

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH - VOL. 1 - NO. 1

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WORD OF INTRODUCTION

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE STUDY

By Ray I. Psalmonds

Anyone who claims to be a Christian and bases that claim on a knowledge gained from the Bible will also have a desire to be pleasing to the One Who has provided the salvation promised in the Bible.

The desire to be pleasing to our Lord is not only something which we may wish to do in appreciation of what has been done for us, but primarily should be the result of what God has asked of those who believe His Word. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

The question of how to be pleasing to our Lord is one that should be considered very carefully.

Nowhere in the Word of God do we find a statement such as, "Do the best you can, and God will be pleased."

God does say in Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." So, then, it is most important that we find out how to have faith. God answers in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Since God has declared faith necessary in order to please Him, and that this faith must come from His Word, then it follows that we must spend much time with the Word of God in order to be pleasing.

Many times we have heard Christians make the statement, "I would read and study my Bible more if it wasn't so hard to understand." Others, who do not claim to be Christians, will point to what they see as contradictions in the Bible as an excuse for not reading it.

The difficulty common to both of these groups is found in the approach taken when reading or studying the Bible.

In the first place, the Bible was not written as a novel. It is the inspired record of God's dealing with man since the foundation of the world. The Bible omits many of the details, but consistently maintains a word picture of the condition, as well as relationship, of man to his Creator. The Bible is used of God as a means of revealing Himself to men. Much of the Bible is a God-breathed history of His dealing with man. This history covers many thousands of years. It is written in the setting of the periods which it covers. Since the past ages differ so radically from our present, it is many times difficult to understand the setting of certain Scriptures. Just because we have never experienced certain events does not make them false. We human beings have a tendency to question any record of events which are outside the realm of our own experience. This is the point where faith must suffice. We must take God at His Word and believe it, even though we have never personally experienced anything of a similar nature.

Of course, there are those who go to an extreme and say, "There is no need for Bible research, for God has spoken and we must believe what He has declared without trying to understand." This statement is in direct disobedience of II Timothy 2:15, which states, "Study to show thyself approved unto God...."

Then there are those who insist that everything in the Bible is spoken directly to them, and therefore must be applied to their lives. Usually these give up in despair, or turn to pretense after a short period of diligent effort.

Faith is not reason, but God most certainly desires that our faith be reasonable enough to apply in our everyday Christian life. If we are clinging to some belief that cannot be made to fit into a practical Christian life, then it is possible that we are in error. (CAUTION) Do not spiritualize any portion...

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...of God's Word in order to make it apply. Leave it in its own context and let God mean exactly what He says.

We maintain that the key to reading the Bible with understanding is found in the dispensational approach. Sometimes this method of Bible study is referred to as "Right Division" (II Timothy 2:15).

There are several types of Dispensational Bible Study. Differences arise over the definition of the term, "dispensation." (The subject, "What is a Dispensation?", is examined in the companion article under this same cover.)

We believe the Greek word *oikonomia* (translated dispensation) is most nearly expressed in English by the term "household with its management." Therefore, when we speak of dispensational Bible study, we are referring to that principle of Bible study which insists that any Scripture being considered must be related to the specific household being managed at that time.

The context and setting in which any Scripture appears will establish the household under consideration.

One very important point to remember is that God may alter His management with any specific household many times, but if the same household is being managed, then it is still the same dispensation. In other words, there is a change in "household managements" only when there is a change in the household that is being managed. The word "management" alone will not fulfill the requirements necessary to be synonymous with "dispensation." There must be a "household" also. Many Bible teachers overlook this very important fact when they seek to define the term "dispensation."

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As we read or study the Word of God, we will enjoy and understand it in direct proportion to how clearly we relate any specific Scripture to the specific household under consideration at that time.

By this method of Bible study we are able to determine which Scriptures are addressed to our household and thus relate them to our Christian life. In doing this we not only have a practical application for interpretation of Scripture, but are more pleasing to our Lord.

If we are guilty of trying to apply Scripture to our household which belongs to some other household, then we are disobedient children of God.

The joy which comes to the Bible student as he studies the Bible with this "dispensational" view will be most gratifying. Many Scriptures which have been a puzzle will glow with new meaning. Many Scriptures which could not be made to apply in our present-day Christian life will take their proper place in their respective household, and we find ourselves out of difficulties. We will enjoy a freedom from religious decrees which will be amazing. The Bible will truly become a new Book. Those apparent contradictions will simply fade away. We will have the answer to give to the skeptic as well as the religious fanatic. We will experience a joy in living the Christian life before others that we never thought possible. We will appreciate much more what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. We will see our position and its relationship to the overall purpose of God. We will understand, probably for the first time in our lives, the true meaning of our HOPE in Christ.

The fact that we won't have to distort or explain away certain Scriptures will give us an added incentive to discuss Bible Truth with others.

4.

Dispensational Bible study will have a stabilizing effect on the personal testimony of any Christian. The better we understand what God requires of us, the greater the possibility that we will meet that requirement and be more pleasing to Him.

Dispensational Bible study will cause us to become more interested in God's Word and thereby foster spiritual growth. As we mature from a knowledge of the Bible, the less likely we are to be led astray by the traditions of men.

When we read a portion of Scripture and relate that Scripture to its respective household, we are "rightly dividing" the Word of Truth. When the principle of "right division" is not observed, many Scriptures are contradictions. For example, God told Moses that unless the nation Israel kept the Law, they would not receive God's blessing (Deut. 28:13), but God says many centuries later, when speaking to the Gentiles through Paul, that the Law had no effect and that the blessing of God came only by Grace, not works (Col. 2:13-16). By the principle of "right division" we see that God was dealing with the household of Israel in the first instance, but with a saved household of Gentiles in the second.

The importance of dispensational Bible study cannot be stressed too strongly. It is the only answer to the confusion which exists in the Christian world today. Anyone who has a desire to study the Bible can use this method. He does not have to join any church, perform any rituals, pay any dues, serve on any committees, sign any doctrinal statement, or conform to any man. All anyone needs is a sincere desire to know what God has said to His different households.

The importance of dispensational Bible study can be summed up in the statement: If we study the Bible...

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...dispensationally we are more pleasing to our Lord, more stable in our testimony, have stronger assurance, greater joy, faster spiritual growth, better understanding of the Bible, and greater ability to withstand the traditions of men.

WHAT IS A DISPENSATION?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL USE OF *OIKONOMOS* AND *OIKONOMIA* by
Russell H. Schaefer

Introduction

One's conception of a dispensation largely determines one's convictions regarding the divisions of Scripture and regarding the question of what specific truths of God's Word are addressed directly to us for our present-day practice, position, and hopes, and these in direct contrast to the practice, position, and hopes of others.

We shall seek, therefore, to determine the precise meaning of this important concept in Biblical usage. Such a search demands answers to at least three questions: What constitutes a dispensation? What constitutes a change of dispensations? What constitutes changes within a dispensation?

Some definitions of the word "dispensation." The Scofield Reference Bible (page 5) defines a dispensation as follows: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Charles H. Welch, *Alphabetical Analysis*, Vol. 1, page 208) states: "The Greek word rendered dispensation is *oikonomia* and refers to the act of administering." On the same page we read: "When we refer to the different dispensations we refer to those subdivisions of the ages, in which the revealed will of God, carrying differing obligations, has been made known and put into force...." In comparing these two definitions, we see that the latter has gained an advantage over the former (as will be evident from our examination of Biblical usage) by the addition of the words "and refers to the act of administering."

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Welch further elucidates: "...and in practically every case, the administration or stewardship of these separate and differing administrations are found to have been entrusted to some chosen servant of the Lord."

Considering the above, we surmise that in the view of these two scholarly men of God a dispensation has to do (1) with the revealed will of God, (2) man's responsibility, (3) specific truths which are related to ages or time, and that a dispensation (4) has definable limits, boundaries, or frontiers. Furthermore, Welch has deduced from the root of the second element of the Greek word *oikonomia* (*nem-*, *nom-*, law, rule) that these administrations are associated and/or identified with certain stewards, administrators, or chosen servants of the Lord.

Premise for a change of dispensation. When we seek to discover just what constitutes a change of dispensations, we find the answer difficult to assess. Scofield, at least, is inconsistent.

While both Scofield and Welch state that a dispensation has to do with revealed truth and man's responsibility to it, no sooner does the Scofield Bible state this than it departs from it, as, for instance, in giving the names "Innocence" and "Conscience" to the first two "dispensations." Scofield has created an inadequate conception of what a dispensation is composed of or what a dispensation comprises. Innocence may well describe the state of primal man and conscience his mental processes of weighing the merits of truth (Romans 2); but neither title fits Scofield's definition.

On the other hand, Welch makes the change of stewardship (*oikonomia*) the test of a change of dispensations (*oikonomias*) along with the truth these stewards (*oikonomoi*)...

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...ministered. This has a great element of truth in it, and Welch is to be highly commended for pointing out the union between the ministers and their respective ministries in the Word of God.

If the Word is seen to bear out this distinction, this represents a great advance in the discovery of truth. We do voice an objection to Welch's definition, however, giving rise as it does to an endless, and, to us, needless, number of dispensations. For, by this approach, each new revelation

of truth (along with the agent or administrator of that truth) would constitute another or a new dispensation. Welch states: "Every single believer who has been entrusted with stewardship (*oikonomia*) of truth adds to the number of dispensations (*oikonomiai*)." It is to be wondered at that Welch comes up with only eighteen major dispensations and the Scofield Bible, seven.

Changes within a dispensation. We affirm, as the remainder of this study we trust will bear out, that what these men of God define as new or different dispensations are in reality merely changes within a dispensation. In contrast to each stewardship (*oikonomia*) of truth's bringing forth a new dispensation (*oikonomia*), we suggest that a dispensation may have more than one stewardship of truth, more than one minister at or over a specific time, to a particular people, in order to secure the purposes, promises, covenants, etc., given to them. Both of these men assume minor changes and ministries within their respective dispensations. We humbly suggest that these changes are greater, more inclusive, less divisive, and more far-reaching than hitherto allowed, considered, or conceived.

We propose that, along with the information given by Welch and Scofield, another premise be added to the primary concept of the make-up of a dispensation. We feel that a...

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...broader concept would eliminate some of the dispensational divisions now currently confusing this great subject. This simplification would in no wise detract from the truth of the Scriptures.

The English word "dispensation" in the translations. The A.V. translates the Greek word *oikonomia* by "dispensation" four times. While repeatedly using this word in this study, we do so only to identify the subject, not to sanction "dispensation" as a correct translation of *oikonomia*. "Dispensation" comes from the Latin *dispensatio*, and that from the verb *dispenso*, distribute, spread or deal out; lay out money, administer, manage; dispose. This word was used of the art and practice of dispensing medicine, pardons, and forgiveness. A steward in Latin parlance was a *rerum domesticarum curator*, "caretaker of domestic affairs," and not a dispensator. The *majordomus* was a later formation. It is unfortunate that the common conception of a Biblical *oikonomia* has been conditioned by the Latin derivative dispensation.

That stewardship should have been used to translate *oikonomia* (three times in A.V.) is not surprising, since a stewardship, trusteeship, or management is very definitely conceived of in the Greek word. While stewardship is an improvement over dispensation, still this lacks the force of the Greek word, which has the identifying element *oikos*, "an inhabited house," in view. While we agree that a stewardship is essential in order to identify a dispensation, no less essential is the fact that a Biblical *oikonomia* has to do with certain households, and that usually of God. We maintain that under divine inspiration this Greek word was chosen to convey to us precisely what household is being administered the things of God at a given time.

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In I Tim. 1:4, instead of edifying (which follows the Western reading *oikodomian*, Vulgate *aedificationem*, edification) we prefer the reading God's oikonomian (which seems to have better manuscript evidence in its support).

The English word economy is, on the face of it, an anglicizing of the Greek word. It is unfortunate that this word has come to mean "saving" (a connotation resulting from a semantic position keeping in view the wise handling of affairs), whereas, as Welch points out, true economy might mean the expenditures of great sums of money.

The LXX translation (from which nearly all N.T. quotations are taken, rather than from the Hebrew text itself) uses this Greek word *oikonomia* in Isa. 22:19-21. The A.V. has in these verses "station" and "government," respectively. Bagster translates it "stewardship." A look at the context will readily identify the house and rule. (However, it ought to be pointed out that the LXX *oikonomia* represents in these instances the Hebrew *ma'amadh*, "station, standing," from */'amadh*, he stood, in verse 19; and *memsheleth*, ruling, government, from */mashal*, he ruled, in verse 21).

The Greek words *oikonomia* and *oikonomos* and the lexicons, *oikonomia* is compounded from *oikos* (an inhabited house) and *nomos* (which is a derivative from the root */nem -*, *nom-*, with the idea of administering, ruling, legislating, and which means law, when it is used judicially).

This word was used by Plato, Xenophon, and by the common people of that day whenever the great dynastic, opulent households then existing were spoken about. At the...

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...time of the writing of the N.T., it meant "the management of a household or of family affairs. "

We wish to cite the following authorities as they give the first and primary meaning of this word *oikonomia* (and its related word *oikonomos*, the house steward). That the "management" element in these words should lead to secondary meanings is to be expected, since what is done by the steward may in our minds overshadow the reference to the persons with whom the thing is done. It is a common fault of all of us to delight in the promises of the Word of God without considering to whom and with whom they were made.

Before citing these authorities on the Greek words, we wish to state that a household steward in the Hebrew is not expressed by a single word but by a circumlocution, *asher al habbayith*, "who is over the house," *bayith* indicating the household and the other servants (the steward himself being a servant or a freed man), a usage seen in Gen. 43:16 and 44:1. See also I Kings 4:6, 16:9, 18:3; II Kings 10:5, 15:5; and Isa. 22:15, where the reference is not to one over a private household, but to one who was superintendent of the king's household at large, approximately equivalent to a court *marchal*, a *marechal du palais*. The former is well illustrated in Gen. 24:2, where Abraham's servant ruled over all that Abraham possessed. The setting in which we see Joseph in the house of Potiphar as overseer provides the three elements involved in the term: the house with its honor, position and wealth, the steward, and the management.

In the items below, we list under (1) the definitions of *oikonomia* and under (2) those of *oikonomos*.

Parkhurst, *Greek Lexicon*: 1. Properly, a dispensation, administration or management of family affairs; a stewardship

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2. A person who manages the domestic affairs of a family; a steward.

The Analytical Greek Lexicon 1. The management of a household, a stewardship. 2. The manager of a household, a steward.

Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 1 From Xenophon and Plato down, the management of a household or of house-hold affairs. 2. The manager of a household or of household affairs; esp. a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free- born, or as was usually the case, a freed man or slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to children not yet of age. Cf. Luke. 12:42,

I Cor. 4:2, Gal. 4:2.

Robinson, *Lexicon of the New Testament* 1. Economy, management of a household or of household affairs. 2. A house-manager, overseer, steward. One who had authority over the servants or slaves of a family, to assign their tasks and portions: with which was also united the general management of affairs and accounts.

Skeat, *Concise Etymological Dictionary* (under economy): 1. The management of a household. 2. One who man-ages a household.

Lidell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* 1. The management of a household. 2. One who manages a household.

Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance To The Bible* (under dispensation) 1. Law or arrangement of a house. 2. A house manager (steward).

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Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance* 1. Administration of a household or estate. 2. A house-distributor, i.e., manager or overseer.

Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*

1. Primarily signifies the management of a household or of household affairs. A dispensation is not a period or epoch (a common but erroneous use of this, word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement of administration of affairs.

2. Primarily denotes the manager of a household or estate.

Green, *A Greek Lexicon* 1. The management of a household. 2. The manager of a household.

Universal Dictionary (under "economics"): 1. The science of the management of a household or of domestic concerns. The management, regulation, and government of a household or household affairs.

E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance Of The New Testament* 1. Administration of a household. Actively, the administrative activity of the owner or steward. Passively, that which is administered. 2. A house-manager.

Some deductions. From the above data we gather that involved in a Biblical dispensation (*oikonomia*) are the following:

- 1. A household (households) with its honor, position and wealth.
- 2. The management or government of that household or family.
- 3. The manager (*oikonomos*) or steward of that family's affairs.

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On the basis of these three points, we would define as one dispensation (*oikonomia*) all that has to do with Abraham's household, i.e., Israel and those Gentiles blessed in Abraham and made his seed (Rom. 4:13-18; Gal. 3:7-9, 14, 29) or those who share his hopes and promises either in the land (Gen. 15:7), with Israel (Gen. 17: 4-14), or in the kingdom of heaven (of, from) with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt. 8:11), or as joint-heirs with Abraham of the world (Rom. 4:13), the New Jerusalem with its new earth (Heb. 11:8-16). We would place together and as a different dispensation that household of believers spoken of in the post-Acts letters of the Apostle Paul, those who are blessed "in Christ," in the "super-heavenlies" with all spiritual blessings that the wealth and riches of grace can bestow without any reference to Abraham, Israel, the New Covenant, the land, the old earth, or the New Jerusalem.

The household of Abraham in its varied history has had many stewards of truth. In an effort to gain Israel's repentance, Christ sent out twelve at one time (Matt. 10) and on another occasion seventy. The Apostle Paul's early ministry was to Abraham's personal seed, then to those Gentiles (having no dispensational position of their own) during the period of the Acts, who were made Abraham's seed and grafted into Israel's Olive Tree (Rom. 11 and Gal. 3).

The stewardship of truth for this present out-calling, this household of the mystery, has had its stewards first of all, that "prisoner for Gentiles," the Apostle Paul, then those seven or eight "grace" apostles associated with him in his prison ministry as he unfolded the secret will (Eph. 1:9, 10), the secret dispensation (Eph. 3:9), God's hidden dispensation (Col. 1:25, 26), God's dispensation of grace (Eph. 3:2). In conjunction with this household and directed to it, is a secret concerning the person and position of the ascended and seated Christ of Glory, "far above all." This mystery concerns a Gentile...

company or family "placed as sons" in the Son and their being seated, glorified, and filled with God's own fullness in the Son of His Love (cf. Eph. 3:1-8; 1:22, 23; 4:13; and Col. 2:9). There is no "Israel of God" or Jews blessed as Israelites today. Any saved Jew is of "one body" (Eph. 2:14-16) with Gentiles, "in Christ" apart from all prior affiliations: with Abraham's position, promises, covenants and hopes.

From Adam to Abraham? After the advent of the family of Abraham it is easy to see the varied events, programs, etc., as working out God's ultimate destiny for that great and complex family household. A natural question comes to mind, and that is: What about those living believers before Abraham? Where do they fit in?

Deut. 32:8 pre-dates Israel's kingdom thus: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." The author of the book of Hebrews joins together in one bond and one hope all those from Abel to those to whom he writes (cf. Heb. 11:4-40). In the book of Romans (2:26), Paul speaks of a time when certain Gentiles were counted for Circumcision if they by nature (though ignorant of the law of Moses) kept the righteousness of the Law. No Gentile is being thus counted today. That God dates Abraham and Israel's things from the foundation of the world is seen in considering the following scriptures:

From - secrets of the prophetic kingdom (Matt. 13:35)

From - the kingdom "sheep" nations appraised of their future inheritance in relation to Israel (Matt. 25:34)

From - God's rest and invitation for Israel (Heb. 4:3-8)

From - the Lamb slain in relation to the kingdom people (Rev. 13:8)

From - the book of life in relation to the kingdom People

From - the restitution of all things (Acts 3:21)

It is interesting to note that all that pertain distinctively

to this present dispensation has been:

Kept hidden from ages, from generations (Col. 1:26), Untrackable (Eph. 3:8), In other ages not made known (Eph. 1:5),

From the beginning of the world, hidden in God (Eph. 3:9).

God has been pleased to use two terms in connection with the "foundation of the world" (see Greek texts) and places those in Abraham's calling on this side ("from...") and those in the household of the Secret (those in the dispensational position of Paul's post-Acts epistles) on the other side ("before the foundation").

Besides those verses that deal with the glory of the Son (before ..., John 17:4), the Father's love in the Son (before ..., John 17:24), and Christ, the Wisdom of God and Christ foreknown (before..., I Cor. 2:7; I Pet. 1:20), we have those verses of Scripture directly addressed to us that deal with a people chosen in Christ (before..., Eph. 1:4), a people of God's own purpose and grace given before the world began (II Tim. 1:9), an elect of a promise before the world began (Tit. 1:2). If this concept is borne out in Scripture, then God has given us an insight into His great purposes respecting (1) a household for the earth (old and new) -- Abraham and his family; and (2) a family of sons in Christ for the heavenlies, along with the Princes and Magistrates of that realm, and in Christ over them (Eph. 1:21-23).

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Conclusion. We would therefore conclude that there are two vast Bible dispensations, that these have to do only with those who are of God. We agree that while some things are common to both, the great areas of differences are so very extensive as totally to change the character, hope, practices, and destiny of those receiving truths pertaining to the one or the other.

Whereas just two vast dispensations may seem like an over-simplification to some or not, nonetheless we would ask that this great subject be restudied and reevaluated, considering the three elements we have isolated as characteristic of the Biblical *oikonomia*-concept: (1) the household; (2) the house-management; and (3) the household manager, or steward.

CONCORDANCE OF THE TWO TERMS

The Hebrew text relating to Steward and Stewardship should be consulted in the following verses:

I Kings 1:2, 4 (*sokhen*: fem. *sachan*)

Isa. 22:15; 51:18 (*mehahel*: under *nahal*)

Oikonomia

Luke 16:2, 3, 4

I Cor. 9:17

Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9

Col. 1:25

I Tim. 1:4

Isa. 22:19, 21 (LXX)

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Oikonomos

Luke 12:42; 16: 1, 3, 8

Rom. 16:23

I Cor. 4:1, 2

Gal. 4:2

Titus 1:7

I Pet. 4:10

Oikonomeo (verb)

Luke 16:2

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IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, BUT WHO YOU KNOW By Ray I. Psalmonds

To a great degree the benefits we receive in this life are determined by the often repeated expression: "It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know." Almost any goal can be attained in this world if we only know the proper person at the opportune time.

The expression, "It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know," is commonly true in this present world, but in the world to come it will be a MUST. No one will have a part with Jesus Christ in the future life who does not KNOW Him as the Son of God. John 3:36 states, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

When asked, "How can one come to know Jesus Christ the Son of God?," we give God's answer from John 20:31, "These are written that Ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name."

Anyone may KNOW this most important Person, Jesus Christ, if they will only believe what God has written concerning Him. Ephesians 2:8-9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

God has already accepted the work of Jesus Christ at Calvary for the full payment of our sin (Eph. 5:2, II Cor. 5:19). All God requires of us is to believe these statements of Scripture to be true. (John 3:15)

Upon believing God's Word we are expressing faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ for us, and are assured of KNOWING Him and sharing with Him all the benefits that the future life holds. (Titus 2:13-14)

God declares to the believer in Colossians 2:10, "Ye are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power." Knowing this, we can experience Philippians 4:4 which says, "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice."

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(Inside back cover).

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