



“You MUST Be Born Again”



TITLE & AUTHOR

“You MUST Be Born Again”
By W.D. Furioso



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W.D. Furioso
Editor, Frances Furioso
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John 3:1-11

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony."

Nicodemus

The topic of this teaching is Jesus' statement: **"You must be born again."** Let's begin with Nicodemus, who "came to Jesus at night." Why did Nicodemus come at night? He either didn't want to be seen or wanted some undisturbed "alone time" with Jesus.

The passage tells us he was "a man of the Pharisees", "a ruler of the Jews", "a teacher of Israel". This means he was a member of the Jewish Council that sent a committee to investigate John the Baptist. Nicodemus knew that John had denied being the Messiah, and now he was checking out Jesus to determine for himself if He was the one John said would come after him.

Did he come at night because he was afraid to be seen with Jesus? Maybe. It says in John 12:42-43: "...many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

But I think verse 2 shows that Nicodemus was sincerely looking for the Messiah. And we can't think too little of him, because in John 7:50-51 we see Nicodemus somewhat defending Jesus before the Pharisees. And

in John 19:38-42, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, are asking Pilate for Jesus' crucified body, in order to prepare it for burial. I think, in the end, Nicodemus was a believer.

“You MUST Be Born Again”

But we can also see from his encounter with Jesus – specifically in verses 4 and 9 – that, like many people, he had difficulty with the idea of being “born again”. When Jesus said: “You must be born again”, in verse 4, he was thinking that Jesus was referring to a 2nd **natural** birth. And in verse 9, after Jesus had explained to him that He was referring to a **spiritual** birth – a **heavenly** birth - being born **from above** – being born **of the Spirit**, Nicodemus still asks, “How can these things be?”

Today, most people do not understand what it means to be Born Again. Because some have abused the meaning of the term, it is often ridiculed. And there are even Christian denominations which ignore or avoid the biblical experience altogether.

However, as someone has said: *“The answer to abuse is not disuse.”* This saying is based on the Latin phrase, *“abusus non tollit usum”* (abuse does not cancel use, in other words, misuse of something is no argument against its proper use).

It may be difficult to understand. It may be misunderstood. It may be abused. But we can’t avoid it - it’s a necessity. In fact, Jesus said: “You MUST be born

again.” There is no sense of option or preference in His statement.

The apostle Paul explains: “If any one does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”. (Romans 8:9) This is a biblical definition of a Christian. And being “born of the Spirit” has all to do with “having the Spirit of Christ”. We cannot be biblical Christians without experiencing this spiritual reality.

Also, Jesus said that one cannot “see” or “enter” the Kingdom without being “born of the Spirit”. As Christians, we are called to preach the gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14). And as the Church (Ekklesia), we are to represent the Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven) in the world. With various misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the Kingdom of God, it seems to me that it is at least quite possible that many who identify as Christians are not, as they are not truly “born again” (regenerated) and do not “see” and have not “entered” the Kingdom as God has ordained it.

Jesus’ teaching on being “born again” is like Jesus Himself. Both the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Peter refer to Him as – “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.”¹ We may stumble over Jesus and His concepts

¹ Isaiah 8:14, 1 Peter 2:8

- we may be offended by Jesus and His teaching, but we cannot avoid this stone – we cannot just maneuver around this rock – we have to do business with it – we have to deal with it – we **MUST** experience the spiritual reality of being born of the Spirit if we want to be Biblical Christians.

Regeneration

Now, when Jesus said we **“must”** be born again, He did not mean that this is something **we** must somehow accomplish by our own abilities. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus meant is that we **“must”** **believe** it, **desire** it, **seek** it and **receive** this spiritual reality. The new birth is something He desires for us; and something His Spirit accomplishes in us. But it is an absolute necessity – the fact is, the Christian life is quite impossible without being born again. This is the reason why we see this important concept of **“Regeneration”** discussed in John’s gospel and his epistle, as well as the epistles of the apostles Paul, James, and Peter.² This doctrine of Regeneration, which simply means **“generated again”** or **“born again”**, is a basic biblical doctrine of the Christian faith.

So, as **“mysterious”** as it may seem, we **must try to understand it** – more importantly we **must experience** the reality of being spiritually born again.

So, let’s see what we can understand from Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus:

² John 1:12-13, 3:6-7, 5:24; Romans 6:3-6; Ephesians 1:20, 2:5; Colossians 1:18, 3:5-14; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 3:14

Jesus spoke in Aramaic and what He said was written in Greek. The concept He is discussing with Nicodemus simply means to be born a 2nd time – just what Nicodemus was referring to in verse 4. Where Nicodemus missed it is that Jesus wasn't referring to a 2nd **physical** birth, but a 2nd birth that was **spiritual**. The Greek word translated “again” can mean either “anew” or “from above”. This spiritual “new birth”, “by the Spirit”, “from above” is described by the apostle Paul in this way in Titus 3:4-7:

⁴“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Notice Paul's phrase: “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”. I believe this is a direct reference to Jesus' words explaining to Nicodemus what he meant by the term “born again” – namely, “born of water and the Spirit”. “Water” and “Spirit” together indicate a spiritual cleansing and renewal. Putting Paul's and Jesus' terms side-by-side, the “washing of regeneration” or “born of water” and “the renewal of the Holy Spirit” or being “born of the Spirit” **all mean one and the same thing.**

Keys to Understanding

Here are some keys to understanding what Jesus said to Nicodemus:³

Jesus made it clear that the 2nd birth he was referring to was not physical, but **spiritual** – a “new birth”, “by the Spirit”, “from above” a new birth “from above”. He was speaking of being “born of the Spirit”. He emphasized this by saying, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. (v.6)

Jesus said that being “born again” or “born from above” leads to the kingdom of God; and being “born of water and the Spirit” leads to the kingdom of God. These are therefore **two ways of saying the same thing**.

The phrase, “born of water and the Spirit”, refers to one birth – not two, because there is only one article in the Greek referring to the two words “water” and “Spirit”. (Specifically, it is not “the water” and “the Spirit”. It is “the water and Spirit”.) So, there is not a birth of water and another birth of the Spirit. There is only one rebirth “of water and the Spirit”. Nicodemus, being a Pharisee and versed in the Scriptures, knew very well

³ Reference: F.F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (IVP, 1996)

the Old Testament scriptures depicting the Spirit as water.⁴

So, to interpret “born of water” as a **physical birth** and “born of the Spirit” as a **spiritual birth**, would be incorrect because, there is only one article and only one birth to which Jesus is referring – not two. The one birth is a spiritual one – namely, “of the Spirit”. The association of “Spirit” (or “wind” or “breath”)⁵ with birth is strong in the Old Testament. An example of this association would be when the Spirit was breathed into Adam, he became a living being.⁶

To interpret “born of water” as **baptism** would also be incorrect. There are denominations which hold to the idea of “baptismal regeneration” – that is, the idea of being born again through water baptism. These groups usually also hold that baptism is necessary for salvation and practice infant baptism.⁷ While there are some verses, like these in John 3, which seem to be implying this, Scripture taken as a whole does not teach such a concept.⁸ New Testament scripture teaches we are

⁴ e.g., Ezekiel 36:25-27 & Isaiah 44:3-5

⁵ Greek: *pneuma* & Hebrew: *Ruach*

⁶ Genesis 2:7

⁷ This is a doctrine of the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Lutheran Churches, as well as the Churches of Christ (The latter does not practice infant baptism.)

⁸ It is not within the scope of this message to refute in detail the teaching of “Baptismal Regeneration”. But this has been addressed elsewhere. e.g., *False Doctrines* by John R. Rice.

saved by grace through faith – not by baptism.
Scripture teaches that we are born again – regenerated
by the Holy Spirit – not by baptism. Scripture presents
baptism as an act which **pictures** and **testifies** of
salvation and regeneration, but not the **agent** or **means**
of salvation and regeneration.

Biblical Descriptions

But how are we to understand the Spirit's work of **regeneration** in the life of the believer? Here are some **descriptions of regeneration**: To be “**regenerated**” would simply mean to be **generated again**.

The apostle John spoke of it in terms of being “born again”, “born from above”, “born of God”, “born of the Spirit”.⁹

The apostle James spoke of it in terms of being “brought forth by the word of truth (or born of the word of truth)”, so that we would be a kind of first fruits of His creatures”.¹⁰

The apostle Peter described regeneration as being “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”, and also as being “born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and enduring word of God.”¹¹

So, regeneration is a theological term referring to the biblical concept of being “born again”.

⁹ John 1:12-13, 3:6-7

¹⁰ James 1:18

¹¹ 1 Peter 1:3 & 23

Biblical Experience

But **regeneration as a spiritual experience** is also represented in a multifaceted way in Scripture. It means **“believing in”**, and **“receiving”** Christ, and **“becoming a child of God”**.¹² It means being **“saved by grace”**.¹³ It means **“passing out of death into life”**¹⁴, that is, **“having eternal life and not coming into the judgment”** (of the sentence of death)¹⁵. It means passing out of the state of spiritual death (which is separation from God because of sin) and **“being made alive together with Christ”**.¹⁶ It means being **“raised from the dead ... to walk in newness of life”**.¹⁷

The apostle Paul spoke about some of the **effects of regeneration** when he wrote: “you laid aside the old man with its evil practices and have put on the new man who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”¹⁸ This is a work which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the believer **as a result of regeneration**.

¹² John 1:12

¹³ Ephesians 2:5

¹⁴ John 5:24 & 1 John 3:14

¹⁵ John 5:24

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:5

¹⁷ Romans 6:3-6

¹⁸ Colossians 3:9-10

I have a saying: We need to be **taught** sound doctrine; but we also need to **experience** sound doctrine. We must try to **understand** the doctrine of being born again - and more importantly, we must **experience** the reality of being born again. I think it was in a book entitled *Spiritual Reality or Obsession*, in which a man named Watchman Nee stated something to this effect: *"The doctrinal debates come to an end when one experiences the spiritual reality of the work of God in one's life."*¹⁹

While it is good to have understanding, humanly speaking, it seems we cannot totally understand the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. In John 3:8, Jesus likened the Spirit's work of regeneration to the blowing of the wind – it is something we may not totally **understand**, but it is something we can **experience**. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, **but you do not know** (that is, **do not understand**) where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." As was mentioned, the association of "Spirit" with "wind"²⁰ is strong in Scripture. It may be helpful to insert the word "Spirit" where Jesus uses the word "wind" in order to understand what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus and ourselves: *"The Spirit blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know*

¹⁹ Paraphrased

²⁰ Hebrew: *Ruach* (Strong's # H7307) & Greek: *Pneuma* (Strong's # G4151).

where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." In other words, we may not know and understand everything about the Spirit (*"where it comes from or where it goes"*), nevertheless, **we can have an experience with the Spirit** (*"hear its sound"*). That's how it is to be "born again" – "born of the Spirit" (*"So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*) **The experience** is the validation – not our ability to understand and explain it.

This is not to say that *any* spiritual experience can be validated outside of Scripture. It is only those experiences which are cited in Scripture which are valid. But it is to say that there are valid experiences of the Spirit which are cited in the written words of God which we may not be able to totally understand and explain.

For example, Paul's teaching in Romans 8:16: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." There is not much "explanation" there to offer someone. Yet the experience – if you have had it – serves as the most foundational aspect validating the fact that one "belongs to Christ".²¹

It is important that we seek to **understand** this doctrine, but the **experience** of this doctrine is what Jesus is

²¹ Cf. Romans 8:9-10

ultimately after. Jesus would like us to be able to **understand** and teach this doctrine to others, but what He is ultimately after is that we **experience** the reality of being born again. Our testimony and witness are not based upon our ability to **understand** and explain the doctrine – it is based upon our **personal experience** of the spiritual reality. This is essentially what He said to Nicodemus in John 3:11:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen,” In other words, *“We know what we’re talking about – we’ve **experienced** it.”*

Spiritual realities like regeneration are **mysteries** of God. Doctrine is an effort to give a biblical explanation of a **biblical experience**. You may not fully **understand** the doctrine, but you must **experience** the spiritual reality of being “born again”.

The experience of regeneration – being born again – takes place by the work of the Spirit of grace and is received through faith. But this does not mean: *“You just have to accept it on faith”*, (meaning believing it without experiencing it). This experience can be likened to the good works that follow true faith which James spoke about.²² In fact, James said that faith that doesn’t work itself out into your experience in “dead” – it’s questionable as to whether it can save you. Being

²² James 2:14-26

born again is not something you “just accept on faith” that it has really taken place. Being born again involves having an **experience** with the Creator of the Universe – it is **obviously** and **assuredly** life changing.

How Do You Know?

So, how do you know if you are “born again”?²³ I’d like to list some indicators from Scripture that I believe point to the reality of having been born of the Spirit because they indicate the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in one’s life experience.

This is something that Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:8: “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

You are born again, if the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith in Jesus Christ by convicting you of sin and convincing you of the righteousness and judgment of God.

And in John 16:13, He also said this about the Holy Spirit regarding our life experience: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:
“ ... no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we

²³ J.C. Ryle wrote a short article entitled, *Are You Born Again?*, in which he lists 6 marks of being born again. His article is based squarely on Scripture depicting what most would consider to be a “mature Christian”.

impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

1 Corinthians 2:11-14

So, you are born again, if you are beginning to **understand** the thoughts of God in His Word, and you accept the things of the Spirit of God and **experience** the spiritual realities of the things God has freely given. People often say: *“I read the Bible, but I don’t understand it.”* You are born again if you *are* beginning to **understand** the Bible. You don’t have a relationship with a book, but God’s Book is helping you to have a relationship with Him. That’s why God gave us the Scriptures. You are born again if you are convinced of what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16 – that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

You are born again if you are **experiencing** the written words of God to be “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”, as it says in Hebrews 4:12. If this is your **experience**, the apostle Peter says,

“You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”²⁴

You are born again if you have begun to see yourself as having a **new spiritual identity**. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:15a-16: “... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”²⁵

You are born of the Spirit, if you have begun to **experience the “Fellowship of the Holy Spirit”**.²⁶ (2 Corinthians 13:14) In other words, you have begun to **experience** a new spiritual dimension to your life - the presence of “Immanuel” – “God with us” – and you are **experiencing** fellowship – that is, a **personal relationship** with some degree of intimacy with the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and other believers.

²⁴ 1 Peter 1:23

²⁵ Concerning Paul’s phrase, “the Spirit testifies with our spirit”: This is a very rich subject which, in itself, requires another article(s). I could highly recommend the following: *Wesley’s 52 Standard Sermons*, Numbers X, XI, & XII, which deal specifically with this subject. These sermons are available on the Internet: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-10-the-witness-of-the-spirit-discourse-one/> & <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-11-the-witness-of-the-spirit-discourse-two/> & <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-12-the-witness-of-our-own-spirit/> There are two other articles I could recommend which are also available on the Internet (www.Bible.org) : <http://bible.org/seriespage/witness-spirit-romans-816-interpretation-and-implications;> & <http://bible.org/seriespage/witness-spirit-protestant-tradition>

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 13:14

The apostle John speaks of this **“Fellowship of the Holy Spirit”** in 1 John 1:1-4:

¹ “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

Bill & Frances Furioso
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Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

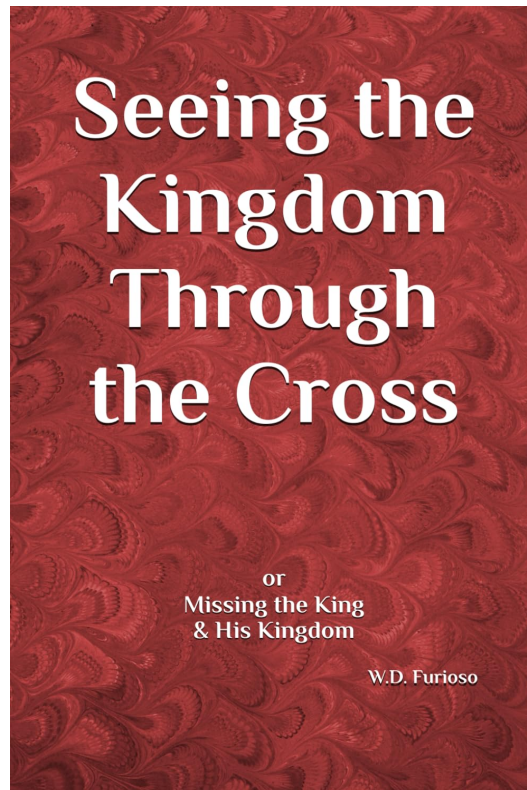
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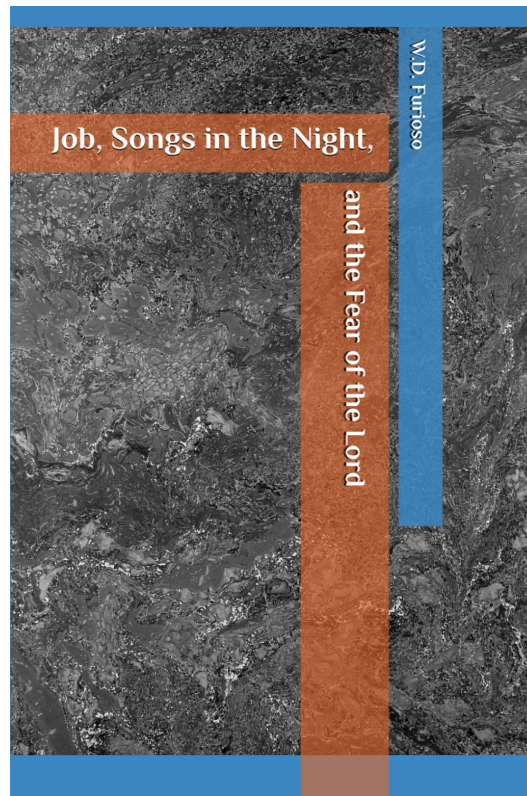
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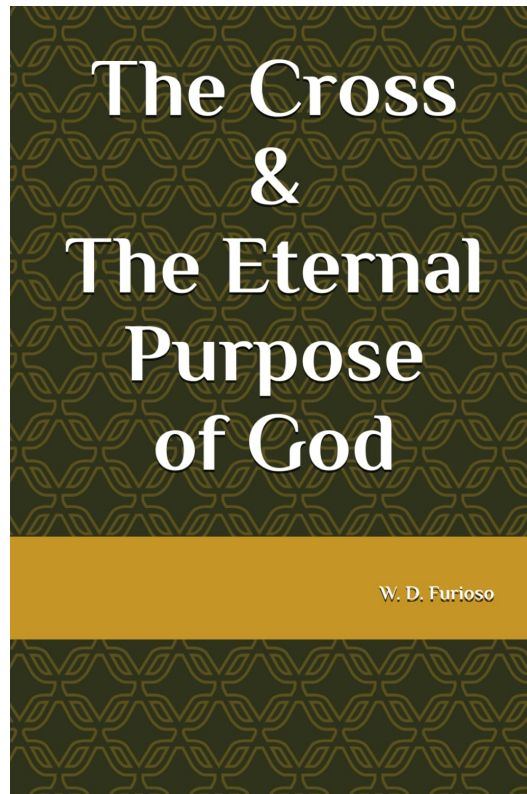
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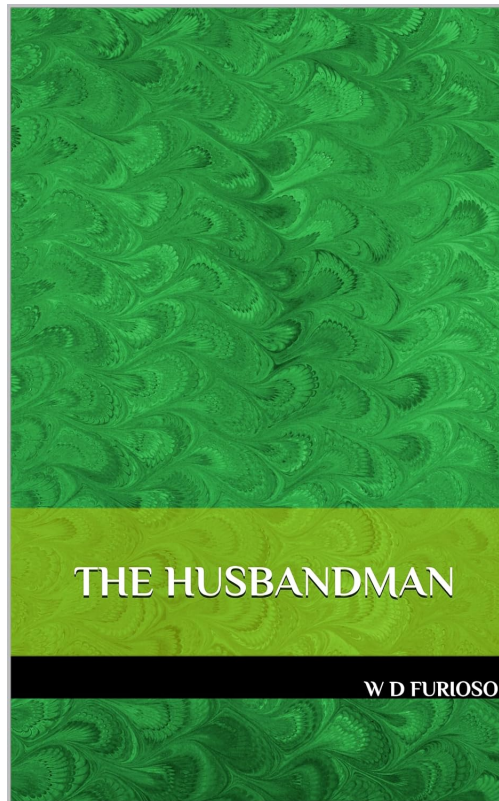
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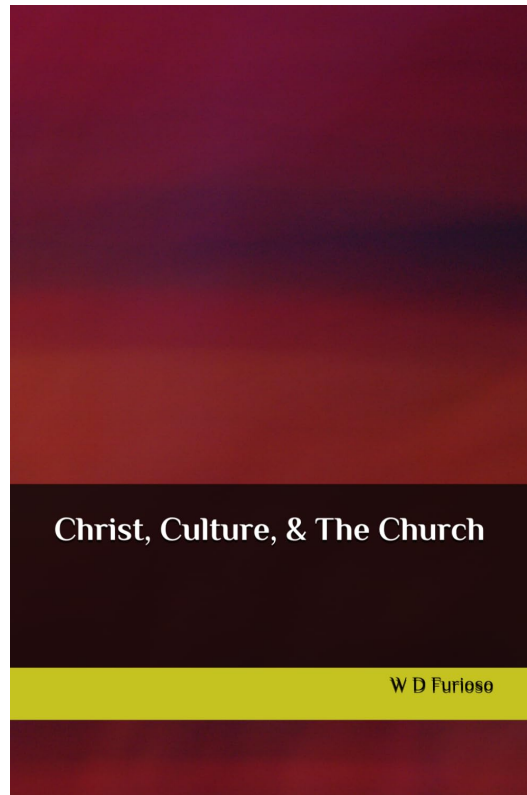
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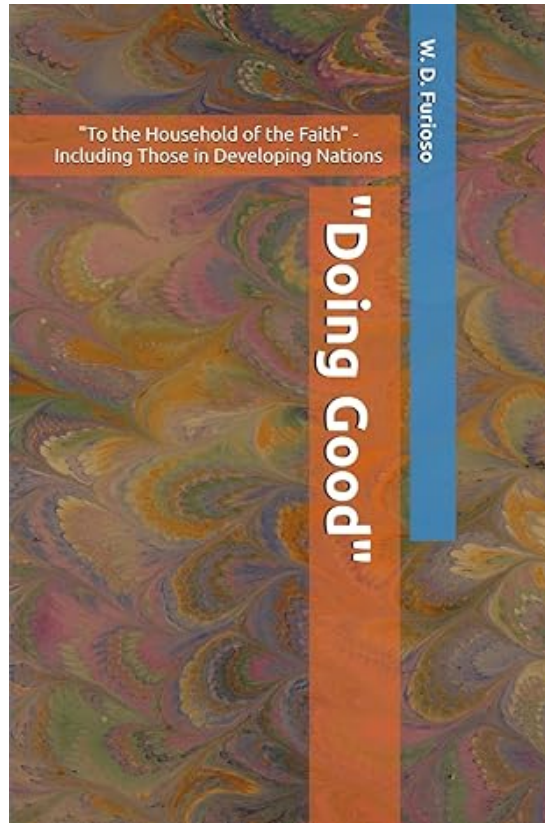
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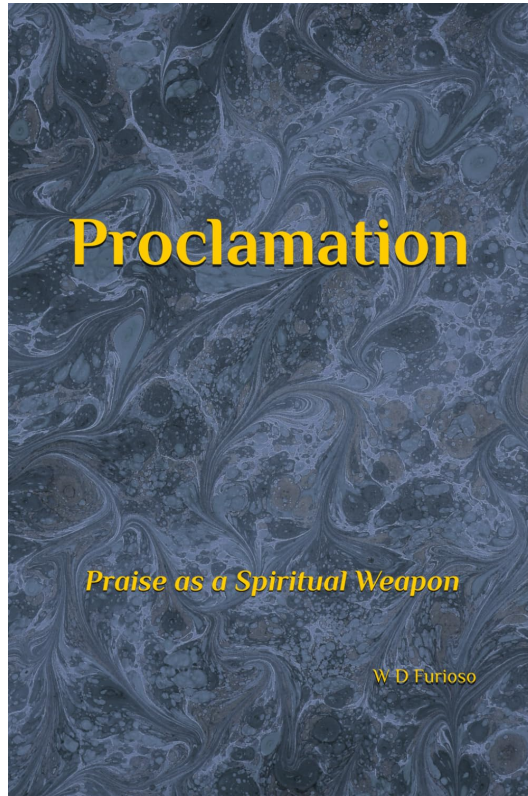
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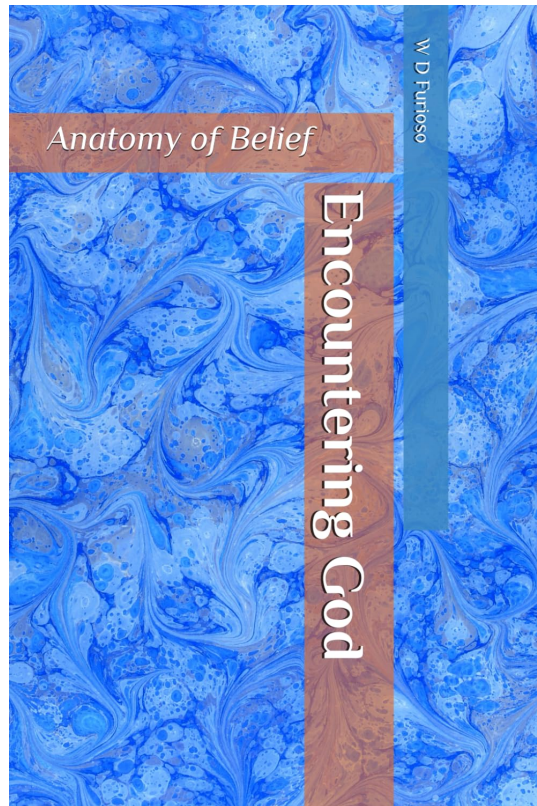
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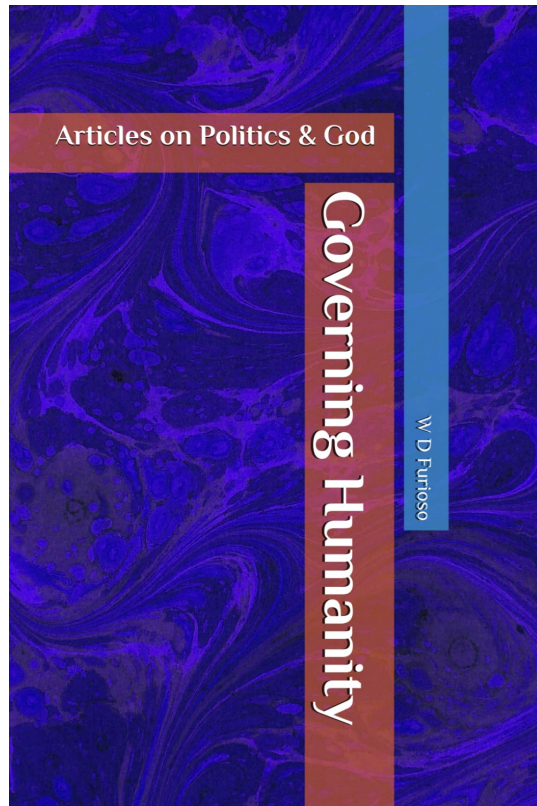
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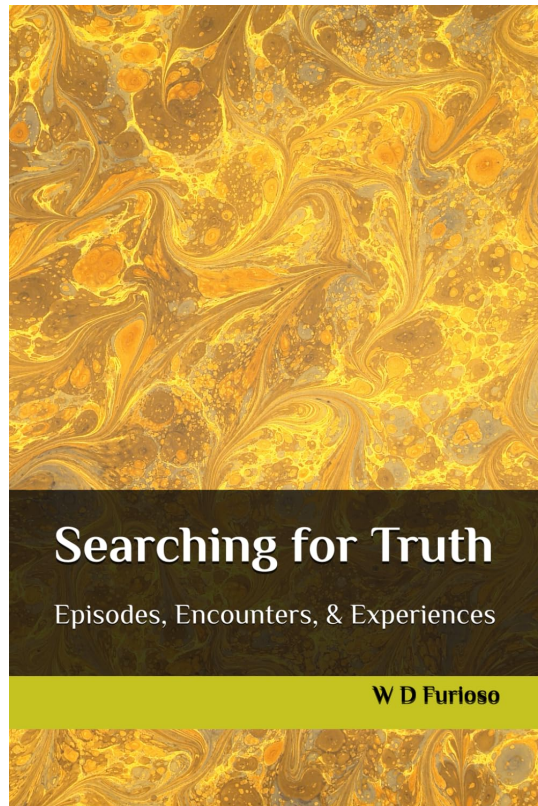
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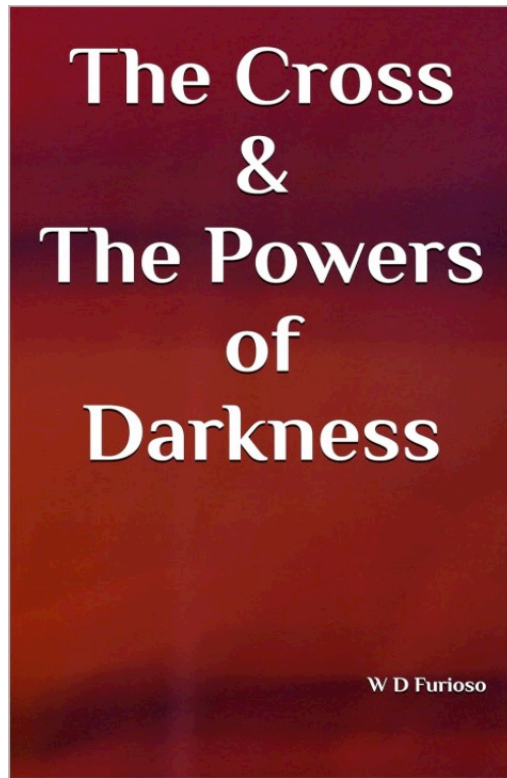
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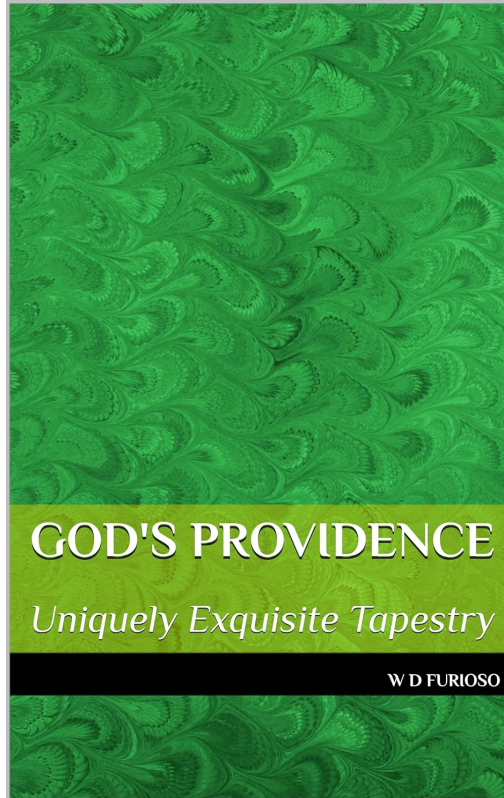
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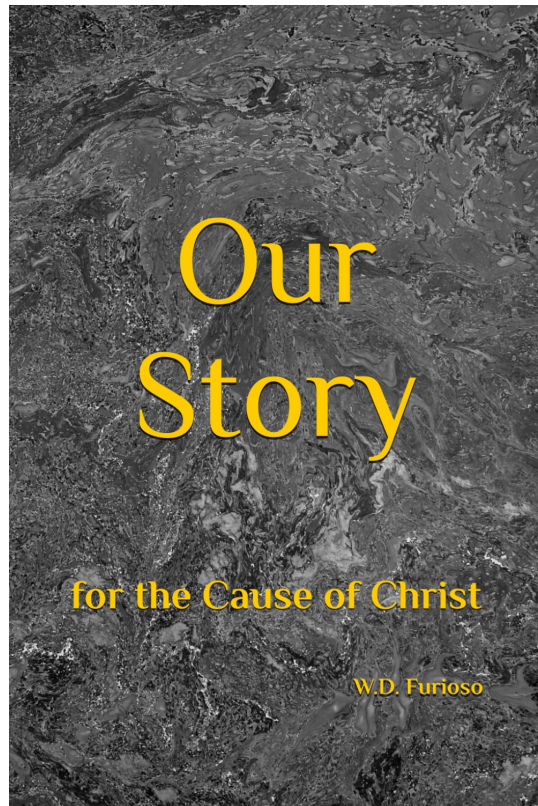
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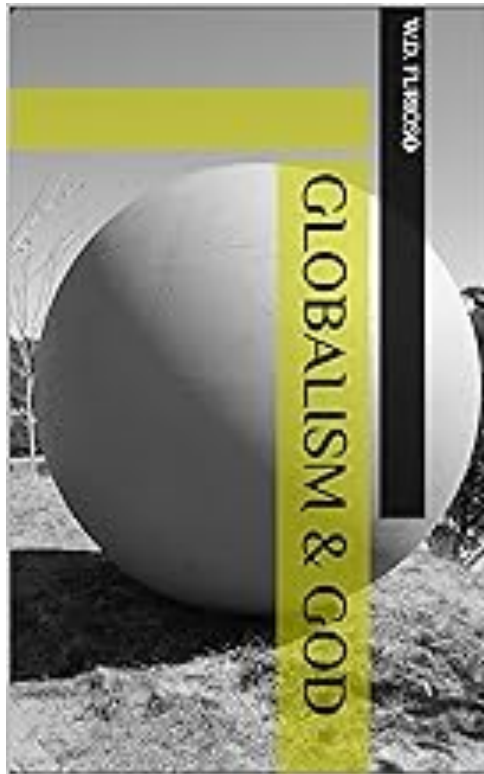
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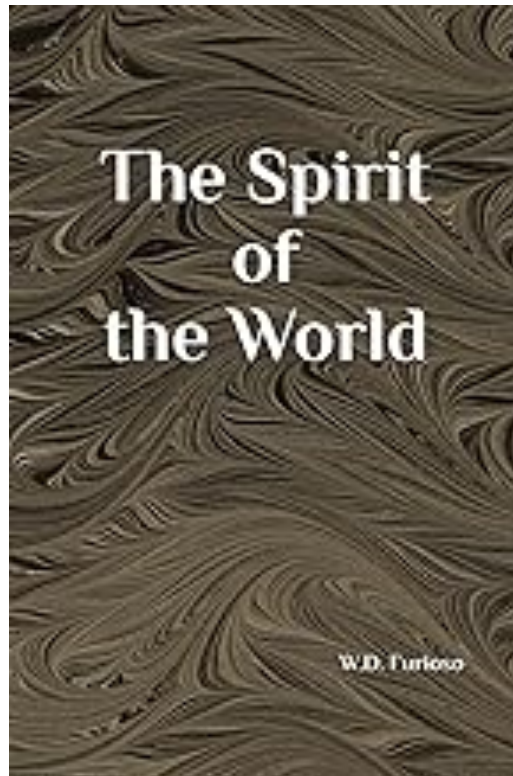
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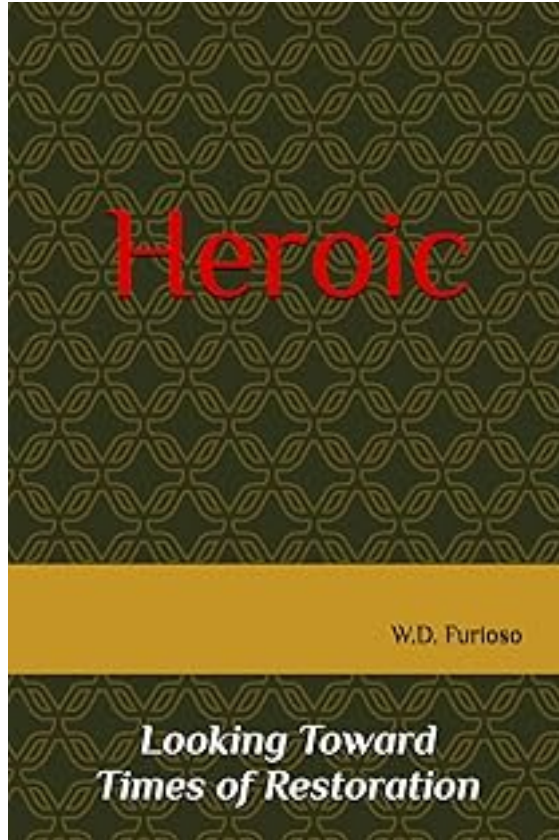
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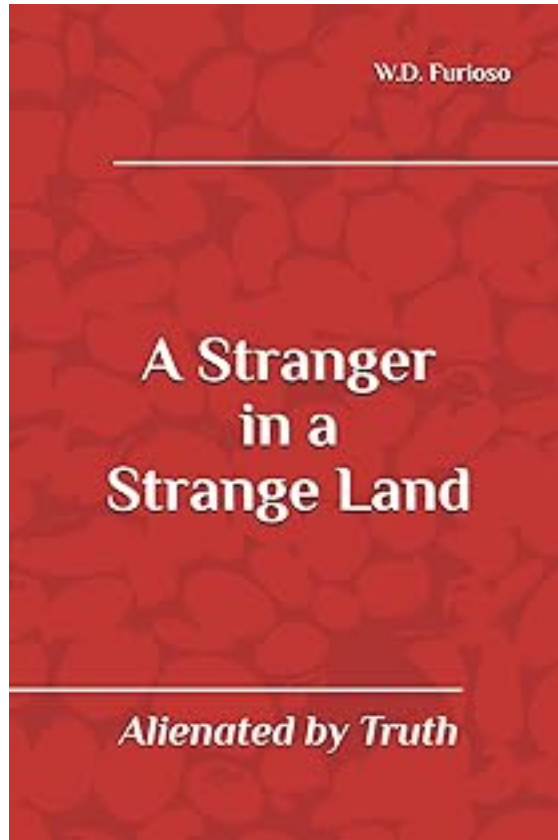
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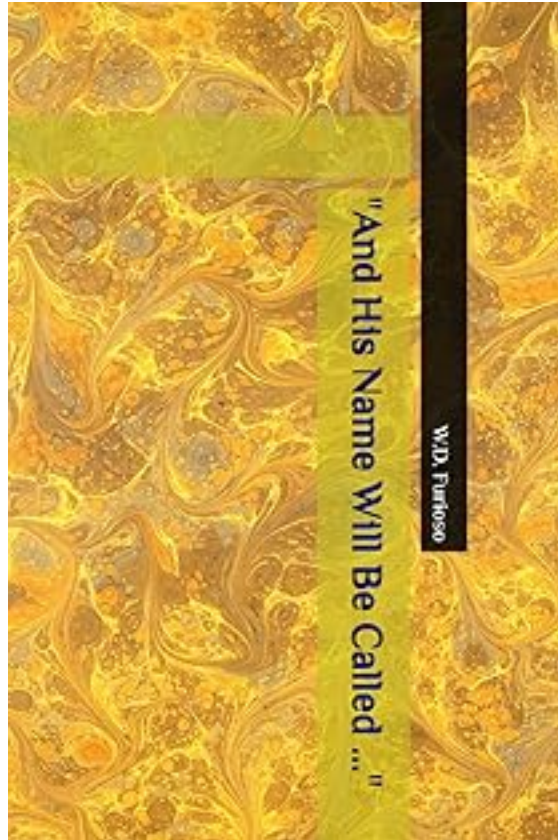
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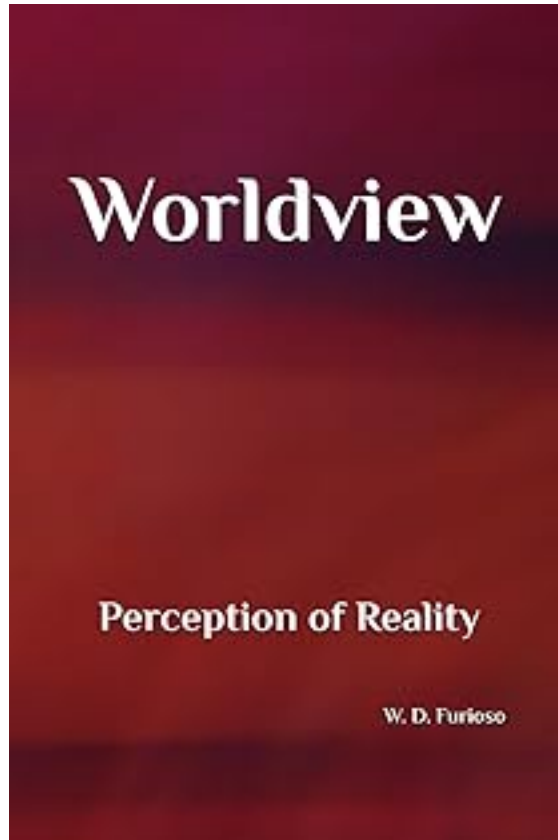
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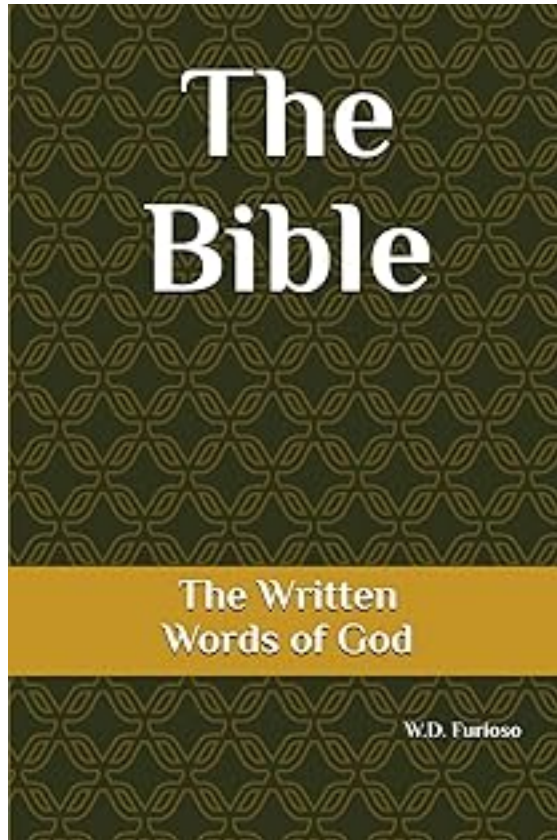
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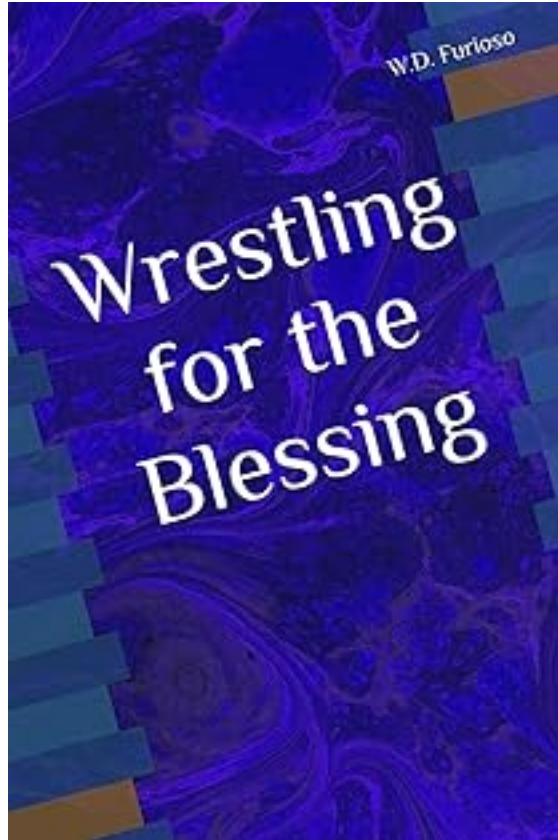
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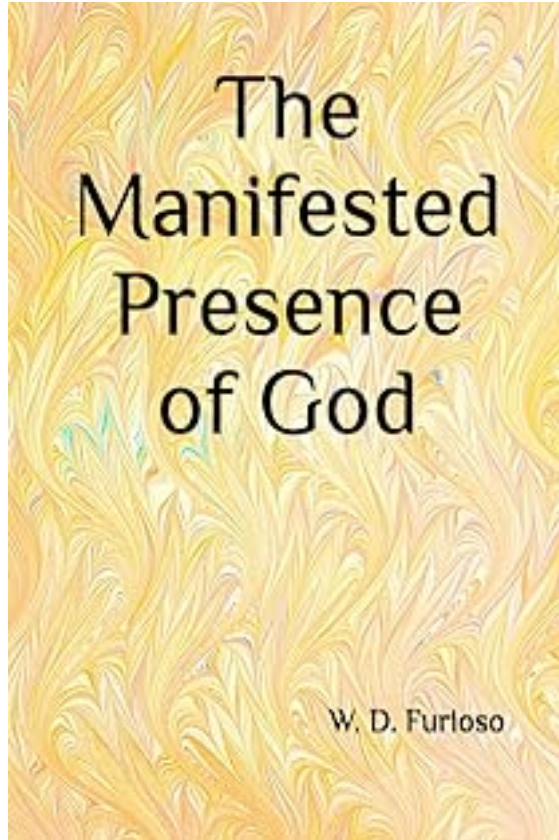
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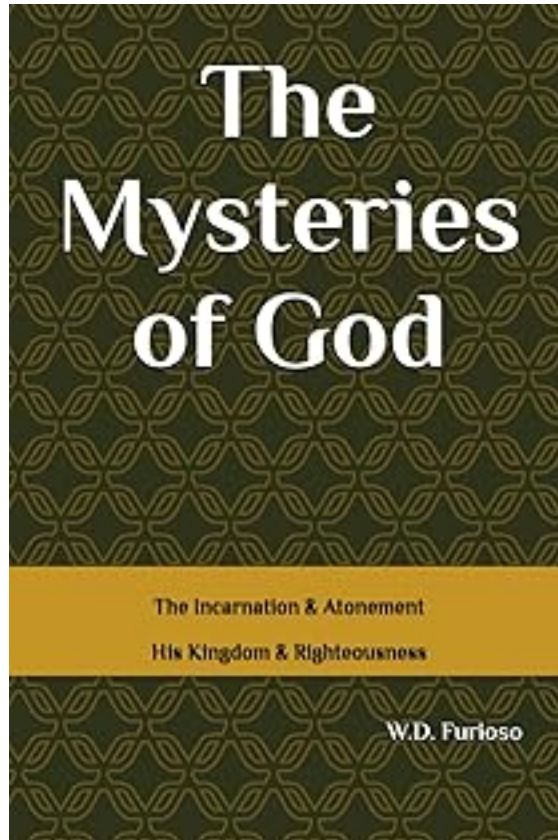
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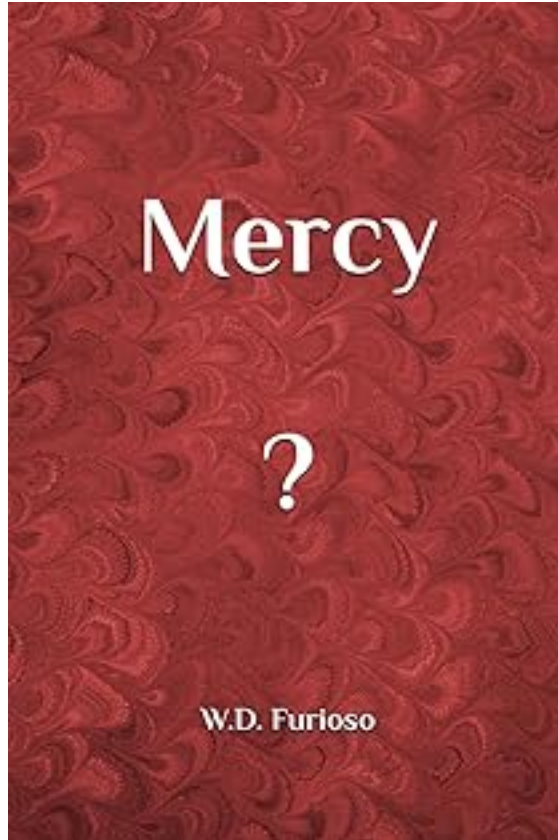
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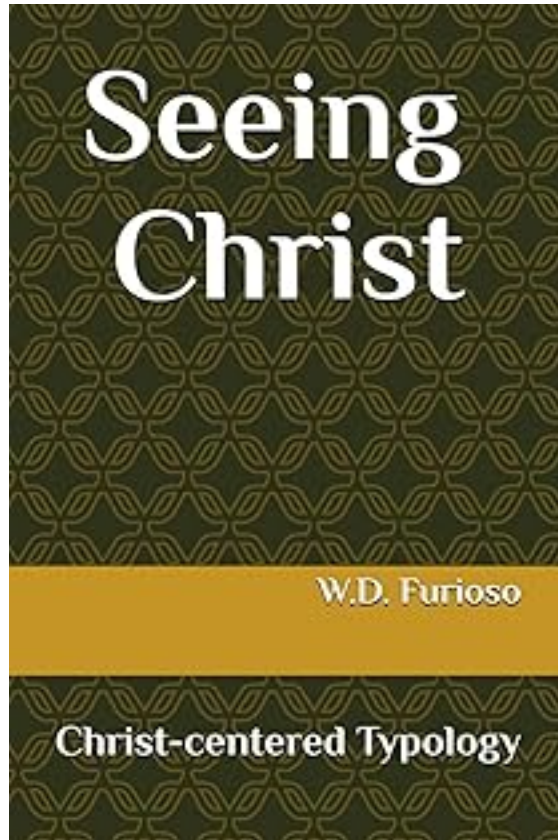
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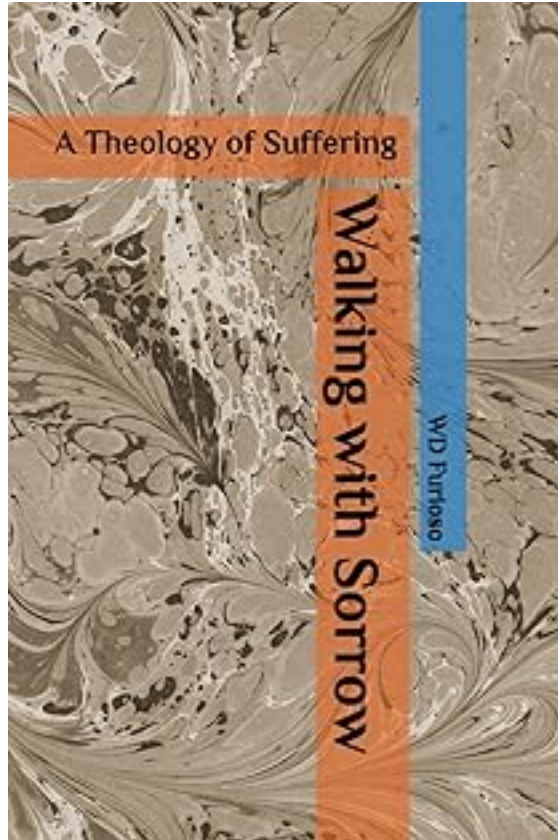
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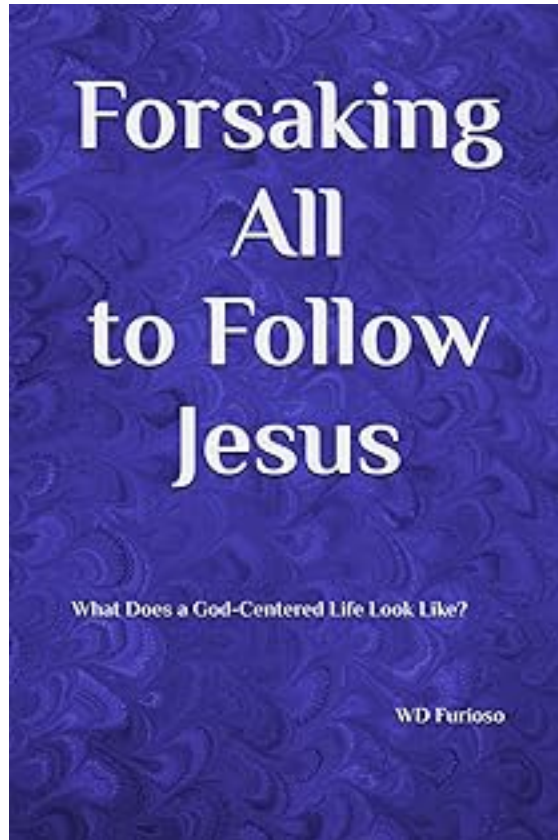
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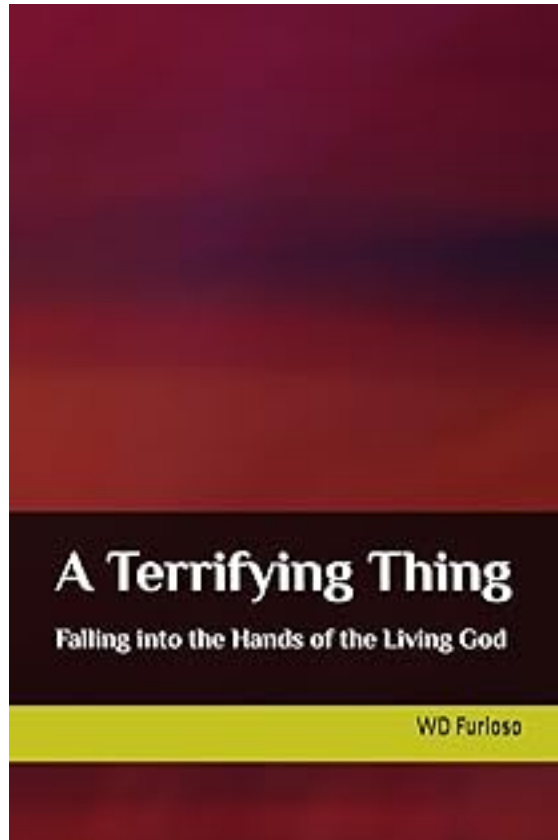
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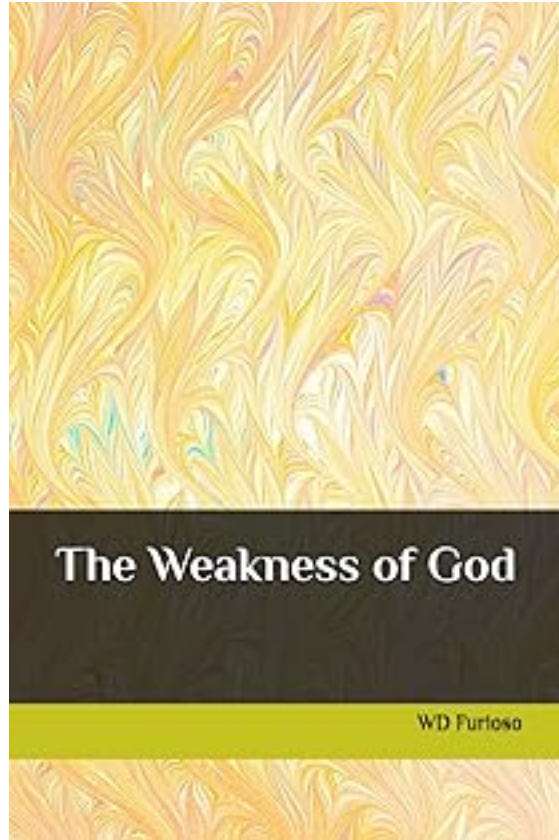
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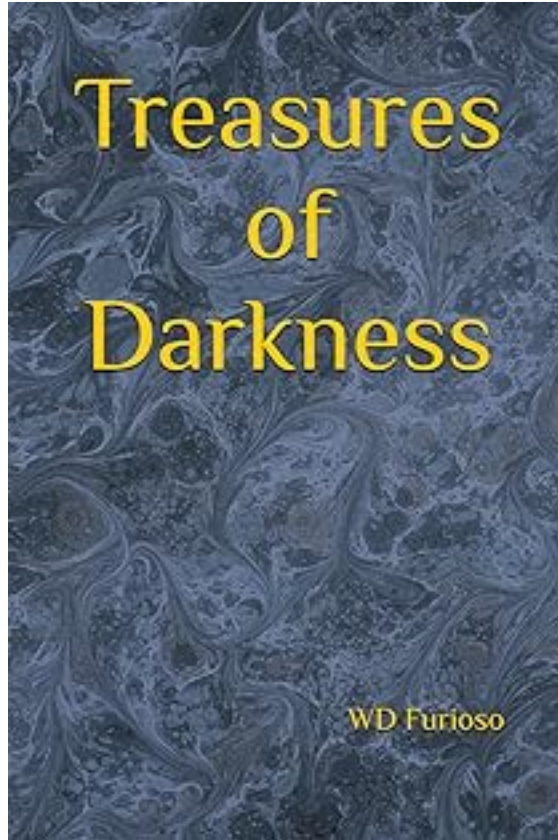
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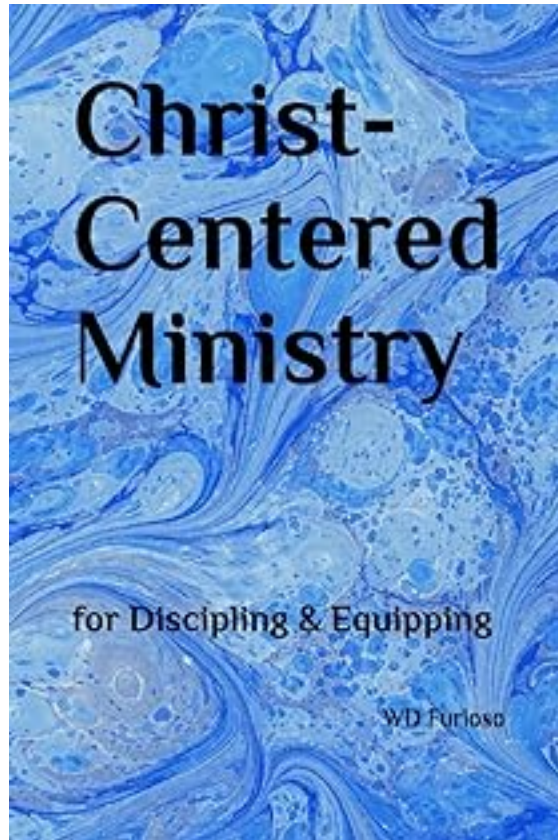
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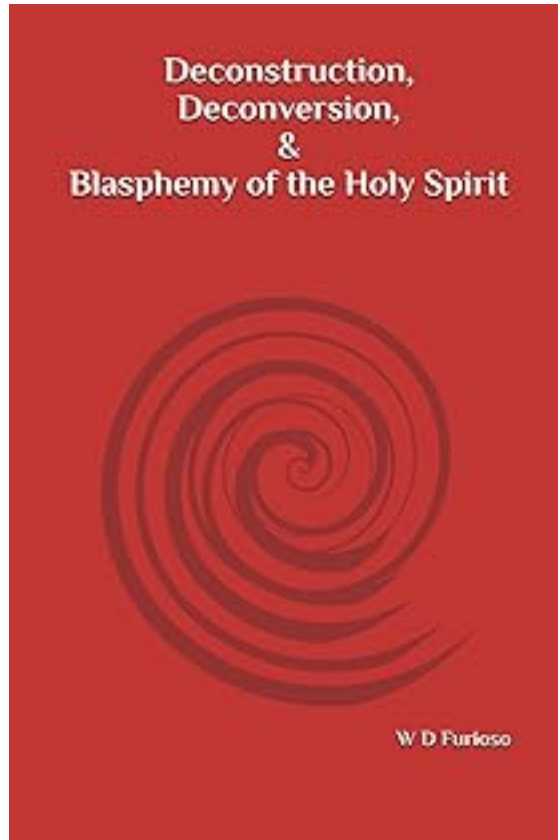
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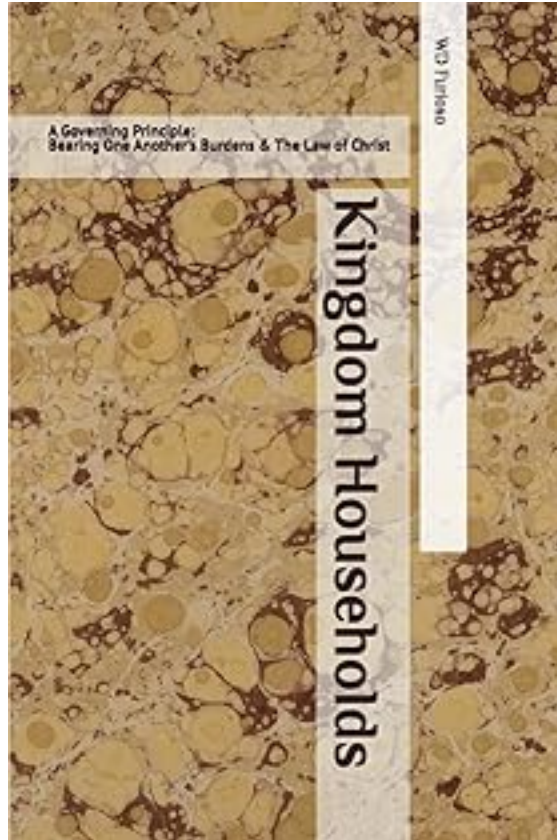
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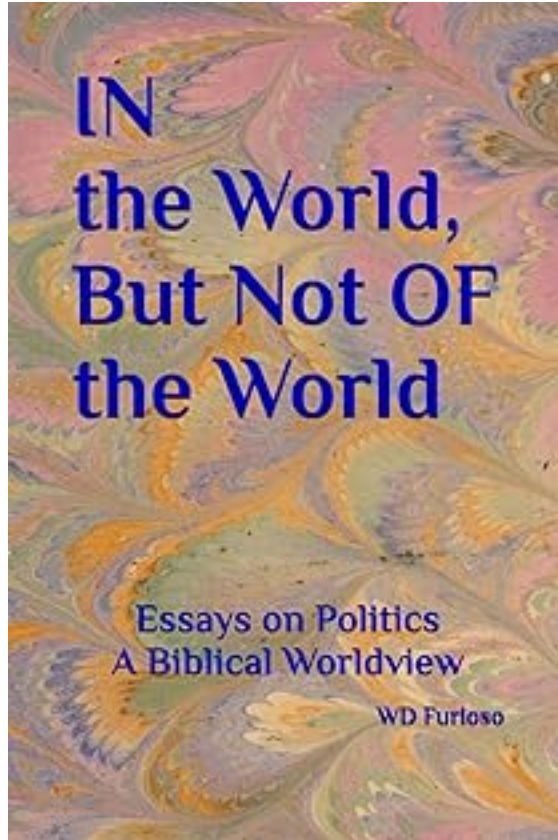
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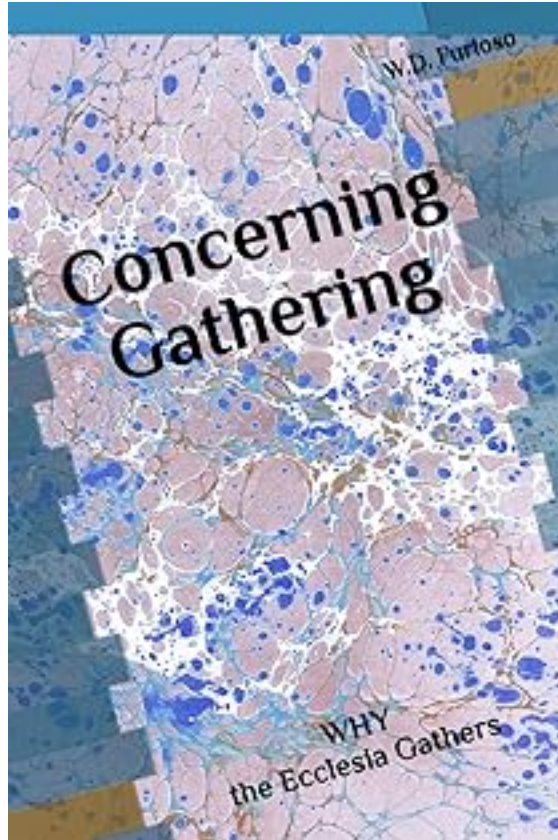
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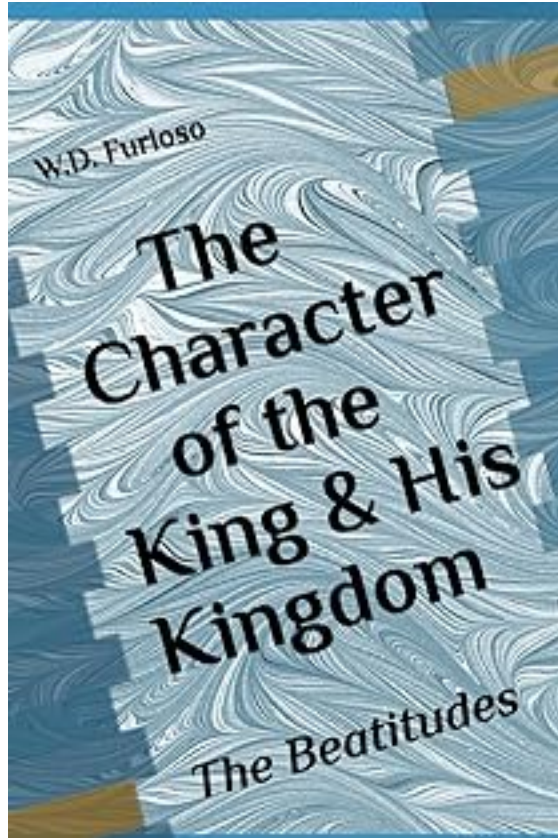
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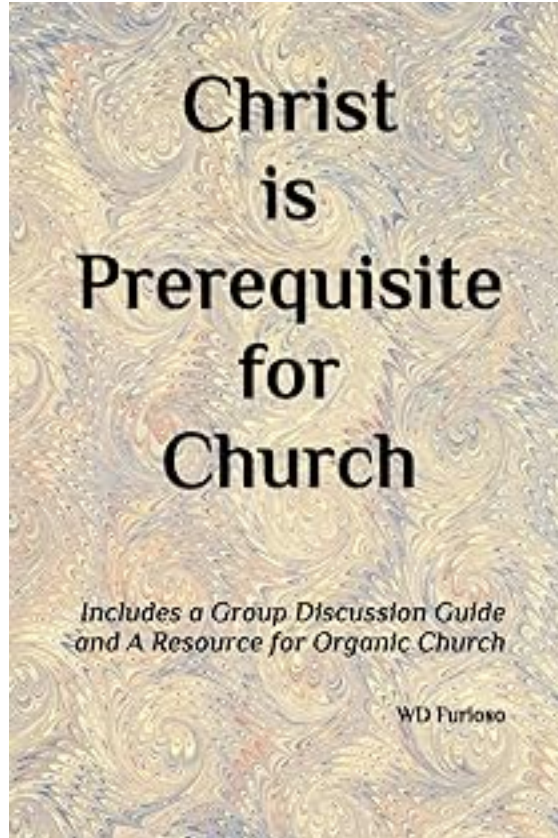
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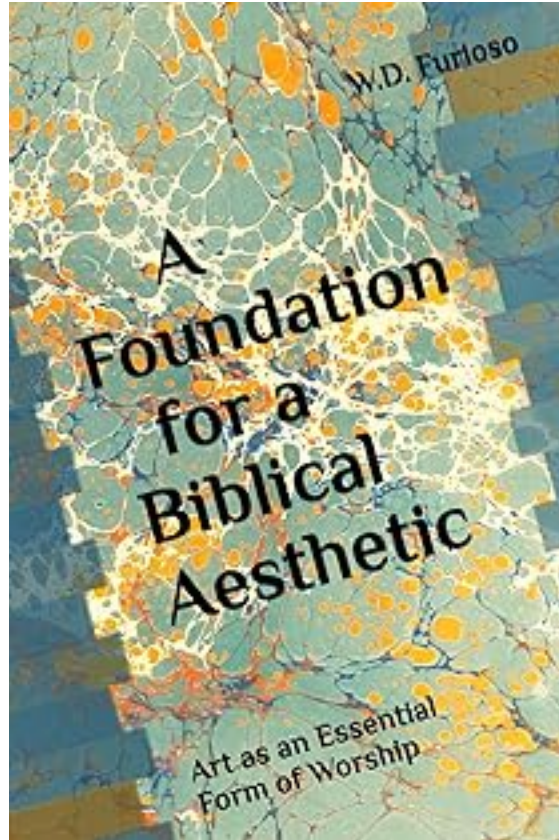
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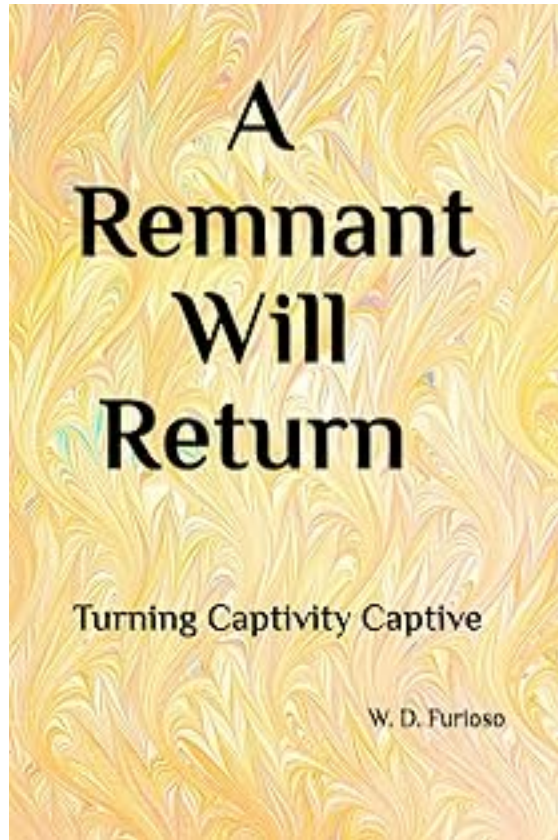
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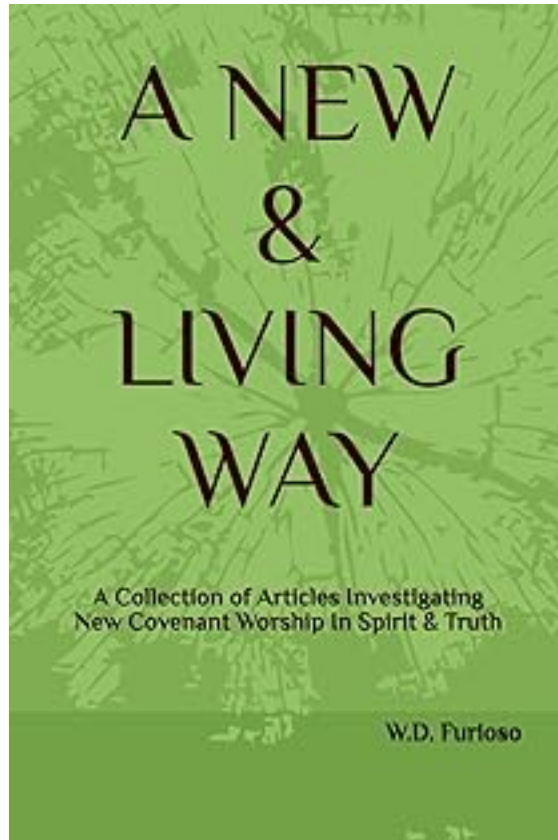
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