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The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 42
Issue 1050

The Celestial Realm: Seeing the Unseen

A Study of Our Real Enemy

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Part 3 of 3

by – Stephen Hill

In a beginning, Elohim created the Heavens and the Earth (Genesis 1:1, CV).

Key Points:

When Jesus spoke to the religious elite or even His own disciples, He was speaking indirectly to them and was speaking directly to the unseen spirits of wickedness.....8821
In fooling the evil celestial powers God and Christ disarmed the sovereignties and authorities, making a public spectacle of them.....8822
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Eventually all beings, no matter how depraved and opposed to God, will one day be restored to their loving Creator and made right!.....8827

One of the questions I posed early on was why Solomon would worship other gods after already being well acquainted with the Most High God, and the reality of Deuteronomy 32 and the passages just quoted gives us our answer. Solomon knew that the gods of the nations were also real (and far more powerful than himself), and his wives turned his heart to the worship of their gods as he grew older so that his devotion was divided rather than fully affixed on the Most High as his father, David, had been (I Kings 11:4). A.E. Knoch said,

The worship of the world is largely accorded to [real] spirits. The ancient pantheons held not mere idols of stone, but had a background of actual spirits, who were able to communicate with men through possession and mediums.¹



To an ancient person, the existence of gods and other supernatural powers would have been unquestionably obvious, and it is no surprise that past civilizations have all placed heavy emphasis on their gods and on pleasing them – even in ways that now seem abhorrent to us but seemed appropriate to them.

Imagine living during ancient times and having no knowledge of modern science. We live in an era that has a scientific or medical explanation for many of the occurrences we experience, but our ancestors had none of that and would have naturally reasoned that nearly all of their experiences were caused by supernatural beings, both good and evil. In fact, the Greek word *daimon* originally referred to any lesser

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So Severe a Strain (quote: A.E. Knoch).....8828

1. "The So-Called Angel Word: Celestial Spirits," *Unsearchable Riches*, Volume 25, Number 3, page 158 (1934).

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6);
- adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of saints intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

We are always open for discussion, but never for disputation. – André Sneidar

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deity that was thought to bring harm or good fortune. It's no wonder that a person suffering from dementia or schizophrenia would have been thought to be possessed by an evil spirit, and no one would have had the ability to distinguish between a mental disorder and possession by a wicked force. It was this dynamic that enabled evil spirit beings to more easily influence unsuspecting victims, and Jesus' ability to easily command these spirits was the catalyst that initially garnered Him much attention.

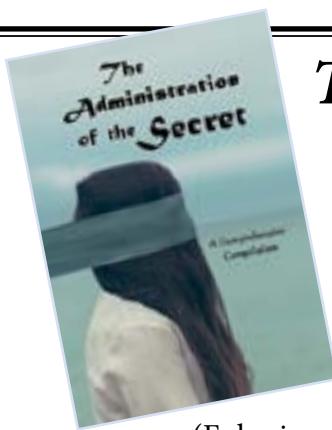
Prior to the gospel accounts, Scripture is virtually silent in regard to demons, and little is said about them throughout the rest of the New Testament books. The synoptic gospels, however (Matthew, Mark and Luke), contain many references to these spirits, their *belittling* teachings and Jesus' handling of them; and this is not at all surprising when we understand the totality of Jesus' mission and the determination of the powers of darkness to prevent His success.

The backdrop to Jesus' earthly ministry is far more than the Israelites yearning for a Savior under Roman rule and the arrogant, hypocritical leadership of Israel's religious leaders. It is an entire, unseen army of evil spirits infecting the minds of these people in an effort to destroy the Messiah's chance at victory, which was ultimately to overthrow the powerful forces of darkness and strip them of all authority. As I John 3:8 reminds us, the Son of God was manifested *"that He should be annulling the acts of the Adversary,"* and this goes far beyond saving men from their sins.

In many cases, when Jesus spoke to the religious elite or even His own disciples, He was speaking indirectly to them and was speaking directly to the unseen spirits of wickedness whom He knew to be His true enemies.

The account of Peter's public recognition of Jesus as the Messiah is a prime example of this. Jesus intentionally gathered His disciples in a very unexpected place for this event, in a region known as Caesarea Philippi, and this area in northern Israel was also known as the Grotto of Pan (a Greek god) and ground zero for the wicked spirit forces on Earth. An opening to a cave at Caesarea Philippi even contained a gate, which Jesus referenced shortly after Peter's confession. He informed His disciples that Peter was correct – thus announcing to them and the surrounding, unseen powers that He was, indeed, the Son of God – and He quickly went on to say that the gates of Hades would not *withstand* the body of called-out ones He would build *"on this rock."*

This, of course, is yet another popular passage that has been too frequently mistranslated. The Greek is void of the preposition *"against,"* while gates are clearly defensive structures that have no ability to *"prevail against"* anything, and a correct translation sheds an entirely new (and exciting) light on this famous passage. In stark contrast to the typical notion that Jesus is building something that the powers of darkness will seek to attack while Jesus and His followers are on the defensive, we discover that it is the Savior Who is building something to go on the attack against *them* and that they will be powerless to stop it!



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The Secret Administration, revealed through Ephesians and Colossians, is characterized and empowered by the dispensing of transcendent grace (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7; 3:2). Now, believing Gentiles are *"no longer guests and sojourners,"* as they were in the Pentecostal and Readjustment Administrations, but are *"fellow-citizens of the saints and members of God's family"*

(Ephesians 2:19). This outstanding work includes 45 chapters, by 17 authors, spanning nearly 200 years. Author's include: Oscar M. Baker, Tom L. Ballinger, J. R. Caldwell, E. H. Clayton, J.J.B. Coles, John Essex, J.H. Evans, H.W. Fry, Vladimir Gelesnoff, William B. Hallman, Richard Holden, John H. Kessler, A.E. Knoch, Adlai Loudy, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., and Charles H. Welch.



One glance at Caesarea Philippi reveals that it's most prominent feature is a large and jagged rock, and Jesus may very well have intended a double meaning when He changed Simon's name to Peter ("rock") while making His declaration at a literal rock in the region most renowned as a hotbed of evil.

Shortly after this pivotal moment, Jesus appeared in glory during the transfiguration, which likely occurred on Mount Hermon, overlooking Caesarea Philippi. This moment was undoubtedly transformational for Peter, James and John, but it would have been even more significant (and terrifying) to the unseen powers witnessing it. In moments like these, Jesus was simultaneously bringing hope and amazement to His followers while picking a fight, so to speak, with His enemies in preparation for impending and crucial events.

Jesus was, indeed, continually aware of His true enemies, and His battle plan interestingly involved ongoing deception as He and His Father played the powers of darkness at their own game and, ultimately, outwitted them.

God's purpose in keeping surprising and wondrous secrets hidden prior to Christ's victory was primarily to prevent the wicked forces from knowing and predicting His grander intentions, and we err in assuming that God's objective was to hide His plans for salvation of the nations from men only. Had the powers of darkness known the Father's true plan and that Jesus' death would lead to His resurrection, ascension and full authority over them, they would not

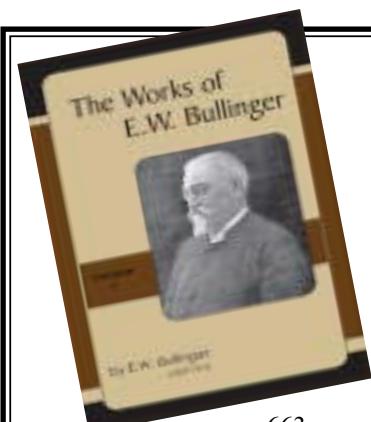
have crucified the Lord of glory (I Corinthians 2:8).

Israel's religious leaders and the Romans also would certainly not have killed the Son of God, had they recognized the whole picture, but they knew not what they were doing (Luke 23:34) and were acting under the control of stronger, unseen forces who assumed, based on what God had revealed to that point, that killing the Messiah would prevent their demise.

In fooling the evil celestial powers and, by extension, the men with authority they controlled on Earth, God and Christ disarmed the sovereignties and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, "*triumphing over them in it*" (Colossians 2:15).

This is an amazingly powerful passage, and it possesses many truths that are easily missed. First, we are told that the powers of darkness were put to shame publicly when Jesus was being crucified. How can their shame have been public, though, when they could not even be seen by the people witnessing the event?

The answer to this question lies in the simple fact that it was far more than men and women on earth seeing what was happening; and while the majority of humans were ignorant of what was really taking place, the vast host of celestial beings realized exactly what Calvary entailed. Jesus' crucifixion, while humiliating in the eyes of human spectators, was simultaneously His coronation among the celestials – His public (and literal) crowning, at which time He was also proclaimed "*King of the Jews*" and clothed with a purple robe signifying royalty.



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Other witnesses to this pivotal moment were “strong bulls” of Bashan (the area encompassing Caesarea Philippi) prophesied in Psalm 22:12, who were surrounding the Savior as He was dying, unaware that their apparent victory would soon be proven to be an unexpected and crippling defeat.

An even more glorious realization stems from an understanding of the term “*triumph*” as it was used in the ancient world, and Christ’s triumph reinforces the public shame of His enemies to an even greater degree. When we hear the word “*triumph*” today, we think of a great victory but nothing more. To someone living during and shortly after Christ’s time on Earth, however, the term had a much more significant meaning due to its history in ancient Rome.

A *triumphus* (triumph) was a civil ceremony and religious rite in Rome that was held publicly to celebrate the success of a Roman military commander after defeating a foreign enemy and returning home. The conquering general or other hero was crowned, clothed in a purple, gold-embroidered toga, and paraded through the streets in a chariot with his army, war captives and spoils of war. The entire Roman citizenry participated in this extravagant celebration, praising the hailed conqueror and feasting in his honor – often for several days – and the shame of the captives was every bit as palpable as the glory of the victor. This is a remarkable picture that reflects the totality of Christ’s victory, and Paul (via inspiration from the Father) used this word in his epistle to the Colossians knowing that it would be well understood by his readers.

After stripping the evil powers of all their authority, and doing so openly for the entire celestial realm to see, Christ became the conquering hero of the entire cosmos and was granted the full right to rule over all celestial powers, as well as the human nations they had previously ruled over unjustly. Calvary was, therefore, much more than a saving of men from their sins; it was a conquering of the celestial rulers of the nations and a reclaiming of the non-Israelite nations for the Most High God. At once, God and Christ righted the wrongs inflicted in Eden and at Babel, and we have since been living in an era in which a long process of ultimate reconciliation has begun.

As complements of Christ, we as members of His

body are destined to draw celestial beings back to the Father in the future, and this great honor seats us together with Christ among the celestials, far above every sovereignty and authority and power and lordship (Ephesians 1:21; 2:6). Our calling is absolutely unfathomable, and our destiny as sons of God is one day to be gods ourselves, subordinate only to the Most High, our Father, and to Christ, our Lord.

Have more seemingly blasphemous words ever been uttered? To a typical Christian this claim undoubtedly appears unspeakably evil, and to an atheist it likely seems crazy enough to warrant a trip to a psych ward. Yet, as we’ve reviewed the unmistakable contents of Scripture, I trust that such truths have come into clearer focus and that the notion of those made in God’s image and unified with Christ being made immortal, perfected and granted unlimited creative potential is an obvious truth as opposed to an imaginary delusion.

To be sure, the current goal of our celestial enemies who no longer hold any real power over us is to convince us that our loftiest hopes in our Father and Lord are baseless and unworthy of belief. To combat their efforts we must remain vigilant, filter our experiences (especially those that are difficult) through scriptural truths, reject apparent supernatural wonders, and continually focus on our Father’s sovereignty, perfection and goodness.

It goes without saying that combating the powers of darkness in our current, mortal state is an insurmountable task apart from our unity with Christ and His authority over them. Martin Luther captured this well in these lyrics to his famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*:

For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and pow’r are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On Earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side –
The Man of God’s own choosing.

To oppose our true enemies successfully, though, we must first understand their nature and motives with clarity, and this is precisely where most believers falter. The wicked forces we face are, for now, far more powerful than we are, they possess far more patience, and they are crafty and manipulative beyond compare.

It also doesn't help that we can't see them and that they can so easily divert our frustration away from themselves and towards other people we *can* see and deal with directly but whom *they* largely control.

Remember that regardless of how awful your experiences with other people may be at times, *no human is your real enemy*. This simple, but not-so-obvious truth is part of the foundation upon which a solid battle plan against the wicked celestial forces is built, and it is why Jesus asked His Father to forgive the men who crucified Him and spoke directly to Satan when rebuking Peter for insisting that He avoid death.

Like Christ, we must remember when others wrong us that they, too, are loved by their Creator and Savior and are being influenced often by the deceptive enemies none of us can see. The image of a puppet master is quite appropriate in this case, as people are so often manipulated by invisible forces completely

unawares. Indeed, entire earthly governments and militaries are unknowingly influenced by these powers, and this realization makes it easier to show grace to those Father places in our lives.

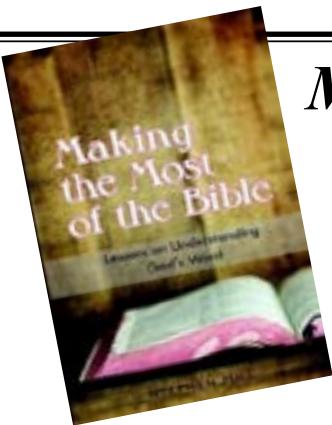
Knowing that we wrestle with unseen spirit forces rather than our fellow men is an important step, but it is only one ingredient in a broader recipe for success as we complete the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24) and train for our future roles as rulers among the celestials.

Another vital ingredient is ridding our minds of the grotesque imagery that Hollywood and literature have foisted on us regarding the "devil" and demons, as well as the notion that demonic possession is as rampant today as it was two thousand years ago. As stated earlier, nearly every image our minds conjure up when we hear these terms is inaccurate; and we can rest assured that the now-defeated spirits of wickedness hold no great sway over those who are in Christ, for, as Paul declares at the end of Romans 8,

Neither death nor life, nor messengers, nor sovereignties, nor the present, nor what is impending, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Making the Most of the Bible *Lessons on Understanding God's Word*

by – Stephen Hill



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Making the Most of the Bible is a "must have" for every serious Bible student, and will make a perfect gift. Even if you feel confident in your own method for study, you likely know several people who are greatly in need of this book.



By and large, the “*demons*” we battle most often in our daily lives are the dominant *teachings* of our own time that *belittle* God and Christ. They are *not* spirit beings that possess individuals and endow them with incredible physical strength, cause them to dramatically alter their voice, forcefully vomit, or speak in other languages.

Such occurrences were more widespread during and immediately after Jesus’ ministry, as the terrestrial spirits were attempting to thwart the mission of Christ and the apostles, but their approach now is far more subtle.

The countless “*little teachings*” that continually bombard us, however, *do* often originate from evil spirit forces and from the chief slanderer of God and man, Satan; and our adversaries cannot be cast out with so-called holy water, communal prayer chains, or the repetitive recitation of church creeds. Our task *now* is not to attempt to somehow banish evil spirits from others or the world but, rather, to trust in the light of God’s truth to overpower the darkness of their deception.

One of the greatest paradoxes of our time is the surprising but vital truth that the so-called great commission, given by Jesus to His disciples, is not our priority as members of Christ’s body. If this were indeed our loftiest task, we would undoubtedly be resisted at every turn by the powers of darkness as Jesus and the apostles were, and we would have little time to devote ourselves to anything other than the grueling mental and physical battle that would naturally ensue. In this era of grace, in which Christ has delivered us from the authority of the celestial powers, our *primary* task is to trust in the completed work of our Father and Savior, to be at peace in the knowledge of God’s grace and true nature as we seek to know Him better, and to hold fast to the hope of our calling.

Evangelism will one day be of paramount importance again (as will more active battling with the spirits of wickedness), but that time will not come until God has completed His work with “*the ecclesia which is His Body*” and brought Israel fully back into His focus. Until then, we should not expect to be directly confronted by demons or overt demonic possession,

but we *should* be capable of recognizing and resisting the deceptive *teachings* that strive to *belittle* our Father and diminish our faith.

The list of demonic, *belittling* teachings is nearly endless, but it will help to review some of the most pervasive and widely accepted deceptions our enemies are currently deploying so that we, ourselves, are not so easily deceived. You’re likely familiar with the phrase “keep your friends close and your enemies closer;” and while we do not seek to commune with our spiritual enemies, there is wisdom in knowing the tactics of our adversaries as thoroughly as possible.

The following list is by no means exhaustive, but it includes many of the most common demonic teachings we battle in our own time, and many have been the prevailing doctrines for centuries. Prepare yourself with an open and truth-seeking mind before reading this list, because you may very well hold tightly to some or all of these doctrines as I, myself, did before searching God’s Word more intentionally.

Eternal Torment

The orthodox teaching of “hell” and eternal torment is, without doubt, one of the most vile doctrines of Christendom and maligns the love, mercy and justice of God more than any other.

Free Will

The idea that men have a free will that trumps God’s seeks to challenge God’s sovereignty and His preeminence as *the Almighty God* Whose will can never be thwarted. It places the creature above the Creator and does so very convincingly.

Salvation by Works

Even the most apparently ardent supporters of grace insist that works must, to some extent, accompany faith for one’s salvation to be assured. This notion seems logical, yet Paul’s evangel (gospel) continually stressed salvation through faith alone *apart* from works, and it is *Christ’s* faith that ultimately saves all. If we possess faith now, it is *only* because God has graciously granted it to us at this time for a purpose. Ultimately, *all* will be restored as God, Christ and the

saints draw all of creation back to the Creator (I Corinthians 15:22, 28; Romans 5:18; I Timothy 4:10)!

Water Baptism and The Lord's Supper

There is little debate among Christian denominations over whether believers should be baptized – only over how and when. Water baptism, though, is a work and one given for Israelites at the time surrounding Jesus' ministry only, and it plays no part in the hope of believers today. The same is true of the Lord's Supper ("Communion") and other sacraments that are frequently observed by so many Christians, and this is why Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1:17 that "*Christ does not commission me to be baptizing*" and why his later epistles do not stress these observances as his earlier letters did.

The Trinity

Probably the most agreed upon yet confusing of all of the false teachings that Christianity espouses, the doctrine of the trinity denies the plain, scriptural distinction of the Father as the one and *only* Almighty God, His spirit, and His obedient Son. An insistence that Jesus is in every way equal with His Father (Whom He called greater than Himself in John 14:28) leads to an unintended denial of Christ's literal death, which subsequently invalidates His resurrection and glory and negates our expectation.

National Pride

As ambassadors of our true home among the celestials, we are foreigners and aliens in this world. As

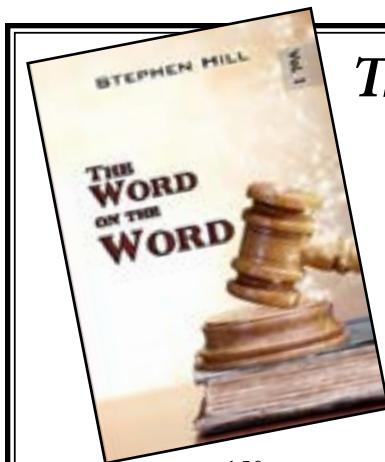
such, it is not in keeping with our position to profess pride in an earthly nation or participate in its political processes – including voting. Most Christians believe the exact opposite and view political involvement as a right and duty, but a correct understanding of our position will lead us to avoid political activism. God is using human government to demonstrate man's desperate need for divine rule, and a grasp of the celestial powers equips us to take pride in our *true* home and see through the guise of earthly patriotism. This, by the way, is being stated by an Army veteran who has always been fascinated with history and the political systems in America and other countries.

The Prosperity Gospel

Unsurprisingly, some of the most popular preachers and largest church congregations in our era lure people in by promising wealth and worldly prosperity to those who attend (and donate to) their church. The appeal of this message is obvious, but it takes little more than a basic understanding of Scripture to know that the life of any believer is guaranteed to be full of suffering and that our ongoing trials are actually gifts that prepare us for our future allotment (Philippians 1:29: 3:10).

The "Church"

When nearly anyone hears the term "church," they instantly think of a building with a steeple, an altar and pews. Many would be surprised to learn that most practices among local "churches" have pagan roots and that God now dwells within His people rather



The Word on the Word – Vol. 1

by — Stephen Hill

This is a collection of articles from the author's blog. In its pages you will learn of many truths from God's Word that you will likely not encounter in the traditional church setting. No topic is off-limits, as Stephen Hill addresses a variety of biblical truths – many controversial – which will likely challenge you to reconsider many of your long-held beliefs.

Discover what the Bible really teaches about love and suicide, honesty and lying, marriage and parenting, grace and judgment, and much more. May this book be an edifying tool for your spiritual growth!

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than in any building. The simple truth of Scripture is that we cannot go to church because we *are* the church. The Church, today, consists of all those who make up the *ekklesia*, or “called-out ones,” and we are called out of organized religion as much as we are the world more broadly.

The Rapture

Prior to John Nelson Darby’s teachings in the early nineteenth century, the term “rapture” (often referred to by believers in the salvation of all as the “snatching away”) did not exist. Paul’s words about the event in I Thessalonians 4 obviously have been around since he penned them, but they have long been misunderstood. The same is true of many prophecies, which Christians so often mistakenly apply to themselves; and causing so many people to focus so intensely on the end times while neglecting their current, God-given roles is one of the most successful distractions which the powers of darkness have continually used – including among many renowned Bible teachers. Every generation for the past two thousand years has found numerous reasons (and often with apparent merit) to insist that the end times would occur in their lifetime, and *every one of them has been wrong*. We eagerly await our manifestation and future glory with Christ, but we err in focusing our attention solely on end times events while simultaneously expecting to never die.

The “Wrath” of God

Since long before Jonathan Edwards came out with *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, Christians have been focused on God’s supposed “wrath” – often even more than His love. Paul informed us that, since Christ’s sacrifice, our Father is “*the happy God*” (I Timothy 1:11) and that we are privileged to refer to Him as “*Abba*” (“Daddy,” Romans 8:15). I John 4:8 tells us that “*God IS love*,” meaning that, while He possesses many other characteristics, love is His very essence. Much is made of the importance of fearing God, which is described as the “**beginning of wisdom**” in Proverbs 9:10, but the emphasis here is on the word “*beginning*.” Maturity, produced by true knowledge of our Father, leads far from fear and into complete trust and peace.

Far more examples of deceptive and *belittling* (demonic) *teachings* exist than these, but this list is hopefully sufficient to demonstrate how widespread and convincing our adversaries are. They are still very much active, despite their prior authority being stripped away, and we must learn to adopt a *cosmos* view rather than a much narrower, worldly view to understand all of our experiences in proper context.

The whole picture of God’s lengthy plan and Christ’s work includes far more than the Earth and its inhabitants, and it is my hope that this information has equipped you with a profound and enlightening realization as it did for me personally.

What a blessing it is to know that eventually *all* beings, no matter how depraved and opposed to God, will one day be restored to their loving Creator and made right! Until then, we stand firm in our Father’s sovereignty and love, faithful in our glorious expectation, and diligent in overcoming the celestial enemies we are destined to eventually welcome home.

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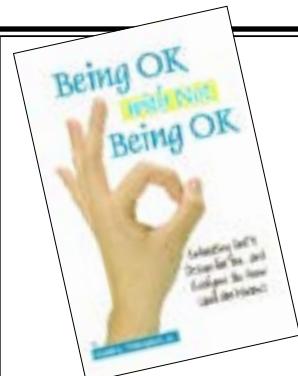
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