

DISCERNMENT

The background of the cover is a photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in shades of green and blue, dancing over a dark landscape with mountains and a body of water. A small, glowing cross is visible in the sky near the horizon.

BECOMING SKILLED IN THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Aurora Borealis

A physical phenomenon symbolizing Satan's
angel of light deceptions upon God's people.

CHARLES PRETLOW

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BECOMING SKILLED
IN THE
WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Charles Pretlow

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Becoming Skilled in the Word of Righteousness

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About the Cover

Aurora borealis: The cover is an enhanced photo of the aurora borealis (Northern Lights) at sunrise with a cross superimposed on the horizon. The Northern Lights phenomenon was named Aurora for the Roman goddess of the dawn and Borealis (*boreas* in Latin) for the god of the north wind.

In simple terms the aurora borealis is electrical current flowing through the atmosphere generated under certain conditions, and giving off a beautiful and mesmerizing light that flows in the atmosphere as if it were a wind. Scientists estimate that the power of the aurora borealis, if it were able to be harnessed, would surpass the electrical kilowatts generated in all of North America.

Angel of light: Using the aurora borealis for the cover is a metaphor on the work of Satan who appears as an angel of light with a demonic wind that counterfeits the wind of the Holy Spirit.

Many ministries, denominations, and movements throughout the body of Christ have built a foundation upon false doctrine originated by Satan who sends his workers as perceived servants of righteousness. These false teachers and false shepherds walk in *false light* and have learned to harness a *demonic counterfeit power*; this power is real but it is not of God.

The false light and demonic power appears like the aurora borealis; beautiful, mesmerizing, misleading and, if harnessed, very powerful in performing signs and wonders, just as Christ warned: "*For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*" (Matthew 24:24).

Those who lack discernment and those who buy into Satan's angel-of-light schemes tap into a demonic, counterfeit spiritual power; this power is like a borealis wind that causes the Northern Lights to mysteriously glow and flow.

Angel-of-light ministries have a power accompanied with a twisted light that appears to affect a person's life; however, the changes are superficial, never truly affecting the heart or character of the deceived.

The Cross: Jesus said to his disciples, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail*" (John 6:63). A true disciple will learn to enter into a death

like Christ's, embracing the cross and crucifying the works of the flesh. These disciples truly are transformed in character, becoming Christ-like. They are not followers who work for Christ; rather, they are disciples who have Christ working through them and who have learned to distinguish between good and evil.

The cross is the avenue for God's power to flow through the true saint who has died to the use of Christ's name in the flesh; it is for those who have learned to discern the difference between the power and flow of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual power that flows through the human spirit that is harnessed and power—boosted by Satan and his minions; for many are deceived by the spiritual power of the flesh that is acclaimed to be the power of God.

The message of the cross must be worked into the life of every true servant of Christ that the true power of God may flow unrestrained in purity and glory—the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

1 Corinthians 1:18

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Introduction

Christians should be realizing that things in the world and within the body of Christ are not going as advertized according to most pulpits. Unfortunately, those seeking truth are experiencing a hard time getting help in the form of sound teachings that bring deeper understanding of God's words and the harder teachings of Christ.

This book introduces the sincere Christian to the solid food of the Word, challenging each reader to examine teachings they hold dear but that may not be properly supported in Scripture. Give yourself opportunity to learn what Christ and the Apostles taught and forewarned concerning this very hour that we are in.

Christ clearly warned about the times that are upon us now, when many would come in his name and lead even more astray. The writers of the New Testament, especially the Apostles Peter and Paul, describe in detail how insidious, pervasive and persuasive the end-of-this-age deception for Christians would be.

Many want the ability to distinguish between spirits, seeking this gift of the Holy Spirit; however, few Christians are taught how to allow their powers of discernment to effectively grow. True discernment can only increase by becoming skilled in properly handling the Word of righteousness, which requires embracing the harder, more difficult teachings of Christ and the Apostles.

The deeper things of God have become hard to explain to Christians who receive the elementary teachings of Christ over and over again, missing the meat of the word—but it is the deeper and more difficult scriptures that must be embraced to facilitate growing up into salvation and to give the saint an edge in the war against the end-of-the-age powers of darkness.

Satanic principalities have succeeded in implanting imposters, impersonators, and deceitful workers who operate as gates of hell and oppose the true body of Christ, deceive naïve Christians and attack the true saint.

As the end-of-this-age closes, darkness and evil will become all the more disguised by Satan. The devil appears as an angel of light, using false teachers and false prophets who espouse destructive heresies. This resource will introduce the sincere disciple of Christ to the meat of the Word, expounding biblical principles that are often ignored or overlooked.

This short introductory work will challenge and encourage readers to diligent study and enter Christ's school of ministry that the sincere believer may learn to effectively navigate in these dark times—for this present darkness will only get darker and more dangerous.

Scripture passages that explain these principles are written out for your convenience. They are presented in the English Standard Version, a more recent and credible word-for-word English translation; take time to read the passages and ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight. Though you may be familiar with a cited passage, deeper insights often come when verses are read again in conjunction with the exhortation or explained insights that we have garnered in these many years of ministry and study. Passages that are quoted may have portions **underlined** to aid in stressing the Scriptural principles or meaning.

Dear reader, if you are serious about becoming a mature servant of Christ, then you will certainly benefit from using this book as a resource to carefully study, apply, and share with others as a ministry tool.

It is an excellent start in becoming skilled in applying the Word of righteousness and having the Holy Spirit train you in distinguishing good from evil, increasing your powers of discernment.

To that end, may God strengthen you with the ever increasing knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that you may become mature in Him, no longer tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine by the cunning of deceitful men.

Charles Pretlow
January 2012

Disclaimer

This work is shared in hope that the information, exhortation, testimony and commentary herein will benefit the reader; to help in drawing closer to the true Christ, learning to walk in His fullness and in perfect obedience.

Success in doing such cannot be guaranteed by simply reading or applying the principles we share. As stated by the Apostle Paul, it is up to each and every Christian to: *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Ephesians 2:12, 13).

It is not our responsibility to do this work for you; to make you understand the Gospel of Christ or try to convince you to embrace what we have learned and have applied for ourselves and now share.

None of us can blame our pastor, favorite teacher or author, minister, or upbringing for not growing up into salvation in Christ. For once we hear the truth of Gospel and receive the witness of the Holy Spirit to that truth it is up to each believer to exercise their faith in obedience to the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hungering after the true Christ, embracing his discipline, learning obedience and obtaining the grace of God will allow Christ himself to guide and empower you to safely arrive into eternity.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24, 25).

The Saint's Darkest Hour is Coming

End-of-this-Age Darkness

Few Christians know exactly how the end of this age will unfold; all manner of myths are presented as the “right” scenario of the next coming of Christ.

Most Christians believe they will escape any trouble since they believe the rapture will occur before the Great Tribulation begins, however Jesus clearly said that his appearance would happen at the end of that trouble filled time:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31: see also Mark 13:24-27).

No one knows the hour or the day that Christ will appear; however, Jesus expects us to be ready: *“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).*

Through the years many have been duped by false leaders who predicted the exact day that Christ would appear; these false predictions and the many false doctrines about how the end of this age will unfold have seduced many into a deep sleep where few realize that His coming is very near.

The belief that Christians are exempt from suffering and are not required to endure the Great Tribulation is lulling millions to take their ease and avoid becoming mature in Christ and preparing for the coming terribly dark and evil days.

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The false doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture in and of itself has caused millions to stay immature, in love with this world, playing church and living in a false peace and a false joy. There are also numerous false teachings that mislead Christians and keep them from walking and abiding in the true Christ.

It is dark now—and the darkness will increase to the point where millions of seemingly solid Christians will fall away or be misled.

This is fact—you can count on because Jesus said it! *“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. Then if any one says to you, ‘Lo, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect”* (Matthew 24:5, 21-24).

The indicators of the coming trouble that Satan will be allowed to inflict upon the world (including Christians) appear in the news daily, yet few take heed.

One major sign that Jesus foretold is how the world would become immoral and degenerate, reaching the same level of wickedness that caused God to bring forth the flood during the days of Noah and then later to cause fire and brimstone to fall upon on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The same kind of immoral filth and perversion is now widespread and ever growing all through America and around the world.

This sign and many other notable signs that Jesus described are now abounding, growing in frequency with ever-increasing intensity. Yet most Christians are spell bound and taking their ease.

The Last Days Evils Are upon Us

A gradual flood of evils has desensitized millions of Christians

America is adrift on a boiling sea of immorality, corruption, political upheaval, social factions of discontent, and well into the process of

committing national security suicide! Every institution in America has an evil or immoral taint upon it.

The populace of America is witnessing discontent and immorality erupting in a continuous stream of ills and evils in the news—daily. People are begging for something positive, uplifting and hopeful. Yet the cycles and levels of wickedness surpass our desire for good. Billions are spent annually on prescription drugs to numb fears, anxieties and other stress-related symptoms. Affliction upon affliction, perplexities, and calamities, the roaring of the waves of the sea, being on the verge of economic meltdown—yet for most the *party-hardy* and *just-have-fun* lifestyle plays on.

Forty-five years ago, who could have imagined the level of wickedness, national and international perplexities, robberies, murders, sexual immorality and extreme differences in political ideology—and the lawless idolatry, drunkenness, orgies, and sinful passions—that we now face.

Society and most Christians have gradually absorbed these drastic changes and continue to live as if nothing is amiss. *“As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”* (Matthew 24:37-39). Yes, America and millions of Christians are unawares what is coming upon this country and the world.

The moral majority, first led by the Reverend Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and then Focus on the Family's James Dobson, made great strides in influencing public sentiment against the many moral ills overtaking this country; but now the cry for national repentance is just a faint whisper.

A Sodomite-type society has taken subtle control of this country's culture, particularly in politics, in liberal Christianity and in the state and national legislature.

This fight by the righteous had its power drained by the many scandals church leaders have been embroiled in, and by the Christian populace of America recoiling from a morally conservative agenda. Many, witnessing the continuous string of leadership scandals appearing

in the news, look upon Christians as hucksters and hypocrites. Peter prophesied about these false leaders: “*And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words*” (2 Peter 2:2-3 RSV).

A definite blow came to the moral conservatives when Ted Haggard, then president of the National Association of Evangelicals, resigned after admitting he had solicited a male prostitute for homosexual sex and methamphetamines. The national elections of 2006 and 2008 reflected the revulsion of the voters to the morality champions—revulsion which directly reflects Haggard’s hypocrisy. Thus, those opposed to the moral conservatives gained Congress and then later the presidency.

Indeed, there is now a whimpering moral *minority*, with evangelical Christians across America having less and less influence politically. James Dobson during his retirement speech on April 12, 2009, said, “We are awash in evil and the battle is still to be waged. We are right now in the most discouraging period of that long conflict. Humanly speaking, we can say we have lost all those battles.”

Few realize that not only are the battles lost, but the *entire war* is lost in the attempt to save America. The righteous are now powerless politically in stopping the ever-growing flood of evil. America has morally gone past the point of no return and final judgment is looming.

I am convinced that the prayers of the righteous will not turn the tide of immorality and spare this nation judgment. These days are as the days of Noah and Lot. The mounting wickedness is not another cycle where a prayer ignited revival will sweep this nation back to righteousness.

Jesus clearly warned that there would be no nation exempt from the last day’s judgments; that God’s people would be forced to come away from trying to fight and maintain any sort of national-religious conclave of peace, security and religious freedom. Rather, Christ stressed that we are to be living in such closeness to Christ that these days will be exhilarating in spite of the gloom and doom; living with no strings attached to this world, trusting in his protection and perfect guidance. “*But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at*

all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

Abraham attempted to intercede for those of Sodom and Gomorrah, that the inhabitants would be spared—only to hear from God that there were not enough righteous to hold back the impending judgment. However, Lot and his family were saved, and this is still the plan of God in these last days; to save the righteous from judgment.

It is now like the days of Lot in Sodom, when the lawless and homosexual wicked took control of the whole city. When a mob of homosexuals attempted to assault Lot’s angelic visitors, Lot tried to reason with them and stop their attack:

“I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.’ But they said, ‘Stand back!’ And they said, ‘This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.’ Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door” (Genesis 19:7-11).

Lot’s attempt to reason, to even sinfully offer his daughters as an alternative for their madness, just enraged the lawless crowd all the more.

Now America is leading the way to a global lawlessness concerning this same kind of wickedness. Jesus and the disciples warned about all of this as signs of the end, but few discern the hour! *“So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates” (Matthew 24:33).*

The fight for morality and purity must begin in the saint’s own life; we must wake up and come away from a world that is about to receive the wrath of God. Give up trying to take back America; the wicked are gaining complete control and any attempt to restore morality, freedom and civility will just bring abuse. Anyone who attempts to stop the homosexual agenda will be attacked.

“And if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then

the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:7-10).

The future of America is in God’s hands, and according to the end-of-this-age truth that Christ taught, from here on out it will not be pretty. The wicked will gain and eventually have complete control until the wrath of God falls; then when Christ returns to set up his millennial one thousand year reign, the righteous get America *and* the whole world back.

Don’t be like Lot’s wife clinging to the American dream and embracing an Americanized Gospel—give up the world and don’t look back. Learn to hear and obey Christ’s voice—that he may keep you during the Great Tribulation and then rescue you from the coming wrath of God.

Lawlessness and Cold Love

The world and America are on the threshold of persecution madness!

Jesus warned that near the end of the birth pangs of the coming Kingdom lawlessness and persecution of Christians would escalate worldwide.

Wickedness and lawlessness would become so hideous that the love of many would grow cold. (The Greek word for love in the following referenced passage is *agape*, primarily meaning God’s kind of love towards each other and love towards God.)

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:9-13).

Hatred towards Christians is increasing, and in the near future certain events will cause intense persecution to come upon the Christian who desires to follow Christ and obey His Gospel.

These are the harder teachings and warnings by Christ that few Christians pay close attention to, leaving themselves unprepared for the coming trials and unable to walk in discernment.

The Apostle Paul wrote the following about the end times that we are now in: *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people.”* (1 Timothy 3:1-5 RSV).

If we do not understand how vile most people will become, we will not learn how to stay clear of such people. During the coming days leading up to Christ's appearance, many who claim to be believers in Christ, who appear now to be religious, will fall away and not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul describes some as imposters, and others who are not ready will eventually become apostate, shipwrecking their faith by rejecting conscience; their love for God and godly love for others will grow cold.

The false will be great in number and they learn to hate the true Christian. If we do not learn to avoid such people now, but continue to have an improper relationship or continue to fellowship with such people, we will be giving them opportunity to betray us as they live in hate and sell out true believers during the coming persecution.

If you discover that your fellowship is lukewarm and denying the power of Christ to truly transform and make true disciples of Christ—then flee that fellowship or congregation! It is better to fellowship with two or three who mean business with Christ than to languish in faith attending a seemingly prosperous and growing church that is wayward.

Lethargic and Lukewarm Followers

A product of the love of money, prosperity and false leadership

The Apostle John prophesied on behalf of Christ concerning the seven churches in Asia. Five of these churches were metaphorically speaking in hot water with Christ. Only two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia received a clean bill of health from Christ.

Those five faulty churches listed in Revelation had various maladies, summed up as follows:

- **The church at *Ephesus*** had abandoned the love they had at first towards Christ and were so far away from Christ that their lampstand would be removed unless they repented.
- **Christians in *Pergamum*** fellowshipped with believers who embraced the teachings of Balaam, which encouraged idol worship and sexual immorality, and some of the Pergamum Christians held to the teachings of the Nicolaitans (a Christian sect of the time) who practiced the same kind of immorality. Jesus said through the Apostle John's writings that if they did not repent, "*I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth*" (Revelation 2:16).
- **Many Christians in *Thyatira*** tolerated a woman named Jezebel who practiced sexual immorality and in turn taught and seduced Christians to do the same, as well as sacrificing to idols. Judgment was pronounced: the woman Jezebel had not repented and thus would be thrown onto her sickbed, her children would be slain, and those who committed adultery with her would be thrown into great tribulation.
- **Christians in *Sardis*** also received a bad grade from Christ because most Christians there were spiritually dead but pretended to be alive. These Christians were worshipping Christ in rote; just going through the motions and actually believing they were alive in Christ. Jesus said of them, "*You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*" Jesus then warns, "*If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come against you*" (Revelation 3:1-3).
- **The church in *Laodicea*** is the fifth and last church listed in Revelation, and in my opinion these believers received the most severe rebuke from Christ and were at risk of being totally rejected by Christ. These Christians were prosperous and content in life, saying to themselves *I have prospered, and I need nothing*. They were lethargic (sluggish, dull, lackluster) and Jesus declared to them, "*So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*" (Revelation 3:16-17).

False teachings over the last century have infected churches and fellowships across America with all the same issues listed with the five churches in Revelation, especially lethargy. Some denominations have crossed the point of no return, becoming apostate by embracing abominable practices and immoral behavior.

Christians more than ever are in love with this world and are at risk of judgment as most leaders continue to preach *all is okay* even as the afflictions of the birth pangs ever increase.

There is an extreme lack of life, energy, and inspiration that normally comes from an on-fire relationship with Christ, just as it was with the Christians in Laodicea; Christians in America and most other industrialized nations wallow in a lukewarm condition.

Millions upon millions of believers are plagued by prosperity teachings that promote life on earth as a blissful journey for Christians, free of anxiety and care especially when it comes to money. Teachers of prosperity twist Christ's teachings on being "anxious for nothing" to mean that God will bend over backwards to make the faithful Christian prosperous and in need of nothing—and to cause them to become rich with money.

Jesus said, "*No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money*" (Luke 16:13).

Thus, a lukewarm condition has become predominant, with teachings depicting the faithful Christian's lifestyle as identical to that of America's rich and famous—the prosperous Christian who needs nothing!

However, according to Christ and Scripture, "abundant life in Christ" actually means receiving the *spiritually rich* life (*zoë* life) that is found in a right relationship with Father God, rather than the carnal, worldly life (*psuchē* life) that Christ instructs his disciples to hate and have crucified.

The false doctrine of prosperity undermines true worship and servanthood, causing many to seek God in order to receive riches on earth. Fellowships who embrace the prosperity doctrines find it necessary to serve up entertaining worship and worldly activities to soothe pangs of the heart that these false doctrines conceal, but not eradicate.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this destructive issue: "*But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich*

fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 6:8-10).

If you are embracing these false doctrines concerning prosperity, (a veiled love for money), you will never walk in true discernment. This idol—or any idol of heart—will cause great difficulty for Christians, and subvert efforts to become discerning and effective in ministry.

In the coming days many believers will not give up these lies and will wander from the true faith in Christ, plunging themselves into ruin.

A veiled love of money is generated by these false teachings and covers up bitterness, jealousy, envy, greed, and many other emotional and mental maladies and ill motives. Many struggling Christians fall for this error partly due to wounds to their spirit and hidden defilements from their pre-Christian sinful lifestyle.

Lack of Understanding—Lack of Discipline

Christians are taught to work tirelessly for Christ by serving the church, missions, the nursery, Sunday school—the list is endless. However, much of this activity in working for Christ (via the Church) is wrought by the power of the carnal nature; few learn to embrace the discipline of the Lord and crucify the motives of the flesh in order that they might allow Christ’s Spirit to work through them.

They learn to work for Christ, but never reach an understanding through the discipline of the Lord that will enable the power of Christ to *do the work through them*.

The author of the book of Hebrew expounds on how we must enter into the *rest of God* and allow Him to work through us, rather than doing the work for him in the energy of wrong motives and selfish intentions.

We are to learn how to allow the Word of God to become a dynamic knife that cuts to the root of the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (see Hebrews 4:11-13).

Many are motivated to serve God (in the church) for mixed reasons: to further the Gospel is a legitimate reason, but often other reasons such as insecurities, jealousy or selfish ambition are intermingled in the heart.

These not-so-noble reasons are often veiled from the exuberant servant and they provide tremendous energy; because of this condition that most walk in, the power of Christ is diminished, blocked and often substituted for the spiritual power and energy of the flesh. This false spiritual power grows and becomes the drive for worship, ministry, and most of life's activities. Jesus warned, "*Apart from me you can do nothing.*" Christ also taught, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail.*" (John 15:5; 6:63).

The Spiritual Power of the Flesh

Many today are taught to substitute (unknowingly) life in the Spirit and the Spirit working through them with the *enthusiastic-spiritual power of the flesh*, which in the end produces nothing eternal or lasting.

There is a spiritual power that the flesh generates which is often mistaken for the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a tragic deception that false teachings create, where millions of pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical Christians are tricked into conjuring up and embracing a *spirit-power generated by the human spirit*.

In reading the Hebrews reference previously mentioned, take note of this part of that passage: "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit*" (Hebrews 4:12).

Few learn how to allow the Lord to teach and show them how their own spirit and soul are still intertwined, clogging and even blocking the presence and the flow of the Holy Spirit, or how to discern a mixed or partial influence that interferes with the pure flow of the Holy Spirit.

Christ warns us concerning operating in our own spiritual power: "*On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'*" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

How to embrace the discipline of the Lord must be restored to the body of Christ. The sincere disciple of Christ must learn to grasp the words and principles of Christ that press out the carnal motives and brings death to the emotional and spiritual power of the flesh. Those principles teach suffering and dying to self through trials and adversity.

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Love, grace, and holiness, as well as wisdom and discernment are brought together in this discipline. *“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:7-11).*

James 1:2-4 reads, *“Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

If you avoid the discipline of the Lord, you will lose your edge in increasing your powers of discernment, and, more than this, you run the risk of becoming an illegitimate child of God and likely hearing those terrifying words, *“I never knew you!”*

When we refuse to allow Christ to discipline us but attempt to serve him anyway, we end up using Christ’s name but never coming to a place where the person of Christ is formed within us—where the Spirit works through us unfettered by our carnal issues. Thus the power that is thought to be of God turns out to be the spiritual power of the flesh, which often gets a power boost from the demonic, impersonating the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul warned Christians at Galatia that they were being deceived in the way they were walking with Christ. If they continued, they would make Christ’s sacrifice of no avail and actually become severed from Christ. In frustration Paul wrote in the same letter, *“My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!”* (See Galatians 4:8-20; 5:1-9).

The Apostle is saying that when Christ-like character is produced (formed within) the old carnal nature will be put off (a division of soul and spirit). Our soul (mind and heart) will not drive our own spirit, rather our spirit will become distinct and a home for the Holy Spirit: *“If a*

man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23).

This must be accomplished in order to be led by the Spirit of God, that we would no longer be driven by our own spirit-flesh-power conjured up and enhanced up by the deceitful wiles of men in their teaching of false doctrines, inspired and empowered by demons.

Abundant Life Syndrome

For most Christians, the abundant life in Christ has become misconstrued and confused with the American dream and good-times on earth. If we do not understand what Christ meant by the abundant life that He promises, our powers of discernment will be skewed by a natural-carnal immaturity in life. Then we end up trying to follow Christ and yet find ourselves stumbling in the dark with a few glimmering lights of hope here and there.

Jesus said of himself, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).*

However, Jesus also taught, *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13, 14).*

What kind of life is Christ talking about here? The word for life in these passages in the original Greek is *zōē* meaning the life we receive from Father God through Christ.

The other life that Jesus often spoke of is the *psuchē* life, where he states *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, 27).*

This *psuchē* life denotes natural life on earth or the seat of personality for our own life. This life is developed in the world, in family, and in significant relationships, and grows into dynamic dependencies—all based upon mankind’s fallen-sin nature.

In this relationship-*psuchē* life, we derive our self-worth and sense of well being. Quite often this form of life becomes controlling, demanding, self-centered, even idolatrous and sometimes abusive. Thus, this natural life is the primary ingredient of the carnal life or life of the flesh that Scripture describes as being detrimental to the life of God within the believer's life.

The Apostles Paul describes a battle between God's Spirit and our carnal *psuchē* life as believers, stating: "*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do*" (Galatians 5:16- 17).

The *zōē* life in Christ is often in contradiction with carnal or *psuchē* life. Therefore Christ commands that we hate this aspect of our life, within ourselves and in its power in all of our relationships—not just our influence upon others but also its influence on us from others that we are significantly related to.

It is this life (carnal-*psuchē* life) that most believers mistakenly want more of; and easily confuse with the life that Christ said he came to give: "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*"

Few are instructed on how to die to the carnal-*psuchē* life and have the Holy Spirit filled *zōē* life in God become abundant and ever growing. This *zōē* life is not like the other *psuchē* life that we have become so accustomed to and even addicted to.

Basically the *psuchē* life dictates that we live for others and for ourselves—and to demand selfishly and often that others live for us—where humans become gods to each other and for each other.

The most of the harmful characteristics of this natural life are listed in Galatians: "*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:19-21).

However, the characteristics of the *zōē* life in Christ are as follows: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law*" (Galatians 5:22-23).

This life in God is obtained by entering a journey where the carnal-*psuchē* life dies and in its place the Holy Spirit filled *zōē* life becomes the believer's own life within.

Thus, the Apostle Paul finishes his explanation on the carnal-*psuchē* life by writing, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

Now review what Jesus taught, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

The work of crucifying or dying to the carnal-*psuchē* life is not easy and often requires giving up or minimizing relationships that are based on the natural-worldly-carnal life.

I often refer to Christians having an *abundant life syndrome*. Why?

Simply, few Christians are taught the difference between the meaning of the abundant life in Christ, and the carnal life of the world, a carnal-relationship life, where the sense of well being and self-identity stem from relationships, work, ministry, lifestyle preferences, hobbies, sports, education, material possessions, money and all other manner of activities.

This lack of understanding, and lack of entering the right path that leads to the abundant life in Christ, brings confusion, frustration and relationship conflicts along with false peace and false joy.

The idea of dying to the good feelings we receive from the carnal life is difficult to understand and often painful; however, when we put off the old nature, we learn to make way for the fullness of God to come; then our relationships and life in the world contain a wondrous peace and joy.

Rivers of living water (the Holy Spirit flowing freely) flow out from us into the lives of others. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37, 38).

The abundant life syndrome can be seen in millions of Christians in their lusting after quick-fix doctrines, material possessions, money and spiritually sensuous experiences that ease or deliver the deceived from the aforementioned passions and desires of the flesh and unresolved issues of the heart. Bitterness, jealousy, unforgiveness, hidden defilements, insecurities, greed, judgments and selfishness are some specific issues that Christians avoid dealing with properly that cause loss of peace, joy and contentment in the Lord.

Therefore the abundant life syndrome stems from false theology and faulty thinking where the abundant life in Christ wrongly translates into a wonderful life on earth.

Pondering this should help you see that those stuck in this syndrome have very little power to discern the false from the true, good from evil, and to detect the powers of darkness that come as an angel of light.

Embracing false doctrines that are now very popular has caused millions to *receive a different spirit, accept a different gospel, and follow another Jesus* (see 2 Corinthians 11:1-4).

An Easy-Going Jesus and Shoo-In Salvation

So much of the Gospel of Christ is truncated and packaged to suit the wants and needs of the masses that follow Christ, who look to the Bible and church leadership for a way to make life easy while on earth.

When Christ multiplied the five barley loaves and two fish and fed the masses, the people became so excited that they formed a plan to take Christ by force and make him king. When Jesus perceived that the crowd was about to seize him, he left and went away to be alone. When evening came, the disciples went down to the sea without Jesus and entered into a boat and sailed across the sea to Capernaum.

The disciples ran into trouble when a strong wind arose and the sea became rough. As the disciples struggled with the night crossing, Christ came to them walking on water and entered the boat, and immediately the boat arrived at the far shore.

The next morning the crowds saw that Christ and the disciples had departed, so they got into boats also and crossed over to the far shore. When they found Christ on the other side of the sea at Capernaum, they said, "*Rabbi, when did you come here?*"

Jesus immediately said to the crowd, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves*" (see John 6:1-36).

Today many are seeking Christ to have their material-emotional-physical lives filled *miraculously* by so-called representatives of Christ who promise freedom and prosperity.

The Lord saw how the masses wanted to make him a king, a form of manipulation to ensure Jesus would continue to fill their stomachs and make life easier in the world.

Now we have many who present an *easy-going* Jesus with promises to make life easy on earth; a Jesus who will cater to our every need and want, without offering any discipline or rebuke for having wrong motives.

In the book of James, the author writes of this selfishness that now consumes so many believers: “*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:1-4).

This approach in coming to Christ and serving him is often accompanied with another faulty message: a different gospel that allows for deliberate sinning with no repercussions, a message that fosters a lukewarm relationship with Christ, and a *come-one-come-all* invitation to salvation.

For years, preachers, teachers and evangelists have proclaimed that all you have to do to be saved is to come forward publicly and confess Christ as Lord and your salvation will be a *shoo in*.

The old phrase *shoo in* came into use in the late 1920's with regards to horse racing. The phrase implied cheating: a horse was expected to win not on its abilities but by the race being fixed. In the original usage, the phrase carried the connotation that the horse was a winner even if it lackadaisically wandered up to the finish line and had to be “shoed in” by someone to cross the finish line.

Shoo-in theology is a term I use to describe the popular but erroneous teachings concerning salvation in Christ that so many profess today. Most Christians are ignorant of all that Christ and the Apostles taught concerning becoming born again and then working out one's salvation—in other words, growing up into salvation.

In Corinthians Paul writes, “*Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.*”

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Many follow Christ and yet do not know him or obey him, living a Christian lifestyle that is lukewarm at best. These believers are tricked and even self-deceived into cheating—taking shortcuts that put themselves in grave danger of becoming disqualified.

The author of Hebrews wrote: *“Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end...”* (Hebrews 3:12-14).

The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:12-13). Believers must both work out their salvation and grow up into a salvation that is real. 1 Peter 2:2 says, *“Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”*

This process is not done without the Spirit of Christ personally orchestrating challenging situations that force hidden issues of the heart and defilements of the spirit to surface and so receive our attention.

In other words, Christ brings divine pressure in life, encouraging us and challenging us to work with him to become transformed in character and in true holiness; to be purified and transformed from the old carnal nature. If this carnal nature is unresolved it will always undermine our relationship with Christ. Many Christians suffer from wounds and defilements of the past that created within them a double minded condition and hearts full of unbelief.

The following Scriptures express the extreme importance of working out our salvation all the way and growing up into eternal security in Christ. Underlining is used to highlight key points concerning the process of growing up into Christ, obtaining the grace of God and assuring eternal security when Christ is formed within.

“Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (1 Peter 2:1, 2).

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (Hebrews 12:15-17).

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14).

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

There are many more passages that could be cited here to emphasize the importance of embracing all that Christ taught. Few Christians are instructed on how to grow up into Christ and work out their own salvation. Instead they are told that once you call on Jesus and become born again, you are a shoo-in and can never lose your salvation.

The final passage to help ourselves walk seriously in the fear of God and apply every word that Christ said is as follows: *“And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:26-27).*

The sincere Christian must learn to discern faulty teachings that proclaim Christ to be easy going, looking the other way concerning sin, disobedience and carnal works.

Further, watch out for deceitful schemes from false teachers and false pastors who present the wide gate and easy path to salvation, where just claiming Jesus as our savior magically seals us into a state of eternal security. (Yes, there is eternal security for those who have worked out

their own salvation in the fear of God and obtained the grace of God through the sanctifying discipline of the Lord.)

When we begin to see how deceitful these heresies are and renounce them, God will begin to work in our lives and train us in distinguishing good from evil; our powers of discernment will begin to grow in leaps and bounds.

Wounds and Defilements

The current lack of sound doctrine has forced Christians who suffer from wounds to the spirit and damaged emotions to fend for themselves or fall prey to secular psychology.

Christians often carry all manner of defilements of the spirit, impurities of heart and double-minded maladies. Few ministries know how to minister to or counsel the struggling believer who sincerely loves Christ, yet continually finds that true peace and joy in Christ are an elusive pot of gold at the rainbow's end; they are left ever pursuing the next magic formula presented by wayward teachers enticing the wounded to relentlessly pursue a false gospel nirvana (a complete and euphoric sense of happiness).

The book of James describes the symptoms of the double-minded Christian. The word translated as "double-minded" is *dipsuchos* more properly translated as "twice a soul" or "two souled," meaning divided in heart, mind and spirit. Young's Literal Translation translates this very important word (and condition) in this way:

"Be subject, then, to God; stand up against the devil, and he will flee from you; draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you; cleanse hands, ye sinners! And purify your hearts, ye two-souled!" (James 4:7-8 Young's Literal Translation).

Unstable Christians flounder in their walk with Christ because they suffer from a two-souled *dipsuchos* condition; carrying impurities within the heart, defilements and wounds to the spirit, and suffer from a divided mind. In some cases they suffer from a divided heart or a *double heart* (see Psalm 12:2).

Secular psychology calls a double-minded or a two-souled condition DID (dissociative identity disorder), formerly labeled MPD (multiple

personality disorder). For a double-hearted condition *schizophrenia* is the psychological term used and has a wide spectrum of symptoms and related terms.

Christians who are two souled developed this condition as a coping or survival mechanism from trauma, primarily during childhood abuses. The destructive evils they encountered along with the unresolved pain, resultant wounds and their marred and divided character are glossed over or lightly addressed when they come to fellowship as new believers.

The initial born-again experience presented as a cure all, when in reality it is just the *beginning* of salvation. Scripture teaches that the process of sanctification must be embraced to bring full cleansing, healing and transformation in Christ; it is a process of growing up into salvation, obtaining the grace of God and eternal security.

Until this occurs, Christians who suffer from wounds to their spirit and walk in a two-souled condition are vulnerable to charlatans and often become victims of wolves in sheep's clothing. In the worst case, the false often cause those wounded and weak in faith to fall away from Christ, possibly never returning, risking their eternal salvation.

Most struggling and wounded Christians are taught to pretend that evil does not exist or that evil will never come close to them—that they have a new nature that is complete. Any issues from the past are to be ignored. If you are born again, you automatically have eternal security with a complete bill of health simply by believing in Christ.

Yes, we are to believe completely in our hearts all that Christ taught and also act on those beliefs in obedience. James writes, "*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless*" (James 2:19-20). Our faith in Christ must demonstrate genuineness by our walking in obedience and observing all that Christ taught and commanded.

False doctrine directs Christians away from obedience to Christ, redirecting them to follow false leaders. Confusion, lack of conviction, hesitation in doing what is right, even cowering back from being obedient are symptoms of false doctrine; thus many believers are deceived and actually end up believing in Christ halfway.

34 Discernment

Just as the Apostle Paul warned, many will follow myths—false doctrines—and fall prey to the devil’s schemes. They will be as children, “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14).

False leaders and false brethren have infiltrated the body of Christ, making most fellowships a harbor for the last day insurgency of satanic implants; Jesus spoke of these in the parable of the weeds:

“And his disciples came to him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ He answered, ‘He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age’” (Matthew 13:36-40).

True discernment is vital in dealing with the false, and the Apostle Paul stresses the following about detecting such: “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Romans 16:17-20).

Wounded and defiled Christians are extremely vulnerable to the game playing false brothers and sisters who are Christian in name only. Peter described them as “blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! (2 Peter 2:13, 14).

Peter continues to describe the false brethren as waterless springs who “entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error” (2 Peter 2:18), and by promising freedom to Christians who are unsteady—those who have never been cleansed and transformed as believers.

Often we learn true discernment through conflict with those who claim to be Christian but are not. Eventually the discerning saint will

learn how important it is to detect and avoid such. Look again at the Apostle Paul's admonishment: "*Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve*" (Romans 16:17, 18).

You cannot avoid these troublemakers if your powers of discernment are not up to par because of a two-souled condition—if you are suffering from past unhealed trauma and defilements.

There are also Christians who are sincere and have not suffered wounds to the spirit but who are often naïve for lack of training and fall prey to listening to the flatteries of false brethren. Moving from the milk of the Word to the deeper things of God in the meat of the word will increase our powers of discernment and spare us great trouble and heartache.

DISCERNMENT

BECOMING SKILLED IN THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesus and the writings of the Apostles instruct Christians to discern false shepherds, false brethren, evil people, and the schemes of the devil.

The Apostle Paul warned *"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:13, 14).

True discernment requires understanding the harder teachings of Christ and taking in a steady diet of solid food found in the word of God; *"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:14).

As the end-of-this-age unfolds, it is paramount that the sincere Christian learns how to become skilled in understanding Scripture and applying sound judgment in discerning the hour that we are now in. False leaders, satanic implants, and false doctrine abound as Satan makes war on the saints through the gates of hell.

This resource has been developed out of years of study and ministry to help equip the true saint to grow in maturity to the fullness of Christ; to no longer be naïve and troubled *by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Charles Pretlow shares insights gained from years of study and ministry concerning false doctrines that keep Christians weak and confused. He continues to write and speak, helping the sincere Christian prepare for the coming dark times leading up to Christ's appearance.



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