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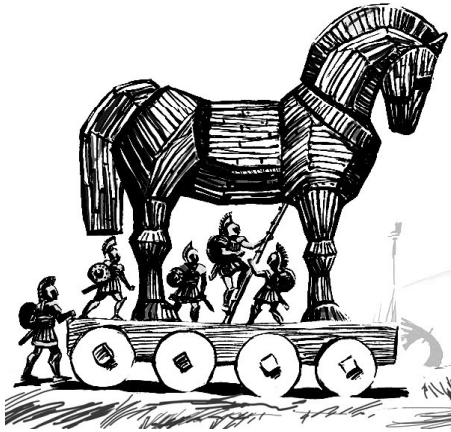
One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up all others. Christ our Righteousness

No. 97

JULY 2014

The Mystery of Iniquity - Part 1

Vlad Ardeias & David Clayton



Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7)

In this passage, Paul describes how Satan would attempt to invade and take control of the Christian Church, an assault in which he would be surprisingly successful. The climax of this Satanic assault would be the appearing of the “man of sin.”

CLUES

There are two passages in Scripture which give us clues as to what this “mys-

tery of iniquity is. The first is written by Paul, and the second by John:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

We see therefore, that this mystery of iniquity was already active within the Christian Church from as early as the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians, in the year 52 AD. This diabolical work had not achieved much success at that time because there was Someone opposing it and keeping it from taking over. Obviously the Person in question was the spirit of Jesus Christ, the One whom Satan cannot overcome. But, as Paul predicted, Jesus was to be removed from His place in the church and this would open the way for the successful takeover of the “mystery of iniquity.”

Let us think about this for a moment. Satan would have had very little success if he had tried to openly take over the Christian Church, or to openly form an alliance between it and the forces of evil. This is why the Scriptures refer to the method he chose as, “mystery,” for it had to be something which would confuse Christians, something that would seem to be in their best interest, something appeal-

ing, something so difficult to identify, that even the best of them could have been deceived. This “mystery of iniquity” must have been a doctrine drawn from Scripture, a teaching which promised people a pathway to God, but actually kept them prisoners of iniquity. This is why it is called the “mystery of iniquity”.

The Scripture goes even further in revealing this apostasy, and identifies those who were promoting it. John says that “They went out from us” (1 John 2:19). John, who wrote this letter 50 years after Paul gave his warning. John had already witnessed the work and development of this mystery in the Christian Church and gives us an amazing and important detail: This mystery of iniquity had not only come to be accepted by Christians, but it was being promoted by them!

Like a Trojan horse, this iniquity had successfully infected, and now dominated Christianity: Satan had made unsuccessful attempts to destroy the Christian Church by the Jews, by the sword of Herod and the iron fist of Rome, now he changed his strategy, achieving far greater success by introducing an idea that was to transform some of the most loyal followers of Christ in the very carriers of the killer virus itself.

In summary, here are the features of the mystery of iniquity we have seen so far:

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Open Face is dedicated to the promotion and the restoration of apostolic Christianity. In particular to the restoration of those truths which have been cast down to the ground and trampled underfoot by the papacy, and adopted by her daughters.

Our purpose is to motivate our readers to commit themselves wholly to the task of personal preparation for the coming of the Lord, and to the taking of the final warning message to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

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1. It already existed in the Christian church from the time of Paul.
2. It was diametrically opposed to the gospel of Christ
3. It was so cleverly disguised that it fooled many Christians.
3. It was believed and promoted by professing Christians.

THE MYSTERY APPEARS

In seeking to identify this mystery, we need to ask ourselves a question: What was the religious doctrine promoted in the Christian Church, by Christians, even in Paul's time, against which Paul fought with all his power? There was something he denounced as having nothing to do with Christ, and even more, one that indicated that Christians had denied Christ. It is not difficult to discover what this doctrine was when we examine his teachings. Paul condemned this doctrine openly and in the most emphatic way. Let us read the following verses carefully:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law,

then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

If we are familiar with the writings of Paul, then we will immediately recognize that he was constantly writing about the danger of having a wrong relationship with the law. Furthermore he was constantly in conflict with a movement in the Christian Church which was trying to bring people into this wrong relationship with the law. Those who opposed Paul's gospel were presenting an alternative to the way of faith. They promoted the idea that there was something more than simply faith in Christ, which was required in order to obtain the righteousness of God.

THE DISPUTE IN ANTIOCH

This is such an important issue that the Bible outlines what happened in connection with it very clearly. What is amazing is that in spite of this, many Christians today totally miss the significance of what the Bible teaches. At the end of the 14th chapter of the book of "Acts", we are told that Paul together with Barnabas "sailed to Antioch ... And remained there a long time with the disciples. " (Acts 14:26, 28). The Scripture tells us that at this time some unexpected visitors arrived at the Church:

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15:1-2)

This meeting had a big impact on the church at Antioch and severely disrupted the harmony among the brethren. It is hard to believe, but this is what the Scriptures tell us. Apparently there was much argument and it would not be far-fetched to suggest that they came close to quarreling. How was it possible that this issue should have become so intense? Why was it that the word of Paul, as the dominant apostle, as a prophet and a pastor in Antioch, was so little regarded in this matter that there was danger of a split in the church?

First, let us note that the promoters of the doctrine were Christians, coming from Judea, the very headquarters of the Christian Church. Judea was the place where the faith began it was the place where Jesus ministered, where the holy spirit fell at Pentecost, where most of the apostles lived and congregated, it was the place where one would assume that they had the purest understanding of the gospel. These men, coming from the headquarters of the church as it were, carried a certain amount of authority with them. It was natural to believe that they were expressing the faith of the church at Jerusalem, so how could they be wrong? Their influence was so strong that even the authority and understanding of Paul was not enough to settle the issue in the minds of the brethren at Antioch. This is why they decided to form a delegation to go up to Jerusalem and clarify the issue. This delegation would be made up of Paul, Barnabas, and some of the Antioch believers.

IN JERUSALEM

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:4-5)

Here we discover an important fact concerning those who were insisting that the law of Moses had to be kept: The main instigators were, "Some of the Pharisees which had believed". We will recall that the Pharisees as a group had been some of the most determined opposers of Christ during His ministry on earth. They had been constantly critical of Him and frequently accused Him of being a law-breaker. It seems that some of these Pharisees - in fact, many of them - had been converted to the religion of Christ. Like the apostle Paul, himself a former Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), these former enemies of Christ had accepted His teachings and had united themselves to the Christian Church. Unfortunately, however, while these Pharisees made the same profession as Paul did, unlike Paul,

they had neglected to dump the baggage of Judaism when coming to Christ. Paul describes his own experience in the following way:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (Philippians 3:5-9)

However, among the believing Pharisees, Paul's attitude was exceptional. There were not many of his fellow Pharisees who went all the way with Christ, rejecting Judaism as he did. It becomes evident that the Christian Church in Jerusalem was heavily flooded with former Pharisees (Satan's Trojan horse) whose attitude to the Christian faith was: "We accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah provided Christians will accept the law as a necessary part of the Christian lifestyle."

Of course, this did not create an issue for believing Jews; the law was something which had been a part of their lifestyle since birth and in fact, it was very difficult for a Jew to think of living his life apart from the law. Many of them evidently, were persuaded that Jesus had simply come to add something to their religion, not to change it. For them, Jesus and the law continued side by side. It was when the Jews began to try to impose the practices of the law on the newly converted Gentiles, that this demand to keep the law became an issue.

Notice the language which was used by the Pharisees: it was necessary to "command" them. We see the legal mindset which dominated the thinking of these Pharisees. The focus was not on the life

of Christ in the believers, but on the imposing of external rules and ceremonies. They wanted to push the principles of legalism upon the believers.

PETER'S SPEECH

Immediately after this first hearing, "the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." (Acts 15:6). This is pretty amazing! What was there to "consider"? It appears to us today that this issue was so simple that the answer should have been provided immediately by the apostles. However, as we look at what happened we see that the situation in the apostolic Church was not as perfect as we sometimes imagine that it was. The apostles, though baptized with the spirit on the day of Pentecost, and entrusted with the task of carrying the gospel to the world, still did not have perfect knowledge and on this matter which seems so simple to us today, they were uncertain as to what God's will was! Remember that the issue in question was whether or not Gentile believers should be required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Again we are fascinated when we discover what took place at this conference. Luke describes it as follows:

"And when there had been much disputing ..." (Acts 15:7).

We see the brethren in this spirit-filled Church in sharp doctrinal conflict. Nobody has a clear answer, no person is able to say, "the Lord has shown me"! Maybe this should help us to understand a little better how inspiration works and teach us that we should not expect that a person knows everything just because he or she been baptized with the holy spirit and given a spiritual gift. Be that as it may, it is apparent that in this Jerusalem council, Paul and Barnabas were not willing to yield even an inch in this conflict, and that on the other hand the supporters of the law fought determinedly for these Jewish principles which they wanted implemented everywhere in the Christian Church.

Finally Peter stood up and presented an argument which won the day.

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God

made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter's argument was a very powerful one and it could not be denied. Everyone there knew the story of how the Gentile believers had received the gift of the holy spirit without ever having kept any part of the law! This made it clear that God did not require anyone to keep the law in order to receive His most precious gift, the righteousness of Christ, with the baptism of the holy spirit.

It is interesting how Peter describes the efforts of these Christian Pharisees to impose circumcision and the law upon the Gentiles. He refers to it as a "yoke that neither our fathers now we were able to bear". Later, Paul himself used the same term to refer to the practices of the law when writing to the Gentile brethren in Galatia:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (Gal 5: 1-2)

Both of them referred to the practices of the law of Moses as a binding yoke, something hanging around their necks which bound and kept them in servitude. Peter concluded his speech with a statement which should never be forgotten by Christians and which should define our attitude to the law and its practices forever. He said, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." (Acts 15:11). Placing Christ where He should be, Peter declares Him all-sufficient for the salvation of man. Man needs

nothing more, period. This is Christianity! Notice that this was in distinct contrast to the demand of the Pharisee party to compel all believers to keep the law of Moses.

JAMES' DECREE

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.” (Acts 15:13-15, 19-21)

James understood that the issue was threatening to divide the Christian Church and he proposed a compromise solution: The Jewish Christians should not be encouraged to abandon the law. There was no danger of this because Moses (the law) would continue to be read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. It is evident that this was one of the major fears of these Jewish brethren. They had not been able to abandon their Jewish heritage and they had become comfortable with a hybrid religion which mingled the pure gospel of Jesus Christ with the legalism of Judaism. When we understand that the law of Moses was not just their religion, but their culture and national heritage, we find some sympathy for them, but this mingling of the gospel with the

law did not work out for the good of the church and the real effect of it was to adulterate the true gospel and to confuse the minds of people as to what was really required for salvation.

It seems that even the apostles were not entirely free of the legalistic mindset. If this seems like an extreme statement, just consider how much debating had to take place before Peter's argument carried the day. It is clear that most of them did not have well-defined ideas on the issue of salvation by faith in Christ alone. Notice that James proposed that they give the Gentiles a modified law made up of four commands: It was agreed that the council would write unto them, “that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.” (Acts 15:20). They did not compel them to keep the whole law, but they still insisted that at least a small part of it should be imposed on them. It was still based on a legalistic approach to righteousness.

DISAPPOINTMENT AT JERUSALEM

And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no

such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. (Acts 15:23-29)

Notice that this epistle is lacking any instruction to NOT depart from Christ, and to hold fast to Him by faith. It contains only the four commandments proposed by James. It is not hard to imagine what may have happened in the minds of the Gentile Christians who read it: their attention was diverted from Jesus to the fulfillment of the four rules, with the promise that “if ye abstain... ye shall do well” (Acts 15-29). A new path opened for the Gentile Christians: not the way of the law from Sinai, but of the law from Jerusalem, but the principle promoted was actually the same: be careful what you do and you will be saved. If you do not break the rules you will be a true Christian!



Joe Biden says Gay Rights are a “Mark”

The international crisis concerning the imposing of homosexual values on all people and all nations is continuing to heat up. It is evident that it is only a matter of time until all who stand by the Bible position on this issue will face severe persecution.

On Tuesday, June 24, US Vice President Joe Biden said during a speech, that protecting gay rights trumps (overrules) national cultures and social traditions, as President Barack Obama's administration continues promoting LGBT rights around the world.

Biden told about 100 guests at the Na-

val Observatory's vice presidential mansion. “I don't care what your culture is, inhumanity is inhumanity is inhumanity. Prejudice is prejudice is prejudice.”

He declared that the cause is a “defining mark of a civilized nation” and met with a number of religious, human rights and HIV health care advocates in a forum dedicated to promoting gay rights internationally.

White House National Security Adviser Susan Rice added that protecting gay people from global discrimination, abuse and even death is one of the most challenging international issues facing the U.S.

“To achieve lasting global change, we need everyone's shoulder at the wheel,” Rice said. “With more voices to enrich and amplify the message - the message that gay rights are straight-up human rights - we can open more minds.”

Biden announced in 2012 that he is “absolutely comfortable” with gay marriage, noting that his position on the issue has been “evolving,” and referred to the practice as, “the issue of our day.”



The Mystery of Iniquity - Part 2

Vlad Ardeias & David Clayton



CONFLICT IN GALATIA

Some time after the Jerusalem council, the controversy arose again, this time in Galatia. In the second chapter of his epistle to the Galatians, the apostle Paul refers to that council in Jerusalem and gives us his view of what happened there.

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (Galatians 2:1-5)

Paul mentions a group present at that meeting who apparently were desirous of having Titus circumcised. He refers to them as ... "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:" (Gal 2:4).

It is evident that he was referring to the believing Pharisees. They were the class who had been most insistent that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law. The brethren in Jerusalem had embraced these believing Pharisees with

open arms. Many of them probably saw it as a triumph for Christianity that these highly respected men among the Jews had accepted Christ as the Messiah. I suppose it could be compared to a situation where some highly rated theologians accept the truth about the godhead. Many of our readers would regard this as a triumph for the movement which promotes the truth of the Father and the Son. But this demonstrates the difference in the way God sees things and the way men see things.

The apostle Paul refers to these people as "false brethren", who had come in to "spy out our liberty", and to, "bring us into bondage"! He stated that their purpose was to deliberately pose as Christians in order to deprive Christians of their freedom by imposing the "yoke of bondage" which was the path of the Law. Paul, and Barnabas were fully aware that if they succumbed to these pressures, the gospel would lose its power. Out of love for the truth and the people, they firmly and uncompromisingly resisted the demands of these "converted" Pharisees. Apparently those "regarded as pillars" (Galatians 2:9) namely James, Peter and John, had accepted these "false brethren", and it is clear that this adulterated version of the gospel, promoted by these Pharisees had completely taken over the Church in Judea.

However, Paul would not compromise with this error and it seems that he was one of the few persons standing against the inroads of this mysterious false element which has intruded itself into the Christian Church. Paul recognized this and in his last sermon to the brethren at Ephesus, he said as much:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20:29)

AN EVIL DOUBLE STANDARD

After the meeting in Jerusalem was over, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they spent some time:

So when they were dismissed, they

came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. (Acts 15:30-35)

During this time another event took place which demonstrates how deeply the legalistic mindset had infected the Christian church and had imposed distasteful practices upon it which were destructive to the true religion of Christ. It becomes more clear that the "mystery of iniquity" was indeed at work and already becoming well established. Again, Paul describes this event in his epistle to the Galatians:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14)

Shortly after the meeting in Jerusalem took place, Peter decided to visit the believers in Antioch, while Paul and Barnabas were still there. In keeping with the gospel of Christ and the true spirit of Christianity, all the brethren were sitting together en-

joying a meal, Jewish believers and Gentile believers alike, all together in brotherhood and unity. Suddenly, Peter looked through the window and saw some other brethren from Judea arriving. We are told specifically that these brethren “*came from James*”. Apparently there were factions in the church with differing ideas and these who were arriving, evidently belonged to James’ party. (see article on page 8). Now an absolutely amazing thing took place: Peter immediately left his place at the table, beside his Gentile brethren and pretended that he had not been sitting, eating with them. Of course since this was Peter, the notable guest from Jerusalem, his influence on the other Jewish believers was powerful and the other Jews, including even Barnabas, Paul’s close companion, followed Peter’s example and separated themselves from the Gentiles at the table. The only Jew left sitting there was Paul!

Again, we are led to wonder about the situation then existing in the Church in Jerusalem, when we see that even Peter was afraid to offend those who came, representing James! Why was he afraid of James? Why did James apparently have so much power and authority? Whatever the reason, it is evident that something was not right in the Church and that the spirit of legalism had gained complete ascendancy in the Jerusalem Church.

But now Paul arose and rebuked them all, but especially Peter. He was a leader in the Church and should have known better. As such, he merited the sternest rebuke.

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:14-16)

Paul raised his voice in again, firmly resisting this false and evil hybrid of the gospel, but it is clear that it was something which had taken deep root in the Church and that even at that moment two different concepts of the gospel were developing. One for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. In effect, the Church was being divided along the lines of race and class, a development which would surely result in the banishing of the true principles of love and brotherhood taught and lived by Christ. The Mystery of Iniquity was at work and apparently Paul was one of the few who saw, and warned of the danger in embracing it.

LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

Some years later Paul decided to return to Jerusalem to visit the brethren there. All along the way the spirit of God warned him that there was great danger awaiting him in the Jewish capital and that if he went there, he would be arrested and imprisoned. But Paul was being driven by some strange desire to be in Jerusalem and he ignored all the warnings against going.

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. (Acts 21:17-19)

And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. (Acts 21:20-21)

Paul’s arrival there again generated conflict, precisely because of the gospel which he preached. James explained to Paul that the Christian Church had been increased by thousands of Jews who were “zealous”. But for what? For Christ? Not at all; they were “zealous for the Law.” We continue to be amazed as we see the staggering effects of adulterating the gos-

pel, of compromising with seemingly harmless error in order to please people whose favor we seek to gain. The church had accepted the “believing” Pharisees, but at a price. Instead of representing the religion of Christ, the Church in Jerusalem was now simply an extension of Judaism, a legalistic entity which bore the name of “Christian,” which professed faith in Christ, but which denied him in its method of worship. In truth, what was being promoted in Jerusalem was not the gospel of Christ, but “another gospel”.

Notice again that this counsel is being given to Paul by James and the elders. It is evident that it is James himself who is speaking. His great concern is the law. He fears that some of the Jews may think that Paul, as an apostle of Christ may be inducing Jewish believers to abandon the Old Testament laws. It seems that James is more interested in preserving Jewish identity and relationship with the law, than in maintaining the purity of the path of salvation. It seems likely also that the Church in Judea had been permitted to continue without too much persecution from the Jews, because it had continued to embrace Judaism. It had really become little different than all the various factions which existed in Judaism, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Herodians etc. Christianity in Judea had basically become just another Jewish faction and it seems it had become quite acceptable to the Jews – hence, the large numbers of Jews who had accepted it. It was now possible in Judea to become a Christian without causing any fuss, without stirring up any persecution at all.

James feared that Paul’s extremism would disturb the comfortable situation that the Church was in and he now counseled Paul to do something to soothe the prejudice which the Jews had against him.

What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning

thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. (Acts 21:22-25)

James's proposal reveals the theology present at that time within the Christian church: There were two gospels: one for the Jews which included the path of the law, and another one for the converts from among the heathen, which, at least for the moment, did not include the way of the law from Sinai, but only the one decreed in the council of Jerusalem.

It is hard to explain what happened next. The apostle Paul agreed to this proposal which, among other things involved the offering of animal sacrifice – something which more than any other aspect of the law was a direct denial of Jesus Christ. What we may learn from this is the danger of seeking too hard to be in harmony with those we regard as our brethren. While Christian unity is a thing to be desired, it is not to be sought at any cost. Loyalty to God, faithfulness to His principles must *never* be compromised, no matter what the cost!

Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. (Acts 21:26)

Paul had stood unwaveringly for the truth of the gospel. He had made his position clear at the council of Jerusalem and again when he rebuked Peter in Antioch. But now, finally, his desire to be as one with his brethren overcame his better judgment. Perhaps he felt that they fully knew his position and so it would not hurt his witness if he yielded to this request, because, after all, he was an ethnic Jew and besides, he wanted desperately to be able to help his countrymen to accept Christ in any way possible. He meant well, but he made a mistake. May God help us all who read to understand and to never repeat the same mistake. His actions seemed good to some, but in actual fact,

what it did was deprive the church of its greatest apostle without advancing the cause of God one iota.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

As we trace the history of the Christian Church, this underlying tragedy is not often highlighted. However, as we see the development of this growing tide of legalism in the Christian Church it becomes evident that Paul's reference to the "mystery of iniquity," referred to this assault upon the faith of Jesus by this intrusion of the ceremonies of Judaism. In his day it was something already at work, but not yet at the full peak of its influence. According to him, there was someone holding back the development of this evil, but that person would be "taken out of the way," and then the way would open for the full manifestation of this mystery. The end result of it all would be the appearing of the "man of sin."

Today, there are two institutions which are more focused on rituals and ceremonies than any other religious bodies. They are Judaism and the Papacy. Judaism retains its rituals and ceremonies imposed by the law of Moses. The Roman Catholic Church however, has adopted many of those ceremonies, but adapted them to paganism. Both systems are works oriented, but while one denies Christ, the other is antichrist. The Roman Catholic Church is the ultimate result of the obsession of the early Jewish Christians with the works of the law. A system developed where the hierarchical structure of the Mosaic system was adopted by the Christian Church, the system of priests with its concept of clergy and laity, the liturgical ceremonies, the meaningless ritualism, all were adopted, the observance of "days, times, months and years," were all embraced as a part of the religion of Christ. What was the tragic result?

Legalistic works inevitably replaced Christ in the minds and hearts of the early Christians. There was no way to avoid this consequence. Christ cannot co-exist with a rival system of religion.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you

are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:2-4)

Christ was "taken out of the way", and this could immediately be seen in the experience of the early church. The first part of the book of Acts is full of the mighty works of the early church after the believers were filled with the spirit of Christ at Pentecost. The experience of the Christians was described by Luke as follows:

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43)

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people (Acts 5:12)

Miracles were the natural lifestyle of the Church. The supernatural intervention of Jesus was a daily thing. However, after chapter twelve, these kind of events seem to decrease more and more. The description of all the extraordinary events of Christ's manifestation that took place in the first 15 years of the Christian Church would have been impossible to include in one book, but after that period of time the author focuses mainly on the ministry and the miracles done by the apostle Paul. Can it be possible that Christ, the One who had been restraining the mystery of iniquity had been gradually removed from His place in the church – "taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:7)? This is certainly in keeping with what Paul taught:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

This story is really amazing, but probably the most useful question for us would be: if the mystery of iniquity managed to conquer the Christian Church during the period when the majority of its members were people who walked personally with our Redeemer and when the apostle Paul was still alive, what effect did it have in the following generation? What about nowadays? After two thousand years of development and refinement, how deeply established could this "mystery of iniquity" be? Is it possible that even the best Christians among us are affected by it?



Who Was James?



As we read through the book of Acts, a name comes up from time to time in unexpected places; it is the name, “James.” Most people understand James to be the brother of John. Both of these brothers were called from their fishing trade by Jesus, to be His disciples.

In Acts chapter 12 we read of a tragic event which took place early in the history of the Church:

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. (Acts 12:1-2)

James, the brother of John, was the first of the apostles to die, martyred by Herod. Yet as we continue to read in the book of Acts, we see the name of James coming up several times. When the Council of Jerusalem was called in Acts chapter 15, we find someone named, James present, taking a prominent part in the proceedings. In fact, he seems to be almost in charge of the proceedings. He is the one who makes the final decision.

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name ... Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: (Acts 15:13-19)

Later again, when the apostle Paul returned to Jerusalem on his final trip

when he was imprisoned, we find James featuring prominently.

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. (Acts 21:17-18)

“Paul went in with us unto James”. There is no question that James was a prominent person in the church. In fact, many years ago I read an article suggesting that he was the first head of the Church. I rejected the idea at the time because I felt that the early church was too spirit-filled for them to make the mistake of exalting man to such a place, but today, having read more carefully, I am inclined to agree with the article. There are many indications that this James wielded a lot of influence and power in the church and that everyone seemed to regard him as an authoritative person.

After Herod killed James, the brother of John, he saw that it pleased the Jews and he immediately captured Peter, intending to kill him also. But Peter was delivered by an angel. He walked out of prison and went to a home where they were praying for him. There he startled the brethren by his unexpected appearance. At first they could not believe it was he:

But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. (Acts 12:17)

Notice his instructions: “show these things unto James ...” But James had just been killed! Yet here was another James, apparently so important that Peter singles him out by name.

Again, the apostle Paul, when referring to his experience at the Council of Jerusalem specifically mentions James, along with Peter and John.

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and

Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. (Galatians 2:9)

Notice how Paul perceived things: James, Peter and John, “seemed to be pillars.” He could discern that these three appeared to be more prominent than the other brethren. But it is evident that even among these three, James seemed to hold the preeminence. James was such an important person that even the writer of the book of Jude, indulges in a little name-dropping at the beginning of his epistle. He identifies himself by associating himself with James.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: (Jude 1:1)

But who was this James? The apostle Paul identifies him at the beginning of his letter to the Galatians:

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1:18-19)

This James in fact, was the brother of Jesus! He was not James, the brother of John, but actually the brother of Jesus, someone who had not even been a disciple of Jesus during the time of His earthly ministry. Jesus actually had several brothers.

Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? (Matthew 13:55)

Notice the names. One was “Judas,” he is the one who wrote the book of Jude and identifies himself as the “brother of James”.

What is interesting is that Jesus had not chosen any of His brothers to be his disciples during the time of His earthly ministry. In fact, we read a statement in the book of John which explains why this was so.

His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. (John 7:3-7)

Interesting! Here we see that Jesus's brothers did not believe in Him. Jesus said that the world could not hate them. Why not? Evidently because they had a worldly perspective and had the spirit of the world! Even in the moment of His death, while hanging on the cross Jesus saw it necessary to entrust the care of His mother to His disciple John, not to any of His brothers and this makes it clear that He did not have any confidence in them.

However, it is evident that after His death Jesus' brothers came to believe in Him. What is astonishing however, is that James, probably the eldest brother, rapidly rose to the place in the Church where he was regarded as the head! His influence was so great that apparently he intimidated even Peter (Remember the incident in Antioch where Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles because he was afraid of the messengers who came from James? - Gal. 2:12)!

How did this happen? It seems that the early Church was not free from nepotism. They adopted the principles of the world in some things and this led them to make some wrong decisions. Apparently the fact that James was the actual brother of Jesus resulted in him being highly regarded by the believers. They were delighted to have actual flesh and blood relatives of Jesus as a part of the Church. If we reason in a human way, who would be more qualified to understand Jesus' principles than those who had lived with Him all His life? There are clues in the Bible which tell us that this undue regard developed for those who were flesh and blood relatives of Jesus. Look at the way Paul refers to Jesus' brothers as being prominent people in the Church:

Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5)

Notice that the "brethren of the Lord," that is, the brothers of Jesus, are regarded as being, along with the apostles, examples of the kind of life a Christian should live. We see in this kind of thinking the seeds of the philosophy which eventually resulted in the full development of the mystery of iniquity. It was the practice of adopting human principles in governing the Church of Christ.

Jesus Himself had impressed the fact upon His disciples that His kingdom was not to be run on the same pattern as the kingdoms of the world. He had explained this to His disciples in no uncertain terms, but even the best of us finds it hard to escape the thinking of many generations.

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: (Matthew 20:25-27)

In addition to this Jesus had made it clear to them that flesh and blood ties were not the bonds which mattered in His kingdom. The following incident demonstrates this clearly:

And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it. (Luke 8:20-21)

It was not that Jesus did not love His mother and his brothers, by no means. But Jesus was addressing precisely the kind of thinking which resulted in James becoming the head of the Church. When his mother and brothers came to see Him, expecting to get special treatment, Jesus made the people understand that there was a connection with Him which was much more important than the connection of flesh and blood. It was the con-

nection with God which made a person obedient to God. This was far more important in connecting a person with Christ than the connection of physical flesh and blood. Jesus taught this lesson clearly, but apparently those who led out in the early Church did not learn this lesson well, and as a result, James was rapidly exalted to the place where he became the head of the Church.

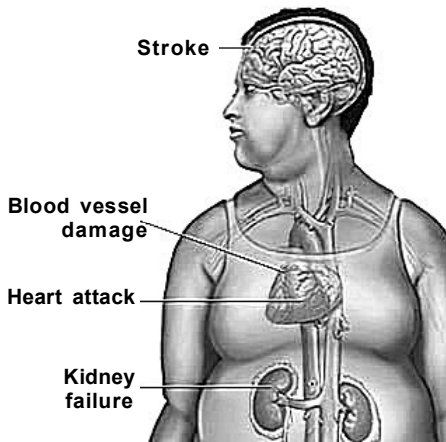
When we look at the statements which were made by James and the events which transpired in connection with his administration, we discover that he, above all others was most anxious to keep the Jewish identity of the Church. He was most desirous of maintaining the practices of the law as a part of the Christian faith. It was fear of James which caused Peter to stop eating with the Gentile believers in Antioch; it was James who decreed that the Gentiles should keep four laws while the Jews should continue to keep the others; it was James who made the suggestion that Paul should take a Nazarite vow and offer a sacrifice to appease the Jews on that fateful occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem. In short, it seems that the embracing of the way of the law by the Church, rather than the simple faith of Jesus Christ was largely due to the influence of James!

When Paul spoke of the "mystery of iniquity", already at work, he avoided being specific, but it is clear that he knew what he was talking about. Perhaps he did not want to offend those in charge of the Church, and we can understand why, but it clearly caused him great concern. The principles of Satan were present in the Church and had manifested themselves in the exaltation of man to the headship of the Church, in the choosing of a leader on the basis of his "connections", rather than his spirituality, and in the maintaining of the system of the law, to co-exist along with the faith of Jesus Christ. This was the mysterious working of the mystery of iniquity and all of these principles can be seen clearly as they developed and bloomed into their full ugliness in the system of the Papacy



The Silent Killer - Hypertension

Lenworth Frankson



High blood pressure (also known as “hypertension”), is the number one reason people visit their doctor in the United States. Each year, more than 100 million doctor visits are made to seek treatment for this condition. High blood pressure is a causal factor in heart attacks, strokes, and congestive heart failure, which makes it the leading associated cause of death and disability in westernized societies.

About one in three American adults have hypertension and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hypertension is “the second greatest public health threat” in the US. While high blood pressure is commonly thought of as an “adult problem,” teenagers and even younger children can develop hypertension as well. Many teenagers in the U.S. and other countries now weigh more and exercise less than teens of past generations. As a result, high blood pressure among teens has increased. High blood pressure in teenagers increased from 1 percent to 5 percent between 1989 and 2002.

The term “Blood pressure,” relates to how hard your blood pushes against the walls of your arteries as it moves through your body. It is normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day, but if it stays up, you have high blood pressure. When blood pressure is high, it starts to damage the blood vessels, heart, and kidneys. This can lead to a heart attack, stroke, end stage kidney disease and other serious health problems. High blood pressure is called a “silent killer,” because it doesn’t usually cause symptoms while

it is doing its deadly damage.

Our blood pressure consists of two numbers: systolic and diastolic. Someone with a systolic pressure of 120 and a diastolic pressure of 80 has a blood pressure of 120/80, or “120 over 80.” Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

- The systolic number shows how hard the blood pushes when the heart is pumping.
- The diastolic number shows how hard the blood pushes between heartbeats, when the heart is relaxed and filling with blood.

If a person’s blood pressure is 140/90 or higher generally, they are considered to have high blood pressure. Adults should have a blood pressure of less than 120/80. Many people fall into the category called pre-hypertension. Pre-hypertension systolic numbers are 120-139 and the diastolic are 80-89. Again, numbers above these strongly suggest that the individual has high blood pressure. People with pre-hypertension signs should make lifestyle changes to bring their blood pressure down.

WHAT CAUSES HYPERTENSION?

Many people are of the opinion that even moderate amounts of salt in their diet will cause hypertension but research is now revealing that one of the primary causes of high blood pressure is your body producing too much insulin and leptin in response to a high-carbohydrate and a processed food diet. (Leptin is a hormone that is produced by fat cells that indicates the degree of hunger to the brain and Insulin is a hormone produced in the pancreas that regulates the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood)

DIET AND BLOOD PRESSURE

A high grain and low fat diet might not be the best, simply because this nutritional combination is a prescription for hypertension and can absolutely devastate one’s health. Research published in 1998 in the journal “Diabetes”, reported that nearly two-thirds of the test subjects who

were insulin resistant (IR) also had high blood pressure. Insulin resistance is directly attributable to a high sugar, high grain diet, especially if accompanied by inadequate exercise. It is therefore very likely that if you have hypertension, you also have poorly controlled blood sugar levels, because these two problems often go hand in hand. As your insulin level elevates, so does your blood pressure.

Insulin stores magnesium. If your insulin receptors are blunted and your cells grow resistant to insulin, you can’t store magnesium so it passes out of your body through urination. Magnesium stored in your cells relaxes muscles. If your magnesium level is too low, your blood vessels will constrict rather than relax, which will raise your blood pressure and decrease your energy level. Insulin also affects your blood pressure by causing your body to retain sodium (salt). Sodium retention causes fluid retention, fluid retention in turn causes high blood pressure and can ultimately lead to congestive heart failure.

FRUCTOSE AND BLOOD PRESSURE

A recent study revealed that those who consumed 74 grams or more of fructose per day (the equivalent of about 2.5 sugary drinks), had a 77 percent greater risk of having blood pressure levels of 160/100 mmHg. This is significant because the average American now consumes 70 grams of fructose every day! This statistic is also true in many other countries. Fructose, found in fruits, is good and healthy when eaten in moderation but the fructose that I am referring to is that refined, commercial, processed high fructose corn syrup that is present in hundreds of processed foods.

The problem is that this fructose breaks down into a variety of waste products that are bad for your body, one being uric acid. Uric acid drives up your blood pressure by inhibiting the nitric oxide in your blood vessels. Nitric oxide helps your vessels maintain their elasticity, so nitric oxide suppression leads to increases in blood pressure.

SALT

A large study published in 1988, examined sodium intake in relation to blood pressure in subjects from 52 international research centers and found no relationship between sodium intake and the prevalence of hypertension. In fact, the population that ate the most salt, about 14 grams a day, had a lower median blood pressure than the population that ate the least, about 7.2 grams a day. In 2004 the Cochrane Collaboration published a review of 11 salt-reduction trials. Over the long-term, low-salt diets, compared to normal diets, decreased systolic blood pressure (the top number in the blood pressure ratio) in healthy people by 1.1 millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number) by 0.6 mmHg. That is like going from 120/80 to 119/79, which is not significant by any means. A 2003 Cochrane review of 57 shorter-term trials similarly concluded that “there is little evidence for long-term benefit from reducing salt intake”

Excess fructose promotes hypertension to a far greater degree than excess salt. Salt is actually essential for maintaining and regulating blood pressure, but the type of salt you consume does matter. Natural salt, such as Himalayan salt, contains 84 percent sodium chloride, and 16 percent naturally-occurring trace minerals. Processed (table) salt, on the other hand, contains 97.5 percent sodium chloride and the rest is man-made chemicals. Natural salt is essential for good health and the better of the two.

EXERCISE THE BEST DRUG

Exercise is still one of the best remedies for hypertension. A single workout can reduce blood pressure for an entire day, and regular exercise can keep the pressure down for the long run. Aerobic exercise agitates the heart and lungs and significantly lowers blood pressure in hypertensive patients. Flexibility and strengthening exercises such as lifting weights are also an important part of an overall fitness plan, but it takes aerobic activity to control high blood pressure. Aerobic exercise would include the following:

- Household chores, such as mowing the lawn, raking leaves or scrubbing the floor

- Active sports, such as basketball or tennis
- Climbing stairs
- Walking
- Jogging
- Bicycling
- Swimming

WEIGHT TRAINING

According to Dr. Sheldon Sheps, “Weightlifting can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure. This increase can be dramatic - depending on how much weight you lift. But, weightlifting can also have long-term benefits to blood pressure that outweigh the risk of a temporary spike for most people.

Regular exercise, including moderate weightlifting, provides many health benefits, including helping to lower blood pressure in the long term”. He also says that if your blood pressure is between 140 to 170 mm Hg systolic or 90 to 109 mm Hg diastolic, check with your doctor before starting a weightlifting program to discuss any precautions or special considerations.

If you have high blood pressure and want to include weight training in your fitness program, remember:

- Learn and use proper form when lifting to reduce the risk of injury.
- Don’t hold your breath. Holding your breath during exertion can cause dangerous spikes in blood pressure. Instead, breathe easily and continuously during each lift.
- Lift lighter weights more times. Heavier weights require more strain, which can cause a greater increase in blood pressure. You can challenge your muscles with lighter weights by increasing the number of repetitions you do.
- Listen to your body. Stop your activity right away if you become severely out of breath or dizzy or if you experience chest pain or pressure.

If you’d like to try weight training exercises, make sure you have your doctor’s OK.

VITAMIN D

Low levels of Vitamin D can be a major

cause of hypertension. Data was gathered from 35 studies, which included more than 155,000 participants from different parts of Europe and North America. The study showed that the participants with high levels of vitamin D had reduced blood pressure and were at a lower risk of developing hypertension. Getting your vitamin D through sun exposure on your bare skin is the better way, as opposed to tanning or pills, .

Strokes, congestive heart failure, heart attack, hardening of the arteries, aneurism (bulge in the artery), kidney disease, disease of the retina (eyes), blood vessel rupture and weakened memory and mental abilities are all complications that can occur from hypertension. However, the good news is that lifestyle changes can reduce blood pressure and with effort on your part positive results will be experienced. Here are some highly recommended changes to follow:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains and unsalted nuts in moderation.
- Drink lots of water and avoid foods high in sodium.
- Avoid low fiber foods such as meat and dairy products.
- Eliminate coffee and caffeinated beverages along with sodas and alcohol from your diet
- If you smoke STOP!
- If you are overweight, bring your weight down to the recommended level for your height, age and build.
- Adopt an aerobic exercise routine such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling etc.
- Learn to cope with stress.

Hypertension does have lifelong and life-shortening effects that often do damage without warning, but with the above changes in lifestyles you have a very good chance of reducing your blood pressure to a normal level and keeping it there without the need for medication. Take the time now to make sure your blood pressure is in the ideal range. Remember it’s a “silent killer”.



Roan Mountain 2014

The Roan Mountain, Campmeeting, hosted by Berean Ministries will take place on June 16-21 this year (2014). Those who have attended previous campmeetings will remember the beauty of the scenery and the peaceful atmosphere of this campmeeting in the hills of Tennessee.

The theme of the campmeeting this year is, *“The Significance of Christ’s Sonship”*, and it promises to be a highly spiritual event. Among the speakers expected to share the word of God are, Lynnford Beachy, Nader Mansour, Imad Awde, Howard Williams, Adrian Ebens, Jim Raymond, Ken Corklin and David Clayton.

More information may be obtained by visiting www.roanmountaincampmeeting.com or by calling the organizers of the campmeeting, Malcolm & Sandy McCrillis at (423) 772-3161.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Keeping in Touch

Some of our readers may not be aware of the fact that we have expanded our outreach potential by establishing a channel on YouTube and setting up a page on Facebook. All of our latest video sermons are available on our YouTube channel in good quality. We encourage you to subscribe to the channel so that you may receive a notification whenever we upload a new video. The address is, www.youtube.com/user/vidjam.

Our Facebook page is updated almost every day with relevant news items and encouraging thoughts and studies. There is also opportunity for asking questions or joining in some of the discussions which take place from time to time.

Go to Facebook, search for Restoration Ministries and our page will be the first one to come up. We encourage you to “like” our page so that you will receive updates.

Open Face

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