God had plans for this man, a calling to give, and a healing of the mind, soul, and spirit was needed. **Love prevailed**. Before it was all said and done, Jesus gave Peter a life-changing mandate.

Next, we see the hurt of His death manifested in doubt, disbelief, and anger as Thomas could not – would not take the word of his friends after he himself saw the death and burial of his Lord. Thomas was no different than the other disciples, they didn't believe the words of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Peter, and the other disciple that walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Thomas was hurt and Jesus addressed Thomas directly with Love, **"Then saith Jesus to Thomas, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing,'"** **John 20:27**.

The very thing that Thomas thought he needed to see to prove that Jesus lived was the very thing Jesus offered to Thomas. That is what God does, He may not give us everything we want, but He gives us what we need.

All the ingredients needed to build the Church were there. Sin had been paid for. Workers were in the house. Salvation was at hand. All that was needed was a bit of last minute instructions and a catalyst to bring it all together. The instruction started with an upbraiding of the apostles and disciples for their lack of faith, their hardness of heart, and their unbelief. *"When the disciples saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted,"* Matthew 28:17. And then the instructions came, *"Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 'All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in Earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,'"* Matthew 28:18-20. *"Jesus said unto them, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover,'"*

Mark 16:15-18.

Sidebar: Here is something I think is a very - VERY important point (fact) to remember when reading, talking, or thinking about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the angels. Everything that they said or did (or do) comes from "Jehovah," the "Creator" of everything, the "LORD of all," the "I AM that I AM," the "Master of the Universe," and our "Heavenly Father." Why is this important? Because the Love, the compassion, and the power that we see in the life of Jesus, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the actions of God's Ministering Spirits towards mankind has always come from the FATHER. The Father loves His Son, His Son loves His disciples with the Love of the Father, and the Father and the Son sent Their Love to mankind through the Holy Spirit. It is the same Love that the Father Loves us with today through His Holy Spirit! WOW - that is almost too big to handle.

Why did Peter become the most influential Christian leader in the first century Jewish Church? Peter had the boldness and confidence that Jesus was Christ which was needed to build the Church, and so much so that later he would be called *"The Gate Keeper."* *"Jesus saith unto the disciples, 'But whom say ye that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said*

unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven,'" Matthew 16:15-19. Peter was a rock, but not *"THE ROCK,"* for that is Jesus Christ!

However, after denying Jesus three times, Peter's ego needed a little rebuilding. *"This is now the third (and last) time that Jesus shewed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?' Peter saith unto Him, 'Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.' Jesus saith unto him, 'Feed My lambs.' He saith to him again the second time, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' He saith unto Him, 'Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.' He saith unto him, 'Feed My sheep.' He saith unto him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, 'Lovest thou Me?' And he said unto Him, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.' Jesus saith unto him, 'Feed My sheep,'"* John 21:14-17. The Will of the Father was made known, the mandate was given, *"FEED MY SHEEP!"*

At or just before His ascension, Jesus gives the mandate for the addition of the active ingredient (or the catalyst) to the mixture of prophesies, teaching, and promises of the Godhead that would solidify God's Word, and the children of God would be set on fire for the Kingdom of God. *"And, [Jesus] being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, 'but wait for the promise of the Father; which, saith He, 'ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence ... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the Earth,'"* Acts 1:4-5; 8.

Last but not least, Jesus, after His ascension into Heaven, dealt with the *"hate filled, letter of the Law,"* mentality of Saul of Tarsus and humbled him on the road to Damascus and told Him, *"Arise and go into the city, and there you will be told what you must do,"* Acts 9:8. In preparation for Saul's arrival, Jesus called Ananias, *"Ananias! Ananias said, 'Behold Lord, here I am.' The Lord said to him, 'Arise, and go to the street named Straight. Inquire at the house of Judas for someone named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For behold, he is praying, and has seen a vision. He saw a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him to give him back his sight.' Ananias replied, 'Lord, I have*

heard from many about this man, and how much evil he did to Your saints at Jerusalem. Here in Damascus he has authority from the Chief Priests to bind all who call on Your Name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Be on your way to him, for he is My chosen vessel to carry My Name before the nations and their kings, and before the children of Israel. I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name's sake,'" Acts 9:10b-16.

Would we have the New Testament teachings and books if Ananias had not set his fears and the words of men aside and walked in the faith and followed the mandate of Jesus to leave his comfort zone and minister to a man that was feared by the Jewish Christians? His obedience to the Voice of God changed the world forever! I assure you of this, that Ananias has a reward for all the souls that Paul won to the LORD, and for all of the Holy Scriptures penned by, or on behalf of, Paul.

Ananias was seemingly a small step in Saul's life. If Ananias had said *"NO way, that man's a murderer!"* the LORD would have called someone else willing to obey His Voice, and Ananias would have missed out on the LORD's blessing. However, the LORD wanted Ananias to receive the reward for obedience. The New Testament was written to teach and encourage the New Testament Church, and everyone who would follow.

The Bible is relevant for us today!

Today we see the Scriptures point to end-of-time. What else needs to happen before we are called Home? Nothing that I know of. The other day I read of a lady who lives on the West Coast who started her own church. *Easter Sunday* was her first church service. She is a self-made wealthy business owner. Her fundamental doctrine is *"Worshipping Abortion!"* They pray to, and worship abortion.

"Dear LORD, how much longer???"

Typically, the most important words anyone will speak are words spoken just prior to their departure, whether they are words of a *'dying declaration'* or the words spoken to a person knowing that they will never see them again.

Jesus spoke both. Just before He was received into Heaven, Jesus spoke to His disciples and said, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,"*

Mark 16:15.

My closing question today is: *Have we heard, and more importantly, are we obeying the mandate that Jesus gave to Peter, which applies to every Believer,*

"If you love Me, Feed My Sheep!"?

Your Covenant Brother in Jesus Christ, my Lord,

Phillip Buttram

Phillip L Buttram

OH – For a Good Woman!

This month we celebrate Mother's Day. Almost everyone has a good story about their mother. My heart goes out to those who grew up under a mother's hand whose life was broken by drugs, abuse, or death. Our Heavenly Father intended for a child's life to be under the love and protection of Godly parents. God gave mothers a special love for her family, a love that would transcend poverty, fear, disappointment, sickness, and even death.

I'm reminded of a famous man that gives all of the credit to his success to his God-fearing, faithful mother. Most people will give some glory or at least good remarks about their mother. Few very rich, successful, famous, TV and movie stars say anything about their parents. Chuck Norris is the exception to that rule. He was raised in extreme poverty and grew up with an absentee alcoholic father. His mother repeatedly told him, *"God's got a plan for you!"* She stood upon her faith to get her family of 3 sons through the day, re-enforcing her love and faith in the LORD. Chuck was raised in the church and walked with the LORD. God led this shy boy into taking karate lessons while serving in the Air Force in Korea. This led him to become a six time world champion in karate. The championships opened the door for him to play the hero in 23 feature films, star and produce his long-running, award-winning TV show *"WALKER – Texas Ranger."*

After all of the fame and glory of being a *'Hollywood Star'*, he began to believe all of the hype, and drifted from the LORD. While his second wife was in a medical crisis with their unborn twins, the power of a mother's prayer rang true, and Chuck returned to the LORD with a renewed faith of Who was the biggest hype in Hollywood, the Lord Jesus Christ. Chuck's mother will celebrate her 102st birthday this month. Chuck has repeatedly stated, *"My Mother Has Prayed for Me all My Life."* Chuck wrote in one of his recent books, *"Mom has been an example of perseverance and faith her whole life. She's also endured the deaths of her two husbands, a stepson, two grandchildren, and my younger brother Wieland in the Vietnam War, and yet she's still here to tell about it."*

"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is ; not out by night," Proverbs 31:10-